

# Myerscough College

## Inspection report

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Unique reference number: 130743

Name of lead inspector: Bev Barlow HMI

Last day of inspection: 28 May 2010

Type of provider: Specialist college

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## Information about the provider

1. Myerscough college is a specialist land-based college located near Preston in Lancashire. The main campus includes a farm, horticultural production, ornamental gardens, a sports centre, a golf academy, animal care and equine units, a rural business unit and residential accommodation for 700 learners. The college has several urban centres located in Blackburn, Burnley, Liverpool and Manchester and veterinary nursing schools in Dorset and Wirral. The college's vision is that 'Myerscough will be the college of choice in the land-based and sports sector - providing opportunities for all'.
2. The local region varies from relatively prosperous areas to some with high levels of deprivation. In 2009 the proportion of pupils aged 16 in Lancashire who achieved five or more GCSEs at grade A\* to C, including English and mathematics, was just above the national average.
3. The college offers learner responsive provision funded by the the Young People's Learning Agency and employer responsive provision funded by the Skills Funding Agency. Around two thirds of its £11 million government funded provision is for learners aged 16 to 18. The college's commercial activities provide approximately 20% of its annual income. In 2008/09 the college enrolled 2,728 learners of whom 58% were aged 16 to 18. The college recruits around half of its learners from Lancashire, a third from the North West and the remainder from the rest of the country and overseas. It offers a broad range of further education (FE) courses, primarily in land-based and sports subjects, from entry to higher education (HE) level. Around 30% of the college's provision for learners aged 16 to 18 is delivered in the urban centres. The majority of learners are White British and around two thirds are men. Around half of learners are on advanced-level courses with equal numbers on foundation and intermediate-level courses. Almost 1,300 learners study HE courses, 690 learners are on Train to Gain programmes and 747 are work-based learning apprentices. The college engages with many businesses locally, regionally and nationally; currently it is working with 458 employers. Around 25% of full-time FE learners live on the college campus. The college provides part-time vocational courses in 11 subjects for 525 pupils aged 14 to 16.
4. The inspection took into account all of the provision offered by the college. Provision in animal care and equine, horticulture, arboriculture and floristry, sport, and foundations for learning and life was inspected in depth.
5. The college provides training on behalf of the following providers:
  - Riverside College, Halton
  - Sysco Business Skills Academy.
6. The following organisations provide training on behalf of the college:
  - Progress Sports Ltd

- Achievement Sports
- Mike Kidd Horse Power Ltd
- Lynwood Veterinary Centre, Dorset.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
Provision for young learners: 14 to 16	478 part-time learners
Further education (16 to 18)	1,382 full-time learners 234 part-time learners
Foundation learning	74 full-time learners 574 part-time learners
Entry to Employment	2 learners
Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)	163 full-time learners 995 part-time learners
Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships	827 learners 676 apprentices

## Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 3
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Capacity to improve	Grade 4
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	Grade
Outcomes for learners	3
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	3

Subject Areas	
Animal care and equine	4
Horticulture, aboriculture and floristry (learner reponsive provision)	3
Horticulture, aboriculture and floristry (employer reponsive provision)	2
Sport	3
Foundations for learning and life	2

## Overall effectiveness

7. The overall effectiveness of Myerscough College is satisfactory. Learners enjoy college and feel safe. Achievement of adults and those in work-based learning have improved and are satisfactory although too many apprentices do not complete their qualification in the agreed time. Over the last few years too many students aged 16 to 18 have not completed their studies; management actions to improve the situation have not yet been successful in all areas. Students aged 14 to 16 achieve well. Equality and diversity and learners' health and well-being are promoted well. Learners develop good practical skills and are active members of the college and local community. The college responds well to learners' views and there is an atmosphere of strong mutual respect. Welfare provision in the residential accommodation is outstanding. A wide range of

courses, including additional qualifications, support students' progression to employment or FE although the college is unaware of the destinations of too many students when they leave. The college works extremely well with a vast range of partners to develop its curriculum and many learners benefit from well thought-out work experiences.

8. Teachers use practical activities well to support learners' understanding of theory but they are not always sufficiently challenging for more able learners. A good range of specialist resources and facilities support learning in most subjects; resources in foundation courses and at the Liverpool site require improvements. Personal support is good and learners have access to a wide range of specialist advice. Guidance at enrolment is not sufficiently focused and too many students transfer to a reduced programme after the start of their course.
9. Leaders, managers and governors are committed to providing good opportunities for all potential learners and improving standards but managers do not have clear enough roles and levels of accountability. The arrangements to review the quality of provision and improve learners' outcomes are not sufficiently rigorous. Data are not used effectively to monitor the impact of management actions to lead to more rapid and consistent improvements. As many of the college's areas for improvement identified at the last inspection still exist, the college's capacity to improve is judged to be inadequate.

## Main findings

- Learners enjoy college and their outcomes overall are satisfactory. Adult learners' success rates are better than those for learners aged 16 to 18. Learners' progress is generally in line with expectations but too many learners on advanced-level courses do not achieve their main qualification, as retention rates are too low. Female learners do not achieve as well as male learners; minority ethnic students and those with a declared disability achieve better than their peers.
- Success rates on work-based learning have improved in recent years and are satisfactory, although too few achieve in the agreed time. Learners gain in confidence and develop their literacy, numeracy and vocational practical skills well.
- Provision in foundations for learning and life and employer responsive programmes are good; it is satisfactory in horticulture, arboriculture and floristry, and sport, and is inadequate in equine and animal care. Resources to support the delivery of animal care at Liverpool and foundation-level courses are in need of updating.
- Safeguarding is a very high priority throughout the college and an atmosphere of respect is strongly promoted. Learners feel safe and are confident that any issues they have will be dealt with effectively. Health and safety have a very strong profile in subject areas and work-based learning.

