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04 December 2006

Mr Ioan Morgan
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Dear Mr Morgan

Ofsted Subject and Survey Inspection Programme 2006/07

Sector Skills Area 04: Engineering and manufacturing technology

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation during my visit on 09 and 10 November. I am particularly grateful to teachers and other staff for all their hard work in preparing the programme and background documentation and giving up a great deal of their time during the visit. Please pass on my thanks to staff and students who gave up their time to talk to me.

The visit provided much useful evidence for the good practice survey. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but should we cite specific aspects of practice and attribute them to particular colleges we will contact those colleges prior to publication. College letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term and copied to the LSC. The letters will also be available to the next inspection team to visit the college and to inform your AAV visits.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work, observation of four lessons, a visit to an employer and general observation of resources.

I said I would provide a summary of my observations and of the good practice seen and suggest areas for development.

Good practice observed included:

- Data provided by the college after the inspection shows that adult learner success rates are high, particularly so in 2006.

- Success rates for learners aged 16-18 on long level 3 courses were high in 2006.
- All the lessons observed were of good quality. Strengths included:
 - high attendance; 97% on average
 - enthusiastic and knowledgeable teachers who planned their teaching carefully; they have a good rapport with learners, are patient and clear in their explanations and move the learning on at a pace which is appropriate to all the learners
 - teachers specialist knowledge is used well to interest the learners, who respond positively to the teaching
 - the lessons were well structured and included an appropriate variety of learning activity, making teaching interesting and promoting learning; for example questioning, by teachers was frequently used to good effect and learners responded well. Group work was included in most lessons.
 - demonstration, using three-dimensional models, was used particularly well in one lesson.
 - there was a good mix of hand-outs, note-taking, and computer projected notes. The virtual learning environment was used to good effect in two lessons.

- There are particularly strong links with industry. The department responds well to employers' needs by offering flexible and bespoke provision. These links help to develop and maintain the resource base.
- The theme of motor sport helps the national diploma recruit motivated learners. Aspects of the course such as the major project and the competitive 24 hour pit team experience succeed in maintaining this interest.
- The virtual learning environment is being developed by a small group of teachers. The potential this offers is already evident in some of their work.
- Rigorous attention is given to learners at risk of not succeeding through, for example, the identification of learning and support needs, close monitoring of progress and reporting to employers and/or parents as appropriate.
- The quality of the accommodation and resources at the Trident centre is outstanding.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- success rates for learners aged 16-18 were low in 2006 on level 1 courses
- aspects of the management of group work can be improved, for example by better seating arrangements and more thought to how the activity is structured and reported
- some schemes of work do not give confidence that an appropriate variety of activity has been planned into a complete unit or the course as a whole; course files sometimes contain too much generic material, and miss out important specific course management material
- following lesson observations the strengths and areas for development in the teaching across the curriculum area as a whole are not analysed in order to inform professional development
- continue to develop the use of the virtual learning environment.

Please note that these findings do not constitute a full evaluation of the quality of the department and are based on a short visit.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop engineering and manufacturing courses.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Colin Evans". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large 'C' and 'E'.

Colin Evans
Her Majesty's Inspector