

# Berkshire College of Agriculture

## Specialist college

<b>Inspection dates</b>		9–12 June 2015
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Good-2</b>
	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement-3
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

### Summary of key findings for learners

#### This college is good because:

- at the end of the current academic year, the proportion of learners who have stayed on their courses is high and their progress is considerably improved and mostly good
- learners develop good or better practical skills for employment in subjects including land-based, sports and public services
- a high proportion of teaching and learning is good
- the curriculum is managed very well and is based on a detailed evaluation of local and regional employers' requirements and on a thorough analysis of local area intelligence; curriculum development in response to the needs of the local land-based sector is particularly noteworthy
- support for students is very good, particularly for vulnerable learners
- staff undertake robust and frequent monitoring of learners' progress which ensures learners almost all make good progress; the number of learners' progressing into employment is high
- senior managers have put in place many improvements, such as a strong focus on developing learners' English and mathematics skills which have helped many more learners to complete their courses and be well prepared for progression to meet their career aims.

#### This is not yet an outstanding college because:

- on a small number of two-year courses, too many learners left early, at the end of the first year
- the new online marking system, and the guidance for its use, is not yet effective enough in ensuring that learners' spelling and grammar errors are always corrected, or that learners receive appropriate feedback on how to improve
- apprenticeship provision requires improvement because there is too much variation in performance between subjects
- the arrangements for promoting cultural diversity do not consistently have sufficient impact on all learners to lead to their better understanding and greater awareness of differences in culture and values across modern Britain.

## Full report

### What does the college need to do to improve further?

- Improve apprenticeship provision through close collaboration between college and subcontractor staff teams so that apprentices' learning and assessment are carefully planned and learners make consistently good progress. Increase the frequency of assessments where needed and ensure that staff make best use of apprentices' time in college to help all learners achieve their learning goals as quickly as possible.
- Review and improve the arrangements for the promotion of cultural diversity within the curriculum so that learners are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Ensure that the online marking system is fully effective by clarifying the guidance provided to teachers for correcting errors in spelling and grammar on learners' written assignment work.
- Monitor learners' progress on the second year of two-year courses to make sure that those at risk of leaving early are supported quickly and effectively.

### Inspection judgements

<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	Good
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- The college's Study programmes for learners aged 16 to 19 at levels 1, 2 and 3, make up more than three quarters of the provision. Learning programmes for adults account for most of the remainder of the provision, with apprenticeships making up less than a tenth.
- The proportion of learners who are successful in achieving their main qualifications is increasing, but remains below the proportion in similar colleges. In 2013/14, too many learners withdrew from their courses before they had completed; in the current year, a much higher proportion have stayed on courses until the end.
- Teachers' predictions, based on end of year assessment information, indicate that the proportion of current learners who will successfully complete their qualifications is likely to be much higher than in 2013/14, and above that in similar colleges. However, until learners' results are verified by the awarding organisations, this position cannot be confirmed.
- In 2013/14, learners studying qualifications at level 2 and below were less successful than those studying at level 3. This was mostly because learners' staying on rate and results in functional skills qualifications at these levels were too low. The few learners studying on A- and AS-level qualifications underperformed notably and this provision is no longer offered as part of the curriculum.
- In the current year, a high proportion of learners have remained on courses for GCSEs in English and mathematics, and functional skills qualifications. Their attendance at the GCSE examinations was very high. The proportion expected to achieve a grade C or better is much higher than previously, where too few have been successful.
- In 2013/14, learners studying subjects including public services, art and design, sport, horticulture and animal care had high success rates on most courses. However, learners' success rates were not high enough on courses in hairdressing and beauty therapy, health and social care, business and some equine studies courses. In the current year, learners' progress in these previously underperforming subjects is much improved.
- Most learners make good or better progress compared to their starting points, which are often lower than average. For example, a high proportion of learners on level 3 courses do not have a grade C or higher at GCSE in English and mathematics when they begin their courses. A high proportion of learners are vulnerable either because they have significant barriers to learning, low starting points, or because of personal or social problems.

