



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT APRIL 1999

# Askham Bryan College

## SUMMARY

Askham Bryan College provides good training in a number of land-based subjects. Training is flexibly arranged on a roll-on/roll-off basis to allow trainees to begin at any time. Well-resourced out-centres provide accessible training over a large rural area. Trainees are accorded high status in the college. They receive good pastoral support, but little systematic or structured learning support. Arrangements for assessing trainees in the workplace are underdeveloped. Staff are well managed. The quality assurance system is good.

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Agriculture	2

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	2
Trainee support	3
Management of training	2
Quality assurance	2

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ innovative and flexible modes of training
- ◆ good resources across all aspects of training provision
- ◆ good access to training in rural areas
- ◆ highly effective team of guidance officers
- ◆ good staff management
- ◆ well-documented policies and procedures

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient workplace assessment
- ◆ weak initial assessment processes
- ◆ insufficient guidance to employers
- ◆ insufficient provision of structured learning support

## INTRODUCTION

1. Askham Bryan College is a further education sector college offering land-based programmes. It is situated 4 miles from the city of York. The college has its origins in the Yorkshire Institute of Agriculture, which first registered students in 1948. The college was awarded the NFU College of the Year Award for 1998 in recognition of the high-quality education and training it provides for the land-based sector. The college farm at Askham Bryan consists of 174 hectares and is used for a variety of arable enterprises. There are also livestock enterprises consisting of dairy, pigs and sheep. The college has farm machinery workshops and extensive resources to enable trainees to work on their own and to develop information technology skills. The college has four out-centres to serve the rural community. The Bedale centre serves the west of the county where a large number of leisure courses are provided for the local community. The Guisborough centre serves Teeside and the area bounded by the Cleveland Hills, through the Esk Valley to Whitby. The Harrogate centre serves an area covering Skipton, Ripon, Boroughbridge and Leeds, and the Pickering centre serves the eastern area of North Yorkshire from Sutton Bank across to the coast. All centres provide a library, private study and computing facilities, a large craft room, woodwork area and a workshop with welding bays. The Guisborough and Harrogate centres also have a small horticultural unit. The college has diverse sources of income. About 37 per cent of its annual earnings comes from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and some 14 per cent from higher education courses. Another further 14 per cent comes from contracts with North Yorkshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and Tees Valley TEC. The co-ordinating TEC for quality assurance purposes is North Yorkshire TEC.

2. At the time of inspection, the college had 229 trainees in work based programmes. North Yorkshire accounts for more than half of the total area of Yorkshire and Humberside, but it contains only 14.5 per cent of the population in the region and this is thinly spread over a large rural area. The area has a high concentration of employers and employment in the agricultural sector. Employment is declining in the agriculture sector and 18 per cent of businesses employ fewer than five people. The area is large and rural with few large urban centres. Unemployment rates in the area vary considerably. The unemployment rates in Scarborough (on the east coast), the City of York, and Harrogate, are 5.5 per cent, 4.9 per cent and 2 per cent respectively, compared with the national average of 5.2 per cent. The proportion of school leavers in North Yorkshire who achieved five or more general certificates of education (GCSE) at grade C or above in 1998 was 48.9 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent. The proportion of school leavers who stay on in full-time education in North Yorkshire is 71 per cent. An average of 10.1 per cent of school leavers enter work-based training. The college employs 10 people to administer the training schemes, including seven guidance officers based throughout the centres, some of whom work part-time.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. Askham Bryan College had previously carried out self-assessment prior to its inspection by the Further Education Funding Council. In preparation for its inspection by the Training Standards Council, it produced a self-assessment report on its work-based training. This report was concise and clearly identified the strengths and weaknesses of the training provision. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. They also agreed with all the grades given by the college, with the exception of the grade for trainee support, which they considered was too high.

