

Warwickshire College

Focused monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 130835

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Last day of inspection: 26 February 2014

Type of provider: General Further Education College

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Warwickshire College is one of the largest general further education and higher education colleges in the United Kingdom. The college has six centres across two counties including a specialist land-based centre at Moreton Morrell which provides training for farriery apprentices. Up until the 1 November 2013 the National Farrier Training Agency (NFTA), a division of the Farriers Registration Council (FRC), managed the provision of the advanced apprenticeship in farriery and was the sole provider of this qualification. By law, all practising farriers must be registered with the FRC and the apprenticeship qualification is a requirement of this registration. The FRC received funding from the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) for farriery apprentices training throughout England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Ofsted last inspected the NFTA in February 2013. At that inspection, inspectors judged outcomes for learners to require improvement, but found the the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the effectiveness of leadership and management inadequate. Following this inspection the NFTA closed and the provision was handed over to three colleges; Herefordshire and Ludlow College, Myerscough College and Warwickshire College. These three colleges had all previously acted as sub-contractors for the off-the-job training. All apprentices are employed by approved training farriers (ATFs) who provide the on-the-job training. Off-the-job training and assessment is carried out during block release periods of between two and four weeks, currently every six months throughout the apprenticeship.

This report focuses on Warwickshire College's farriery provision and the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

What progress has been made in introducing an effective and robust system to monitor and protect the welfare of apprentices?

Significant progress

Warwickshire College has made significant progress in ensuring the well-being and safety of the farriery apprentices in its care. Following the handover of the provision college staff risk-assessed all ATFs and the reviewed what paperwork was made available from the NFTA when it closed. Senior staff revisited and reinvestigated all existing complaints from learners to ensure that they were properly resolved. Since the handover senior staff have taken swift action to remove apprentices from ATFs where they were either making poor progress or where there were concerns about their welfare. College staff have visited all ATFs to ensure that they have a very clear

and accurate understanding of the role they play in the training programme and what is expected from them.

All new apprentices now have a welfare induction at the start of their training. Apprentices now receive pastoral review visits in the workplace to help to ensure their safety and welfare. When carrying out these reviews college staff ensure that they spend some time speaking to the apprentice in private so that apprentices have the opportunity to raise any concerns in a confidential way. The new review paperwork is greatly improved and provides a much more thorough and detailed record of the meeting. However, although staff now take action to ensure that apprentices are paid correctly, work appropriate hours and have access to the correct amount of free time, the review paperwork does not explicitly direct reviewers to ask and record information about these important aspects of working conditions.

Farriery apprentices now have access to the complete range of college services for welfare and support. Staff from student services are ensuring that they have full and easy access to information about all the types of support available to them. College managers and staff are working hard and successfully to develop a culture of disclosure and support, and apprentices feel safe and able to raise concerns. New complaints are handled swiftly and effectively, and apprentices are increasingly confident to voice their concerns. Apprentices report significant improvements in working relationships not only between themselves and their ATF, but also between apprentices from different stages of training. The process of 'back-blocking', or sending apprentices home from college blocks on the first day if they failed to meet assessment standards, has completely ceased.

What progress has been made in ensuring that all ATFs provide a high quality training experience for apprentices? And in particular resolving the issue of poorly performing ATFs?

Significant progress

Warwickshire College has made significant progress in ensuring that ATFs provide a high quality training experience. College staff worked very effectively with staff from Herefordshire and Ludlow College and Myerscough College to review and risk assess all ATFs using all available information as soon as practical after the handover. College senior staff have introduced a new role of industrial training manager and this new member of staff is responsible for managing the on-the-job training. All the ATFs have been visited in the workplace and the college used the risk banding to ensure that high risk ATFs were allocated senior members of college staff for these visits.

Senior managers have introduced strong arrangements for dealing with poor performance from ATFs. Farriery staff have worked hard to advise and support ATFs. However, college managers have removed apprentices and discontinued the relationship with the ATF if it has proved impossible to sufficiently improve the experience of apprentices. This is sending out a very strong message that the college will only work with those ATFs who are committed to providing excellent training.

Managers have reviewed, clarified and revised the role of the field officer, who had responsibility for work-based visits in between college blocks. They have drawn up new job descriptions for new placement officer roles and have provided training to support staff to carry out the new roles effectively. Central to these new roles is an expectation that visits focus on the needs of the apprentices and are not influenced by relationships between placement officers and ATFs. Senior staff have taken stringent steps to ensure that placement officers act as effective advocates for the apprentices. Communication between ATFs and college staff has improved significantly.

All ATFs have attended a mandatory training day to support them as coaches/trainers and their feedback following this training showed that they greatly welcomed the advice and support and felt enthusiastic about the new arrangements and the college's plans for the future. The thoughtfully structured event provided useful guidance on equine anatomy, safeguarding, health and safety in the workplace, employment legislation, equality of opportunity, and teaching and learning strategies, all intended to improve farriers' ability to fulfil their role as employers within the apprenticeship framework. The college is contributing to development work to introduce a mandatory coaching award for ATFs.