- Learners develop the practical skills of their chosen vocation very well in almost all cases. For example, equine learners ride a range of horses effectively and can improve their paces and outline well; agriculture learners provide full husbandry of the college's commercial ewe flock, including lambing, and horticulture learners contribute to the very high standard of the landscape and gardens on the estate. Learners' work is mostly of a high standard, including in subjects such as media and creative arts.
- Learners' attendance has increased since the previous inspection and is good on most courses; but, although increasing, it is not high enough for lessons in English and mathematics.
- In the current year, the achievement gap between male and female learners has closed markedly, mainly because male students have been retained on functional skills courses at a much higher level than previously. Other groups of learners, such as those with additional learning needs achieve as well as their peers. The numbers of learners of minority ethnic heritage are too small for statistical analysis. Looked after children who study at the college achieve very well.
- Learners gain good personal and social skills while at the college. For example, learners on foundation learning courses, some of whom have either learning difficulties and/or disabilities, learn to work well together as well as improving their self-confidence and broadening their horizons through playing in the college's football team, the Wildcats. Learners use the many other opportunities to develop these skills well, such taking part in the running of equestrian events and through being part of the entertainments team at a local theme park.
- More than half of learners take up employment when they leave college, many in the land-based sector, and over a quarter go on to further study or higher education. A high proportion of continuing learners move to higher levels of study at the college because they are well prepared for progression.
- The very small cohort of apprentices achieved well in 2013/14, and most were successful within the time allocated for their qualifications. However, of the much higher number of apprentices due to complete in 2014/15, more have withdrawn before they have completed and the overall success rate is likely to be considerably lower and closer to the rate in similar colleges.

<b>The quality of teaching, learning and assessment</b>	Good
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- Teaching, learning and assessment have improved since the previous inspection and are now good. This improvement is reflected in learners' higher retention rates, increased attendance and their much-improved progress.
- The extensive and very well focused programme of professional development for teaching staff has enabled teachers to provide learners with demanding tasks and challenging learning activities that are helping many of them to achieve higher than expected grades. Most learners know exactly what they need to do to achieve well in their qualifications and the vast majority are on track to achieve or exceed their target grades.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are often outstanding in public services and sport sessions. Good teaching and assessment are common in most other subjects, including animal care and English. A small minority of lessons require improvement, typically because teaching is undemanding and unimaginative and, in a very few cases, planning of learning is poor.
- Most teachers are highly experienced subject specialists, using their knowledge well to create lessons that engage and motivate learners. Teachers use an appropriate variety of teaching methods in theory and practical sessions that link these aspects of learning well. Teachers make extensive and good use of interactive learning technologies to enhance their lessons.
- In most lessons, teachers plan learning carefully to take full account of individual abilities and circumstances, and help learners overcome any barriers to learning.
- Teachers work very closely with support staff to ensure that teaching is informed well by individual learners' learning needs. Learning coaches work closely with teachers during lessons to provide targeted support for individual students. Senior managers and teachers track

learners' progress closely and accurately; the support provided for learners who are struggling or falling behind is prompt and effective.

- Development of learners' English, mathematics and wider employability skills is good and is an integral part of study programmes in all but a very few subject areas.
- Teachers encourage learners well to develop independent learning skills. For example, on level 3 art and design courses, learners are adept in skills of research, critique and analysis. Online study resources are extensive and include a good range of reference and source material, but a small minority of learners are unaware that these resources are available remotely.
- Most learners hold their teachers and the quality of their teaching in very high regard. Learners' behaviour is often exemplary; however, teachers do not always manage the very rare instances of poor classroom behaviour quickly or well enough.
- Teachers provide constructive oral feedback which helps learners understand clearly what they need to do to improve. Teachers' written feedback on paper-based work is frequently detailed and developmental, except in motor vehicle. However, written feedback on learners' work submitted online is often sparse and uninformative, particularly when related to improving their English skills. The policy on the correction of spelling and grammar as part of the new online marking system lacks clarity and, consequently, teachers' practice is not always good.
- Assessment practice for apprentices is sound, but assessments on a small number of courses are not always timely, frequent enough or well planned. In a minority of cases, spelling and grammar in apprentices' written work are not corrected routinely or thoroughly.
- Teachers promote equality of opportunity very well, but their success at promoting diversity in lessons is not always good. In the best cases, such as in public services lessons, topics such as religion, sexuality, gender, safeguarding and barriers to participation are routinely woven into lessons. However, promotion through discussion is not effective in other curriculum areas.