- Learners are supported well to make informed decisions about their health. They have access to a variety of support services, which they are using more frequently. Learners work hard to support the community and have a good understanding of sustainability and what they can do to promote it.
- Practical lessons are used well to support theory and develop learners' skills. However, teachers do not always ensure that activities provide sufficient challenge for more able learners. Information and learning technology (ILT) is used imaginatively to support learning in some subjects but it is not yet embedded across all areas.
- Assessments are clear although they are not always spread out evenly and teachers' feedback does not always tell students what they need to do to improve their grade.
- A broad range of courses and additional qualifications meet the needs of learners. Enrichment activities are varied and participation is good. The needs of employers and local schools are met very well.
- Partnership working is outstanding and provides significant benefits to learners, schools, employers and the wider community.
- Personal support for learners is strong and additional learning support is good. Guidance for learners is insufficiently focused in ensuring that learners are enrolled onto the most appropriate course and too many learners transfer to a reduced programme. The college is unaware of the destinations of too many students. Progress monitoring is developing; for many learners the targets set are too general.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. A new mission and strategic plan are focused on raising standards and widening participation. Governance now provides a clear focus on monitoring learners' outcomes.
- Quality assurance arrangements are not sufficiently rigorous. The self-assessment report does not use data effectively; it is overgenerous in its grading, too descriptive and fails to identify some key areas for improvement. Action plans are not sufficiently clear to ensure rapid and consistent improvements.
- Equality and diversity are promoted well although management action to reduce the gap between male and female learners' success rates is slow.

### What does Myerscough College need to do to improve further?

- Increase success rates of students aged 16 to 18 and reduce the achievement gap of female learners; use challenging and specific targets in individual learning plans to monitor learners' progress more closely.
- Improve retention rates on advanced-level courses by ensuring that learners are enrolled on the right programme and by establishing clear strategies to support students at risk of leaving.

- Increase the proportion of apprentices who achieve in the agreed time; establish realistic end dates, make full use of prior learning and increase off-the-job workshop support.
- Improve the quality of provision in equine and animal studies. Provide better resources for foundation level and animal care courses.
- Introduce more consistent teaching and learning strategies, including the use of ILT, to ensure that teachers include sufficient stretch, challenge and support so that all students achieve their potential.
- Improve assessment practices to ensure that completion dates do not clash and that teachers' feedback is prompt and clearly informs students of how they can improve their work.
- Ensure that the analysis and use of data are effective in informing self-assessment. Develop action plans that set realistic and challenging targets with clear areas of management responsibility so that progress can be closely monitored, to bring about more rapid and consistent improvement.

#### Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

##### What learners like:

- the helpful teachers who are very approachable, friendly and not judgemental
- the respect that students and staff have for each other in a safe environment
- the good facilities and resources for practical lessons
- the enjoyable lessons that include a good variety of activities
- the teachers' wide range of industrial experience that is used effectively to support learning
- the opportunities to progress and take additional qualifications in preparation for work
- the ability to monitor their own progress in personal tutorials
- using i-Pod Touch and electronic portfolios in work-based learning.

##### What learners would like to see improved:

- the range of opportunities for work experience and practical work in animal care
- the dates for handing in assignments to be spread out so that there is more time to do each one properly
- the speed at which teachers mark students' work so that there is more time for them to see how it can be improved
- the quality and price of food in the canteen
- the access to computers and the speed at which they work
- the range and number of non-sport enrichment clubs and evening activities that are interesting

- the timetable so that lessons are more evenly spread out so that they do not have to come into college for a single lesson
- the availability of lockers for personal belongings
- the repetition of questions in national vocational qualifications (NVQs).

#### Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

##### What employers like:

- the extremely responsive way in which the college supports local and regional initiatives
- the well-structured and flexible programmes to meet the needs of business
- the communication with college staff, which is particularly helpful in providing updates on employees' work and their progress
- the college's commitment to sustainability
- the encouragement that learners receive to develop appropriate technical skills
- the well-qualified teaching staff who have specific industrial expertise
- the good resources to support learning
- the use of electronic portfolios for recording learners' evidence.

##### What employers would like to see improved:

- none reported.



## Main inspection report

### Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 4

10. Senior managers have successfully communicated the college's strategy to raise standards and widen participation; the number of learners studying in urban centres has increased. However, the management structure does not allocate clear lines of accountability and insufficient progress has been made in improving the outcomes for learners and the quality of provision. Success rates, although improved since the last inspection, have been static for the last three years and they remain slightly below the national average. Retention rates are low and remain a key area for improvement, particularly on advanced-level programmes; college data do not indicate any in-year improvements despite a number of management actions. Learners who complete their programme achieve well and broadly in line with expectation. Success rates for apprentices improved significantly in 2008/09 but too many do not achieve their qualification in the agreed time. The college has not made sufficient progress in remedying the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection, most of which remain issues of concern at this inspection.
11. Self-assessment is comprehensive but the report overgraded most aspects of the college's provision; a number of strengths are overstated and some key areas for improvement are not identified. The report is far too descriptive and does not contain sufficient evaluative judgements to identify key priorities in sufficient detail. Data are not used effectively by managers to establish focused targets against which the effectiveness of management actions can be monitored. The inappropriate recording of success rates on national diploma courses gives an inaccurate view of learners' outcomes and so targets for improvement are based on unreliable data.

### Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

12. Success rates on long courses have remained static over the last three years and are slightly below the national average for similar colleges. Success rates of adult learners improved in 2008/09 and are high. However, for learners aged 16 to 18 success rates remain seven percentage points below the national average. As recognised by the college, retention remains a key area for improvement for the college; in-year data do not indicate any improvement. For those students completing their course, pass rates are high except on foundation-level programmes. College data do not accurately record the outcomes for advanced-level diploma courses and this has inflated success rates. Students with a declared disability and the small proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups achieve well, although female students do not achieve as well as males. Outcomes for learners aged 14 to 16 are good. Learners' success rates on apprenticeships and Train to Gain programmes have improved and are satisfactory, but not enough learners achieve their qualification by their planned

end date. Adults achieve well on short courses but many students aged 16 to 18 are not successful.

13. The standard of learners' work and their progress in lessons are satisfactory and for some they are good. On advanced courses students make the progress expected given their qualifications on entry. However, there is too much variation in the progress made across subjects; it is good in agriculture, conservation and motor sport and poor in sports courses. The college recognises that students are not always given sufficient chances to achieve the highest grade possible. Strategies have been implemented to increase the proportion of students achieving high grades but it is too soon to judge their impact. Key skills achievement is high. Learners develop good practical and vocational skills and industry-specific additional qualifications for progression to employment or FE. Students enjoy their time at college and attendance is satisfactory.
14. Learners feel safe in college; an atmosphere of mutual respect is promoted strongly. Learners are confident that any issues they have will be dealt with effectively. Safety is covered well during induction and health and safety are a high priority in practical sessions. The coverage of health and safety in work-based learning is good.
15. Local services are used well to develop a range of activities to give learners the information they need to make informed choices about their health. These include the annual well-being week, tutorial sessions, subject-specific issues and a choice of healthy food. External agencies provide relevant activities such as safe driving courses and chlamydia testing. Learners can access a variety of support services including the chaplaincy, nurse, counsellor and FE sports coordinator.
16. Learners enjoy contributing to fund-raising events and work hard to support charities in the local area. Course representatives play an active role in collecting and passing on learners' views at subject level; staff respond positively to their input. However, cross-college meetings between course representatives are not frequent enough to facilitate effective communication. The student association plays a key role in raising the profile of the learner voice and organising social events. Learners have a good understanding of sustainability and many are involved in projects, including the recycling shop.

## The quality of provision

Grade 3

17. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In more effective lessons, teachers use their skills and vocational experiences well and plan a variety of activities to support learning at a good pace. They use questioning techniques effectively to check learning and extend students' knowledge. Literacy and numeracy are embedded well. In less effective lessons, teachers do not ensure that learning sufficiently meets the individual needs of all students. Key learning points are not always reinforced and teachers do not provide enough opportunities to

stretch and challenge more able students. In a significant minority of lessons too much of the lesson is led by the teacher. Practical lessons develop learners' skills and are used effectively to reinforce theory. However, these links are not sufficiently developed in advanced-level animal care lessons. Lessons for students aged 14 to 16 are good; teachers manage their learning well and students respond positively to the way they are treated.

18. Significant resources are invested in training and support to improve teaching and learning. Teaching and learning and ILT champions, subject learning coaches and mentors work well through projects and initiatives to develop and promote good practice. Enthusiastic teachers make imaginative use of ILT and other activities to stimulate and engage students. Resources on the college's virtual learning environment support learning but the targets for implementation and monitoring the development of this and the use of other technological applications are undemanding. The use of technology for work-based learners is good.
19. Assessment is satisfactory. Assignments are clear but in a few subjects they do not provide sufficient challenge or variety. The quality of feedback on students' assessed work is inconsistent. Weaker feedback is brief and concentrates on standards of work achieved with not enough guidance on how to improve. In a few courses, the timing of assessments creates an uneven workload, reducing students' opportunity to present their best work. The college's arrangements for moderating assessments are insufficiently robust.
20. A good range of specialist provision with progression from foundation level to HE in most subject areas is offered. Additional relevant qualifications improve learners' skills for employment. The college's expansion to urban sites in areas of high levels of deprivation has widened participation very effectively and is having a considerable positive impact on local communities. Work-based learning provision meets the needs of learners and employers from a broad geographical area. Although well developed, numbers studying the environment and land-based diploma are disappointing. Key partners and employers attend technical advisory boards to help plan courses in some subject areas. The college works very effectively to meet the needs of businesses, including providing bespoke and shared training opportunities.
21. Students have access to good curriculum-related enrichment activities and have access to on- and off-site activities that help to widen and enhance their learning experience. Many students are able to take part in non-curriculum related activities which add to their enjoyment of life at Myerscough.
22. Partnership working is outstanding and provides significant benefits to students, schools, employers and the wider community. The college is actively involved in partnerships at regional, national and international level that significantly enhance all aspects of the college's activities. Links with partners in subject areas provide students with excellent work experience and specialist opportunities. Particularly effective links with local schools support the delivery

of flexible vocational courses for pupils aged 14 to 16 and many progress to FE. College staff and students are very active members of the local community.

