

Myerscough College

Monitoring visit report

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Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

Myerscough College has seven centres, including the main college campus at Bilsborrow, near Preston, 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.

The NFTA was last inspected in February 2013. At that inspection outcomes for learners were judged to require improvement, while the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the effectiveness of leadership and management were judged to be 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 colleges had all previously acted as subcontractors 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 at every six months throughout the apprenticeship.

This report focuses on Myerscough 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?

Reasonable progress

Myerscough College has made reasonable progress in ensuring the well-being and safety of farriery apprentices in their care.

Following the handover of the provision college staff carried out risk assessments of all ATFs and the college reviewed what paperwork was made available from the NFTA when it closed. Staff from the farriery department have visited all current ATFs in the workplace, spoken in private with apprentices and thoroughly checked their welfare, working conditions and pay; health and safety checks were carried out at the same time. 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 forge time, the review paperwork does not

explicitly check that reviewers ask and record information about these important aspects of working conditions. Farriery apprentices now have access to the complete range of the college's services for welfare and support and new apprentices now have a welfare induction on their first block at college. Apprentices now have access to a great deal of information about what support is available and how to gain access to it, and the college is working hard to foster a healthy atmosphere in which apprentices feel safe to make disclosures knowing that they will get the help and support they need. 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. Safeguarding is an item for discussion at the weekly farriery team meetings; however, recording at these meetings is poor. Actions are copied from one meeting to the next and most, including the need to address inappropriate language and behaviour among teaching staff and apprentices, are regarded as on-going.

At handover, the NFTA had identified two ATFs who were causing particular concern. These ATFs were asked to attend the college for discussions about future practice and expectations. Staff have taken steps to ensure that their current apprentices are adequately protected, cared for and trained. However, recording of these discussions is poor, no action plans have been drawn up or targets set, there are no records of formal monitoring, and correspondence does not adequately set out the college's expectations.

What progress has been made in ensuring that all ATFs provide a high- quality training experience for apprentices? And in particular addressing poorly performing ATFs? **Reasonable progress**

Myerscough College has made reasonable progress in ensuring that ATFs provide a high quality experience. The college has ensured that new contracts are in place between ATFs and apprentices. Senior managers have been clear that the college will only work with ATFs who share its commitment to training and developing apprentices in a safe and supportive way. College staff have visited all ATFs and made its expectations clear to them and also offered support and help where required. Communication between ATFs and the college is significantly improved. All ATFs have now attended a mandatory training day to support them as coaches/trainers, and more are planned. 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 enhance farriers' ability to fulfil their role as employers within the apprenticeship framework.

Myerscough College is leading the development work to introduce an obligatory coaching award for ATFs who wish to employ apprentices. At the handover of provision the college carried out risk assessments of all ATFs using all the available information, however, high risk ATFs have not received significantly different monitoring or review arrangements to those rated as low risk. Actions taken to deal

with poorer performing ATFs have not been sufficiently robust and too much reliance has been placed on verbal communication which is not reinforced by letters or action plans.

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

Significant progress

Significant progress has been made in ensuring the quality of off-the-job training. The college has made significant improvements to the information, advice and guidance given to new apprentices. The farriery team has greatly improved the communication with potential apprentices about the training and about what to expect on college blocks. All new learners will now complete electronic portfolios allowing them to make good use of evidence gathered on-the-job and to take ownership of their training. This will allow apprentices to progress at their own pace and to work in a much more individual way between blocks. The process of 'back-blocking' has ceased and if apprentices arrive at college poorly prepared, the farriery team now uses the block productively to help the apprentice catch up and improve their skills. The farriery team is working hard to make the training programme more coherent, to build strong links between the on-and off-the-job training and to increase accountability for apprentices' progress. Communication with ATFs has improved significantly and farriery staff are keen to make the farriery apprenticeship more flexible and ensure that it meets apprentices' individual needs. Apprentices making slow progress now attend college between college blocks and receive individually tailored training to increase their skills and confidence. Apprentices are now able to submit work at any time in between blocks and receive help and feedback.

A virtual learning environment (VLE) is being developed and is proving a good resource to support learning. Farriery staff have been equipped with tablets to support the development and use of modern technology within their teaching and assessing. College structures offer a good opportunity for sharing of information between the farriery team and the learning support team and better coordination of their work. However, these new arrangements have yet to be fully exploited. At the end of the block farriery teaching staff draw up action plans for apprentices to take back to the workplace, but as yet, they are too generic and lack enough individual tasks and target-setting to assist ATFs in planning work and developing apprentices' skills.