4. A team of four inspectors spent a total of 16 days at Askham Bryan College during April 1999. They met with 79 trainees, 31 employers and visited 27 workplace providers. They met and held discussions with 37 members of the college staff. The inspectors examined trainees' portfolios and a range of documents including trainees' assessment records and internal and external verifiers' reports. They observed a review of a trainee's progress which was held in the workplace, and five training sessions.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Agriculture		5				5
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Agriculture

### Grade 2

5. Training programmes cover a number of areas within the Council's classification of agriculture. These areas are as follows: agriculture, commercial and amenity horticulture, agricultural engineering, forestry, floristry, equine studies and animal care. The college is subcontracted to provide training for one New Deal client who is working towards an NVQ level 2 in equine studies. There are 128 trainees in agriculture and commercial horticulture. Of these, 29 are modern apprentices, 30 are national trainees, and 69 on other training programmes. In agricultural engineering there are 10 modern apprentices, three national trainees, and 24 trainees on other programmes. Ten trainees are on forestry and eight are on floristry programmes. Of the trainees in amenity horticulture, 18 are receiving training in green keeping, 23 in decorative horticulture, three in hard landscaping and one is on a nursery stock production programme. The new areas of provision are equine studies and animal care, and there is one trainee on an equine studies programme. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses, and with the grade, given in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ imaginatively designed and flexibly arranged training programmes
- ◆ good resources across all aspects of training provision
- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ good on-the-job training

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ inadequate monitoring of trainees' understanding of health and safety
- ◆ failure to complete the programme by a high proportion of trainees
- ◆ insufficient workplace assessment

6. Employers play a major part in the training programmes which are imaginatively designed and flexibly arranged to permit a variety of modes of attendance. Trainees can attend on a day-release or block-release basis, or by selecting those modules which meet their training needs. The programmes are available at five centres across rural North Yorkshire. All centres are well resourced and their staff are occupationally qualified. There are good-quality work-placements across all subject areas. Resources for training and assessment both on and off the job are very good. Qualified staff undertake assessment off the job and give trainees excellent support with portfolio-building and cross-referencing of evidence. They encourage the use of witness statements from a wide variety of people. These statements, however, are not always completed. There are no work-based assessors in agriculture, and trainees on agriculture programmes are assessed infrequently. The college has not given priority to the recruitment or training of work-based assessors. There is an innovative funding mechanism approved by the TEC, whereby trainees may undertake TEC-funded modern apprenticeship training leading to an NVQ during the middle year of an FEFC-funded national diploma course. There are currently 10 trainees on this type of programme. These trainees, however, do not complete their individual TEC-funded NVQ programme within the specified timescale and they add to the high proportion of trainees who do not complete their programmes. Trainees are given a health and safety assignment as part of the induction process. Their performance in these assignments is not effectively monitored to ascertain whether they have a full understanding and awareness of the importance of health and safety in the workplace. Three-monthly checks are carried out on trainees' understanding of, and work placement providers' compliance with, health and safety regulations.

7. Off-the-job training on the agricultural engineering programme is provided on a block-release basis. This is organised on a roll-on/roll-off basis to make it easier for trainees to begin their training at any time. Off-the-job training meets the needs of local industry, while complying with the requirements of the scheme. The quality of the training is high and the training staff are experienced and occupationally qualified. Employers also have a strong commitment to training. Resources at the college are excellent. Workshops and teaching areas are maintained to a high standard. Although some of the equipment is old, the college renews as much equipment as possible. Tutors have excellent relationships with a number of local dealers, from whom they are able to borrow the most recent equipment for short periods. In their work placements, the trainees complete awarding body task sheets

in order to have their competencies assessed, and they return them to the college for internal verification. An internal verifier also visits work placements once a year to check on the status of those who provide witness testimonies on the trainees' performance. There are no qualified assessors in the workplace. Portfolios are kept at the college. On entering each block of off-the-job training, trainees are encouraged to bring them up-to-date. Although trainees are allowed to take these portfolios away with them, they are not encouraged to do so. Employers are not always made aware of the content of the trainees' programme. Some trainees on the modern apprenticeship programme who have obtained a general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) in engineering at intermediate level already possess relevant skills. They follow the same training programme, however, as those trainees who have not obtained the GNVQ and they are not enabled to progress at a faster rate.

8. The green-keeping programme attracts trainees from a wide area and from outside the county. Off-the-job training is provided through periods of block release during the winter months, an arrangement preferred by the employers. The off-the-job training for one commercial horticulture trainee is subcontracted to a land-based college in the south-east at the request of the employer concerned. This arrangement is effectively managed and assessment is internally verified by the college staff. Amenity horticulture trainees are primarily assessed on the evidence of their job sheets, endorsed by the employers. They are also assessed through their performance in assignments, based on models supplied by the awarding body, which provide evidence of their acquisition of theoretical knowledge. With the exception of those on the green-keeping work placements, there are few work-based staff who hold, or are working towards, assessor qualifications. Work placements are of a high quality and offer trainees good opportunities for the development of a wide range of skills and knowledge. Workplace supervisors support, and have a high understanding of, training in the workplace.

