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Mr J Wells  
Principal Advisor, Extended & Lifelong Services  
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council  
Sandwell Adult Education Service  
PO Box 2374  
Oldbury  
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Dear Mr Wells

**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 2 and 3 February 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, employers and other partners; visits to three learning centres, and one Jobcentre Plus jobcentre; scrutiny of relevant documents; and observation of one learning session.

**Key findings**

- Since September 2011, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council's Adult Learning Service has developed good strategies to improve the employment prospects of local residents by improving partnership arrangements with local employers and in particular with Jobcentre Plus. It has also made good use of the resources and skills provided by the council's training organisation, Future Skills.
- The service uses local labour market information very well to plan provision and respond effectively to local needs. The co-location of schools, Children's Centres and adult learning centres supports the

activities well and helps ensure that the provision reaches a high proportion of Sandwell residents. The good range of work-related learning opportunities effectively supports the council's implementation of its anti-poverty strategy.

- The well-designed 'Step Into' courses support local employment needs effectively by providing participants with a good understanding of the industry requirements and by developing appropriate vocational and employability skills. The programmes for participants with criminal records or those involved in gang culture are particularly effective in giving participants a very positive learning experience, developing their practical skills and providing potential routes into employment.
- Staff are suitably qualified and have good relevant occupational experience. Many tutors have a particularly good understanding of the barriers to employment experienced by the local community. Tutors receive relevant professional development to support them in this work. All staff, and particularly those working in the construction trades, have high expectations and successfully demand high standards from participants. However, participants do not always receive sufficiently detailed feedback on their progress or priority areas for improvement.
- Participants make good progress and they receive appropriate information, advice and guidance to help them identify realistic employment goals. Local employers are committed to creating employment opportunities for Sandwell residents and many of the participants interviewed are now more optimistic about their changes of employment. However, participants have too few opportunities to develop their employability and vocational skills in real work-related settings.

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

- developing a more evaluative way of giving feedback to participants that builds on the positive aspects of their progress, but also makes clear what individuals need to do to improve their performance and increase their employment opportunities
- extending the range of work trials or work experience to help participants develop a work routine and demonstrate suitability for particular job roles.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop employability provision at Sandwell Adult Education Service.

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

**Nigel Evans**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**