23. Learners receive good individual and personal support. The access to, and take up of the broad range of services, including finance and counselling, has improved following the successful centralisation of services in 'The Core'. Additional learning support is good. Early identification of literacy, numeracy and specific support needs is prioritised; flexible support is provided quickly to best meet individual needs. Subject area mentors have improved the impact of support arrangements. Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress.
24. Strong links with local schools support potential learners applying to college. School liaison staff attend a wide range of events to disseminate information. However, the guidance to support learners on to the right course at the right level is insufficiently focused. At advanced level too many learners transfer to a reduced diploma programme before the end of their course. Retention rates have remained static over the last three years, and on a number of courses they are low. Guidance on progression opportunities is not always sufficiently clear and the college is unaware of the destinations of too many students.
25. The tutorial provision is satisfactory. Learners value one-to-one tutorials and the personal support that they receive from their tutors. Tutors work closely with students to motivate them to achieve their target grades and use the recently introduced electronic individual learning plans to monitor progress, although these are at an early stage of development. At present targets do not provide sufficient focus on short-term goals or identify actions that students need to take to succeed. Progress reviews for work-based learners are held frequently; useful target setting and action planning prepare them well for assessment and future learning. Group tutorials include a good range of topics on the Every Child Matters themes and are adapted to suit the specific needs of different groups. Tutorials are observed as part of quality assurance; however, there is no overall evaluation to ensure their consistency and the sharing of good practice.

## Leadership and management

Grade 3

26. The college's new strategic plan, developed by leaders and governors in consultation with staff and partners, provides a clear direction focused on improving quality and widening participation. Staff support the vision for the future and are positive about the core value of respect which is central to the new mission 'to provide high quality responsive education, skills and services for all in the land-based and sports sector'. The monitoring of key performance indicators is at an early stage. While ambitious targets are set they are not always met. Partnership work is very strong; schools, employers, universities, community and voluntary organisations all benefit from the college's inclusive work to meet their needs. Communications are good. Learners value the variety of ways in which their views are sought and used to inform college decisions.

Employers feel that the college meets their needs very well and they have opportunities to contribute to curriculum developments. Middle management is mostly satisfactory.

27. Governors have an appropriate range of skills. The new chair has introduced changes to the committee structure to increase the focus on raising standards. A new reporting system to monitor learners' performance provides data in a more accessible format. It is too soon to assess its impact on improving the level of challenge and scrutiny. While governors are aware of the under-performance of females aged 16 to 18, they have not yet received reports to enable them to monitor the impact of management actions.
28. The college provides a safe and welcoming environment for all learners; safeguarding is a very high priority. Learners feel safe and know where to access help and support for any problems that they have. Staff and governors have appropriate training and are fully aware of their responsibilities; many have completed higher level safeguarding training. The college's single central record shows that all required checks are in place. Very thorough recruitment processes ensure that staff meet all necessary criteria well. The college works closely with other agencies, including the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Learners' awareness of safety issues in college and the workplace are reinforced well through activities at induction and in tutorials, lessons and reviews. Appropriate risk assessments are completed for activities on and off the college's premises. Health and safety have a very strong profile in subject areas and work-based learning.
29. Equality and diversity are promoted and celebrated well through a range of cross-college themes such as anti-bullying week and Fairtrade fortnight. The college recruits an increasing number of students from disadvantaged areas and is involved in a number of innovative projects such as 'Faiths for Change' to improve social and community cohesion. A range of equality topics is included in the tutorial programme although some aspects are optional. The monitoring of the performance of different groups of learners is completed at senior level but is not sufficiently developed at subject area level. Very few subject plans include targets to improve the performance of a particular group of students. The success rate of female students aged 16 to 18 has fallen for three consecutive years and so the gap between male and female achievement is widening. Staff training on equality and diversity is comprehensive. In work-based learning the majority of staff have completed an online equality and diversity qualification. Issues on equality are embedded in the work-based curriculum and are covered well at learners' reviews. The virtual learning environment contains appropriate training material and exercises to develop learners' understanding and ensure suitable behaviour. Rigorous checks are made on all subcontracted providers to ensure that they comply with appropriate legislation. The single equality scheme has been developed with key staff, students and stakeholders and its implementation is monitored effectively through the equality and diversity committee.

30. The college's quality improvement arrangements are not sufficiently effective in raising standards. The college has recognised that a lack of clear accountability and ownership of targets at senior level has hampered the strategic monitoring of the quality improvement plan. Plans are in place to implement a central quality function from August 2010. While there are regular meetings to monitor retention, attendance and achievement data at subject level, the high level management information reports are not readily accessible to enable effective monitoring of college performance. The lesson observation system is not yet sufficiently rigorous to provide an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning. In joint lesson observations, while some key areas for improvement were missed by college observers, inspectors generally agreed with their findings. Observers do not always place enough emphasis on what students have learnt and the standard of their work. Feedback to teachers is not yet precise enough for them to develop an action plan to enable them to improve the quality of their lessons. The quality assurance arrangements in work-based learning are good and are underpinned by effective management information, clear target setting for learners and staff, and an embedded culture of performance management. This is contributing to a much faster rate of improvement in work-based learning compared to the college's FE provision.
31. Though the self-assessment report is comprehensive, it lacks clear evaluative judgements and gives insufficient weighting to learners' outcomes in many subject areas. The self-assessment report overgraded three subject areas and all of the cross-college aspects. It combines FE and HE provision and consequently this makes the monitoring of FE provision more difficult. A number of strengths are overstated and some key areas for improvement are not identified. The inappropriate recording of success rates on national diploma programmes has over-inflated learners' outcomes.
32. Learners have access to excellent specialist resources in most subject areas although resources and facilities at the Liverpool centre and those for foundation learners are more limited. The accommodation is adequate although some teaching areas are in need of modernisation. Funding for a proposed new build has been withdrawn and staff are working hard to develop alternative improvements to facilities. An holistic approach to sustainability is focused on three themes: reduce, reuse and recycle. Sustainability is embedded in subject areas. Overall learners' outcomes, the quality of teaching and learning and attendance are satisfactory. Financial management is strong and value for money is satisfactory. An expansion of commercial activities has diversified the college's income.

