

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
F 020 7421 6855
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Ms Nancy Cookson
Principal
Accrington & Rossendale College
Sandy Lane
Accrington
Lancashire
BB5 2AW

Dear Ms Cookson

Ofsted Survey Programme 2006/07

Aspect: The contribution made by CoVEs to the development of vocational work, including preparation for the specialised 14-19 diplomas, in schools.

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation during my visit on 14 December 2006. I am particularly grateful to Clive Weston for his hard work in preparing the programme and background documentation and giving up his time during the visit. Please pass on my thanks to other staff who gave up their time to talk to me.

The visit provided much useful evidence for the good practice survey into CoVEs' work with schools. Where published reports cite specific aspects of good practice it is usual practice to name the colleges involved. However, where reports identify common issues which represent barriers to progress, individual colleges will not be named.

I agreed to provide a summary of my observations of good practice seen and to suggest some areas for development.

Good practice observed included:

How well do learners achieve?

- Success rates on courses within the CoVE are very high. The overall success rate in construction increased from 82% to 86% in 2006. The college success rate for work-based learning apprenticeships, a large proportion of which are in construction, is currently 71%.
- For students aged 14 to 16 on construction courses at the college, the overall success rate in 2005/06 was 69%, with retention at 87% and achievement at 79%. This included students who took the new written

test on the building crafts occupational foundation award, an assessment change which has tended to affect success rates detrimentally elsewhere. About 45% of students in this age group subsequently progress onto full-time construction courses at the college. Overall, about two thirds of students aged 14 to 16 who take courses at the college progress into further education.

How effective are teaching, training and learning?

- The CoVE has established a strong reputation nationally for the quality of its construction provision, which has been judged outstanding in each of the college's last three inspections. It would be perverse in these circumstances if the CoVE was not leading construction diploma developments locally.
- During 2005/06, as part of the college's internal lesson observation system, 24 lessons for 14 to 16 year olds were observed. 75% of these were judged to be good or better. The lesson observation profile for construction provision was not reviewed.
- CoVE staff have developed a range of expertise which will be particularly valuable in delivering the construction diploma effectively. This includes their experience in developing and implementing successful teaching and learning strategies for both theory and practical lessons across the 14 to 19 age range and their expertise in developing real and realistic work-based assignments for assessing standards of achievement.

How well do programmes and activities meet the needs and interests of learners?

- The college plays a significant role in the 14 to 19 agenda locally. It makes large scale provision for 14 to 16 year olds, with around 450 such learners attending college courses each year.
- There are four strands of provision for this age group; vocational courses through the established increasing flexibility programme (IFP); individualised programmes targeting those at risk of exclusion; a Year 11 project funded directly by the local authority for those not attending school, which includes a discrete group in construction; and the construction component in the new menu of twilight courses designed to broaden curriculum choice further for higher ability students in Key Stage 4 across the Hyndburn partnership. It is intended to extend the range and geographical coverage of this partnership offer of additional level 1 and 2 courses next year and include the diploma lines in due course. A broad range of vocational areas is available to 14 to 16 year olds. Construction probably makes the most significant contribution with about 130 to 140 students each year, about 25% of the total.
- The CoVE has excellent links with employers. Over time, it has established a large-scale network of employers who provide a valuable source of work placements, work-based assignments, up-to-date industry intelligence and career opportunities for students. For example, the CoVE's high standing with the local construction industry helped enable the Education Business

Partnership to arrange work placements in the industry for some 146 learners aged 14 to 16 last year.

How well are learners guided and supported?

- There are several good features in the range of guidance and support procedures most pertinent to the advent of the diplomas. The college has a well-established practice of providing 'taster classes' to help school students make their post-16 study choices. A local common prospectus is already in place, but in due course this will be superseded by a Lancashire-wide on-line version.
- There are very thorough procedures for the recruitment and selection of 14 to 16 year olds for college courses. Places in construction are heavily over-subscribed; typically 150 young people are interested in between 40 and 60 places each year. The schools initially interview students and their parents to determine a long list of candidates, and those applicants are interviewed by college tutors to determine who will be offered places. Groups contain students from different schools as this is believed to contribute strongly to avoiding behavioural problems and raising achievement.
- Support for 14 to 16 learners on construction courses, including especially supporting them to progress, is recognised as very good. Their attendance and progress is routinely reported to schools and parents, and CoVE teachers make good use of 'praise notes' to flag good individual contributions.

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?

- Clear infrastructures are established at area level to take forward diploma development. These consist primarily of the 14 to 19 learner entitlement and action development (LEAD) group, its curriculum sub-groups and their diploma network groups. Structures are more formalised and relationships are more secure in Hyndburn area than they are in the Ribble Valley and Rossendale areas, but a common approach is being adopted across all three areas.
- An overarching handbook is in place for area-wide 14 to 19 provision based on the Wolverhampton model.
- There is clarity around lead partner preferences and the CoVE is the compelling choice to lead on the construction diploma line. Most schools have a sound awareness and acceptance of the need for specialist staff and facilities to be able to deliver the construction diploma in its proper vocational context. A coherent hub and spoke model is proposed, and a key capital bid has been submitted to enable the development of appropriately located hubs in the Ribble Valley and Rossendale partnership areas.
- CoVE resources are of a very high standard. In addition to the high quality learning environment and facilities for construction trades, which are simply not available in the schools, teachers have good vocational

expertise and college support for periodic up-dating ensures courses and their delivery are well-informed by current knowledge of industry standards and employers' skills needs.

- The schools also recognise the college's expertise in developing a virtual learning environment, and using it effectively to support learning, as an asset which will be very useful at the area level.
- The high and widely-recognised quality of the CoVE's construction provision makes it well placed to take the leadership role for this diploma line, establish the standards for construction provision across the area and quality assure construction diploma provision.

Areas for development, which were discussed, included the following points

- Further progress needs to be made in developing a common prospectus, of which staff see the 14 to 19 Hyndburn partnership prospectus as the embryo.
- Although the Hyndburn partnership area has some experience of collaborative timetabling to facilitate access to college courses and a broader range of options in Key Stage 4, it is recognised that a greater degree of common timetabling will be required to ensure equality of access to the full range of specialised diplomas.
- Determining and securing the transport arrangements needed to support diploma delivery across the areas may be challenging.
- In construction there is already a significant capacity issue which will be exacerbated should the construction diploma line prove popular with young people.
- Staff are eagerly awaiting the detailed diploma specifications and greater clarity about likely student numbers before they are able to make much more progress in developing the implementation model.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop the ways in which your CoVE(s) support 14-19 curriculum development in the area.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your LLSC and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

John Evans
Her Majesty's Inspector