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Dr S Sangha OBE
Principal
Stockton Riverside College
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Dear Dr Sangha

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 6 and 7 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, and partners; scrutiny of relevant documents; analysis of participants' work; and observation of three learning sessions.

Key findings

- Since August 2011, Stockton Riverside College has worked well with its partners to use local labour market information effectively to design relevant short, flexible employability courses. These courses give participants good progression routes on to longer vocational courses. Participants enjoy the structure of their courses and the opportunity to achieve units that they can build on to gain qualifications.
- In the teaching and learning sessions observed, participants received highly effective individual tuition and support. They developed good knowledge in retail and information technology which they applied competently to challenging scenarios and when using computers.

Participants attending the college's 'work clubs', located in community and high street venues, gain useful employability skills alongside qualifications in health, safety and hygiene which increases their self-confidence and prepares them well for job interviews.

- Tutors plan a wide range of learning activities that make good use of participants' varied experiences and skills. Tutors get to know participants well as individuals but do not systematically assess their learning support needs or barriers to employment. As a result, participants do not have clear or sufficient learning and career development plans.
- Tutors make their courses relevant to industry through a range of successful initiatives. Although a few participants volunteer or have worked for short periods of time in the college, most do not have the opportunity to gain experience of work with an external employer.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- involving employers more in designing short courses that aid progression into work and increasing the opportunities that participants have for work experience
- bringing together the team of vocational trainers to share successful initiatives, expertise and best practice when working with participants
- devising more suitable systems for initial assessment and identifying participants' barriers to employment so that they have clear learning, development and career goals.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop employability provision at Stockton Riverside College.

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

Janet Rodgers
Her Majesty's Inspector