## Subject areas

### Animal care and equine studies

Grade 4

#### Context

33. At the main campus there are 221 learners on animal care courses and 197 on equine courses. Courses range from foundation to advanced level with progression to HE. At the urban centres a further 276 learners attend animal care courses in Liverpool, Blackburn, and Manchester, and 78 learners attend courses in horse care in Liverpool and Burnley. Most students are aged 16 to 18; 79% of animal care and 92% of equine students are female.

#### Key findings

- Learners' outcomes are inadequate. Success rates on advanced level courses are low; while pass rates for students who complete their course are high, retention rates are too low. Success rates on the national diploma courses have declined; only around half of the current second year animal management students are expected to complete. The proportion of students achieving high grades is too low.
- Success rates on intermediate level courses have improved and are satisfactory. The small number of students on foundation courses achieve well. Success rates for learners taking British Horse Society stage tests as an additional qualification are low.
- Students enjoy the varied aspects of their course and work diligently. Horse care students develop good practical skills, demonstrate safe working practices and are prepared well for employment in the equine industry. Specialist equine resources and realistic yard duties are used well to support learning. Opportunities for animal care students to develop practical skills are insufficient.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory; students are attentive and make satisfactory progress. Teachers use a variety of activities to engage learners but some teaching lacks challenge for the more able. Students on foundation and intermediate level courses have a balanced programme that integrates theory and practice well but these are not sufficiently developed in advanced level animal care.
- Students complete a broad range of theory and practical assignments and their written work is satisfactory. In the best work students link theory to practical work effectively. While assignments are clear and students understand what is expected of them there is a lack of challenge and variety in advanced-level animal care work. Teachers' feedback to students is too inconsistent; some give constructive advice on how to improve but others do not offer clear guidance.
- A good range of courses from foundation level to HE are available to support progression. Horse care students can specialise in stud or equitation. The full-time courses across three urban sites have widened participation effectively. The promotion of equality and diversity in lessons is good.

- Students benefit from well-managed work experience in a good range of placements. Partnership working with employers effectively supports the delivery of specialist options. Employers in horse care but not animal care are involved in developing the curriculum.
- Students value the level of individual support from their tutors. The new electronic individual learning plan is used to set students' targets and monitor their progress but it is too soon to judge its full impact. Students appreciate topics covered in the varied and responsive group tutorial programme.
- Practical resources on the main campus are good with an extensive well-managed equine yard and an animal care facility with a good range of species. Practical facilities at the Blackburn site are good but resources at the Liverpool site are inadequate for the number of students.
- Leadership and management are unsatisfactory; action to improve low success rates has been too slow. Curriculum self-assessment reports are detailed but they lack some key judgments and are not used well to drive improvement. Student destination data are not maintained for use in curriculum evaluation.

What does Myerscough College need to do to improve further?

- Implement a more robust recruitment, selection and initial assessment process to improve retention rates on advanced-level courses.
- Improve the teaching of animal care courses to integrate theory and practical aspects. Develop the range, variety, and calendar of assignments, and give a greater focus to practical skill development.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by sharing best practice across courses and sites. Improve lesson planning to ensure that learning activities engage and challenge all students.
- Systematically monitor and review students' progress to ensure that they all achieve their full potential and that staff are aware of their destinations after college.
- Increase the rigour of self-assessment by using data effectively to set robust targets for improvement, and develop a clear action plan that is reviewed regularly and systematically.



## Horticulture, arboriculture and floristry (learner responsive provision)

Grade 3

### Context

34. The college offers full- and part-time courses from foundation level to level 4 in horticulture, arboriculture and floristry. Around 200 students study full-time diploma courses in countryside, landscape, horticulture, arboriculture, floristry and sportsturf. Approximately two-thirds of students are aged 16 to 18 on advanced-level programmes.

