

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: The Grimsby Institute of Further & Higher Education
Date of visit: 9 February 2009

Context

The Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education (the institute) is a large general further education institute and the main provider of post-sixteen education in Grimsby and the wider area. The curriculum includes courses at all levels from entry to degree level with extensive commercial activities and an increasing work-based learning provision. The institute operates in over 25 centres in the area.

The institute has over 4,000 learners aged between 14 and 18 and over 16,000 adult learners. Most learners are of white origin. Most learners are recruited from schools with low GCSE attainment levels and around half of all enrolments are at level 1.

The institute has provision in all sector subject areas from entry level to level 3 and offers higher level provision in a broad range of subjects. It makes a key contribution to local 14 to 16 provision, providing training for over 300 school pupils and is a key partner in the development of the specialist diplomas.

The institute has experienced considerable growth over the last four years. Approximately 40% of the institute's income is not Learning and Skills Council generated. The institute is currently developing a capital build proposal for its main campus and is undergoing a merger with the Yorkshire Coast College.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made towards improving success and retention rates?	Reasonable progress
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The success rate on long level 1 courses for all learners improved in 2007/08 and is now in line with the national rate. The success rate for adult learners on long courses at level 2 improved in 2007/08 to around three percentage points above the national rate. The success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 at level 2 was maintained in 2007/08 and is slightly below the national rate. The success rate for learners aged 16 to 18 on long courses at level 3 declined slightly in 2007/08 to around four percentage points below the national rate. The success rate for adult learners was maintained in 2007/08 and remains broadly in line with the national rate.

Key skills success rates improved across most levels and age ranges in 2007/08. Success rates for learners aged 14 to 16 are good with very high achievement rates.

Apprenticeship overall and timely success rates are good, improving and consistently above national rates. Train to Gain success rates declined in 2007/08 but remain six percentage points above the national rate.

Retention rates improved in 2007/08 to 80% and are now only slightly below, but improving in line with, the national rate. In-year retention rates at the time of the monitoring visit when compared with the same period last year improved by three percentage points to 95%.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in the implementation of plans to improve information, advice and guidance?	Reasonable progress
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The institute has continued to develop productive partnerships with schools in the area to provide more focused careers guidance. This information and guidance now stresses more clearly the importance to potential students of matching a career choice to their school attainment. Potential learners are clear about the expectations and demands of the various courses and programmes on offer at the institute. School taster days are now organised in most curriculum areas to provide pre-course information and experience. When students start their courses the institute's additional support workers work closely with curriculum teams in the institute to monitor learner attendance rates and signpost learners to the most appropriate support or guidance service where appropriate. Learners now settle more quickly into their learning programme and transfer rates at the 1 November 2008 declined by over 12% when compared with the previous year.

What progress has been made in the implementation of planned improvements in target-setting for progression?	Reasonable progress
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Reasonable work has been completed since the previous inspection to improve the standard and content of individual learning plans, target-setting and qualification progression monitoring. New documentation has been developed that requires tutors to set clear and achievable progression targets. Staff development has taken place to improve tutors' skills in assessment planning and using students' prior attainment to better set and monitor progress targets. Assessment plans are now more structured to link with individuals learning plans. The analysis of student feedback has shown that learners are now clearer about the progress they have made so far and what they still need to complete to succeed in their course. The institute is aware that more work needs to be done to promote the opportunities that exist to extend the institute's gifted and talented students.

What progress has been made to engage employers and better meet the needs of learners?	Reasonable progress
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The institute has introduced a range of strategies to engage learners and collect their views. Learners participate across a range of committees and forums to express their views. All courses have student representatives who are suitably trained and attend course team meetings. A student newsletter is published every two weeks. Annual 'meet the principal' events have led to improvements, for example the provision of a budget to allow music students to copy manuscripts. Focus groups have recently replaced the use of student perception questionnaires but it is too early to judge their effectiveness.

Employer engagement is co-ordinated centrally by the business development unit who also carry out organisational training needs analyses for employers. Some employer forums exist but their effectiveness is not monitored by senior managers and attendance is low in some cases. All faculties have a nominated member of staff responsible for employer engagement and there has been some training to support these responsibilities.

