

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs C Miller
Head of Newcastle City Learning
Newcastle Upon Tyne City Council
Westgate Community College
West Road
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE4 9LU

Dear Mrs Miller

Ofsted 2011–12 survey inspection programme: employability - the impact of skills programmes for adults on achieving sustained employment

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and participants, during my visit on 12 and 13 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, partners, subcontractors and employers; scrutiny of relevant documents; analysis of participants' work; and observation of two learning sessions.

Key findings

- Newcastle City Learning (NCL) has a very clear and effective strategy for helping participants find employment including those with multiple barriers and those furthest away from the job market. Since August 2011, the service has responded very positively to the increase in participants who are mandated to the provision. It is using the funding flexibilities well to meet their needs, especially those with multiple barriers to learning and employment.
- NCL works very effectively with partners and subcontractors to provide a wide range of provision and progression routes. Close working with Jobcentre Plus and Newcastle College helps to ensure that the high number of participants needing provision in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) to improve their employability can access learning at a level and location to suit them. Effective working with agencies and other local providers enables participants to access a one-stop-shop of services

including initial assessment, jobsearch skills and specialist help with homelessness. Partners work closely together to share information about participants to avoid unnecessary duplication. Successful work with subcontractors and partner agencies to increase the range of participants supported into employment has included good links with a local training provider that resulted in many participants finding employment in care homes.

- NCL works well with employers, helping large national retail employers with their recruitment and equipping participants with the necessary skills to apply for these new jobs. Work with smaller employers results in some good work-placement opportunities which develop participants' confidence and skills. However, participants do not always receive sufficiently detailed feedback on their work when on a placement.
- Programmes effectively develop participants' employability skills such as teamworking, time management and problem solving skills which they recognise in themselves and others. Staff use participants' experiences of work and applying for jobs effectively to develop individual learning plans and the provision. Employability skills, such as using a computer, jobsearch, language used in job interviews and numeracy for work, are an integral part of the ESOL provision. However, the pre-apprenticeship programme does not always develop participants' sector-specific skills sufficiently.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- coaching work-placement providers to give more constructive and detailed feedback to participants
- ensuring that participants on the pre-apprenticeship programme develop sector-specific skills
- ensuring that the new employability programme develops the literacy, numeracy and IT skills that participants need to increase their employability.

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

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