### Key findings

- Overall success rates are satisfactory and close to national average. At advanced level, success rates are low for horticulture, landscaping and arboriculture and are high for sportsturf. Success rates at intermediate level are high in landscaping and sportsturf. Pass rates for those students who complete their course are high but retention rates have not improved and remain low on advanced-level courses.
- Students develop good practical skills that enhance their employability. They take pride in their work. Students work independently and produce good quality work. They have good knowledge and understanding of theoretical aspects and many gain valuable additional qualifications.
- Students participate in a variety of vocationally relevant activities including woodland management, garden design, and maintenance of public spaces and sale of products to raise money for local charities.
- Learners feel safe in college and demonstrate a good understanding of safe working practices in practical sessions; staff check rigorously that learners know how to use equipment safely and all wear the correct protective equipment. Detailed and thorough risk-assessments are carried out for all learning activities. Students are aware of their rights and responsibilities and know where to go if they need support.
- Teaching, training and assessment are good. An appropriate balance of theory and practical work engages students and supports learning. Teachers provide extension activities for those who complete work more quickly. Learners are challenged well and the pace of learning is at least satisfactory and in some cases good. Teachers frequently use effective questioning techniques to check and enhance learning.
- Staff are well qualified; they use specialist resources well and there is a strong commitment to sustainability and recycling. The college grounds provide access to a wide range of well-maintained and labelled plant material, a woodland area, golf and sports pitches, glasshouses and a plant centre. Information learning technology and material on the college's virtual learning environment support students in completing their assignments.
- Assessment of learners' work is regular and thorough. Tutors provide detailed and constructive feedback to students on their coursework. Learners are set

clear targets; monitoring of their performance and progress is accurate and kept up-to-date.

- The broad range of courses offers progression from foundation to HE level. The college works closely with local schools to involve pupils in learning about plant care and the environment. Employers provide an extensive range of practical experience to support academic learning and some contribute to learners' careers and progression guidance.
- Support for students is satisfactory. Learning assistants work alongside students with an identified learning difficulty and/or disability; the support is good and students make good progress. College tutors provide good informal guidance to learners about progression opportunities although insufficient attention is given to ensuring that students are enrolled on the right course. Monitoring of attendance and punctuality is satisfactory.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Initiatives to improve retention on college courses have been introduced but they have not yet had an impact across all areas.
- Recruitment of underrepresented groups is low. Less than 10% of learners on long courses are women and very few are from minority ethnic groups. Efforts to widen participation, for example, employing women role models and providing courses in neighbouring Liverpool and Blackburn have been effective.
- The self-assessment report for the newly created Greenspace department is too long and insufficiently evaluative. Data are not used effectively to monitor and analyse performance at subject level.

What does Myerscough College need to do to improve further?

- Improve retention rates, particularly on advanced-level courses, by ensuring that learners are recruited onto the right courses and are supported to complete them.
- Improve the effectiveness of self-assessment and focus on the accurate use of data to set targets and drive forward improvements.
- Build on the staff development and good practice sharing initiatives to improve the quality of lessons further.

## Horticulture, arboriculture and floristry (employer responsive provision)

Grade 2

### Context

35. Employer responsive provision includes 331 apprentices and 275 Train to Gain learners covering a broad range of horticulture, sportsturf and floristry programmes from Entry to Employment to advanced level. The college provides courses across England with some prestigious employers, including many high profile sports clubs and several local authority parks departments.

### Key findings

- Success rates for work-based learners are satisfactory but not enough complete their qualification in the agreed time. Success rates for apprentices increased steadily in the three years to 2009 and are close to the national average. Train to Gain success rates are high. The proportion of learners successfully completing in the planned time improved to the 2009 national average in arboriculture and horticulture and was high for floristry apprentices.
- Learners enjoy their learning and gain in confidence. Many demonstrate good vocational skills and possess good theoretical knowledge that supports them well in their work. Learners' portfolios contain a good range of activities completed to a high standard. Their key skills are developed well. A range of relevant additional qualifications enhance learners' employment opportunities.
- Learners feel safe and staff proactively promote a safe working environment. Learners are trained to carry out their own risk-assessments before starting practical work. Detailed health and safety assessments are completed before placing a learner with an employer. Learners make a positive contribution to the local community, particularly in their work in local parks.
- Teaching and training are good. Staff use a good range of activities to motivate learners. Class sizes are small and this allows teachers to provide good individual support. Learners are given challenging tasks during teaching and assessment although teachers' use of direct questions is not always sufficient to check individual learning.
- Good use is made of technology to provide materials over the internet and give some work-based learners an online record of their assessment progress. Digital photography is used well to capture evidence for assessment. Some teaching is delivered over the internet to those who live a long way from college.
- Assessment of learners' work is regular and thorough. Learners are set clear targets and their progress is monitored well. A new and effective electronic recording system is used for some work-based learners. NVQ assessment evidence is good. Key skills and equality and diversity are integrated well in assignment work.
- The college has a wide range of programmes for work-based learners, including Entry to Employment programmes, apprenticeships, and Train to Gain, which are developed in response to demand from employers and the community.

Employers are successfully encouraged to play a full part in the delivery of training and assessment.

- Partnerships with employers, local authorities and private companies are particularly productive. The college is responsive to the needs of the industry and local area; it carries out a detailed needs analysis of a business, which often leads to appropriately tailored provision.
- Support for work-based learners is good. Information, advice and guidance for work-based learners at the start of their course are detailed and thorough. Initial assessments identify learners' needs and these are addressed appropriately. Learners' progress reviews are held frequently and prepare them well for assessments and future learning.
- Leadership and management are good. Ambitious targets to expand employer responsive provision have been met. Programmes are well managed and flexible. Managers give a clear direction to improve standards and communicate well with their staff. Quality improvement activities have quickly improved success rates in work-based learning.
- Performance management arrangements are thorough and rigorous. Staff are well qualified and benefit from regular update training. New technology is used well to manage assessors who are geographically dispersed around the country and to minimise their travel time.
- Self-assessment of work-based learning is broadly accurate. The analysis of data and a focused action plan with clear targets have been used well to improve provision. Regular meetings enable staff to discuss ongoing issues and appropriate actions are put in place promptly.

