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Mr S Criddle
Principal
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Dear Mr Criddle

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 23 November 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 prior to 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 with a representative group of learners.

Features of best practice

- A culture across the college that focuses on value for money based on frequent and effective review of learners' experiences and progress.
- Clear and systematic approaches to agreeing future objectives and monitoring progress towards these objectives effectively, whether they are associated with income, expenditure or performance. Actions to solve any problems, that may impede planned progress, are put into place swiftly.
- Staff who have high expectations of their learners and are good at helping them to reach these expectations. The quality of teaching and learning is very closely and effectively monitored to ensure high standards. This is supported well by the high profile that the college gives to celebrating the success of staff and learners using both internal and external recognition

systems. Learners' enjoyment and success in the range of activities outside the classroom are regarded in the same manner as their success on their course.

- Very effective external benchmarking with a range of peer organisations. The college identifies very clearly the purposes of its external benchmarking and uses the outcomes from these groups to good effect to support improvements.
- The college tends not to use external consultants, but concentrates well on developing the confidence and expertise of its own managers and leaders through high-quality continuing professional development.
- Learners' progress is monitored very closely, and effective and timely interventions are used to support any students who show signs of struggling to make the progress expected of them. A wide range of approaches support this work including the close attention paid to learners' attendance, effective use of electronic individual learning plans (eILPS) and a well-supported virtual learning environment with innovative support for staff to encourage and ensure its use.
- There is very strong partnership working with local schools, employers and the wider community. For example, the 2010 Beacon Award for 14–19 Collaboration recognises the high standard of work that the college undertakes with local schools.
- The college has created very good accommodation and resources over the last few years, which it has recently added to with its new higher education building. Buildings and resources are very well maintained and managed, and provide a modern environment in which learners enjoy working and socialising.

Areas for development

- Strengthen the value-added approaches used in GCE AS and A-level programmes to support the college's objective of improving performance in these areas.

I hope 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

Wilf Hudson
Her Majesty's Inspector