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Mr Ray Goy
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Dear Mr Goy

Ofsted Survey Programme 2006/07

Aspect: The contribution made by CoVEs to the development of vocational work, including preparation for the specialised 14-19 diplomas, in schools.

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation during my visit on 20 November 2006. I am particularly grateful to Julie Craddock for her hard work in preparing the programme and background documentation and giving up their time during the visit. Please pass on my thanks to other staff who gave up their time to talk to me.

The visit provided much useful evidence for the good practice survey into CoVEs' work with schools. Where published reports cite specific aspects of good practice it is usual practice to name the colleges involved. However, where reports identify common issues which represent barriers to progress, individual colleges will not be named.

I agreed to provide a summary of my observations of good practice seen and to suggest some areas for development.

Good practice observed

- Existing links with schools include provision within the CoVE for about 50 students aged 14 to 16 each year, funded through a combination of the Increasing Flexibility Programme (IFP), European Social Fund (ESF), Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) and school contributions. The CoVE also provides a three-day computer and network building activity during July for gifted and talented students in Key Stage 4.
- There is a very high level of employer involvement with the CoVE which is genuinely purposeful and productive. For example, the role of the steering

group is very much focused on applying IT business expertise to identified areas for development. There are several examples where members of the steering group have been able to propose better ways of doing things which the CoVE has subsequently implemented. If this level of employer involvement can be generated for the ICT diploma locally it would be of tremendous value.

- The CoVE is very responsive to employers' skills needs and demonstrates an enthusiasm for taking employers' views on board. In addition to being demand-led in contributing to the 'up-skilling' needs of local businesses and their employees, the CoVE has become pro-active in identifying the wider skills needed by employers. The CoVE has developed the habit of regularly finding out about developments in the IT skills needed by employers and then adapting its mainstream courses so that the range and depth of skills developed by students are better matched to current labour market needs. One such example is the CoVE's response to the concern that students who gained employment following completion of their ICT qualification lacked broader employability skills such as customer service awareness, something employers are often unable to address quickly enough. This has led to an increased emphasis on workforce development across mainstream courses. Among the changes made have been the extension of work experience periods so that students have more opportunity to become familiar with organisational culture and tackle some real work problems and the increasing use of realistic work-related projects to provide more motivational assignment work for students. Although no development work has yet taken place on assessment for the diploma, this is an aspect in which the CoVE has some good expertise to share.
- The CoVE has developed a widely recognised expertise in the provision of the new information technology qualification (ITQ) courses developed by the E-Skills sector skills council, which are proving popular with employers because their flexibility enables them to be tailored closely to individual development needs. The CoVE has also developed a useful capacity to train assessors for these courses. This approach could provide a model for one strand of quality assurance across the ICT diploma line within the federations.
- Similarly, the 'managed work experience model' under development, with four different levels of work experience matched to the capabilities of different groups of students, is also transferable to the design and implementation of the diplomas.
- These aspects of good practice mean that the CoVE is well positioned to lead on the development of the ICT diploma across the two federations of Coventry schools of which the college is a member.
- Federation working groups have not yet directly addressed aspects of teaching and learning, but there appears to be a good understanding of the format and intentions for the new diplomas. The CoVE manager's active involvement with several awarding bodies through participation in working groups which develop and review qualifications, provides the benefit of the most up-to-date intelligence about the emerging structure and content of ICT diploma.

Areas in which further development is needed before diplomas can be implemented effectively locally

- There is still considerable distance to travel in creating the joint or compatible timetable arrangements for students aged 14 to 19, which will enable them full access to the diplomas where they are provided across institutions; for example, the need to address the different hours of the student day in schools and in the college.
- The transport arrangements which will be critical in supporting diploma students who will study across a variety of institutions are still to be determined.
- Direct employer involvement in the various working groups involved in the development of the diplomas locally remains very limited.
- A joint prospectus is still to be developed. Although the on-line area prospectus is at a reasonably advanced stage, certainly relative to many other areas, it is not yet fully functional and simply provides lists of courses available.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop the ways in which your CoVE supports 14 to 19 curriculum development in the area.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your LLSC and will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of the half-term following the visit. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

John Evans
Her Majesty's Inspector