What does Myerscough College need to do to improve further?

- Make sure that work-based learners have realistic target dates for their course, that full use is made of prior learning and that appropriate levels of off-the-job workshop support are given to improve the number of apprentices who complete their programme in the planned time.
- Ensure that all learners understand theory development in lessons by making better use of direct questioning.
- Develop further the use of new technologies so that the majority of work-based learners use electronic portfolios.

## Sport

## Grade 3

### Context

36. Around 560 students study full-time sports courses. The vast majority of students are male, aged 16 to 18 and on intermediate- or advanced-level programmes, with a small number of part-time students aged 14 to 16 from local high schools. A range of vocationally-specific additional qualifications are offered. Over 12% of students participate in representative sport at prestigious clubs, including 20 who are represented at national and 10 at international levels.

### Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Success rates on national and first diplomas in sport have improved and are close to national average. Almost all students who complete the course are successful but retention rates are low on advanced-level courses. The proportion of students achieving high grades, although improved in 2008/09, is too low. Many learners do not make the progress that is expected of them based on their qualifications when starting the course.
- Students enjoy their studies; good working relationships, mutual respect, team work and peer support are strong. Health and safety are reinforced well and students feel safe. They are encouraged to eat well and are fully aware of the importance of a balanced diet.
- Students participate in a wide range of community activities and charity events, for example, they coach pupils in local schools and coordinate local sports leagues. Their confidence improves, they develop good personal skills and many obtain relevant additional qualifications. Students demonstrate high levels of skill in a range of sports and have considerable autonomy in managing their own development.
- Teaching and learning are good. Teachers plan practical lessons well and build and test concepts covered in theory lessons. Teachers use questions effectively to check learning and extend students' knowledge. In some theory lessons, there is insufficient challenge for more able students as teachers do not provide enough opportunities for the exchange and development of ideas.
- Excellent sports facilities including a well-equipped sports centre, an all-weather pitch, a sports performance and assessment laboratory and extensive sports grounds support teaching and learning. Specialist sports software packages make learning interactive and help to prepare students for employment.
- A good range of courses is tailored to meet students' individual sporting interests. Additional qualifications develop specific skills and knowledge for progression into employment or HE. A very good sports enrichment programme provides further opportunities for volunteering and representing the college in a variety of sports often at a high standard. However, a minority of students find

it difficult to manage the balance between enrichment and their main programme.

- Outstanding partnership arrangements inform course developments and delivery. College representatives contribute to local and regional sports development initiatives. Students benefit greatly through prestigious guest speakers, worthwhile work experience at national and international events, and links with professional rugby, golf and football clubs.
- Students receive very good individual support from committed and enthusiastic teachers. Expectations of students are high but targets in electronic individual learning plans are not sufficiently focused or specific enough to challenge, guide and support achievement of their learning goals.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. The self-assessment report is detailed but not sufficiently evaluative, although most areas for improvement are identified. Staff contribute to setting targets and progress towards them is monitored regularly although this monitoring is not always based on accurate data. Strategies to improve retention and the percentage of high grades are in place but it is too soon to judge their effectiveness. Communication and team work are good.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good and is reinforced at team meetings and quality reviews. The analysis of outcomes and recruitment by gender and of underrepresented groups is used to set targets. Equality and diversity are promoted well in most lessons but there are some missed opportunities when planning to identify issues naturally occurring in sport.

What does Myerscough College need to do to improve further?

- Improve guidance and enrolment processes to ensure that students are enrolled on the right mix of courses to improve retention.
- Increase the rigour of learners' reviews; set more specific targets to provide challenge for all learners and monitor more closely their performance and progress; provide prompt intervention to students at risk of leaving.
- Improve the planning of theory lessons to use a wider variety of learning and assessment activities to provide appropriate challenge to all students.
- Increase the rigour of self-assessment by ensuring that targets in action plans are based on accurate data. Produce an overarching assessment of the college's sports provision.

## Foundations for learning and life

## Grade 2

### Context

37. The foundations for learning and life programmes are delivered at centres in Preston, Liverpool and Blackburn, to 188 learners. The 16 courses offered provide students with progression opportunities from entry level 1 to a good range of foundation-level courses.

### Key findings

- Achievement is good. Students make good progress with particularly high levels of attainment in science and mathematics at entry level 3 and skills for working life at entry levels 1 and 2. On most accredited courses, retention rates are very high. Retention declined significantly in the certificate for working life due to students' transport difficulties.
- Students develop in confidence and improve their communication skills well. Students with learning difficulties can express opinions and preferences confidently in a variety of environments. They gain good practical skills for everyday living and work. On internally-accredited provision, Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA) is used adequately to record and verify students' progress in achieving their individual learning goals.
- Students' progression to higher-level courses in college is good although there is limited opportunity to progress to employment or voluntary work. Extensive opportunities for work experience exist in college but there are insufficient external work placements. New links with a supported employment recruitment service have been developed to extend this opportunity.
- Good practice in health and safety is apparent in lessons. Students are reminded regularly of hazards and safety issues. Detailed risk-assessments are completed for visits and placements. Students report that they feel safe within the college and know what to do if they have concerns. Promotion of equality and diversity is embedded in curriculum delivery.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Teachers provide good support for students with significant communication difficulties. Literacy and numeracy are embedded well and activities are designed carefully to enhance learning opportunities and support students' main learning goals. Good use is made of college facilities to promote integration and social competence. Students of differing abilities progress at an appropriate pace. In a few lessons there is insufficient challenging work for some learners.
- The recently revised curriculum provides a good range of linked and progressive steps to foundation level vocational programmes. Progression rates are outstanding. A few students with mental health difficulties progress to HE. Partnerships with schools, Connexions, social services and other stakeholders are satisfactory.

