

Herefordshire & Ludlow College

Monitoring visit report

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Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

Herefordshire and Ludlow College has three campuses including a specialist land-based centre at Holme Lacy 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 that outcomes for learners required improvement, but they judged the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the effectiveness of leadership and management 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 sub-contractors for the off-the-job training. Apprentices are all 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 Herefordshire and Ludlow 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

Herefordshire and Ludlow College has made significant progress in ensuring the well-being and safety of farriery apprentices in its care. Immediately after the inspection of the NFTA, and before the handover of the provision, the college employed a consultant to carry out a full review of its welfare practices, including reinvestigating complaints and reviewing its teaching practices. The review resulted in a comprehensive and thorough report, which made a number of recommendations for improvement. College managers have now drawn up a comprehensive action plan to put these recommendations into practice and they are taking strong action where appropriate. All ATFs have been risk assessed and an experienced member of staff with a strong welfare remit has now been moved to a permanent appointment, in the farriery team, to lead the area and ensure welfare issues are tackled and

resolved effectively. The new team leader has visited all ATFs to establish a new direct relationship between ATFs and the college. These visits were made in conjunction with a farrier from the teaching team. The visits were planned so that those apprentices who had the longest time gap before attending college again, and were considered highest risk, were visited first. All apprentices are now attending a welfare tutorial at college to extend their knowledge of their rights and responsibilities. Herefordshire and Ludlow College has taken action to remove apprentices from ATFs where the apprentices are either making poor progress or where there are concerns about their welfare. College managers and staff have made their expectations from ATFs very clear and communication between the college and ATFs has improved significantly. The farriery team makes sure that reviews in the workplace now include time spent in private with the apprentice to ensure that apprentices are able to speak freely. 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 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. The support team have ensured that apprentices are able to access a great deal of information about the support available for them freely and easily. New apprentices have a welfare induction in their first week at college. The process of 'back-blocking' whereby apprentices were sent home from college blocks on the first day if they failed to meet assessment standards has ceased completely. The farriery team have worked hard to promote a healthy atmosphere in which apprentices feel comfortable to make disclosures knowing that they will be given the help and support they need. Managers and staff now resolve new complaints swiftly and effectively. Farriery staff now attend the faculty safeguarding meetings and strong links have now been built between the safeguarding team, student services and the farriery team.

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

Herefordshire and Ludlow College has made significant progress in ensuring that ATFs provide a high quality experience. College staff worked very effectively with staff from Warwickshire College and Myerscough College to review and risk assess all ATFs using all available information as soon as practicable after the handover. New contracts are now in place between ATFs and apprentices. The college has been absolutely clear that it will only work with ATFs who share its commitment to training and developing apprentices in a safe and supportive way. All ATFs have attended a mandatory training day to support them as coaches/trainers and managers plan to hold more. 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 an obligatory coaching award for ATFs. Senior staff have visited all ATFs and made the college's expectations very clear to them, as well as offering support and help where required. The college now has strong arrangements for dealing with poor ATF performance and it has taken steps to educate ATFs. If it has proved impossible to improve the experience of apprentices the college has removed the apprentices and discontinued its relationship with the ATF. Communication between ATFs and the college is significantly improved.

The college has decided that farriery teaching staff will now carry out work-based assessment. This new approach to including work-based assessment means that a much stronger link can be built between the college team and ATFs. It allows the possibility of coaching at work, to support the development of ATFs' skills, as well as providing additional training for apprentices.

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. They have made substantial improvements to the college's information, advice and guidance for new farriery apprentices. All new learners will now complete electronic portfolios allowing them to make good use of evidence gathered on-the-job and 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 use 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. Since this requires the teaching team to also travel and carry out assessments managers have recruited new members of staff to expand the team, and ensure it can meet these new demands.

The culture of teaching in the farriery department has changed radically. Apprentices are now much more engaged in their lessons and teachers encourage them to participate and contribute to the whole group's learning. Tasks involve much more onus on apprentices researching and finding answers rather than the rather directed approach teachers previously employed. Teachers are determined to provide an encouraging and supportive culture in which learners feel safe and valued. An extensive programme of staff development supports teachers to develop and share good practice. The farriery team now work much more closely with the learning support team and the sharing of information and co-ordination of the learning support, with the off-the-job training, is much better. However, it is unclear how

apprentices will access learning support whilst in the workplace between college blocks. Apprentices now receive detailed information on what they will cover at the next block so that they and their ATFs can prepare better. At the end of the block farriery teachers draw up action plans for apprentices to take back to the workplace, but as yet they are too generic and do not have enough individual tasks and targets to really 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 programme structure and content has been insufficient. Herefordshire and Ludlow College has taken effective steps to improve and rationalise those elements of provision over which it has direct control. College leaders and managers have clearly prioritised apprentices' needs and security in their revision of the apprenticeship programme delivery and management. Managers and staff contribute fully and energetically to the tasks allocated to them as part of the joint post-inspection action plan for the three colleges.

