

Berkshire College of Agriculture

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	130606
Name of lead inspector:	Montserrat Pérez-Parent, Her Majesty's Inspector
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Type of provider:	Specialist further education college
Address:	Hall Place Burchetts Green Maidenhead Berkshire SL6 6QR

Interim visit

Context and focus of visit

On 17 March 2020, all routine inspections were suspended due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. As part of our phased return to routine inspections, we are carrying out 'interim visits' to further education and skills providers. Interim visits are to help learners, parents, employers and government understand how providers are meeting the needs of learners and apprentices in this period, including those with high needs and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

We intend to return to routine inspection in January 2021 but will keep the exact timing under review.

The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below and the findings are based on discussions with leaders, managers, staff and learners.

Following changes to government guidance and the imposition of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, we made this visit remotely to reduce pressure on the provider.

Information about the provider

Berkshire College of Agriculture (BCA) 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.

At the time of the visit, there were 1,566 students aged 16 to 18, 161 apprentices, and 18 adult learners studying at the college. There were 261 students in receipt of high-needs funding. BCA does not work with any subcontractors.

What actions are leaders taking to ensure that they provide an appropriate curriculum that responds to the reasonable needs of learners and stakeholders and adapts to changed circumstances?

Leaders and managers spoke proudly about how they had planned in advance and were able to offer all lessons remotely to students from the first day of COVID-19 national restrictions. They took the decision to offer live lessons on the college's web-based platform. Students welcomed having the same daily routine at home as they would have had at college.

Leaders and managers supported all their students to continue to learn. They distributed laptops to those students who needed them to access lessons from home.

Staff delivered printed booklets to students who were not able to take part in remote lessons. Students on entry level and level 1 courses completed projects with the help of their parents/carers. Leaders and managers kept some college buildings open throughout the period of restrictions, for staff and students who did not have a suitable environment to work in at home.

Since the start of this term, most students attend lessons at college two days a week and work remotely from home for one day. Leaders and managers identified that level 1 students have not yet developed the skills they need to organise their work and manage their own time when working from home. These students attend college three days a week. In response to student feedback, students attend English and mathematics lessons at college rather than working on these subjects remotely.

Apprenticeship managers secured alternative employment for the few apprentices who had been made redundant during the first period of national restrictions, so that they could continue with their apprenticeships. Managers kept apprentices and their employers informed about changes to the dates and format of their final assessment. Managers report that fewer apprentices than usual have enrolled on apprenticeships this year, with the biggest decline in enrolments being in floristry.

What steps are leaders, managers and staff taking to ensure that the approaches used for building knowledge and skills are appropriate to meet the reasonable needs of learners?

Leaders and managers encourage teachers to reflect on their teaching practice and use students' feedback to identify areas that staff need to improve on. Recent training for teachers focused on planning more effectively for the content and duration of the lessons students access from home.

Leaders and managers have adapted their processes for checking the quality of the teaching students receive, to include online and remote learning. In the recent round of observations, managers focused on how teachers are checking the progress that students make in their online lessons. Managers check students' attendance and participation at these lessons.

Teachers identified gaps in the knowledge and skills of students who joined the college in September, as well as a lack of experience in online or remote learning. Teachers are providing extra support to those students who need it. Managers have scheduled additional lessons for students with grade 3 in English and mathematics. They have identified larger gaps in the knowledge of these students compared to previous years.

Apprenticeship managers reported that apprentices were already learning from online resources before the start of the pandemic. Managers had electronic systems in place to monitor the progress of apprentices.

Leaders and managers report that the uncertainty of future restrictions is the biggest

barrier to planning for the rest of the academic year. To prepare for future closures, teachers are teaching the essential course content and practical elements as early in the year as they can. They are also collecting information on students' progress more often.

Because of the pandemic, most work placements have had to be delayed until later in the year. In the meantime, the 'Beyond BCA' team support students with their applications for university or part-time jobs and provide training in online interview skills. Students have benefited from a series of virtual interviews with employers, aimed at motivating students to plan the next steps in their careers.

How are leaders ensuring that learners are safe and well informed about potential risks, including from online sources?

During the period of national restrictions, the newly restructured welfare and well-being team started keeping a central record of the support they offered vulnerable students. Leaders and managers continue to use this central record now that students are back at college. Teachers and managers review their learner cohorts to identify any additional vulnerable learners and refer them to the welfare and well-being team for support. Managers talked proudly about interventions they had made to successfully support learners whose home life had become more challenging due to the period of national restrictions.

Leaders and managers reinforced the information provided to students and parents/carers to include advice and guidance on keeping safe online. Teachers and students spoke about expected behaviours when working or studying remotely, such as dress codes and selecting appropriate rooms in the house when taking part in remote lessons.

Students report that they feel well supported at college, both by staff and other students.

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Store Street
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