- Individual student support for their personal, social and learning activities is good. Guidance is not sufficiently specific to set students clear long-term personal targets and aspirations on completion of their course. Support staff and a specialist mentor work effectively with tutors in, for example, managing challenging behaviour. Personal care is managed well.
- Data are not used sufficiently by managers to monitor students' progress and the quality of the provision and to inform self-assessment. Internal observations of lessons are overly generous in their grading and do not lead to a clear plan of what needs to improve. Insufficient time is available to develop partnerships and plan students' external work experience placements.
- Most teachers are qualified and experienced and benefit from targeted staff development, including specialist training. Facilities and resources for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are adequate although there are too few specialist resources to support learning. Accommodation is satisfactory, but some rooms are not suitable.

What does Myerscough College need to do to improve further?

- Improve the analysis and use of data and the outcomes from lesson observations to add rigour to the self-assessment process and to set clear targets in the quality improvement plan.
- Improve the effectiveness of initial guidance and assessment to ensure that all students have clear and measurable long-term learning goals.
- Develop links with supported employment providers and employers to extend students' opportunities for work experience and paid employment.
- Improve accommodation and specialist resources to support teaching and learning, particularly on entry-level programmes.



## Welfare provision

Grade 1

### Context

38. Myerscough College provides single sex accommodation in seven halls of residence on the main campus. At the time of the inspection there were 168 male and 54 female students aged 16 to 18 years. The college provides an adult presence throughout the 24-hour period of each day during term time.

### Key findings

- Students' health needs are met very well. Policy and guidance has been developed over a number of years with support from health professionals. Students' health histories are known from the point of enrolment. A dedicated pastoral support team, including a registered nurse, coordinates health support on many levels. Partnership arrangements provide access to doctors and a full prescription service. Suitable controls for administering medicines are established.
- College counsellors are valued by the students. Specialist agencies support mental health. The college holds regular health fairs and students are encouraged to adopt healthier lifestyles. Students confirm satisfaction with how their health and well-being are promoted.
- A catering committee allows genuine opportunities to discuss menus. Students' views and comments on food are shared with staff, and aspects to improve have been identified. Students enjoy themed meals as part of ongoing work looking at cultural diversity.
- Appropriate safeguarding policies are in place and all staff receive safeguarding training. Arrangements for complaints, child protection, bullying and behaviour management are handled extremely well. Students confirmed that they feel safe, are listened to and protected. Contact has been established with local safeguarding boards. Any incidents at the college are recorded appropriately and reported transparently.
- The promotion of equality and diversity amongst residential students is outstanding. Equality and diversity are highly valued and each student is treated fairly. A culture of high expectation increases students' self esteem and confidence; they acquire skills relevant to adult life and the world of work. Students learn about discipline, take responsibility and respect the rights and needs of others.
- A comprehensive framework of risk assessment is established. Hazard identification is good. Maintenance is effective and student accommodation is fit for purpose. Students are fully aware of emergency evacuation procedures. The fire risk assessment is reviewed annually. The staff recruitment and selection procedure is robust. Students are looked after safely by skilled and experienced staff.

- Students' induction to welfare provision is excellent and they confirmed that it helps them to settle into college life. Rules on residency are clear. An inclusive community is established where there is mutual respect and trust between students and the pastoral support team.
- Consultation takes place with students on proposed plans and developments. Students are proud of their college and in particular the friendliness of the residential students and staff. The college ethos secures positive outcomes for students. Resources are excellent. Governors closely monitor the welfare provision.
- Senior managers provide excellent support in maintaining a competent, well-qualified workforce. Performance management enables staff to reflect and critically analyse their work and has led to many creative and innovative ways to develop further the already high standards. Staff morale is excellent; their enthusiasm and skills provide an interesting environment. A culture of continuous improvement is established, which places high expectations and challenging targets for both staff and students.
- The college's residential policies and procedures are comprehensive, clearly written and accessible. Practice meets with the requirements of the national minimum standards for FE colleges.

What does Myerscough College need to do to improve further?

- Continue to develop arrangements to consult with students regarding catering arrangements.

## Information about the inspection

39. Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), a social care inspector and seven additional inspectors, assisted by the college's deputy principal, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding bodies, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
40. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the college. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the college offers.

**Record of Main Findings (RMF)**  
**Myerscough College**

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; 16-18 Learner responsive: FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses; Employer responsive: Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners					
Full-time learners	1,455	0	1,214	241	0
Part-time learners	3,074	499	392	649	1,534
Overall effectiveness	3	2	3	3	2
Capacity to improve	4				
Outcomes for learners	3	2	3	3	3
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3				
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3				
How well do learners progress?	3				
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	3				
How safe do learners feel?	2				
Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*	2				
How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*	2				
Quality of provision	3	2	3	3	2
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3				
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2				
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	1				
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	3				
Leadership and management	3	2	3	3	2
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	3				
How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*	3				
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2				
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3				
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2				
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	4				
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	3				

\*where applicable to the type of provision

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