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Better education and care

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Ms Angela O'Donoghue
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Dear Ms O'Donoghue

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 29 and 30 January 2007. I am particularly grateful to teaching 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 wish to cite specific aspects of practice we will contact the college first. 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 and observation of three lessons (a fourth observation was out of scope of an engineering survey but informed the comments on Blackboard VLE).

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

Good practice observed

- The provisional data provided by the college shows the success rates are high. They are above the national average at levels 1, 2 and 3 on programmes for learners aged 16 -18, and at levels 2 and 3 on adult programmes.

- The good standard of students' work in practical projects, assignments and portfolios.
- Aspects of teaching and learning

    - Effective use of information and learning technology to support the teaching of theory. In one lesson students accessed dedicated motor vehicle learning programmes that allow the students to break down assemblies to component parts and to animate the parts to simulate movement within the assembly, in this case a clutch assembly. The students then answered questions on clutch systems using remote controllers to input answers to multi-choice questions in real time with responses displayed on the interactive white board.
    - Good application of theory to practical assignments was observed in a national certificate in electronics lesson. Students, using programmable controllers assigned numbers to input/output devices, verifying the program and running realistic engineering programmes. Excellent follow-up assignments then related the exercise to work-related projects which linked theory to practical application, integrated the key skills of numeracy in calculations, communications in report writing and information technology in a power point presentation of the projects' findings.
    - Excellent development of skills in a national diploma lesson where students used suitable computer aided design packages to produce drawings in 3D and learned to program computer controlled lathes, mills or routers to produce a complex model of a van.
    - Good lesson plans and schemes of work which include ways of differentiating the teaching and suitable forms of assessment.
    - Learners work well, individually, in groups, and in class discussions.

- The wide and flexible range of provision, from level 1 through to level 4 in mechanical, electrical, and electronic engineering, and entry to level 3 in motor vehicle engineering. Courses are delivered through modes of attendance and in places which suit the needs of learners, employers and schools. For example, NVQs in Manufacturing are delivered on employers' sites.
- A wide range of guidance and recruitment procedures. These are provided through focused advertising in the local press and media, school visits, telephone contact advisors, one to one interviews, open days with advice given by engineering curriculum staff.
- Thorough initial assessment and induction for fulltime learners. Induction includes enrichment team building events in the Lake District as part of the Duke of Edinburgh scheme.
- Effective support arrangements. For example, three motor vehicle learners accessed a commentary on an on-line multi-choice assessment where the questions and possible answers where read out to the students via headphones. Learners engaged in revision or catch up activity can access the virtual learning environment anywhere and at any time.

- Excellent promotion and reinforcement of health and safety procedures. These begin at induction and then in every lesson plan. Risk assessment sheets are clearly visible on equipment within the college workshops.
- Excellent motor vehicle equipment. For example, laser alignment jigs, the latest water-based paint techniques and infrared drying equipment.
- Links with local schools are strong. The college works with 15 secondary schools to deliver motor vehicle and manufacturing courses and helps teach several courses on school premises.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- retention rates for adult learners at level 1 and some courses at level 2
- the learning targets set at learners' progress reviews are often too general to be useful
- the additional learning needs support provided is not being recorded on individual learning plans.
- a programme of secondments by staff to industry

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Green
Additional inspector