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23 March 2012

Mrs G Alton
Principal
Rotherham College of Arts and Technology
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Dear Mrs Alton

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 3 November 2011 and 14 March 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, Jobcentre Plus staff and employers; scrutiny of relevant documents; analysis of participants' work; and observation of three learning sessions.

Key findings

- Rotherham College has a good strategic focus on the development of employment provision to assist unemployed people in improving their employment prospects. Since August 2011, it has recruited additional staff experienced in employability work and developed courses to meet local employment opportunities. A section of the college is being refurbished to become a dedicated site for its employability provision.
- The college has promoted apprenticeship funding grants to employers effectively to encourage them to employ apprentices within their businesses. The business development team has managed to find employment for 416 apprentices and of these 226 were previously benefit

claimants. However, other opportunities for unemployed participants to gain work experience with local employers are limited and overall job entry rates are low.

- Unemployed participants receive good individual support. Those interviewed said that staff were very friendly and helpful, and provided good support to help improve their job prospects. The college has recently created a post for a project coordinator and adviser. This post enables a very knowledgeable member of staff to support and advise participants for up to two years. This includes support for people who gain a job to review their progress and help them to sustain their employment.
- The targeting of disadvantaged groups to help develop their skills and employment prospects is good. The college works with the local probation service well and provides courses to help ex-offenders address barriers to finding and sustaining work. This includes vocational taster courses to help persistent offenders develop relevant work skills. The college's employability provision also helps people with drug and alcohol misuse problems. A pilot programme for young single mothers teaches them parenting skills and leads to a qualification for teaching assistants as employment in this area will fit in with their childcare responsibilities.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing more opportunities for unemployed participants to access work-experience opportunities to allow them to update their skills in the workplace, increase their confidence and update their CV
- developing further initiatives to expand the job opportunities available to participants to improve the overall success rates for people finding sustainable work as a direct result of the college's interventions.

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