## **GENERIC AREAS**

### **Equal opportunities**

### **Grade 2**

9. Askham Bryan college has an equal opportunities policy and its effectiveness is monitored by the equal opportunities monitoring group. Membership is drawn from all areas of the college and the group is chaired by a member of the senior management team. The college is firmly committed to providing learning for all who seek it, irrespective of their ability and previous attainment. There is a comprehensive disability statement that was initiated in 1996 and is reviewed annually. The trainee handbook contains an equal opportunities statement and details the grievance procedure. Inspectors agreed with the findings and the grade in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good access to training in rural areas
- ◆ good promotion of equal opportunities by word and example

- ◆ equality of status for trainees at all levels

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ ineffective equal opportunities monitoring group
- ◆ no follow-up to equal opportunities issues after induction
- ◆ failure of marketing materials to promote equality of opportunity

10. The college is situated in a large rural area and has a catchment area beyond the county boundary. The college maintains four outreach centres. The college promotes equality of status for all trainees at all levels. The equal opportunities statement is clearly displayed throughout all the centres. All training centres are accessible to those with mobility problems. Staff have a good understanding of equality of opportunity and uphold it through their own attitudes and behaviour.

11. Through its self-assessment process, the college recognised that the equal opportunities monitoring group was not effective. The equal opportunities monitoring group has recently been re-formed and is now chaired by a member of the senior management team. The remit of the group is being rewritten. The action plan identified by the group is not being fully implemented. There is no equal opportunities statement on the majority of the marketing material for NVQ programmes. The trainees' handbook contains an equal opportunities statement and a copy of the grievance procedure, which is explained to trainees at their induction. Trainees have a low awareness of equal opportunities issues, however, and there is little reference to them after induction. Employers are not made fully aware of the college's equal opportunities policy.

### **Trainee support**

### **Grade 3**

12. The college recruits trainees with a wide range of needs, skills and abilities. Trainees are recruited through the careers service, the promotional activities of the college at recruitment fairs and by word of mouth within the land-based industry. All trainees who have not been identified by the careers service as needing additional support, undergo a basic skills assessment. The college has three trainees on level 1 programmes who have been assessed as having no realistic prospect of achieving an NVQ level 2; and 11 trainees on level 2 programmes who have been assessed as having some prospect of achieving an NVQ level 2 but who require significant additional support. They all receive individual support that is recorded in the trainee's personal file. The inspectors found weaknesses not identified in the self-assessment report and awarded a lower grade than that given by the college.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good and impartial careers advice
- ◆ highly effective team of guidance officers
- ◆ good provision for those with physical disabilities

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ insufficient structured learning support for trainees
- ◆ weak initial assessment processes
- ◆ insufficiently individualised training plans
- ◆ no initial assessment or effective development of key skills

13. All potential trainees are given impartial and accurate advice at interview and this is well recorded. Trainees are given good information on which to make an informed career decision. There is a comprehensive induction process that lasts up to six days in college prior to commencing work-placement or employment. Trainees are also given an induction to their workplace. The guidance officers work well together as a team and provide trainees with good pastoral guidance and support. There is good communication between employers, the guidance officers, trainees and academic staff. Guidance officers make themselves available at the centres to the trainees on their day of off-the-job training. Through their regular contact with guidance officers, trainees are clearly informed of progression on their current programme, and of other training and career opportunities open to them. The guidance officers provide good assistance to trainees with disabilities. They work with the appropriate college staff or seeking the assistance of specialist support agencies. They ensure that this support is available in the workplace for trainees with disabilities. The guidance officers make special visits to the trainees in the workplace every three months to carry out reviews of their progress. These reviews, however, do not cover the trainees' progress towards completing NVQ units. Most guidance officers are occupationally qualified and some are still working for assessor qualifications.

14. All trainees receive an initial assessment of their basic skills but this is not used as a means of identifying their learning support needs. The college does not provide specific additional learning support for trainees who are not identified by the careers service as requiring it. It is assumed that by placing trainees in small groups, they will receive the individual attention they need. Although 37 per cent of trainees come from farming families and have worked on farms, there are no arrangements for accrediting their prior learning and experience. Individual training plans are insufficiently detailed and do not take into account the farming skills the trainees already possess. Trainees lack understanding of key skills requirements and there is no initial assessment of the key skills they possess. The college aims to improve trainees' understanding of key skills and two members of staff have recently become qualified to assess key skills.

