

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



20 April 2012

Mrs A O'Donoghue
Principal
City of Sunderland College
Bede Centre
Durham Road
Sunderland
SR3 4AH

Dear Mrs O'Donoghue

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 visits on 13 and 14 December 2011 and 8 March 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, partners, participants and employers; scrutiny of relevant documents; analysis of participants' work; and observation of four learning sessions.

Key findings

- The college has a clear priority on developing employability provision and has had an extended history of developing this area of work. Since August 2011, staff have continued to work well with community and learning partners as well as with employers to create progression pathways to work, although joint action-planning is still in development. The college has created a good range of courses to meet needs and continues to develop these in consultation with employers and participants. It has also developed an increasingly used drop-in resource to cater for the support of participants before, during and after mainstream provision.
- The college is working well with employers to develop bespoke provision that is matched well to labour market needs. Staff make good use of

labour market information, network groups and good links with particular sectors such as customer service/call centre employers to create good packages of training and guaranteed interviews to help participants into employment.

- The college has formed very close partnerships with a range of referring agencies both community-based and sector-specific, as well as developing sound relationships with Jobcentre Plus to secure a wide referral network. Referrals therefore represent the wider community very well, particularly in minority ethnic communities and women's groups. The drop-out rate from referral to starting provision has improved well. However, too many participants still do not attend the college following referral.
- The learning sessions observed provided good teaching and learning that inspired and motivated participants to develop skills, build confidence and overcome their fear of applying for jobs and dealing with rejection. Well-qualified, experienced and knowledgeable staff provide good individual support. The participants interviewed spoke highly of the staff, who they saw as highly supportive and helpful. However, information, advice and guidance and tailored provision to stretch all participants are not as well developed.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- making better use of purposeful work experience and/or voluntary work to enhance work skills and give participants a chance to try different jobs
- continuing to develop good working relationships with referral agencies, especially Jobcentre Plus, to minimise the drop-out rate from referral to starting on programme
- continuing to develop individual action-planning and provision that help participants overcome their particular barriers to employment and that guide each participant through a series of active steps to the jobs market.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop employability provision at City of Sunderland 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

June Cramman
Her Majesty's Inspector