

21 March 2007

Ms Sue Higginson
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Dear Ms Higginson

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 13 and 14 February. 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 four lessons.

I have provided below a summary of my observations, the good practice seen and suggested areas for development.

Good practice observed

- Improving success rates on many courses. Provisional data shows that success rates in 2005-06 have improved significantly and most are now comparable to national averages.

- Effective quality assurance systems. Course reviews are conducted regularly and staff involvement in and commitment to action planning and course improvement are well embedded.
- Aspects of teaching and learning. Most of the lessons observed were of good or better quality. Strengths included:
 - excellent use of ILT in support of learning; in one theory lesson the internet and interactive white board were used well to demonstrate the working of a step-down transformer
 - lessons are planned well; the planning includes the consideration of learning support needs and key skills development
 - lessons generally include a good range of activity, including small group work, demonstration using models and other visual aids; hand-outs were used well to help note-taking
 - one particularly good lesson involving the dismantling of a gearbox assembly, combined practical activity with theory development very well; power point, video, use of the internet and workbooks helped make the theory interesting; the teacher's and students own experiences were drawn on well to increase the students' motivation
 - teachers, technicians and learning support staff work well together in lessons.
- Employers are closely involved in curriculum development. For example they have been involved in the choice of management units on the higher national certificate programmes.
- Support for learners, both before registration and during the programme is very good. A four week taster programme before recruitment helps gauge learners commitment and aptitude. Learners' progress is monitored carefully.
- The assessment of learners' incoming levels of attainment and the identification of learning support needs are completed early and appropriate learning support is provided. Learning support is well-integrated into lessons.
- Professional development includes industrial placement and attendance at commercial training courses.
- Much of the equipment is up to date and reflects good industry standards. The motor cycle workshop is very well resourced.

Areas for development, which were discussed in my verbal feedback, include:

- success rates for learners aged 16-18 had decreased and were now low in 2006 on level 2 courses
- the targets set at learners' progress reviews are often not specific enough to guide students' learning

- aspects of the planning of the curriculum: some teaching schemes provide insufficient evidence that an appropriate variety of activity has been planned into a unit or the course as a whole
- learners are unaware of improvements or actions taken as a result of their feedback
- some low attendance
- the under-developed use of questioning, by teachers, to ensure all learners are concentrating appropriately
- some workshops are slightly cramped for space.

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

Yours sincerely

Bob Busby
ALI

cc. Colin Campbell