What progress has been made in ensuring high quality off-the-job training for apprentices which meets their individual needs?

Significant progress

College managers and staff have made significant progress in ensuring the quality of off-the-job training. The college has made substantial investment in resources to support training; including the development of e-learning packages to support learning between college blocks. Farriery staff have now draw up comprehensive and individual action plans for apprentices at the end of the college block so that they have a training plan to take back to the workplace. The farriery team has taken well-planned specific actions to resolve previous slow progress by apprentices. These include action plans, work-based support, and re-scheduling of the training programme. The demotivating and upsetting practice of 'back-blocking' or sending apprentices home from blocks has completely ceased. Farriery staff are keen to provide more intensive college time for apprentices who are struggling to reach the required standard. Farriery staff are also introducing a supportive and clear exit strategy for the tiny minority of apprentices who have been on programme for several years, are making little progress towards competence, and for whom farriery is not an appropriate career.

What progress has been made in conducting a thorough and comprehensive evaluation of the programme structure and content to modernise it and ensure it meets the needs of the industry and reflects current practice?

Insufficient progress

Progress to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of programme structure and content has been insufficient. At a local and operational level, college managers have made good progress in improving and adjusting those elements of the apprenticeship programme that lie within its control. They have worked hard to carry out tasks agreed as part of the three-college farriery post-inspection action plan. For example, following discussions and agreement all three colleges have now dispensed with 'back-blocking' of apprentices. Managers have made good progress in preparing staff and apprentices for the implementation of electronic portfolios to support more effective evidence gathering in the workplace.

Warwickshire College has participated fully in multi-party discussions about strategic programme review, and has worked effectively to carry out all tasks the Farriery Apprenticeship Steering Group (FASG) it. However, neither the FRC nor the Worshipful Company of Farriers (WCF) has responded with sufficient energy to the improvement agenda now clearly led by the three colleges. Despite constructive initial meetings involving all industry parties (Lantra, the British Horseracing Education & Standards Trust, WCF, FRC, SFA and the National Apprenticeship Service), and despite the readiness of the college and many of its employers to engage in wide-ranging and forward-looking debate around programme design and structure, insufficient progress has been made in this important area.

What progress has been made in carrying out a strategic review to evaluate the number of farriers needed to meet local and national needs in order to plan recruitment effectively?

Insufficient progress

Insufficient progress has been made in carrying out a strategic review to evaluate the number of farriers needed to meet local and regional needs or to plan recruitment effectively to meet such needs. However, college managers have made strenuous attempts to support such a review, though these have had little impact on the levels of activity initiated or permitted by the FRC and WCF.

The college has undertaken research into the range and nature of farriery activity nationally, and has shared a range of useful findings about the numbers of horses in the United Kingdom, and the numbers of active farriers. The research findings have been submitted to the members of the FASG, but no clear action has resulted. The FRC has undertaken to produce an overarching strategy for farriery for the next meeting of the FASG in March 2014. However, it is unclear whether the FRC has made any progress with the review, because to date the council has not shared the content or direction of thinking contained in the review with the three colleges or with other industry partners.

What progress has been made in ensuring a smooth hand-over of provision?**Significant progress**

College managers and staff have made significant progress in ensuring a smooth transition for apprentices and staff, following hand-over of provision in November 2013. Throughout the past four months, a clear and consistent focus on the welfare of apprentices and on the quality of provision has underpinned all activity. A suitable sense of urgency has characterised action to roll-out improved provision on time for new apprentices from January 2014, while a determination to maintain 'normal service' for existing apprentices has ensured that their learning and progress has not been affected by changes.

Managers have contributed energetically to a good range of multi-party meetings, and they have established clear and effective partnership working between colleges. Senior staff at the college have communicated well their determination to ensure that those involved in farriery training have the same expectations, rights and responsibilities as staff providing any other apprenticeship. This action has had a highly beneficial impact, improving both the provision and the interactions of those who hold training and support roles within the apprenticeship. Since the handover, college leaders and managers have maintained a patient and constructive engagement with the FASG, the FRC and WCF, as well as other industry bodies, despite the lack of action and engagement in return from the FRC and WCF.

What progress has been made in ensuring that appropriate actions are planned and taken so that provision is adequately improved?**Reasonable progress**

Managers and staff have made reasonable progress with arrangements to improve apprentices' training experiences and progress, but it is too early to judge the impact of their actions. Key to college leaders and managers' improvement of training is strengthening the links between off- and on-the-job training. Managers have carried out a comprehensive review of the apprenticeship to create a coherent training programme to replace the rather disjointed arrangements they inherited. College staff, farriery placement officers and ATFs have received extensive training which on the need to improve apprentices' welfare, their progress and the quality of provision. Staff at the college are now better aware of their responsibilities to oversee progress over the entire apprenticeship; rather than just administering assessments and training in college blocks. Farriery placement officers are now subject to a clearer contractual obligation to check apprentices' welfare and the quality of on-the-job training they receive. Managers oversee the work of placement officers more rigorously. Support staff at the college have a good range of well-established measures in place to support the apprentices whether at college or with their employers.

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