



Berkshire College of Agriculture

Re-inspection report

Audience Post-sixteen	Published March 2008	Provider reference 130606
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Introduction

Berkshire College of Agriculture was inspected in November 2006. Inspectors carried out the inspection under Section 62 of the Learning and Skills Act. The quality of provision was found to be satisfactory or better in all areas inspected, except in sport which was found to be inadequate. The leadership and management of work-based learning were also found to be inadequate, but the LSC withdrew the college's work-based learning contract in January 2007. Ofsted is responsible for re-inspecting all provision that is inadequate.

The less than satisfactory curriculum area of sport was re-inspected on 26 and 27 February 2008. The outcomes of the re-inspection are as follows.

Curriculum area	Original grade	Re-inspection grade
Sport	4	3

Context

At the time of the re-inspection 109 learners were enrolled on sports courses. Most learners are on full-time course and are aged 16 to 18. Full-time courses offered are diplomas in sport at levels 1 to 3.

Strengths

- good use of assignments to develop learners' key skills
- very effective management and teamwork to improve the provision.

Areas for improvement

- inadequate indoor specialist sports accommodation
- insufficient development of links with the sports industry.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Success rates are variable and are satisfactory overall. The success rate for the national diploma in 2006/2007 was 67% compared to the national average of 64%. The achievement of key skills shows improvement with a success rate of 70% for communication at level 2. The quality of learners' work has improved and is now satisfactory on all courses. Learners make good progress with their leadership skills. Many learners make good and worthwhile contributions to community sport by taking up coaching opportunities in the college and at external venues. The attendance of learners is good with an average attendance rate of 95%.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Planning is good with appropriate schemes of work. Teachers now use a good range of learning activities to relate theory to practice. Some courses provide insufficient opportunities for learners to work independently and carry out research using the internet.

Assessments are well planned and sports-based materials provide meaningful and motivating contexts for assessing key skills. Learners are fully aware of assessment criteria and the strategies required to improve their work.

The programmes and activities are satisfactory and largely meet the needs of the learners. However, links with the sports industry are insufficiently developed and learners get too few chances to contextualise their vocational work.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Managers work well with staff to implement revised systems to improve the provision and increase success rates. Communication within the sports team is particularly effective with frequent and well-led meetings offering good opportunities to share good practice. Some sports facilities are inadequate. Indoor accommodation is poorly heated and inadequately maintained, and the weight training equipment is outdated.

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Berkshire College of Agriculture

Date of visit: 26 – 27 February 2008

Context

Berkshire College of Agriculture, near Maidenhead, is a specialist land-based further education (FE) college serving the rural and urban areas of Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and West London. While maintaining a core of land-based work in horticulture, countryside, floristry, animal care and equine studies, the college also has activity in sports studies, early years and care, public services and construction.

In 2006/07, the college enrolled over 3,000 students on FE courses, including approximately 1,500 students on part-time courses. About a third of students are aged 16-18, of whom about one quarter study at level 2 and one third at level 3. Land-based courses represent about half the provision for full-time learners aged 16-18 and two thirds of the provision for adult learners. The college provides vocational courses for just over 200 students aged 14-16, recruits approximately 140 higher education (HE) students, and works in partnership with local authorities and community groups to provide a general education programme and community activities.

Berkshire College of Agriculture was last inspected in November 2006 when all aspects were found to be satisfactory, apart from the leadership and management of work-based learning which were inadequate. Three of the four curriculum areas inspected were found to be good, but provision in sport was judged inadequate. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) withdrew the college's work-based learning contract in January 2007.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made to improve achievement and standards?	Insufficient progress
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The college has made insufficient progress to improve overall achievement and standards. There are variations in retention rates, in the performance of

different levels of courses, and for different groups of learners. 2006/07 data does not confirm a trend of consistent improvement.

The 2006/07 college data indicate that success rates have continued to rise for learners aged 16-18 on long level 1 programmes, from 31% in 2004/05 to 67% in 2006/07. However these remain below national averages. Success rates for adult learners on level 1 courses have continued to improve and are above national averages. In 2006/07 success rates decreased on level 2 and level 3 courses and are below national averages for all learners, with the exception of success rates for adults on level 3 courses which are now well above the 2005/06 national average. Attendance has improved and in-year data indicate 90% attendance on full-time courses and 94% on part-time provision. Progression rates are good both between different levels of courses and into employment.

The college has recognized variations in performance and has worked hard in 2007/08 to develop strategies and interventions to improve achievement and standards. The management of data has improved and regular reports against targets and key performance indicators are well used.

