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17 December 2010

Mr J Mutton  
Principal  
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Dear Mr Mutton

**Ofsted 2010–11 survey inspection programme: numeracy – tackling the challenge of ensuring that young people and adults gain the numeracy skills they need for their careers and personal lives**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 15 and 16 November 2010 to look at your work in numeracy.

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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with senior staff, tutors and learners; face-to-face and telephone meetings with employers; observation of three teaching and learning sessions in numeracy; and a review of the supporting documents that you provided.

Overall, Loughborough College is satisfactory at tackling the challenge of ensuring that young people and adults gain the numeracy skills they need for their careers and personal lives.

**Key findings**

- The well-formulated strategy for developing numeracy (and literacy) skills involves a whole-college approach in which all the college's vocational courses include both subjects. Skills for Life advocates work alongside the vocational staff to help learners understand the relevance and importance of numeracy in their vocational contexts. However, staff acknowledge the need for more teachers with specialist expertise in teaching numeracy.
- The effective training for the introduction of functional skills programmes has prepared staff well for teaching these new courses. Staff in different vocational areas share good practice and have produced appropriate new assignments that incorporate numeracy (and literacy) skills. The

observation of numeracy sessions focuses too much on generic aspects of teaching and learning. Teachers receive useful generic feedback, but insufficient detailed comment on how they might improve their teaching of numeracy.

- The quality of teaching and learning in the numeracy sessions observed during the visit was mainly good. The lessons engaged learners in a wide range of vocationally relevant tasks. However, the lessons did not always challenge the more able learners sufficiently. The 'Café Chino' provides a realistic working environment where learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have many opportunities to develop numeracy skills, such as handling money when using tills, and weighing and measuring when cooking.
- The teaching and support staff work well to bolster learners' self-esteem and eradicate the negative perception that many learners hold of numeracy. Learners are appreciative of this approach and feel well supported. Many are now motivated and for the first time enjoy learning numeracy. The learners identified as requiring additional support in numeracy receive effective support. They greatly value this support and generally have higher success rates compared with the overall college performance.
- The college has established strong links with many local employers. Train to Gain programmes in numeracy have very high success rates. Employers report the benefits that their companies have derived from having workers with stronger numerical skills, including better productivity and less waste of resources. They appreciate the flexible approach of the college, such as locating courses on employers' premises at convenient times. Their employees increase their ability to deal with everyday tasks that involve numeracy, both at work and in their personal lives, as well as improve their opportunities for promotion or a better job.
- College managers contribute to the local learning partnership's work to collate information about numeracy needs in the area. However, much of the outreach work previously carried out in the local community has now ceased, mainly due to funding pressures.
- Success rates for numeracy courses decreased in 2009–10. Overall, learners' outcomes for numeracy qualifications improved steadily from 2006–07 to 2008–09 and, albeit from a low base, came close to national averages. However, they dipped significantly last year. Staff attribute this fall mainly to mistakes in the recording of learners' enrolment details on the college's newly introduced management information system. The proportion of learners aged 16 to 18 obtaining an A\* to C grade in GCSE mathematics is consistently low.

**Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- ensuring that learners are enrolled on the appropriate level of course and monitoring regularly their progress towards achieving the goals on their learning agreements

- considering alternative ways to organise the GCSE course in mathematics and to increase learners' attendance rates, to improve their attainment at the higher grades
- ensuring that teachers receive more detailed feedback after observations of their learning sessions to help them develop their expertise in teaching numeracy.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop numeracy at Loughborough College

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. A copy of this letter will be sent to the Skills Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

**Tony Noonan**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**