

TEC Partnership

Interim visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Sarah Lonsdale, HMI

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Type of provider: General further education college

Address: Nuns Corner
Grimsby
DN34 5BQ

Interim visit

Context and focus of visit

On 17 March 2020, all routine inspections were suspended due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. As part of our phased return to routine inspections, we are carrying out 'interim visits' to further education and skills providers. Interim visits are to help learners, parents, employers and government understand how providers are meeting the needs of learners in this period, including those with high needs and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

We intend to return to routine inspection in January 2021 but will keep the exact timing under review.

The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below and the findings are based on discussions with leaders, managers, staff and learners.

Following changes to government guidance and the imposition of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, we made this visit remotely to reduce pressure on the provider.

Information about the provider

TEC Partnership is a very large provider of further and higher education. It comprises the Grimsby Institute, University Centre Grimsby, Scarborough TEC, East Riding College, Skegness TEC, The Academy Grimsby, Career 6, and Modal Training. The partnership works across 14 sites, including adult and community learning centres, and works with four subcontractors.

At the time of the visit, there were 3,968 learners on education programmes for young people, including 229 learners aged 14 to 16. There were 5,534 learners on adult learning programmes, and 157 learners who have high needs. The group offers apprenticeships, and there were 1,137 apprentices on programme at the time of the visit.

What actions are leaders taking to ensure that they provide an appropriate curriculum that responds to the reasonable needs of learners and stakeholders and adapts to changed circumstances?

Leaders and managers have changed the order in which some elements of programmes are delivered. They believe that this has helped them to overcome some of the difficulties in providing work placements during the pandemic. For example, in early years and in health and social care, staff have planned work experience in extended blocks rather than one day per week to reduce contact between college sites and workplaces.

Leaders and managers recognise the impact that the pandemic has had on the availability of jobs for learners and apprentices. Managers described how they adapted the pastoral curriculum to focus on building learners' communication skills and resilience to prepare them for the increased competition that they will face when applying for jobs.

Managers explained how they have adjusted the adult learning curriculum in response to changes in the local economy. Tutors include digital skills training in courses to help prepare learners for taking part in online interviews and working from home.

Apprenticeship managers have adapted programmes to meet the needs of employers and apprentices. They have supported apprentices by extending programmes or offering breaks in learning. Staff have helped apprentices who have lost their jobs to find alternative opportunities to complete their apprenticeship.

Stakeholders who manage large employment programmes value how staff have adapted the programmes in response to the pandemic. They described regular communication with college staff and a responsive approach to meeting employer and labour market needs. For example, staff designed a new programme to train up to 700 adults to take up new roles to support the increased number of benefit claimants.

Leaders identified that managing and responding to adaptations in assessment were challenges in the early stages of the pandemic. They said that staff had to interpret messages from awarding bodies to ensure fair and timely assessment for learners and apprentices. Leaders and managers believe that the uncertainty about future examinations and assessment continues to pose a challenge.

What steps are leaders, managers and staff taking to ensure that the approaches used for building knowledge and skills are appropriate to meet the reasonable needs of learners?

Leaders and managers told us that they plan to continue delivering a full curriculum for learners and apprentices during the pandemic using a mix of face-to-face and online delivery. Tutors share resources on the provider's virtual learning environment and use a range of digital technologies to carry out reviews and allow learning to continue if staff, learners or apprentices need to self-isolate.

Staff recognise the need to prepare learners for different employment opportunities due to changes in the labour market. Tutors described how learners on health and social care courses trained as cancer champions while they were unable to go out on placement. Adult learners working towards security qualifications are being prepared for managing queue control in essential retail outlets instead of door supervision in the leisure industry.

Staff identified that access to computer equipment and broadband was a barrier to learning online. Leaders and managers helped to mitigate this by investing in equipment to loan to learners. They also worked with employers to ensure that apprentices had access to the equipment that they needed.

Tutors described how they have altered their use of assessment to overcome social distancing restrictions. They continue to use live assignment briefs but in a different way. For example, music students who normally perform at the Christmas lights switch-on are recording their performance so that it can be streamed live during the virtual event.

Managers explained how they provided additional information, advice and guidance to help learners who changed their plans because of the pandemic. Staff supported learners to find alternative programmes during an extended induction period. They provided information and guidance that would ordinarily have been provided at taster sessions in the summer.

Leaders and managers have adapted the way that they monitor the quality of education by carrying out remote visits to teaching sessions and scrutinising digital materials. Managers told us that the online learning resources are screened and rated for accessibility. Staff are expected to update resources that do not meet the required standard.

How are leaders ensuring that learners are safe and well informed about potential risks, including from online sources?

Leaders and managers described how they design individual packages of support for learners identified as being at risk. Curriculum and pastoral staff work with external agencies to coordinate support for learners and their families. For example, learners who have high needs and their parents were provided with remote one-to-one support. Staff set up safe learning environments to allow these learners to come back into college from Easter.

Learners and apprentices know who they can go to if they have any concerns about their safety. They have received training about how to keep themselves safe online. Learners and apprentices said that they have felt safe since returning to college because of the college COVID-19 protocols.

Staff described how they received a three-day training programme before the lockdown that helped them to identify the risks of working online and how to keep themselves, learners and apprentices safe.

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