What strategies have managers used to improve success rates in care and community, construction and animal care?	Reasonable progress
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Managers have developed a good range of strategies to improve success rates. Close monitoring of progress and the impact of strategies takes place at regular and clearly scheduled management meetings.

Initial assessment and induction have improved and learners have more realistic information about the demands of a programme and what is expected of them. Staff feel the initial assessment process takes greater account of learners' prior experience and it is now used more effectively to plan teaching and learning. Learners' progress is monitored more effectively throughout their programmes and this process now includes systematic updates by personal tutors to enlist the support of parents/guardians to raise achievement. 'At risk' learners are identified more effectively and appropriate support is carefully planned and integrated into courses. The college has created three curriculum assistant roles to support the implementation of these strategies.

The use of value-added data is now integrated into tutorials and learners are clear about achievement targets and their progress against these targets. The scorecard process involves rigorous monitoring of individual courses. Staff use indicative performance sheets listing all courses to report on in-year performance. They report a better understanding of how scorecards can be used by individual staff and how these contribute to raising standards. It is

too early to judge whether the assessment of indicative success rates within these reports is realistic.

Quality of provision

The last inspection report identified a significant proportion of teaching that failed to meet the needs of individual learners. How effective are the college's actions to improve the quality of teaching and learning?	Reasonable progress
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The college has increased the head of school posts to three since the previous inspection and has significantly increased the volume of observed learning sessions to approximately three a year for each member of teaching staff. About one third of these are carried out by an external organisation. Outcomes of observations are now systematically shared with curriculum managers and team leaders, and weekly staff development events provide more timely training for staff in aspects that have been identified as areas for improvement within teams or across the college. Teaching staff have better awareness of the relationship between the quality of teaching and learning and students' outcomes, and mentoring schemes have been well developed to provide individual support and coaching for tutors. The overall grade profile for observations has increased so far in 2007/08 with a higher proportion of good and better grades. However, some records of observed sessions lack detail and many do not focus sufficiently on learners' attainment and development within the sessions. Key areas for improvement in teaching and learning are the development of independent learning and use of information and learning technology.

What progress has been made in providing enrichment activities and opportunities for learners to gain additional qualifications?	Reasonable progress
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Staff report that there is a more active enrichment programme that includes a better variety of sports activities, awareness raising workshops and social events. The college has improved the social area for learners and it now includes access to guidance, support and the Connexions service. A student development officer has recently been appointed to develop a wider range of activities including the Duke of Edinburgh and John Muir award scheme. In the current year, staff report that there are a wider group of learners participating in the sports-based programme of enrichment. The college has started to monitor the effectiveness and take-up of enrichment activities in the current year but no data was available at the time of the visit. Most learners gain an additional qualification in first aid and a few curriculum areas have extended the range of additional qualifications offered. However, managers do not use data to quantify opportunities or achievement of additional qualifications.

Leadership and management

How effective are the college's strategies for retaining and developing staff?	Reasonable progress
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The college has increased the proportion of permanent teaching staff in 2007/08 and currently has 67 full- and 55 part-time tutors. Most staff have good and up-to-date occupational expertise and specialist knowledge. This continues to be a priority for the college. However, the relatively low number of number of staff with a full teaching qualification remains a concern. Only 36% of full-time and 27% of part-time staff have a full qualification. The 38 staff who are working towards a qualification receive increased individual support and the college has developed improved and good links with the teacher training providers. Staff turnover in 2006/07 was high at 35%, but the proportion of staff who have retained in post so far this year compares favourably with the previous year's figures. The college is developing a good range of strategies to recruit and retain staff. These include better information provided to applicants and staff during the recruitment and selection procedures, plans to extend accommodation and transport arrangements for staff, and more rigorous monitoring of progress during the probationary period for new staff.

How effective are the college's strategies for promoting equality and diversity?	Reasonable progress
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The college is continuing to develop appropriate strategies to widen participation and, in particular, to challenge gender stereotyping in recruitment to curriculum areas. These include more effective marketing materials, increased use of taster courses to local schools and a wider range of courses at entry level. The promotion of equality and diversity in the curriculum has improved, with effective work carried out by the diversity group. Newly developed packs on a wide range of topics, such as the effects of bullying, gender stereotyping and disability are now used well in group seminars across the college. However, the use of equality and diversity impact measures at course level is still in development. A comprehensive self-assessment tool to monitor and evaluate the promotion of equality and diversity is established and used in all programme areas, but the process is not sufficiently self-critical. The college current self-assessment report does not identify an overall grade for equality of opportunity.