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Ms M Gollock  
Interim Education Director  
Blackburne House  
Blackburne Place  
Off Hope Street  
Liverpool  
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Dear Ms Gollock

**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 visit on 23 and 24 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 a construction workshop session.

**Key findings**

- Since August 2011, Blackburne House has built on its broad experience in learning and skills to provide women with training and education that develop their enterprise and employment skills. Managers continue to extend the range of programmes on offer according to the needs and priorities of employers and participants, particularly in vocational areas not traditionally readily available to women. For example, they plan to expand the current offer of construction courses for women in September 2012 to include a multi-skill Apprenticeship programme.
- Vocational training programmes at Blackburne House are extremely effective at including the development of participants' employability skills. Tutors are skilled at reinforcing communication and numeracy skills at

every opportunity, highlighting the needs of businesses and customers awareness and encouraging participants to take responsibility for their own progress. Businesses within the Blackburne House Group and other employers provide particularly useful inputs into course design. Many of them also make invaluable contributions directly delivering specific parts of the courses and providing well-structured and supportive work-experience opportunities.

- Most participants find out about the programmes through local knowledge or personal links as the referral processes from jobcentres or work programme providers are not fully effective. Initial interviews are particularly effective at ensuring that participants join the most appropriate course according to their needs and that learning plans have realistic and relevant learning goals. The participants interviewed said that the regular feedback, advice and support were particularly useful in helping them progress and they appreciated the welcoming, friendly, safe and exceptionally supportive environment specifically designed for women.
- All participants were clear about their progression opportunities to further education, training and employment while on a course. Blackburne House is in the process of setting up a work club to provide women with a range of advice and development activities to help them enter or re-enter the job market. They are also looking at establishing guilds to encourage networking among individuals and businesses.

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

- strengthening the links with jobcentres and work programme providers to ensure that they understand the range of provision Blackburne House offers
- to launch the Work Club so that participants have access to information, advice and guidance on entering or re-entering the job market whether they are on a course or not
- ensuring that Blackburne House expands its existing systems to effectively monitor unemployed participants as they progress into jobs.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop employability provision at Blackburne House.

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

**Joy Montgomery**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**