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Tony Warren  
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Dear Tony

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 December 2<sup>nd</sup> 2008. I am particularly grateful to you 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 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, the progression rates and arrangements to facilitate adult progression provided by RBIB Loughborough 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

- Good progression into employment

The trend over the last three years shows significant improvement. Just over half of the learners in 2007/08 found employment within 6 months of leaving, compared with a contract target of 30%.

- Strong and increasing focus on development of employability skills

Staff select appropriate units of qualifications to meet employers' needs rather than whole qualifications. The provider now offers job seeking skills sessions and jobsearch more frequently than previously, and also lessons to develop softer employability skills. The college has relocated its office to the same area as the RTU and uses it as an internal working environment for all learners. Learners have individually designed workstations next to the office with appropriate assistive technology. Staff are available at most times to support learners outside timetabled sessions.

- Flexible programmes that successfully meet individual learners' needs

Each learner has an individually designed programme. Those with a successful history of work focus more on using assistive technology. Staff set tasks to help them acquire the specific information technology (IT) or administration skills for their chosen field. Other learners with little experience of work concentrate more on general employability skills such as self-presentation, communication and team working. Learners spend as much time as each needs to develop the skills for making applications and preparing for interviews. Mobility training is available for those who need it. The amount of internal work in the college office and the length and frequency of external work placements are adjusted to individual needs.

- Well chosen work experience placements

The selection of placements takes careful account of the need to provide learners with the right amount of support and challenge. As one employer said, "The placement executive has really learnt our business and sends us the right people for our organisation". Work placements are organised wherever possible in learners' home areas to increase the chances of their moving into paid employment on leaving college.

- Proactive and productive recruitment of employers

The college has developed its good personal relationships with employers so that they are now strategic partnerships led by the principal and chief executives. The college's marketing department works very effectively with the employment placement executive to contact potential new employers and to organise employers' breakfasts for information sharing. Employers offer mock interviews and helpful feedback or host visits by learners to their workplaces. Well attended employers' award ceremonies recognise their contributions and maintain contact and interest

- Good training and support in the use of audio programmes in college

Learners only have six months to acquire audio skills to the necessary standard. The college dedicates a senior learning assistant, who is himself blind, to develop learners' skills in the use of JAWS with very good results

- Effective partnership with RNIB regional office to promote transition

The RNIB regional office provides very valuable additional access to jobs, new learners, advice and helpful contacts. The regional employment officer advises employers on the use of Access to Work funding and motivates them to wait the required time for equipment so that valuable job opportunities are not lost. Learners from the East Midlands receive advice about vacancies on leaving and their cause is promoted with employers. Nationally, the RNIB runs a very effective trainee grade scheme. At least three former learners on the RTU at Loughborough have benefited from the scheme to become fully independent at work

## AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

- More detailed collection of employers' views on work placement arrangements

Employer feedback on the success of each work placement is collected. However, feedback does not always provide the college with sufficient detail on specific aspects that would be useful. These include the speed and comprehensiveness of advice on working with visually impaired learners and the speed of response to requests for specialist technical assistance.

- Improvements to action planning for learners leaving college

Learners receive a very useful handbook on leaving. The college has recently introduced more detailed action plans with timescales identified to help former learners continue job seeking without support from college staff. The college

needs to develop the action plans further, specifically with the addition of telephone follow-up, and to evaluate them to judge their effectiveness.

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