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17 February 2012

Mr P Hannan
Principal
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Dear Mr Hannan

Ofsted 2011/12 best practice survey: supporting college students to progress and achieve

Thank you for your warm welcome and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 8 and 9 February 2012 to look at your work in supporting students to progress and achieve.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our publication about best practice in supporting college students. 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, observation of tutorials and meetings with senior managers, tutors, support staff and students.

Features of good practice observed

- Senior managers and staff are strongly committed to the core values of the college. All staff interviewed have a very positive attitude and strong ethos to support students to reach their full potential and be successful.
- A well-planned induction period is in place, during which students participate in enjoyable and informative activities that help them to settle into their course quickly.
- Students receive a high degree of pastoral support from well-trained tutors. Students appreciate the regular group tutorials where tutors focus on the 'Every Child Matters' themes in a responsive and relevant way.

- Extensive liaison, both formal and informal, between teaching teams and tutors enables tutors to have an informed view of the progress of students and to take appropriate actions to improve their performance.
- Comprehensive and rigorous quality assurance procedures exist to monitor and improve the quality of individual and group tutorials. Tutorials are observed regularly and relevant staff training is arranged to rectify any areas of improvement identified.
- A strong emphasis on providing opportunities for students to gain an awareness of career opportunities helps them to develop employability skills. A nationally accredited employability skills award is taught as part of the tutorial programme for all full-time students and is highly appreciated by them.
- The student support materials are entertaining, informative and available as high-quality booklets and freely accessible on the college's intranet.
- A very broad range of enrichment activities enables students to relax, have fun and learn new skills. Visits and activities often utilise the extensive specialist resources of the college and help students gain employability skills and valuable experience for their future career options.
- Strong support is given to the college's residential students. The student services team give their time freely to organise enrichment activities and ensure students are looked after well.
- Close links have been formed between the college and the local community. Staff work with a large number of local organisations to create opportunities for students to gain additional skills and enrich their experience of college life.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring electronic individual learning plans for students are introduced as planned and providing all parents and carers with written feedback on the progress of their son or daughter.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop your approaches to providing support for your students. As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tony Noonan HMI
Her Majesty's Inspector