

# Myerscough College

## Partial reinspection report

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**Unique reference number:** 130743

**Name of lead inspector:** Vivien Shipley HMI

**Last day of inspection:** 5 October 2011

**Type of provider:** Specialist college

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## Introduction

The college was last inspected in May 2010, when it was judged to be satisfactory overall with inadequate capacity to improve. Outcomes, quality of provision and leadership and management were judged to be satisfactory with a contributory grade of good for safeguarding. Of the five subject areas inspected, employer responsive horticulture and foundation learning were judged to be good, learner responsive horticulture and sport were satisfactory and animal care and equine studies were inadequate.

At the monitoring visit in February 2011 eight themes were investigated. Significant progress had been made in two: the impact of actions taken to improve retention; and the improvements made to increase the proportion of apprentices completing in the agreed time. In the other six themes inspectors judged that reasonable progress had been made. This included the progress made in improving the quality of provision in animal care and equine studies and developments to improve the college's capacity to improve.

This partial reinspection looked at how effectively the college has increased its capacity to improve and the quality of the provision in animal care and equine studies.

The outcome of the reinspection is as follows:

<b>Aspect of the common inspection framework</b>	<b>Original grade</b>	<b>Reinspection grade</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Subject area</b>	<b>Original grade</b>	<b>Reinspection grade</b>
<b>Animal care and equine studies</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>

## Context

1. Myerscough College is a specialist land-based and sports college located near Preston in Lancashire. The main campus includes a farm, horticultural production, ornamental gardens, a sports centre, a golf academy, animal care and equine units, a rural business unit and residential accommodation for 700 learners. The college has several urban centres located in Blackburn, Burnley, Liverpool and Manchester and offers veterinary nursing in Dorset and Wirral. The college's vision is that, 'Myerscough will be the college of choice in the land-based and sports sector - providing opportunities for all to succeed'.
2. The college provides courses from foundation level to higher education. In 2010/11 the college enrolled 2,173 further education learners. Around 1,486 of the learners were aged 16 to 18; 60% were male. In addition 1,042 learners were enrolled on work-based courses and there were 1,176 students on higher education courses.

## Capacity to improve

## Grade 3

3. The new management structure has resolved the issue relating to lines of accountability, which was raised at the last inspection, and has enhanced the leadership and monitoring of the curriculum. The quality team has been strengthened. Learning area managers are now supported by newly appointed assistant heads of department who support them in the monitoring of performance against key targets such as retention and learners identified to be at risk of underperforming. Governors have revised their committee structure and have appointed a new governor with relevant experience of the land-based sector and quality monitoring. These actions have enhanced governors' monitoring of the quality of the experience provided for learners.
4. Managers are making reasonable progress in resolving the areas for improvement identified at the last full inspection. The success rates of learners aged 16 to 18 on college-based courses have improved at all levels. However, at advanced level the success rate remains below the national average. Most adults study at intermediate and advanced level. For these learners success rates are above the national averages. The rate of improvement varies between curriculum areas and success rates remain low on some courses. The proportion of apprentices who complete their programmes within the planned time, which was low at the last inspection, has improved to just below the national average. Effective action has been taken to resolve the difference in success rates between male and female learners. Arrangements for improving the quality of teaching and learning have not been sufficiently effective. Guidance and support for learners have improved significantly and are very effective in identifying and supporting those at risk of leaving college early. The quality of provision in animal care and equine studies has improved significantly and is now satisfactory.
5. Managers now use accurate management information to inform self-assessment. New procedures for learning area and course self-assessment have been introduced recently. Course level self-assessment does not place sufficient priority on evaluating the impact of teaching on students' learning, progress and attainment.

### What does Myerscough College need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates on underperforming courses by monitoring the performance of learners in year two of advanced level courses to ensure that the improvements in retention seen in the first year are sustained and result in increased levels of attainment in 2012.
- Improve teachers' lesson planning by providing them with support in establishing appropriate learning outcomes. Ensure that teachers use strategies and learning materials that provide challenge for learners of all abilities. Enhance the arrangements for monitoring the quality of the experience provided for learners so that the pace of improvement in teaching and learning is much quicker.

- Monitor and evaluate the impact of new procedures for self-assessment and revise the arrangements in order to streamline and simplify the processes. Ensure that course reviews rigorously evaluate the impact of teaching on students' learning, progress and outcomes.
- Ensure that staff development and reports from lesson observations help individual teachers to take ownership of, and make improvements to, their performance.