## Animal care

### 16-19 study programmes Apprenticeships

Good

#### Teaching, learning and assessment in animal care are good because:

- good teaching is reflected in current learners' good progress and, in particular, the high levels of achievement by level 1 and level 2 learners; until the current year, too few learners at level 3 completed their courses, often because they left to go into employment, but almost all of the current first year learners have stayed on their course and are planning to return for their second year
- teachers set high standards and ensure learners acquire very good practical skills, such as in animal handling; they ensure learners develop good work related, personal and social skills, so that learners' punctuality and attendance are now good and they use technical language confidently
- teachers monitor learners' progress well and provide extra help and support promptly; they ensure learners know precisely what they have achieved and what they need to do next, which helps many of them meet or exceed their targets and learning goals
- teachers make sure lessons have a brisk pace and use interesting activities that constantly challenge most learners to participate fully and acquire new knowledge and skills quickly, for example in applying animal medication to different animals on a wide range of application sites
- teachers frequently check that learners understand topics by using very good directed questions and careful observation of their work with the animals; teachers often provide a well-structured review of the main learning points during lessons which aids learners' progress considerably
- learning coaches are used effectively to enhance learning and they work closely with teachers so that their work is most effective

- teachers develop learners' employability skills successfully through well-organised external work experience and working with learners on a range of activities such as mock interviews, writing letters of application and preparing high quality curriculum vitae
- staff ensure that the small number of apprentices are well taught and their work is assessed accurately and frequently; staff monitor apprentices' progress thoroughly and all are on track to complete their apprenticeship within the allocated time
- staff manage health and safety within the animal unit very well, including ensuring that the handling of large animals such as camelids, rare animals such as Scottish Wildcats or electric blue geckos, as well as potentially dangerous animals such as snakes and otters, is carried out safely
- teachers make good use of the excellent resources in the animal unit and of information and learning technology, including a well-resourced virtual learning environment which aids learning outside the classroom
- staff assess learners' work frequently and accurately and provide clear and helpful feedback; in particular, learners at levels 1 and 2 receive feedback on their work which helps them to be well prepared for work at a higher level
- teachers provide very good advice and guidance that inform learners about their career options, including helping them make applications to universities; managers and teachers have made a number of changes to the curriculum to ensure it provides a very good match to current and prospective learners.

**Teaching, learning and assessment in animal care are not yet outstanding because:**

- learners' mathematics skills are not developed well in a small minority of lessons
- in a small minority of lessons, teachers do not help learners to develop their English skills; learners' spelling and grammar are not checked thoroughly in work that is marked online.

**Motor vehicle**

**16-19 study programmes  
Apprenticeships**

Requires improvement

**Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement because:**

- the proportion of learners, particularly adults, who successfully achieve their qualifications is too low, because they have not always received enough help and support to achieve their full potential
- teachers do not support and challenge learners by providing constructive written feedback on their assignments to enable them to improve their work and learn as well as they can
- teachers' use ineffective questioning techniques to check on learners' knowledge or to ensure learners all participate; for example, teachers often allow the more vocal learners to dominate theory lessons on topics such as servicing and the use of gear boxes
- too often errors in spelling and grammar are not corrected in learners' portfolios, even in the spelling of common terms such as engine, chisel and exhaust
- teachers do not monitor the targets set for learners during tutorials effectively enough and too often the deadline for completing the target passes with no action; teachers do not help learners develop their organisational skills, for example in the neatness and ordering of their notes
- work experience is not assessed well, so learners are not always clear about what they have learnt and what skills they need to improve
- the progress of a minority of apprentices is slow

**In engineering and motor vehicle, the college has the following strengths:**

- learners, particularly adults, receive much better support than previously and the number who stay until the end of their courses has increased on almost all programmes
- teachers are good at coaching learners in practical skills, for example in helping learners understand how a clutch operates, or using information and learning technology well to illustrate various mechanical operations
- teachers' oral feedback is often very good and helps learners to gain confidence and competence in complex tasks such as removing a head gasket
- teaching is often linked very well to work, and helps learners develop their employability skills well; most learners take part in work experience which is very useful to their understanding of the motor industry.

