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Mr Ken Warman  
Principal  
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Dear Mr Warman

Ofsted survey inspection programme – a comparison of the effectiveness of post 16 providers

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 05 December 2007 to look at work in level 3 provision.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with managers, teachers and tutorial support officers and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work during lessons and observation of three parts of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of level 3 provision was judged to be satisfactory.

#### Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are broadly satisfactory. The college has carried out a very clear analysis of key areas of underperformance on courses at level three, and has a clear understanding of how these have contributed to the low overall success rate and what it needs to do to successfully raise achievement and standards at level three. As pass rates have improved overall, this has had a positive impact on success rates in 2006-07, but these still remain below national averages for similar colleges. Achievement on vocational level three courses is good. However, the college is aware that it needs to raise student progression from year one to year two courses on National Diploma programmes. There has been a decline in achievement and retention on A2 courses in the last year, but an improving trend with AS levels. The

college is very aware of the need to improve retention, attendance and punctuality overall and has put in place a number of effective strategies in the last year that are beginning to have impact. Value added data indicated that most level 3 students made at least the progress expected and significantly better progress on a few courses. Students in science, media, IT Practitioners and music make good progress in relation to their attainment on entry.

### Quality of teaching and learning of level three provision

The quality of teaching and learning at level 3, including support and guidance is satisfactory. Strengths lie in teachers engaging very well with learners and enabling students to feel confident in expressing their views and opinions during class discussion and debate, with girls more so than boys. Most students demonstrate satisfactory levels of learning, and enjoyment through the group work. However, in many instances, less able or less confident learners are not always given structured opportunities to contribute. Standards of students' written work are very variable and in some cases, lower than the qualification level and grade, students are aspiring towards. Teachers do not use data on their students' attainment in planning lessons. They have yet to develop effective strategies in lessons to help a number of students who are advanced bilingual learners improve their reading and analytical skills, to overcome literacy and language difficulties in their written work and go on to achieve higher standards in their examinations and course work. Marking of students' work, whilst detailed in some subjects, does not consistently offer students opportunities to address weaknesses through redrafting and access to exemplars of good practice. The tracking and monitoring of individual student progress through tutorials is satisfactory, but variable across subjects. Lateness to lessons and poor attendance has an adverse impact on students' progress and managers are tackling this through the appointment of Learning Monitors, who track students who are persistent offenders. This is beginning to show signs of success. The college works with its local schools by offering taster sessions and guidance to prospective students. Owing to lack of suitability and levels of difficulty, a minority of students do transfer between level three courses following induction at the start of the year and students reported that this disrupts their learning and that of others.

### Quality of curriculum

The extent to which programmes and activities meet students' needs and interests is satisfactory. The college is aware of the need to raise achievement further for students who have low attainment on entry to level three courses, or who are bilingual learners, and this year, has put in place suitable courses that aim to provide students with a bridging gap to level three courses. Collaboration with employers is satisfactory and students benefit well from visits to universities and businesses. The college has appointed a mentoring coordinator from Queen Mary's University who has engaged undergraduates to support students on aspects of their study. This is much valued by students as the mentors provide very good role models. Students also have work related placements in some areas of the curriculum. They report that a good range of regularly scheduled enrichment activities is on offer, but that these are not well organised to enable all students to access them. However,

they do benefit from a good range of trips and visits on offer to the theatre, art galleries and museums. These opportunities enhance students' learning experience. Some curriculum areas, such as humanities, offer subject specific workshops that enables students to achieve better outcomes in their course work and examinations and these are much appreciated.

### Leadership and management of level three provision

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The new principal has brought good leadership and strong direction to the college and has implemented strategies designed to improve standards including the new motto, "aspire, study, achieve". He has restructured some of the curriculum areas and appointed new enthusiastic senior managers. The college is developing a clearer shared focus to raise students' and teachers' expectations, improve attendance and punctuality and the quality of teaching and learning at level 3. Self-evaluation is effective and well supported through a system of teaching and learning observations by managers and closer scrutiny of performance data by the Principal. The college recognises that, through its teaching and learning observations, it needs to analyse significant variations, in different subject areas and in vocational and academic courses and to focus far more on features of teaching that help or hinder learning on these courses. Leaders and managers have a very clear understanding of strengths and weaknesses in provision and are taking decisive action to tackle them. The college is constantly seeking to improve achievement and progression for students through greater consistency in the implementation of cross college procedures.

### Inclusion

Inclusion is satisfactory. Recruitment reflects the wide range of students' prior attainment. Mentoring initiatives are helping to raise students' aspirations. The college works successfully with students from backgrounds where educational achievement is low or non existent and helps foster self confidence and a real sense of pride in these students of their personal achievements.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving retention and achievement at level 3
- developing more rigorous evaluation and monitoring processes for initiatives linked to achievement and retention, to better assess the impact of college strategies
- developing more focused analyses of the impact of teaching on learning across level 3 vocational and academic courses.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop level 3 courses in the college.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your Local Learning Skills Council and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Meena Wood  
Her Majesty's Inspector