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Mr I Forward
Kent Community Learning and Skills
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Dear Mr Forward

Ofsted 2011–12 survey inspection programme: employability - the impact of skills programmes for adults on achieving sustained employment

This survey evaluates providers' response to initiatives launched on 1 August 2011 to use Skills Funding Agency funds flexibly to support people on benefits.

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and participants, during my visit on 31 January and 1 February 2012 to look at your work in employability 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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff, participants, partners and one employer; scrutiny of relevant documents; observation of two learning sessions and visits to three learning sites.

Key findings

- Since November 2011, Kent County Council's Community and Learning and Skills Service has built on its previous work well to develop a wide range of short courses across the county to support unemployed people into work. A recent restructuring of the service has focused well on building its capacity to identify and respond to low levels of employment in local communities. However, the number of referrals to many of its courses from Jobcentre Plus has been low.
- The provision is well planned. The service uses its different funding streams very effectively to resource different types of employability courses. Very good links with partner organisations, including those from the voluntary sector, have ensured that the provision extends to many

derived communities across the county. The well-designed short courses provide participants with good opportunities to gain work-related qualifications at levels 1 and 2.

- Staff have very good expertise in teaching and learning in literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). They are particularly skilled at supporting participants with low levels in these skills. In the sessions observed, challenging but achievable tasks helped instil confidence in the participants as they quickly learnt techniques and skills highly relevant to increasing their employability.
- Staff use initial assessments in literacy numeracy and ESOL well to plan individual courses. However, the service does not focus sufficiently on identifying and recording participants' personal barriers to employment, their employability skills and possible employment goals or progression opportunities on completing each course.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing the provision further in collaboration with Jobcentre Plus and other partners to increase the number of referrals to each course, especially to the vocational courses
- extending initial assessments to include identifying participants' personal barriers to employment, their development needs in employability skills, and more specific employment goals
- providing participants with greater opportunities for practical work-related experience to support their classroom-based learning
- developing procedures for monitoring participants' destinations on completing a course.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop employability provision at Kent County Council.

As 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 is also being sent to the Skills Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

Karen Adriaanse
Her Majesty's Inspector