**Public services and sports****16-19 study programmes**

Outstanding

**Teaching, learning and assessment in public services and sport are outstanding because:**

- almost all learners complete their qualifications in public services successfully and a very large majority achieve their learning goals in sport; learners display high standards of work and a large majority of learners in public services achieve at distinction grade
- teaching and learning are often outstanding and learners frequently make rapid progress; teachers use challenging and motivating activities that are relevant, varied and often have currency with life in modern Britain; as a result, learners gain much valuable experience and explore, for example, the impact of governmental or legislative decisions on society
- support for learners is very good; staff use individual learning plans to guide and monitor learners' progress and learners understand and enjoy the challenge of meeting their targets
- teachers provide regular and structured feedback which develops learners' confidence and independence successfully and learners value this highly
- staff assess learners' work frequently and accurately, providing clear, high-quality verbal feedback which learners respond to very quickly and improve their work as a result
- staff are highly experienced coming from, for example, careers in the Army, Navy, Royal Marines, Fire Service and Police and they use their knowledge very effectively to make lessons stimulating as well as providing accurate and valuable careers advice
- extensive links with employers ensure learners gain a great deal from excellent work experience opportunities; for example, learners work with the police to identify where alcohol is sold to under-age drinkers and a formalised partnership with an outdoor education organisation gives learners extensive work experience opportunities, often leading to employment in the sector
- learners use technical language very well and teachers develop learners' English and mathematics skills successfully, leading to improvement in reading, writing and speaking as well as mental mathematics; for example, learners undertake calculations of heart rate and rates of perceived exertion as well as completing spelling tests of key words related to their area of study
- because teachers provide excellent role models, the behaviour of learners is exemplary and they work well with staff and collaboratively with each other; learners respond very effectively to teachers' questions and are able to evaluate facts and challenge opinions respectfully and knowledgeably
- during lessons, teachers and learners explore sensitive subjects very thoroughly, such as disability, religion and sexuality, ensuring learners have a good understanding and are highly respectful of all aspects of diversity

- as a result of rigorous recruitment, selection and induction practices, learners are placed on the right course and benefit from an individualised study programme which helps them reach their career aims; destination data confirm this success.

## Foundation English

Good

### 16-19 study programmes

#### **Teaching, learning and assessment in foundation English are good because:**

- current learners' progress is mostly good, in-year and assessment data show that most will achieve well and the standard of their work is high; most learners have stayed on until the end of their courses in both GCSE English and functional skills, and attendance at the recent GCSE examination was very high
- good teaching, learning and assessment are effective at enabling learners to develop and consolidate knowledge and skills in English reading, writing and listening and speaking which they understand and apply well
- learners demonstrate good comprehension of writing for purpose, such as letters of application; they respond well to teachers' challenge and questioning and work cohesively in small groups
- learners are positive about their experiences and their teachers, and the support and guidance which are readily available for them; the system for identifying learners' additional support needs is robust and learners with assessed needs achieve as well as their peers
- teachers promote the importance of English in learners' vocational subjects and their everyday lives well
- teaching staff are mostly well qualified, all are enthusiastic and passionate about their subject; learners' attendance has increased markedly in GCSE lessons, but still requires some improvement; the picture is similar for functional skills sessions
- learners' progress in lessons and with their assessed work is monitored closely by English teachers and this information is shared with the learners so that they know how they are getting on and what more they need to do
- the majority of teachers use questions skilfully to check and extend learners' understanding and knowledge, enabling learners to reflect and plan how they can continually improve the standard of their work
- in written feedback, the majority of teachers challenge learners to improve their work in a constructive and meaningful way, with good examples and suggestions given on how they can improve; in a very small minority of instances, spelling and grammar are not corrected
- teachers and learners benefit from being taught in bright, well-equipped teaching rooms, which are conducive to learning and replace poor-quality facilities used previously
- teachers use well a broad variety of teaching and learning resources, such as video, still images, diagrams and text; these are used particularly well for learners with additional learning needs.

#### **Teaching, learning and assessment in foundation English are not yet outstanding because:**

- in 2013/14, too few learners were successful in gaining their qualifications
- teachers' targets for learners set as part of reviews of their progress are insufficiently demanding, are not monitored closely enough, nor are they shared well enough with other teachers
- although planning of learning shows where equality and diversity topics can be explored further in learning activities, teachers do not always use the naturally occurring points to develop these themes in lessons and promote learners' better understanding and awareness.

