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Mr I Pryce
Principal
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Dear Mr Pryce

Ofsted 2010–11 best practice survey: value for money in colleges

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and learners, during my visit on 12 October 2010 to look at work in securing and developing best value for money.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our publication about best practice in value for money in colleges. The publication will include case studies about individual providers. If your college is included as a case study, you will have an opportunity to comment before publication. Individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: analysis of success rate data for 2008/09, the most recent inspection report and the 2008/09 self-assessment report; meetings with key managers and leaders in the college and a meeting of a representative group of learners.

Features of good practice

- The competence, consistency and stability of the executive team, in leading the college very successfully to achieve the strategic aims and objectives through a learner-centred approach. It includes an appropriate balance of leaders and managers involved directly in the quality of teaching and learning.
- Very effective use of quality processes, including the European Framework for Quality Management (EFQM) initiative, to define what quality actually is. This leads to a clearly defined focus on effectiveness, with learners' experiences and achievements at the centre.
- Highly effective integration of the core college values in strategic and operational planning and in decision-making, highlighting strongly a very

clear focus on learners' experiences and the expectation that staff consistently strive for high performance in all aspects of work.

- Ensuring a high and rising proportion of good or better lessons, providing good-quality resources and equipment to complement learning and assist learners to meet their progression aims and aspirations through very effective guidance and support.
- Very close monitoring of course, instructor, teacher, assessor and room usage hours, to ensure the efficient and effective use of resources across the college consistently and in accordance with college guidance.
- Using external sector experts to compare performance with that of other colleges periodically, to review outcomes, income and expenditure and so review current practices and consider ways to improve further.
- Elements of performance-related pay, to provide an incentive for teachers to achieve lesson observation grades 'good' or better and for assessors to ensure that their learners achieve within the agreed timeframe, have contributed to improved quality very successfully. In response to learners' concerns around teacher absence, awarding an annual bonus payment to teachers who do not have any sickness absence.
- Effective procedures to monitor income, expenditure and performance across the college and in sector subject areas, which result in timely actions to tackle issues that may occur. These processes encourage managers to identify good practice, which in turn is shared with others requiring support and trialled further in pilot projects across the college.
- The college's commitment to invest in training and developing its staff to equip them with the skills and expertise to continue the drive for improvement and develop leaders for the future. In one department, a role has been created to enable an experienced teacher to manage a smaller group of staff and courses than would usually be expected, to provide management experience before consideration for a larger role.

Areas for development

- Broaden the ways in which learners can contribute to sharing their experiences and views of the college with managers, so that more learners have an opportunity to share what it is they want and so inform strategic and operational planning more consistently than they do at present.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop your approaches to securing value for money in your college.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection.

Yours sincerely

Paula Heaney
Her Majesty's Inspector