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Mr G Trow
Principal and Chief Executive
Doncaster College
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Dear Mr Trow

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 19 and 20 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 two learning sessions.

Key findings

- Doncaster College has a good strategic commitment to developing employability provision. The corporate strategy for 2011–14 identifies three core strands for its delivery; one being returning to work. The college makes good use of the Skills Funding Agency's discretionary funding to develop provision for the unemployed. It has successfully prioritised provision in vocational areas identified locally as areas of skills shortages, such as health and social care, customer service, hospitality and catering, retail and warehousing.
- Experienced staff have very good specialist skills and knowledge and good links with local partners. Discrete courses for unemployed people are designed well and have a good focus on helping them to overcome their

personal barriers to employment to find a job. The college has several good realistic work environments that allow participants to develop their vocational skills through valuable work experience and supervisory experience in preparation for future employment. However, staff do not always have sufficient time to work with employers to create further opportunities to support participants' progression to sustained employment.

- Drop-in computer courses provide flexible attendance options. Participants agree a minimum set number of attendance hours each week to enable them to achieve qualifications within an agreed timescale. Participants turn up when they can and this is very helpful for people with additional responsibilities such as childcare or other studies. Their progress is generally good. However, systems to use information on participants' progression and achievements to set targets, evaluate and improve the provision are underdeveloped.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing more effective monitoring system to enable managers to collate and analyse accurate information about participants' progression and achievement
- setting and monitoring improvement targets for staff running employability courses. Incremental targets should in place to improve areas such as retention, achievements and the number of people gaining work
- considering the provision of dedicated support staff to work with employers and participants to assist them in sustaining employment opportunities

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop employability provision at Doncaster 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

John Grimmer
Her Majesty's Inspector