

08 March 2007

Mr Peter Roberts
Principal
Stockport College of FE and HE
Wellington Road South
Stockport
Cheshire
SK1 3UQ

Dear Mr Roberts

Ofsted Subject Survey Inspection Programme 2006/07

Sector Skills Area 5 – Construction

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation during my visit on 16 and 17 January 2007. 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 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

- The good provision for 14-16 year olds. An increasing number of 14-16 year old school pupils are following construction courses at the college and many of these take courses leading to vocational qualifications at level one. For those completing in 2005-06 the pass rate was good at

76% and some 39% of these pupils progressed to post-16 construction courses on leaving school.

- The good teaching of theory and practical subjects. Teachers use a variety of approaches which effectively engage learners. They draw effectively on their own site experience and make good use of the contributions of learners in the group. Lessons effectively link theory and practical activities and make good use of visual aids including sample materials, components and other artefacts to make learning more meaningful. Most teachers effectively incorporate information learning technology (ILT) into their lessons and good use is made of electronic presentations. Practical teaching is good.
- The particularly effective approach to differentiation in some lessons. Teachers planning in some lessons cater for the needs of individuals well. Activities are planned to enable learners to work at their own pace or material are suitably adapted to enable learners with learning difficulties to make good progress.
- The high quality learner portfolios. Learners produce high quality portfolios. They contain a wide range of evidence including comprehensive photographic, tabular, graphical and documentary evidence much of which is sourced from the workplace. Assessment is thorough and internal verification rigorous.
- The wide range of provision which meets the needs of learners and employers. The department is responsive to the needs of learners and employers. There is a small but growing range of programmes designed to meet the needs of individual employers and learners. There is a good range of entry and level 1 programmes in construction which has improved access and inclusiveness.
- The very effective entry and level one provision. Programmes have a good mix of vocational study across all trades and include personal and social development, team working and basic skill development. Learners gain a wide range of experience, skills and knowledge which provides them with a good foundation in the construction industry and effectively informs future career choices. Teachers work well together and good support enables learners to make good progress.
- The very good support for learners. Learners in construction are well-supported. Tutorial support for full-time learners is effective. Progress reviews for work-based learners are carried out frequently. Most work-based learners can recall their targets and feel that the target-setting process is effective in enabling them to make good progress. At risk learners are identified early and learning mentors provide effective personal support.
- The good resources for construction education and training. Most workshops provide realistic simulations of workplace activities. Laboratories are well-equipped and classrooms provide a good environment for learning. Learners have access to a good range of modern plant and equipment many sourced by beneficial sponsorship arrangements with suppliers and manufacturers.

- The particularly effective quality monitoring arrangements for the review of apprentices and advanced apprentices. All aspects of the apprenticeship framework are comprehensively monitored and reviewed. The college is aware of what it does well within the review process and has identified what it needs to do to improve.
- The good leadership and management within construction. Relationships between managers and staff are very good with much goodwill and a strong priority placed on improving performance and the learners' experience. Communications are effective and the management style is open. Staff work well together across both construction departments and there are many examples of good practice being shared.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- to target for improvement the low retention and success rates on some courses
- to develop further the range of assessment methods used on construction craft apprenticeships programmes
- to improve the arrangements for engaging with employers and for the professional updating of staff.

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

Mike Berry
ALI Inspector