For example, following discussions and agreement, all three colleges have now dispensed with 'back-blocking' of apprentices. Additionally the college managers have instigated a wide-ranging and forward-looking review of arrangements to safeguard and support apprentices in their workplaces. Work to implement electronic-portfolios and a virtual learning environment (VLE) are at an advanced stage. The electronic-portfolios and VLE will allow apprentices and their employers to engage more effectively with the programme, review progress, link on and off-the-job training, throughout the apprenticeship, and gather evidence in the workplace much more effectively.

Since the inspection of the NFTA, Herefordshire and Ludlow College has participated fully in multi-party discussions about strategic programme review, and has made a good range of contributions to project working and debates directed by the Farriery Apprenticeship Steering Group (FASG). 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.

At a strategic level the FRC and WCF have made no progress in reviewing the apprenticeship structure or in ensuring its fitness for purpose, leaving the colleges unable to make any progress with their work in this respect. 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 college managers and staff 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

Since the transfer of provision to the college in November 2013, managers and staff have established effective and much-improved recruitment, interview and enrolment processes. Apprentices now receive good advice and guidance at the start of their training, and they receive appropriate assessment of their mathematics, English and other skills. However, despite the positive work to improve recruitment and the links between ATFs and college managers and staff, insufficient progress has been made in carrying out a national strategic review to evaluate the number of farriers needed to meet local and regional needs or to plan recruitment effectively to meet such needs.

The college, along with many of its employer-partners, has welcomed and encouraged the debate about national needs and recruitment strategies, but the FRC and WCF have taken no concrete action in response to such debate, nor have they taken any lead in reviewing national training strategies. Research findings relating to numbers of horses in the United Kingdom and numbers of farriers currently operating, have been shared with the FASG, but no clear action has resulted. The FRC has undertaken to produce an overarching strategy for the next meeting of the FASG in March 2014, but to date nothing 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 hand-over of provision?

Significant progress

Herefordshire and Ludlow College has made significant progress in ensuring a smooth hand-over of provision, since assuming responsibility for apprentices in November 2013. During the handover of records and employment details for staff from the NFTA and FRC, the college managers and staff worked with unfailing commitment and great patience in the face of unreasonable delays and a generally unhelpful approach on the part of those who held important apprentice and staffing information.

Managers and staff at the college have maintained a determination to safeguard the welfare and improve the experiences of apprentices. They have paid good attention to the needs of those partway through their apprenticeships, as well as to the needs of those new apprentices who started in January 2014. Managers swiftly and effectively reviewed the options for programme management following the handover, and quickly established a workable structure to support staff and learners. Farriery staff, who now have responsibility for apprentices' welfare in the workplace, as well as their assessment and progress at college blocks, are very involved in the process of change. Staff are enthusiastic and forward-looking in their approach to the apprenticeship. They have already gained a very good understanding of the needs of

individual apprentices across the country, because of visits made to each in their workplace.

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

Leaders, managers and staff have made reasonable progress in planning appropriate action to improve provision. They have put in place a good range of effective staffing changes and have strengthened management of the apprenticeship. A clear strategy to change culture in farriery apprenticeship training, though in its early days, is largely successful to date. Staff have a clear and energetically expressed desire to develop their own abilities to liaise with ATFs and promote high-quality workplace assessment and training.

During college training blocks, staff now use teaching, learning and assessment which meet the individual needs of apprentices. Managers and staff now vigorously promote the notion of consistent and coherent training across the four years of the apprenticeship. The rigour of the college's quality summit meeting report of February 2014 demonstrates well the focus of managers and staff on the quality of teaching and learning and on apprentices' safety and welfare. The quality summit report also gives early signs of a growing and constructive engagement with parents and ATFs, as highlighted by the range of actions emerging from the 'accolades and complaints' gathered from these groups.

The college's virtual learning environment needs further development to allow staff to realise its full potential. For example, employers' use of the platform for checking their apprentices' work and progress is under-developed. The farriery team have put good remedial support in place for those apprentices who were making slower than expected progress because of 'back-blocking' under previous training system. The college farriery team has benefitted from a wide range of staff development activity focussed on apprentice safety and needs. Staff have made good progress in dealing with external verifier recommendations and advisory notes in the latest action plan from the British Horseracing Education and Standards Trust.

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