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Tim Ashmore
Royal National College for the Blind
College Road
Hereford
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Dear Tim

Ofsted Good Practice Survey Programme 2008/09

An evaluation of adult progression in learning

Thank you very much for your hospitality and co-operation during my visit on January 14th 2009. I am particularly grateful to you, to Mary, Liz and all your staff for the hard work involved in preparing 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.

The visit provided much useful evidence, which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting for the Adult Progression survey, as well as a wider survey we are carrying out on progression, titled 'Moving Through The System'. It was particularly interesting to see provision in the Residential Training Unit (RTU).

The evidence used to inform the judgements made on this one-day visit included: interviews with staff, partners and learners and scrutiny of the examples of good practice provided. I also reviewed a range of documents.

Overall, progression rates from the RTU at RNC are satisfactory and the arrangements to improve adult progression into employment are good. I agreed to provide a summary of the good practice seen and to identify some areas for development. I outline the main findings as bulleted points below.

Main strengths

- High success rates in work-related qualifications

Almost all learners achieve the work related qualifications for which they study. These include administration, information and communications technology (ICT), customer service, sport and recreation, massage and complementary therapies and Braille qualifications, as well as literacy, numeracy and employment skills related achievements.

- Well structured work experience opportunities

A recently established four stage flexible programme leads learners through work shadowing, work experience and work placement towards a six month transitional employment post within RNC, in which they become salaried members of staff. The college is putting significantly greater emphasis on general employability skills with a programme which develops learners' abilities to assess and analyse their own skills and areas of development. The college is currently building new facilities to provide greatly enhanced training and leisure facilities as well as working accommodation for learners who are self employed in areas such as complementary therapies. The college has made good use of external expertise through the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) and European Social Funding (ESF) to develop transition arrangements. The outcomes of this work have identified the need for greater follow-up after learners leave, including interagency work over housing, social networking through websites and sports activities and the development of mobile technology.

- Very effective partnership with Hereford Council

The college's partnership with the council, the largest employer in an area of predominantly small businesses, is of great mutual benefit. Supported by a cabinet board member, the council provides substantial work experience opportunities, makes contributions to college training on CV writing and provides training and practice on interview skills. In turn, the college runs awareness training on visual impairment for council managers and loans specialist equipment and software for external interviews for council posts.

Areas for further development

- Embed new policies and procedures to raise progression rates into employment

Progression into employment has almost doubled in the last three years. However, rates are not yet as high as the college would wish although achievements for the current year show another increase in numbers from the RTU moving into

permanent work. Recently introduced improvements and the need for greater follow up highlighted by project findings need to be embedded and evaluated to ensure that this positive trend continues.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop your adult provision. If there are any points or aspects of the visit you wish to discuss, please contact me. As we will be evaluating the survey, you may be contacted in the future to find out your views. I hope you will contribute to this evaluation.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted Website.

Yours sincerely

Pippa Wainwright