## **Animal care and equine studies**

## **Grade 3**

### **Context**

Courses are offered from foundation to advanced level. At the main campus, 163 learners are on animal care and 110 on equine studies courses. At the urban centres, a further 257 study on animal care courses at Liverpool, Blackburn and Manchester, and 65 study horse care courses in Liverpool and Burnley. Most learners are aged 16 to 18; a large majority of learners in animal care and most in equine studies are female.

### **Key findings**

- Success rates are high on the two main full-time intermediate-level courses. Success rates have increased markedly on advanced-level courses. On one-year advanced courses, rates are high; however, rates for courses of two years' duration remain below average in three of the four main courses.
- Learners' staying-on rates are much higher than previously; most learners who started two year programmes in 2010/11 are still on their courses, which compares very favourably with the high drop-out rates seen in previous years. These learners are making good progress in completing their work.
- Learners gain good practical experience from working with a wide range of animals including exotics, fish and domestic animals as well as horses of differing levels and specialisms, such as dressage or cross country. Animal care learners have increasingly good practical skills as they are spending more time undertaking practical work in lessons.
- The proportion of learners who progress from intermediate to advanced level courses is high. Learners' attendance at lessons has improved and is now high. Learners who complete advanced-level courses generally make better than expected progress and the proportion who gain higher grades has increased.
- Most lessons are at least satisfactory but not enough are good or better. Teachers integrate theory and practice well. Learners find teachers' extensive industry experience valuable in helping to motivate them to learn. However, more-able learners are often unchallenged and teachers' strategies are only partially successful in ensuring all learners achieve the learning outcomes for the lesson. Teachers' questioning techniques are underdeveloped.
- Assessment practice has improved considerably although managers have rightly identified that written feedback to learners is still not of consistently high

quality. Learners are well informed about the timing and nature of assessment. Assignments are mostly interesting and varied. They often include both practical and theory work and support the development of learners' analytical and research skills.

- Learners' success rates have improved as a consequence of significant revisions to the curriculum and enhanced arrangements for advice and guidance. The additional qualifications studied by learners better match their needs and abilities; entry requirements have been revised to ensure that learners are on the right course; guidance is comprehensive, including stating clearly the demands of working with animals. Initial assessment to identify learners' support needs is robust.
- Learners receive helpful support and their progress is closely monitored, particularly at the start of courses and when they are at risk of underperforming. The range of support in place is extensive and well-targeted with staff working closely across support and academic teams. Individual learning plans, including personal targets, are used well to help many learners succeed beyond expectations.
- Managers' and tutors' accountability for the success of their learners is now high, in part because of effective restructuring but also because of improvements to performance management and a renewed and much needed focus on learners' achievement. Responsibility for assuring the quality of provision at the urban centres is clear and has helped ensure consistent quality.
- Data are used widely to support self-assessment and as part of improvement actions. Managers have a good understanding of the importance of accurate data and are making increasingly good use of the detailed reports available to them. Tutors are fully aware of the targets set for course performance and use these regularly to measure the effectiveness of their actions.
- Self-assessment is becoming more accurate and reliable as a means of identifying improvement actions. Sometimes judgements are overgenerous based on the evidence and a few strengths and areas for improvement are contradictory. Actions plans are detailed. Learners' views have been influential in deciding on several important improvement actions.
- Resources are used well and maintained to a high standard. Resources at the urban centres have been improved, particularly in the use of information and learning technology. The college's virtual learning environment is used regularly by learners who speak highly of its value in supporting their learning.

### **What does Myerscough College need to do to improve further?**

- Ensure that the progress of learners in the second year of two-year courses is monitored closely by senior managers and other staff. Take prompt action to support those learners who are identified to be at risk of underperforming to ensure that success rates improve on advanced-level courses.
- Support teachers to establish clear and comprehensive learning outcomes for their lessons. Ensure these inform their use of specific teaching strategies and

cover fully all main learning points. Develop teachers' questioning techniques, particularly in using questions to provide challenge for more-able learners.

- Use the internal verification system rigorously to identify where feedback to learners is less effective and provide support for assessors to improve their practice.
- Provide training and support for managers so that they become more evaluative in the judgements they make in self-assessment.

## **Additional Themes**

Inspectors explored the following themes as part of this partial reinspection.