## **Management of training**

## **Grade 2**

15. Management of the work-based training is the responsibility of the director of curriculum, who is a member of the senior management team. The manager of the NVQ unit is also a member of the school of agriculture and helps to plan the agriculture training programme and their timetables. There are staff handbooks and procedures for recruitment, induction, appraisal and staff development. Askham Bryan College has been awarded an Investors in People Standard. Guidance officers



are based at each of the centres, and they are supported by the administrative team based at York. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good management and planning of training
- ◆ effective industrial liaison
- ◆ good staff management

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ insufficient information for employers about off-the-job training

16. Through its long established links with industry, the college recognises that programmes need to cover technical content as well as practical work-based training. Through negotiations and following pressure from the land-based industry, the local TEC has agreed to a programme which provides both. Nineteen trainees who are on a modern apprenticeship programme receive work-based training for four days each week and study for one day for a national diploma or national certificate in agriculture. The college has managed to obtain funding for its own students to commence training on modern apprenticeship or national traineeship programmes for up to twelve months in the middle year of their own non-TEC-funded course. When they complete their course in the third year, they can complete their modern apprenticeship or national traineeship. The college has established good links with appropriate land-based industries through regular industrial liaison committees, which meet three times a year. Representatives from the industry serve on a number of college advisory committees. Through these links, the college is able to provide trainees with access to particular resources and practical experience when necessary. Staff appraisal and staff development arrangements are well established. Staff development needs are identified and funds and resources are readily available to ensure these are met. Clear records are kept of destinations of all trainees.

17. Employers value the quality of the off-the-job training provided by the college. They have, however, also expressed concern because they do not receive enough information about the content of off-the-job training sessions and trainees' attendance. Although the college provides employers with some information about the training programme at the outset, it relies on the trainees to keep their employers informed about its progress. Last autumn, the college invited employers to attend sessions for the exchange of information about training. The college sought information from the employers about the extent to which they can assess trainees in the workplace. Some employers responded positively to the prospect of becoming work-based assessors, but the college has not taken action to follow this up. In the centres, there is good communication between the guidance officers and the tutors and they work from the same office. In some subject areas where there are few trainees, communication between college staff and employers is poor and there is insufficient co-ordination of on-the-job and off-the-job training.

## Quality assurance

## Grade 2

18. The college has comprehensive policies and processes for quality assurance for all its provision and these aim to ensure the continuous improvement of the provision. The policies and processes are updated following monitoring and review of their effectiveness. Clear performance indicators are used. The college has achieved a number of external awards for the quality of its provision including an industry award. External audits are undertaken and there are action plans for the improvement of provision. The college has a strategic plan, business plan and sets targets. The self-assessment report is well written and supporting information is well presented. The inspectors agreed with findings of the self-assessment in relation to quality assurance and awarded the same grade as that given by the college.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ effective policies and procedures
- ◆ comprehensive programme reviews
- ◆ good monitoring of off-the-job training

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ insufficiently thorough monitoring of trainees' learning experience on some programmes

19. The college has recently undertaken a comprehensive review of all its policies and procedures across all aspects of its provision. There are clear and concise quality assurance policies. These are implemented through well-managed and effective processes and procedures. The management responsibilities for these processes are clearly identified and regularly reviewed. Monitoring and evaluation of provision are well developed. Action planning for the improvement of provision is carried out and action has to be completed within clearly identified timescales. Staff responsibilities for quality assurance are clearly defined. There are arrangements for obtaining feedback from trainees on the quality of their training. Training programmes in all occupational areas and at all levels are evaluated and reviewed annually. This in-house internal audit is effective and assists the continuous improvement of provision. This audit process includes observation of training by college staff. All staff are committed to providing training of high quality. They are aware of the demanding standards required by external bodies and the industries with which the college works. The aims of the college are clearly indicated in its mission statement. Targets are set and progress towards reaching them is monitored. Performance is effectively reviewed and benchmarking is carried out. Internal verification is thorough and effective. Action required by external verifiers is carried out effectively and it is carefully recorded.

20. When weaknesses are identified, action is taken to rectify them. For example, it was identified that, at three of the centres, trainees were not allowed to borrow library books and management took action to enable them to do so. Some quality assurance processes, however, are not yet well established. The monitoring of



individual trainees' learning experience is more thorough on some training programmes than others. Following self-assessment, the college has identified some aspects of quality assurance which require attention. For example, there are no arrangements for monitoring the effectiveness of the reviews of trainees' progress.