

# Berkshire College of Agriculture

Focused monitoring visit report

---

Unique reference number: 130606

Name of lead inspector: Janet Mercer HMI

Last day of inspection: 19 May 2010

Type of provider: Specialist college

Address: Hall Place  
Burchetts Green  
Maidenhead  
Berkshire  
SL6 6QR

Telephone number: 01628 824444

## FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

### Context and focus of visit

Berkshire College of Agriculture is a specialist land-based further education 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 and animal management and equestrian studies, the college also has provision in sports studies, early years and care, public services, construction and motor vehicle engineering. In 2008/2009 the college had 3,247 enrolments, of which 49% were for learners aged 16 to 18. Vocational courses were offered for 263 young people aged 14 to 16 from local schools. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds has increased over the last three years, but remains below that of the local area.

The college was last inspected in December 2006, when overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management were all judged satisfactory. Four curriculum areas were graded, three of which were good and one inadequate. This area was subsequently re-inspected in 2008 and was judged satisfactory. The most recent monitoring visit in 2009 judged that the college had made reasonable progress in improving achievement and standards, assessment and feedback, the availability and use of information learning technology (ILT) and the effective promotion of equality and diversity. The college made significant progress in improving teaching and learning but insufficient progress in improving key skills and preparing for functional skills.

### Themes

#### Self-assessment and improvement planning

How well do self-assessment and quality improvement systems lead to improvement across the college?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

Over the last year the college has made a number of improvements in its quality improvement systems. Data regarding students' achievements, attendance and progress are much more accessible to managers across the college. Data are better understood and trusted by staff. Data are used well in self-assessment by managers and increasingly by teachers to assess the quality of their work. Curriculum managers appreciate the support they receive from senior managers and the information services manager in producing their self-assessments. Curriculum self-assessments identify areas for improvement clearly and actions taken are leading to improvements such as the much improved in-year retention data.

Inspectors completed paired lesson observations with college staff, and agreed with their judgements regarding the quality of teaching and learning they had observed together. Teaching and learning are assessed regularly and the consistency of grading is monitored by curriculum managers, who now feel that they have a good

knowledge of the standards of teaching and learning in their areas. While these improvements are clearly evident, they are not sufficiently translated into further improvements to success rates and quality across all areas of the college.

### Outcomes for learners

How well has the college maintained improvements in success rates in 2008/09, following the increases achieved in 2007/08? Reasonable progress

In 2008/09 long course success rates showed a small increase on the previous year. They were broadly in line with national averages for 16-to-18-year-olds and adult learners at all levels. The college identified that retention rates were below average for learners in both age groups on intermediate and advanced level courses. Strategies implemented to improve retention in 2009/10 included improving initial advice and guidance, applying course entry criteria more rigorously, and setting clearer expectations during an enhanced induction period. Tutors have monitored attendance more closely and the college has trialled an electronic registration system in some curriculum areas, which is providing more timely information on students' attendance.

The college's in-year retention data indicate that rates have improved for both age groups on all levels of course, compared to a similar point in the previous year, and they are now high. The number of students transferring to different programmes after the first few weeks is markedly lower than in the previous year. Managers are aware that there is still some variation in success rates between different subject areas.

To what extent has the college improved learners' achievements in key skills? What impact has the introduction of the functional skills pilot had? Reasonable progress

Overall key skills success rates declined in 2008/09, particularly on level 1 and 2 communication skills, which had the largest number of enrolments. The college has revised its approach to key skills in this current year, ensuring a better match between students' individual needs and course requirements and the key skills taken. In-year monitoring indicates that success rates are likely to be significantly better than in 2008/09 on level 1 and 2 communications and information and communication technology (ICT) and on level 2 application of number, although success rates are not rising for level 1 application of number.

The college has trialled functional skills with 55 learners on foundation level provision and in-year monitoring indicates good levels of achievement to date. Plans are well developed to support extending this provision across the college from September

2010. Staff have received training to help them prepare to integrate the teaching of functional skills into each course and the college has identified a designated functional skills tutor for each subject area to provide further guidance and support as functional skills are implemented college-wide.

### Quality of provision

How well has the college sustained improvements in teaching and learning noted during the 2009 monitoring visit? Reasonable progress

The college's internal lesson observations indicate a further improvement in the proportion of lessons judged good or better in 2008/09. Staff development activities have focused on improving teaching and learning and have contributed to improving some satisfactory teaching to good. Managers acknowledge that while the proportion of lessons judged satisfactory has diminished, there are still relatively few lessons judged outstanding. The college has increased the number of staff trained to observe lessons and this has enabled the team to provide more support to teachers where lessons have been judged satisfactory or inadequate and to monitor improvements through re-observations and feedback.

The college is making good progress in ensuring that all teachers are fully qualified. The teaching and learning handbook for staff provides helpful guidance on lesson planning to meet individual learners' needs. However, it does not include guidance on promoting cultural diversity in lessons. Where lesson plans or schemes of work make reference to equality and diversity, this tends to focus on meeting different needs or learning styles, rather than how the curriculum might promote students' wider social and cultural awareness. Records of observed lessons do not often include reference to how well equality and diversity issues are covered.

To what extent has the college secured improvements in provision in construction and motor vehicle provision, which they judged inadequate in 2008/09? Reasonable progress

A new curriculum manager has been appointed and detailed action plans in both areas are leading to improvements. Retention rates in both areas are much higher than at the same time last year, but managers recognise that more action is required to ensure that improvements across both areas are secure and sustainable. Self-assessment clearly identifies that the rate of improvement has been greater in construction than in the motor vehicle area.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory, although standards vary. Construction students report that teaching and learning this year are much improved. Accommodation for both areas is good, with good-sized workshops and classrooms equipped with good ILT resources. Resources in construction are good, but

inadequacies remain in the motor vehicle engineering resources. The cars are old and workshop organisation does not meet industry standards.

External verifiers' reports in construction indicate that students' work and internal verification are satisfactory; more work needs to be done in motor vehicle to achieve similar outcomes. Teachers and students have a good working relationship, but teachers do not always have sufficiently high expectations of students or set sufficiently challenging work so that students can attain industry acceptable standards. Links with employers are underdeveloped.

### Leadership and management

How much progress has the college made in ensuring the consistency of effective promotion of equality and diversity across the college? Reasonable progress

The college continues to improve the consistency of this aspect of its work. A new management structure provides clarity for leadership of equality and diversity across the college. A new equality, diversity and inclusion policy has been developed. The membership of the equality and diversity group is being extended to represent all parts of the college community. Analysis of students' success according to their ethnicity, gender and disability is reported to academic board and governors. All staff have received training in equality and diversity. The college demonstrates a strong commitment to social and educational inclusion through its provision for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and has recently introduced a new programme for learners with specific and severe difficulties.

Good examples of cultural diversity are being developed in subjects; in a countryside management lesson, students who had recently returned from Hungary were discussing differences in land use and social structures between Hungary and England. Cross-college events, for example, a faith week, promote students' understanding of different religious faiths. However, managers have identified through internal lesson observations that more work needs to be done to promote cultural diversity in subjects.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this report in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 08456 404040, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

Royal Exchange Buildings  
St Ann's Square  
Manchester, M2 7LA

T: 08456 404040  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

© Crown copyright 2010