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Mrs M Tattersall  
Principal  
Carlisle College  
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Dear Mrs Tattersall

**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 visits on 10 and 11 October 2011 and 1 February 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 partners; scrutiny of relevant documents; analysis of participants' work; and observation of three learning sessions.

**Key findings**

- Carlisle College is implementing strong commitment and clear strategy to grow its provision for people on benefits. In particular, it has used the allocated funds well to develop further its links with Jobcentre Plus and has successfully increased the number of people on benefits referred to the college's employability provision. The college works very well in partnership with the local authority, employers and other providers to identify how they can support new and expanding companies to offer job opportunities to local people.
- Since August 2011, the college has worked well with large national and small- and medium-sized employers to develop bespoke provision to meet their needs. This has involved: helping large national retail employers with

their recruitment and pre-employment training; designing a pre-employment course for a small local engineering firm; and working with Cumbria County Council to provide work placements and training to help participants find temporary or permanent employment with the council or one of its partner organisations.

- The college tailors its approach very well to help those furthest away from the labour market with longer training and more support to remove barriers to employment. Those closest to the labour market receive tailored help with CV and job applications. All participants receive realistic advice about the availability of employment in the relevant vocational areas and the qualifications and skills needed to gain employment.
- Vocational training has a strong emphasis on commercial standards. The participants interviewed commented positively on the disciplined and focused learning environments and the appropriately high expectations tutors had of them that helped motivate them to achieve. Visits to employers and guest speakers raise participants' awareness of the range of careers in their chosen vocation. Some programmes make good use of work trials that enable participants to demonstrate their skills to prospective employers.
- Participants receive very good support in developing literacy, numeracy, English language and computing skills to help increase their employability and to help them achieve their vocational programmes. Participants receive particularly thorough training in jobsearch skills, including guidance on how to tackle online job applications. However, individual learning plan goals are not always sufficiently clear about how participants will develop specific employability skills or know when they have achieved them.

**Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- ensuring that, where relevant, participants' individual learning plans more clearly identify specific learning goals that relate to their barriers to employment and the skills they need to develop to improve their chances of sustained employment.

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

**Marina Gaze**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**