What progress has been made in the implementation of plans to improve teaching and learning and better use the institute's virtual learning environment (VLE) across curriculum areas?	Significant progress
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The institute has continued to invest effectively in improving teaching and learning. There has been significant investment in the provision of smart boards in almost all classrooms and in staff development. The observation of teaching and learning documentation has been revised and guidance issued to all staff. Observers have received more training, including training on providing effective feedback. Following observations, tutors sign to confirm that they have received effective feedback and that they understand how their session could have been improved. New staff and staff awarded satisfactory or inadequate observation grades are well supported through the 'learning curve' where teaching and learning coaches are used well to support improvements.

Staff development is well focused on improving teaching through the use of Information Learning Technology (ILT). All staff undertake mandatory staff development in different aspects of teaching and learning. The institute has investigated good practice in teaching and learning at other colleges and introduced new practices as a result. The virtual learning environment (VLE) has been further developed and each curriculum area has a nominated member of staff responsible for the VLE.

Some staff are highly proficient and make good use of ILT to enhance their lessons and support learning. However, there are still some variations in the effectiveness of

the use of VLE across the institute. The use of ILT and attention to equality and diversity are key features of the observations of teaching and learning. Institute data indicates that the proportion of good or better teaching and learning has increased further to 79% but the tail of inadequate teaching remains at around 5%.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in the planned actions to improve retention rates?	Reasonable progress
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The institute has introduced a range of changes to improve retention rates and student motivation. The institute has split its further and higher education curriculum management roles to create a more focused approach to the coordination and management of these different aspects of its work. The institute's intranet now includes self-assessment reports and action plans at sector subject levels that are closely monitored by staff and managers. The quality performance audit team regularly analyses information on programme performance to support managers and quality improvement planning. More enrichment activities have been introduced to help improve motivation levels for level 1 students.

Course programmes and assessment planning have been carefully reviewed to provide learners with a more balanced timetable and more manageable phases of assessment activity. Individual learner progress is now more carefully monitored and the definition of 'at risk learners' has been widened to ensure support interventions are provided for more students. Retention rates have improved by six percentage points between 2006/07 and 2007/08 and in-year retention in 2008/09 has improved and is high at 95%.

What progress has been made in the arrangements to embed the promotion of equality and diversity within the curriculum?	Significant progress
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The institute has maintained the strengths in equality and diversity identified at the previous inspection. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Education and social inclusion are outstanding. A review group has been established to drive and to monitor the embedding of equality and diversity in the curriculum and monitor the institute's equality and diversity impact measures. The institute has recently won two Beacon awards for work on equality and diversity and has used the prize money well to produce informative booklets that promote equality and diversity in the curriculum. Equality and diversity notice boards have been established throughout the institute to raise student awareness. Student diaries contain key dates of religious festivals. Different cultures are recognized and celebrated throughout the institute.

The institute runs many celebration events. A diversity week is planned during February which includes a range of activities from all curriculum areas to promote

diversity. The institute is active in coordinating local forums for equality and diversity including an equality and diversity forum for institutes and for employers and also coordinates the North East Lincolnshire Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual Forum. Each faculty continues to analyse the performance of different types of learner. Equality and diversity is well promoted across the institute through innovative wall displays and posters including student work.

What progress has been made in the implementation of the institute's Skills for Life strategy?	Reasonable progress
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Since the previous inspection, the institute has produced a Skills for Life strategy. The strategy has a suitable accompanying action plan for implementation although key milestones to measure progress are omitted. The strategy is being implemented across curriculum areas and an appropriate range of mechanisms exist for students to obtain Skills for Life support. Initial assessment takes place early in learners' programmes. Learners' support needs are identified and planned for before the start of programmes through effective induction events which are held before courses begin. Identified additional support arrangements are in place at the beginning of the course. The tutorial curriculum remains varied and interesting and contributes well to all aspects of Every Child Matters. Arrangements for specialist support are good. There are good links between Skills for Life tutors and vocational tutors. Good links have been maintained with outside agencies including the probation service and an agency that supports homeless young people. These links are proving effective in re-engaging disaffected learners. Some curriculum areas now employ Skills for Life tutors directly. Staff development is coordinated centrally and there has been a clear focus on improving staff awareness and the understanding of Skills for Life. All key skills staff hold or are working towards a Skills for Life level 3 qualification. Skills for Life tutors hold or are working towards a Skills for Life level 4/5 qualification.