

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



13 February 2012

Mr R Atkins
Principal
Exeter College
Hele Road
Exeter
Devon
EX4 4JS

Dear Mr Atkins

Ofsted 2011–12 survey inspection programme: employability - the impact of skills programmes for adults on achieving sustained employment

This survey evaluates providers' response to initiatives launched on 1 August 2011 to use Skills Funding Agency funds flexibly to support people on benefits.

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and participants, during my visit on 30 and 31 January 2012 to look at your work in employability provision.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff, participants and employers; scrutiny of relevant documents; analysis of participants' work; and observation of three learning sessions and one information, advice and guidance session.

Key findings

- The college has a very clear mission to serve the needs of the whole community and it has recently developed a good range of flexible provision which meets the needs of the majority of participants well. The Employment and Skills Board has excellent representation from local employers, key local authority partners and other stakeholders. College staff use these partnerships well to plan courses according to current and future labour market needs.
- Since August 2011, relevant staff are more aware of planned job vacancies and use this information well to adapt the employability provision as necessary and provide more pertinent advice and guidance to participants.

The college works well with voluntary groups, council departments and other agencies to promote the the benefits of employability training. A very wide range of participants, some with significant and complex barriers to employment, such as mental ill-health, has good access to the college's employability courses. However, some participants do not have sufficient opportunities to practise their skills in real work environments on work-experience or work trials.

- The teaching and learning sessions observed were good. Well-qualified and experienced staff enthused participants and helped them increase their confidence in key employability skills. In the vocational training observed, participants enjoyed using professional, industry-standard resources and felt motivated to look for work in the relevant industry. However, staff do not always consider all participants' experience and aspirations sufficiently when planning training sessions and the agreed learning goals in individual learning plans are not sufficiently detailed.
- Participants make good progress while they are at college. A good proportion of participants achieve relevant vocational and employability qualifications and improve their skills in functional English and mathematics to help increase their chances of employment.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that employability and vocational training are personalised and related to individual experience and aspirations, and that individual learning plans provide sufficient detail so that participants understand the relevance of agreed learning goals
- increasing the use of real work-experience, visits to workplaces or work trials to help those furthest away from employment make best use of the training and support provided.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop employability provision at Exeter College.

As 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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to the Skills Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

Nigel Evans
Her Majesty's Inspector