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9 March 2012

Mrs E Garner  
Head of Learning, Employment and  
Training Services  
The Hollies  
21 Sutton Road  
Shrewsbury  
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Dear Mrs Garner

**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 28 and 29 September 2011 and 10 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 employers; scrutiny of relevant documents; and observation of one learning session.

**Key findings**

- Since January 2012, Shropshire Council's Learning Employment and Training Services (LETS) has rapidly developed provision to help meet the needs of unemployed residents in Shropshire. Funding to support this work is now available through a consortium arrangement that enables LETS to offer individual units of qualifications and support employment skills activities. The service has identified appropriately ambitious targets for recruiting participants and supporting them into employment.
- Managers make good use of available funding sources to work with the most disadvantaged communities. Joint working with organisations such as Shropshire Housing, Shrewsbury College, the Foyer, housing

associations and Children's Centres provides unemployed residents with good opportunities to gain qualifications and follow routes back into work.

- LETS has worked well to plan provision that helps meet the needs of participants and local employers and it is building the capacity to deliver a good range of individual units of qualifications units. Jobsearch activities are increasingly individualised, particularly since the introduction of software that indicates where participants' skills, qualifications and experiences match current vacancies. Participants receive very good continued support once they have entered work.
- LETS has recently recruited employability tutors and additional staff with appropriate skills and experience. The procedures for initial assessment process and action planning for participants have improved since the first visit. However, not all learning sessions planned focus sufficiently on helping individual participants overcome their personal barriers to employment.
- Work with local employers is good and is now leading to more direct routes into employment for participants. LETS uses these links well to plan activities that help participants become more work-ready for specific occupations. For example, the partnership with a local large engineering company gives potential employees the opportunity to develop the necessary manual skills before taking the company's aptitude test. This has increased their chances of successfully moving on to the next stage of the recruitment process.

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

- ensuring that learning sessions are personalised, meet participants' individual development needs and concentrate on activities necessary to overcome their barriers to employment
- developing the necessary infrastructure to deliver an appropriate range of units of individual qualifications necessary to meet the needs of participants and employers
- increasing the use of consultation with local employers when advising participants on interview practice.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop employability provision at Learning, Employment and Training Services.

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**