### **Self-assessment and improvement planning**

**What progress has been made in improving the leadership and management of the college and the impact in making and sustaining improvement?**

**Reasonable progress**

The college management restructuring that began in September 2010 with the appointment of a new deputy principal and a reorganisation of senior roles has enhanced the leadership and monitoring of the curriculum. The quality team has been strengthened with the appointment of a new director of quality who has responsibility for improving standards across the college. Assistant heads of department have been introduced who are providing significant support to learning area heads and this is increasing the monitoring of performance against key targets such as retention and learners identified to be at risk of underperforming. The accountabilities of heads of learning areas, an issue at the last inspection, are now clear. Management development is being provided for key staff to assist them in carrying out the leadership aspects of their new roles. Managers now understand how their work contributes to the strategic direction of the college. Senior managers have strengthened the monitoring of progress against course-level targets through termly programme boards. The outcomes of this process feed appropriately into self-assessment.

Governors have established a new committee structure that is appropriately aligned to the roles of the deputy principals. A new governor with expertise of the land-based sector and experience of quality monitoring has been appointed to strengthen the challenge in the quality and standards committee. Governors are now provided with comprehensive data on learners' outcomes.

**What progress has been made in improving the accuracy of self-assessment?**

**Reasonable progress**

The self-assessment cycle is set out clearly for staff and timelines are appropriate in supporting them to complete the process on time, allowing for moderation and

validation of the judgements made by managers and governors. The college has revised its procedures for self-assessment with the aim of completing the evaluation of performance at course level earlier. Managers can now focus on implementing plans to improve standards for new learners at the start of the following academic year.

Heads of department produce a self-assessment of their learning area that is based appropriately on course-level reviews. However, the recently introduced process for course review is in a different format to that carried out by heads of learning areas and does not provide sufficient analysis and evaluation of outcomes for learners and the impact of teaching on students' learning and progress. Managers and course leaders now have access to well-presented and accurate data on retention, pass and success rates and external benchmarking information to inform self-assessment. In addition the college is placing greater priority on monitoring the impact of the actions taken to improve quality. The college has increased the use of learners' views to inform self-assessment. However, these often rely on quoting the results from questionnaires without evaluating learners' impact on decision making processes. As many of these arrangements are in the very early stages of implementation, managers will need to reflect on their impact in securing more rapid improvement, particularly in the quality of teaching and learning.

### **Outcomes for learners**

#### **How much progress was made in 2010/11 in improving success rates for college and work-based learners?**

#### **Reasonable progress**

Managers have implemented a range of strategies that have been effective in improving success rates on college-based and apprenticeship programmes. The curriculum has been redesigned to ensure that learners' main programmes are delivered in appropriate timescales and that they follow useful additional qualifications. Arrangements to provide learners with the guidance needed to select the right course have improved significantly. This includes revised entry criteria for courses and interviews carried out by subject specialists. Learners' induction to the college helps them to benefit from the improved support services available. Those identified to be at risk of underperforming are identified quickly and are provided with the support needed to help them to succeed. The proportion of learners leaving early has reduced significantly. The success rates of learners aged 16 to 18 on college-based courses have improved at all levels; however, at advanced level the rate remains below the national average. During 2010/11 the retention of learners in year one of advanced level courses improved. Most adults study at intermediate and advanced level. For these learners success rates are above the national averages. The rate of improvement varies between curriculum areas and success rates remain low on some courses. The proportion of apprentices who complete their programme within the planned time, which was low at the last inspection, has improved to just below the national average. Effective action has been taken to resolve the difference in success rates between male and female learners. This needs to be maintained to ensure that female learners perform as well as male learners.

## Quality of provision

<b>How much progress has been made in improving the quality of teaching and learning?</b>	<b>Reasonable progress</b>
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Senior managers are placing a higher priority on improving the quality of teaching and learning and have accurately identified that the pace of improvement needs to increase so that more teaching is judged good or better. Teachers have been provided with useful staff development but the college does not have systematic arrangements to ensure that this impacts quickly in improving standards. Materials to support teachers' planning are now available on the college's virtual learning environment and a new proforma aimed to increase the focus on learning has been produced. However, the quality of teaching and learning at this visit was largely satisfactory and a minority was judged to be inadequate.

College observers have been provided with good training and support to accurately identify the strengths and areas for improvement in the lessons they observe. The college's arrangements for recording and analysing the outcomes from observations using a software system provide managers with useful reports on the quality of teaching and learning across the college. However, the records do not provide sufficiently detailed guidance to individual teachers on what they need to do to improve. Although all teachers receive formal graded and developmental observations more needs to be done to quality assure the learning experience more regularly. For example, arrangements to quality assure teachers' lesson planning and use of learning materials are not sufficiently effective.



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