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Mr M Wharton
Principal
Hartpury College
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Dear Mr Wharton

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 14 December 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: analyses 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 good practice

- Clear and longstanding strategic direction that has enabled growth, broadened the range of the curriculum successfully and provided a wide range of progression routes, including significant higher education provision.
- Successful development of the college campus and facilities to support the whole curriculum. The college has a strong record of investing in facilities and accommodation.

- Strong links between financial and curriculum management. Good use of course costing approaches to measure and monitor value for money. Very clear focus and control of staffing and other costs.
- Extensive partnership working with schools, employers and the local community. The college is seen as a major centre of excellence in several aspects of the land-based curriculum, including sports and equine studies.
- Very productive approaches to comparing the college's work against other similar colleges through specialist networks and organisations. The mutual benefits to the college and its peers are clear to see.
- Close attention to learners' progress linked to rapid and effective interventions to help those learners who are struggling with their work.
- Effective quality assurance and improvement processes. The recent changes to the lesson observation process have resulted in a sharper focus by observers on effective learning.
- A successful and varied enrichment programme, including a well deserved reputation for achievements in sports and equine events.
- Learners often gain a good range of additional qualifications, giving them a competitive edge when it comes to gaining employment.
- Good staff training to support developing managers for the future from within the college.

Areas for development

- Continue to develop the college's virtual learning environment so that learners can develop independent learning skills, have the opportunity to develop information and communication technology skills, and can access their work outside of college, in their own time.

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

Wilf Hudson
Her Majesty's Inspector