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 the programme structure and content has been insufficient. At a local and operational level, Myerscough College has made good progress in reviewing elements of the apprenticeship programme. Since the transfer of the apprenticeship provision, the college has worked hard to carry out tasks jointly agreed between the three colleges who now hold the apprenticeship contract. Myerscough College has played, and continues to play, an active role in carrying out the three-college post-inspection action plan. At Myerscough College good arrangements are in place to support apprentices who in the past would have been 'back-blocked'. Managers have made good progress in preparing staff and learners for the imminent roll-out of electronic portfolios to support more effective evidence gathering in the workplace.

Myerscough College has participated fully in multi-party discussions about strategic programme review and has worked effectively to carry out the tasks allocated by the Farriery Apprenticeship Steering Group (FASG). At a recent FASG meeting, the college presented proposals for a 'train the trainer' award for farriers, and the Farriers Registration Council (FRC) will consider this in March 2014. Further, the college has made constructive attempts to provide progression pathways for existing farriers by developing a range of higher education programmes. However, the FASG, the FRC and Worshipful Company of Farriers (WCF) have not permitted any action to be taken following forward-looking debates about apprenticeship structure, nor have either of these bodies taken any concrete steps to ensure the apprenticeship programme's continuing fitness for purpose. An initial meeting between WCF, FRC and the three colleges along with a number of industry bodies and the SFA led to no concrete proposals or actions.

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, the college along with its partners has made strenuous attempts to support such a review, though these have had little impact on the level of activity undertaken by the FRC and WCF. A farriers' training event held in February 2014 at Myerscough College was well attended and very well received by farriers. A female apprentice from the college led a standard-setting activity at the training day, projecting a positive role model for a long under-represented minority in the industry.

The college shared research into the range and nature of national farriery activity, producing a range of useful findings about the numbers of horses in the UK, and the numbers of active farriers. The research findings have been shared with members of the FASG, but no clear actions have resulted. The FRC has undertaken to produce an overarching strategy for the next meeting of the FASG in March 2014. However, it is not clear whether the FRC has made any progress with the review, because to date none of the content or direction of thinking in the review has been shared with the three colleges or other industry partners.

What progress has been made in ensuring a smooth handover of provision?

Significant progress

Managers at Myerscough College have made significant progress in ensuring a smooth handover of provision following the contract transfer. Senior leaders have maintained a suitable sense of urgency to roll-out improved provision on time for new apprentices from January 2014. Planning for the handover of provision has been careful, with clear prioritisation of actions that have an impact on apprentices' welfare and safety. Managers and staff at the college have maintained good forward progress with handover plans despite a considerable lack of cooperation on the part of the FRC and NFTA especially in the transfer of important welfare and safeguarding records and staff contracts.

Across the past five months, the college has played a strong role in partnership working between the colleges now holding the apprenticeship contract. Relationships between members of the college's farriery teaching team and the ATFs who employ apprentices have improved considerably. ATFs now speak of good direct communications and a swift response from staff members when queries are raised about training matters. A good range of well-focused training for college staff, for farriery placement officers (formerly field officers) and ATFs has taken place, in the short time since the handover. The college has directly focused the training on the need to enhance apprentices' welfare, their progress and the quality of provision. Staff' understanding of these key areas has improved considerably. However, while existing farriery placement officers have received training and now better fulfil their important role, the college has been slow to implement plans for the appointment of its own placement officers with new contracts which better reflect the changed nature of the apprenticeship training.

Leaders and managers have been receptive to comments from partners, from ATFs and especially from apprentices. The college has maintained a consistently positive engagement with the FASG, the FRC and WCF, as well as other industry bodies, despite the lack of cooperation and engagement by the NFTA, the FRC and WCF throughout the transfer.

What progress has been made in ensuring that appropriate actions are planned and taken so that provision is

Reasonable progress

adequately improved?

Reasonable progress has been made in the short time available for improvement since the college took over the provision. The ending of 'back blocking' and the development of individually focused additional blocks for those who require extra support give apprentices a much better chance to succeed and enjoy their programmes. Managers have worked successfully to promote understanding among all staff that the apprenticeship should represent a coherent training programme. Such work is beginning to show impact, and staff in the farriery team now have a much improved understanding of the ways that their work affects apprentices' welfare and progress throughout the programme, rather than just during college blocks.

The college's VLE provides a good source of course and learning support materials for apprentices to use. These are well produced and accessibly packaged. However, the ATFs do not yet have access to the VLE to support their apprentices and monitor their progress. The college recognises the need to develop this aspect of the VLE. Managers have worked successfully to forge links between cross-college support and advice and guidance professionals and the farriery team, but these links are still relatively new and in early stages of development. Senior leaders recognise that this area of work should be given a high priority across coming months.

At a strategic level within the college, there is a well-communicated drive to ensure that farriery training has in place the same expectations of employers as other apprenticeship training arrangements. However, this strategic vision and broad understanding have yet to permeate fully the farriery team and reach the ATFs. Senior managers recognise this as a key area for professional development and support during coming months.

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