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Ms A English
Acting Head of Adult Learning
Liverpool City Council
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Dale Street
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Dear Ms English

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 8 and 9 November 2011 and 21 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; visits to three learning centres; scrutiny of relevant documents; and observation of six learning sessions.

Key findings

- Meeting the needs of unemployed people is a key strategic priority for Liverpool City Council and the Adult Learning Service uses its funding flexibly to provide programmes and support for people on benefits. Staff are using their prior experience in putting on short vocational programmes well to offer short sector-specific programmes to the unemployed. However, its provision specifically for people on benefits who speak English as an additional language has long waiting lists and does not focus enough on helping learners progress to work or vocational training.
- The service works well with employers and other partners to plan and design good work-related pre-employment programmes. The trainers have

relevant occupational expertise and they support participants well to help them develop a good understanding of their industry or area of work and the employability skills they need to develop to meet employers' requirements. Job outcomes are good.

- Since the first visit, the provision in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) has an increased focus on identifying participants' barriers to employment and helping them develop work-related language skills. The service has just started to provide an initial information, advice and guidance session for all participants assessed at entry level 2 or above. The staff involved have good expertise in providing this support to people from minority ethnic groups. However, the participants interviewed were not fully clear about their next step after they have completed their twelve-week programme.
- Staff have good skills in teaching ESOL and in the sessions observed, they set and achieved high standards in developing participants' accuracy in grammar and pronunciation. The participants interviewed had increased their confidence, especially in speaking and listening. The provision now focuses better on developing work-related language skills but it still lacks opportunities for participants to develop functional language skills and employability skills in vocational contexts.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- continuing to develop the ESOL provision, including through further work with employers, to ensure that it enables participants to develop language skills that directly support their development of employability and vocational skills
- reducing waiting lists by ensuring that learning programmes are time bound for more participants so that they can progress to further training programmes, where realistic
- increasing the information, advice and guidance participants receive to help them focus on identifying specific opportunities for progression to vocational training, voluntary or paid work to support their development of employability and language skills.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop employability provision at Liverpool City Council.

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

Karen Adriaanse
Her Majesty's Inspector