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Mr H Bramwell
Principal
Burnley College
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Dear Mr Bramwell

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

Thank you for your cooperation, and the hospitality of your staff and learners, during my visit on 17 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 scrutiny of documentation and meetings with senior managers, other staff and students.

Features of best practice

- The strong ethos and 'can do' attitude of staff throughout the college that places a premium on achieving excellence, and placing the needs of students first, while continuing to offer outstanding value for money.
- The excellent progress made by students who perform very well in relation to their prior attainment and experience. Success rates are very high and overall students' achievement rates are above those of many similar colleges.
- The building of a wholly new college campus that opened in August 2009. The facilities offered to staff and students are first class and the project was delivered within budget and on time. The campus was built using sustainable techniques and materials that provide very good energy efficiency, utilising rainwater harvesting, solar energy and a computerised building management system that automatically saves power.
- The strong collaborative work of the college, including its well-established partnership with the University of Central Lancashire. The college's new

campus was built in association with the university and university students share facilities and services in a cost effective way. This close partnership between the institutions has increased the profile of higher education in the town and raised aspirations of local people to progress to university.

- Learners' views are taken seriously by staff and actions are taken, where appropriate, in response to their suggestions to improve the quality of services.
- The development of an electronic workflow system, the 'e-fficiency' programme, which has reduced the administrative burden for and improved the quality of pastoral and other services for staff and students. The system cuts costs and college managers estimate it led to a direct saving of £75,000 during 2009/10.
- The whole-college approach to staff training that encourages staff to develop and share good practice. One highly successful feature is the Teaching Innovation Centre. This cross-college resource is used by all staff and it supports teachers in a cost effective manner to help them improve their teaching methods.
- The innovative teaching and learning style developed by staff that is exemplified by the college's nine Active Learning Zones (ALZ). These spacious and well-appointed areas are staffed permanently by ALZ support staff and students attend for timetabled sessions or on a drop-in basis. The ALZs enable staff to engage students actively in learning activities efficiently and effectively.
- The sound financial health of the college and its sustained success in meeting funding targets. Senior managers ensure that the planning, monitoring and control of finances are carried out in a rigorous and transparent way. The deployment of staff and utilisation of space both provide value for money.

Areas for development

- To continue with plans to extend the 'e-fficiency' programme and cover further aspects of the college's pastoral support for students. In particular, to enable subject teachers to compile their progress reports online, thus making them more accessible to tutors and students.

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

As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tony Noonan
Her Majesty's Inspector