**The effectiveness of leadership and management**

Good

- The principal, senior managers and governors instil successfully a culture of high expectations for learners and staff. They provide an inclusive, friendly and lively learning environment in which learners from a wide range of backgrounds and abilities thrive. The mission and strategic plans match the needs of the local community, and local and regional employers' requirements; good progress has been made in achieving the strategic objectives set for the current year.
- Senior managers have focused their work very effectively on tackling the areas for improvement identified from the previous inspection and, in particular, their improvement actions have ensured learners are retained on their courses at a much higher level than previously. They have also ensured that development of English and mathematics skills is central to the curriculum at all levels. As a result, the quality of provision has improved markedly.
- Governors challenge senior managers robustly using accurate reports, monitor the quality of provision and guide and support recovery from a weak financial position very effectively. They have also played a part in developing a relevant and constructive curriculum.
- Managers plan the curriculum well to meet the needs of the vast majority of learners, the community and employers. Managers have successfully implemented 16 to 19 study programmes, including by making good use of the well-established arrangements for giving learners experience of work and the strong tradition of helping them develop personally and socially.
- Senior managers frequently seek the views of employers, for example in agriculture and horticulture, to enable learners to develop a broad range of skills. Managers engage well with corporate and local businesses, such as the Royal Windsor Race Course, the National Health Service and the National Farmers Union, to provide learners with industry-related activities and many job-related opportunities.
- Managers' use accurate data well to ensure robust monitoring of learners' performance at all levels. Senior managers tackle underperformance very effectively in most subjects. By working constructively and collaboratively with a sub-contractor, managers have recently put in place actions to improve apprenticeship provision.
- Managers' self-assessment of the provision is accurate and self-critical. Self-assessment has led to rapid improvements in a number of areas, such as the provision of information, advice and guidance and the support provided to learners to ensure they complete their courses.
- Promotion by staff of equality of opportunity across all parts of the college is good. Managers ensure that the college provides a harmonious and inclusive environment. The relatively large number of vulnerable learners, for example those who are looked after children, achieve particularly well. However, managers have not been wholly successful in promoting the benefits of cultural diversity to prepare learners fully for life in modern Britain. In part this is because the approach taken currently depends too much on individual teachers promoting this theme rather than having a central strategy to ensure that all learners develop their understanding and awareness.
- Safeguarding arrangements for all learners are good; statutory requirements are met and records are properly maintained. Managers implement strategies thoroughly and undertake necessary risk assessments rigorously to ensure the safety of all learners. Staff are well trained and have recently attended training to inform them about how to safeguard staff and learners against radicalisation and extremism.
- Staff performance is managed well and staff development is good. Training for teachers is regular, effective and leads to improvements to teaching and learning. A sound appraisal system of staff performance, drawing on a range of evidence about their work, is implemented effectively. However, managers do not always formally review the actions set to improve staff performance frequently enough, although revisions to the system are now in place to make sure this happens.



## Record of Main Findings (RMF)

### Berkshire College of Agriculture

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance:  1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16 part-time provision	14-16 full-time provision	16-19 study programmes	Traineeships	19+ learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Employability	Community learning
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>2</b>	-	-	2	-	2	3	-	-
Outcomes for learners	<b>2</b>	-	-	2	-	2	3	-	-
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>2</b>	-	-	2	-	2	3	-	-
The effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>2</b>	-	-	2	-	2	3	-	-

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
<b>Animal care</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Motor vehicle</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Public services</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Sport</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Foundation English</b>	<b>2</b>

## Provider details

<b>Type of provider</b>	Specialist further education college							
<b>Age range of learners</b>	16+							
<b>Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year</b>	1,681							
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Gillian May							
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	March 2014							
<b>Website address</b>	<a href="http://www.bca.ac.uk">www.bca.ac.uk</a>							
<b>Provider information at the time of the inspection</b>								
<b>Main course or learning programme level</b>	<b>Level 1 or below</b>		<b>Level 2</b>		<b>Level 3</b>		<b>Level 4 and above</b>	
<b>Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)</b>	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	121	104	391	154	670	100	10	39
<b>Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>		<b>Advanced</b>		<b>Higher</b>			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	5	5	55	31	-	-		
<b>Number of traineeships</b>	16-19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
<b>Number of learners aged 14-16</b>								
<b>Full-time</b>	-							
<b>Part-time</b>	263							
<b>Number of community learners</b>	116							
<b>Number of employability learners</b>	-							
<b>Funding received from</b>	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
<b>At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Activate Enterprise</li> </ul>							

## Contextual information

Berkshire College of Agriculture is a specialist land-based college located on a single site on the outskirts of the town of Maidenhead. The campus includes a 144-hectare estate comprising a range of land-based units, including an equine centre, an animal unit and landscaped gardens as well as sports facilities. Provision is offered in the main land-based subjects, sports and public services, and several other subjects including creative arts. The small amount of GCE A-level provision currently running is being discontinued from September 2015. Nearly two thirds of learners travel to the college from neighbouring large towns such as High Wycombe and Slough. The college is located in an area of relative prosperity, but there are some areas of greater deprivation locally. The proportion of learners of minority ethnic heritage is similar to that within the local population. In West Berkshire, the proportion of pupils who leave school with more than five GCSEs at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics, is markedly higher than nationally.

## Information about this inspection

### Lead inspector

Philippa Francis HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), an associate inspector and four additional inspectors, assisted by the vice principal as nominee, carried out the inspection at short notice. Inspectors took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the past three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. Inspectors observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all the relevant provision at the college. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the provision and graded the sector subject areas listed in the report above.

## What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/handbook-for-the-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-from-september-2012](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/handbook-for-the-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-from-september-2012)

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