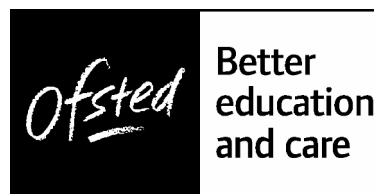


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10 January 2007

Ms Maggie Galliers
Principal
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Dear Ms Galliers

Ofsted Subject Survey Inspection Programme 2006/07

Sector Skills Area 5: Construction

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation during my visit on 05 and 06 December 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 good practice seen and to suggest some areas for development.

Good practice observed

- The effective use of advanced practitioners to improve teaching and learning. Lessons are now more effectively planned with frequent changes in activity and variety to maintain and increase learner involvement. Average teaching grades through the college observation process have improved and are now in line with the college average.

- The good use of information and learning technology (ILT) in teaching and learning. All staff are provided with laptops to promote the use of ILT in teaching. The college virtual learning environment (VLE) is developing and several construction staff are actively developing and storing teaching and learning materials.
- The very good assessment practice in work-based learning. All learners receive assessment by direct observation of competence on site, regardless of their trades. This enables learners to progress more quickly and eliminates duplication of site and college activities. Learners have the mobile telephone numbers of their assessors and are able to request assessment on demand. In addition to training support officers the college has employed assessors in all of the main trades.
- The particularly effective progress tracking systems. Tracking systems are in place across the department, they effectively record all details of assessment completion. For work-based learners this also includes framework components and additional requirements. Tutors and managers have a good knowledge of learners' progress which is monitored frequently. Monitoring and review meetings between programme managers and course team leaders take place frequently and have a focussed agenda on improvement.
- The rigorous and effective monitoring of department progress and performance. Frequent monitoring of performance takes place through programme review meetings between the senior management team and construction managers. These effectively review a range of performance indicators and targets including success, teaching and learning observation grades, resources and income. This has led to a significant improvement in success rates in construction during 2005-06. Construction has demonstrated many good improvements against performance indicators.
- The wide range of provision which effectively meets the needs of learners and employers. A wide range of courses are offered and provision is available at most levels. The number of short courses, the demand for on-site assessment and training (OSAT) courses and the range of community provision is growing.
- The good support for learners. At risk learners are identified early and a learning mentor provides effective personal support. Learning mentors also support students experiencing difficulties with course work and they link well with vocational and learning support staff. There is effective team working between vocational and learning support staff who work alongside each other in classes to help learners progress.
- The effective initiatives to widen participation. A number of effective initiatives to widen participation has improved the recruitment of under-represented groups into construction. For example, the college has been successful in recruiting women onto construction courses some of whom progressed into industry employment. The participation

of black and minority ethnic (BME) learners on construction courses continues to increase.

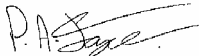
- The very strong commitment from managers and staff to improve construction provision. The college has placed a very high priority on improving construction provision, especially the quality of teaching and learning. Action plans for improvements are well devised and are based on thorough self-assessment. Action plans are well monitored and the provision is improving. Success rates have improved significantly at all levels for all age groups.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- to more effectively coordinate on and off-the-job training for learners on work-based learning programmes
- to use college data more effectively as a tool for quality improvement at course team level
- to engage employers at a strategic and developmental level to further develop provision.

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.



Mike Berry
ALI Inspector