

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Grantham College

Date of visit: 29 January 2008

### Context

Grantham College is a general further education (GFE) college in Lincolnshire. In 2006/07, the college had 7,767 learner enrolments, of which 3,771 were learners aged 16-18 and 3,996 were adult learners. The college offers provision in 14 out of the 15 Learning and Skills Council sector subject areas. The college is a Centre for Vocational Excellence (CoVE) in multi-skilled and maintenance engineering. The college is also involved in contracts for Train to Gain. The college's mission is 'to enable, through partnership, the success of individuals, the community and business'.

### Achievement and standards

How successful has the college been in improving the achievement and standards of learners in 2006/07?	Reasonable progress
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The overall success rate on long courses increased from 58% in 2005/06 to 62% in 2006/07. The overall success rate for learners aged 16-18 on long courses increased by 4 percentage points to 73% in 2006/07 and is likely to be similar to the national average. The overall success rate for adult learners was low at 50% in 2005/06 and increased by only 1 percentage point in 2006/07. Success rates for adults on level 2 and level 3 programmes increased by 9 percentage points and 10 percentage points respectively in 2006/07; however, the success rate on level 1 programmes decreased by 12 percentage points. This decline was primarily due to low retention rates, and to a lesser extent low pass rates, on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) courses. The college has made several changes to this provision in 2007/08 in order to improve retention and pass rates. The proportions of learners retained on ESOL and ICT courses in 2007/08 at the time of the monitoring visit were 71% and 76% respectively. The equivalent retention rates for the whole of 2006/07 were 57% for both ESOL and ICT. Success rates on work-based

learning programmes were generally above national averages in 2005/06 and improved further in 2006/07.

### Quality of provision

What progress has the college made in increasing the proportion of teaching which is good or better?	Reasonable progress
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The college has worked hard to develop more consistent and robust practices to improve teaching and learning. Enthusiastic quality learning leaders have been trained effectively to work with curriculum teams to develop good teaching strategies. Observation practices are now standardised across all areas. Whilst this has not yet led to an increased proportion of good or better lessons, it has established a firm base against which improvement can be measured. Staff development is focused on areas that need improvement and on the sharing of good practice, which is now identified clearly through lesson observations. Staff understand the criteria against which they are being observed. They are encouraged to observe each other, for example to review different ways of managing behaviour or teaching certain topics. The quality leaders have good links with the college teacher training team. The process of developing good teaching and learning is increasingly coherent, with annual appraisal linked to continuing professional development, which is followed up through further observations of teaching and learning.

How successful has the college been in improving the support arrangements for part-time learners?	Reasonable progress
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Several strategies are now in place to improve the support for part-time learners, most of whom are adults. Staff now interview prospective learners more carefully and give them a clear understanding of the demands of their chosen courses. They advise some to take appropriate preparatory courses. Most are offered an initial assessment, although the college does not assess those on a course of less than 20 weeks, nor on some recreational classes. A newly appointed adult learner tutor offers a range of advice and support, including academic help. He works flexibly, and is available during evening lessons help to part-time learners. This service is advertised widely to staff and learners. In addition, an adult learner good practice group works with staff to identify and disseminate successful ways of working. Although it is too early to confirm trends of improvement, the part-time retention rate for 2007/08 to date is around 86%. It is not possible to tell whether this is better

than last year at an equivalent point in time, although curriculum managers report that retention has improved.

How effectively are learners who have recently arrived from Eastern Europe being supported in learning the English language?	Reasonable progress
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Currently, 300 learners are on ESOL programmes. They are mostly from Eastern European countries, and 80% are Polish. Achievement and success rates have risen over the past four years, although they are still low. The overall retention rate in the current year stands at 71%. The provision is flexible, with teaching on employers' premises if required, and all levels are taught in morning, afternoon and evening sessions in college to enable workers on shift work to attend weekly. All learners are initially assessed, and their individual learning plans are updated and monitored regularly. Programmes run over 20 weeks to allow time for language skills to be consolidated. Plans are in place to run a free pre-entry class over 10 weeks to support learners with very limited English skills. Through cross-college quality improvement meetings, ESOL staff are increasing their understanding of how to monitor and evaluate course data to plan improvements.

#### Leadership and management

What progress has the college made in improving the rigour of self-assessment?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made a number of changes in order to improve the rigour of self-assessment. All curriculum managers, course leaders and service managers received training on effective self-assessment in July 2007. For the first time in 2007, course teams produced individual self-assessment reports, promoting greater involvement of a wider range of staff in the process. Course self-assessment reports were then used to produce a curriculum area report. These reports are shorter than in previous years and more judgemental, with a greater emphasis on evidence and the impact of actions. Also new in 2007 was a formal peer validation exercise for curriculum area self-assessment reports. This was followed by validation by senior managers and further validation of a sample of reports by senior staff from another further education college. The college is currently reviewing its self-assessment arrangements to further enhance efficiency and effectiveness,

but it is clear that the 2006/07 self-assessment report is a more focused and self-critical document than its predecessors.

How successful has the college been in improving the use of targets in quality improvement plans?	Reasonable progress
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The college introduced a clear set of key performance targets in 2007, together with improved procedures for monitoring and reporting on performance at regular intervals. These targets are linked to strategic priorities and, increasingly, to business plans and quality improvement plans. Previous performance monitoring had been limited to financial targets, but curriculum areas are now set targets for retention, achievement, attendance, learner satisfaction ratings and teaching and learning grades. The whole college quality improvement plan and curriculum area quality improvement plans now contain a greater range of quantifiable targets against which progress can be measured. This has been beneficial in terms of promoting a common focus for activities across the college, identifying good practice and targeting interventions to support under-performing areas. The college is making better use of its data to monitor and improve performance and the culture of using targets as part of quality improvement initiatives is becoming embedded across the college.