

23 November 2006

Ms Rachel Ellis-Jones
Principal
Northumberland College
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Ashington
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Dear Ms Ellis-Jones

Ofsted Subject Survey Inspection Programme 2006/07

Sector Skills Area 5 – Construction

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation during my visit on 02 and 03 November 2006. I am particularly grateful to you and all your staff for the hard work that took place to prepare for the visit and for giving up a great deal of time during the visit to meet with me. Please pass on my thanks to all those concerned.

This visit is part of a series to provision in SSA 5 graded good or better at its most recent inspection, in order to evaluate how effective/good practice has been brought about, further improved and sustained. The visit provided much useful evidence for the good practice survey in construction. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but should we wish to cite specific aspects of practice we will contact the college first. All letters, following survey visits, will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: lesson observations; interviews with staff and learners; scrutiny of the examples of good practice provided including a tour of resources. I agreed to provide a summary of the observations of good practice seen and to suggest some areas for development.

Good practice observed included:

- the extensive links with a wide range of suppliers; these provide learners with significant quantities of high quality, up-to-date materials for learning and assessment activities; prizes provided by suppliers motivate students and encourage them to make good progress

- the motivation and encouragement for learners provided through regular entry into regional and national competitions; learners have achieved significant success and recognition in these competitions
- the increase in the use of information and learning technology (ILT)
- the effective use to support delivery of professional construction subjects and its use in bricklaying as a virtual learning environment and progress tracking tool
- the strong commitment to maintain a very broad and inclusive range of provision; the college offers an extensive range of traditional and specialist trades
- the wide range of provision for 14-16 year olds; appropriate learning opportunities that enable good progression onto post-16 courses and into related employment and training
- the encouragement, advice, guidance and support given to learners to aid progression from one level to the next.
- the good response to meeting the training and assessment needs of experienced workers; highly effective On site Assessment and Training (OSAT) programme and Train to Gain provision.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- to improve apprenticeship framework completion rates
- to put greater focus on individual learner needs when planning learning and assessment activities in lessons
- to set clear targets for improvement in course and department reviews.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop construction provision in the college.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your LLSC. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Fraser
Additional Inspector