

IAG Gold Standard Assessment - Hull College

**External Assessment carried out on
18.06.2008 (Hull site) and 25.06.2008 (Goole site)**

Assessor – Vince Barrett

Overview

Hull College is a large further education (FE) college operating on four sites in the city of Kingston-upon-Hull: Queen's Gardens Campus, Park Street Centre, Cannon Street Centre and the Learning Zone, run in partnership with Hull City Council and situated in the Kingston Communications Stadium. A fifth site, Goole College, is located 30 miles to the west of the city and plans for a sixth Hull College site in Harrogate, some 70 miles to the west are well in hand. The college offers a vast range of vocational training and academic education which includes Higher Education programmes HNC, HND, BA, PGCE and Foundation and Honours Degrees. The college serves well over 5000 full-time and around 20000 part-time learners. In contrast, Goole College serves 235 full-time and 400 part-time learners. Hull College's stated mission is to deliver high quality vocational and academic education and training, raising the aspirations and prosperity of the local and global community in collaboration with partners.

Assessment

Prior to the formal assessment, the Connexions Curriculum Adviser for Hull, Annabel Brannan, worked closely with key personnel in the college, assisting in the compilation of a very detailed self-assessment form in preparation for external assessment. The Curriculum Adviser for the East Riding, Maureen Kelham, was similarly involved in the pre-assessment process on the Goole site. A comprehensive portfolio of evidence - containing substantial documentary and pictorial representation of IAG practice - was provided to the assessor prior to the date of assessment. The results of both learner and practitioner-focused surveys were also included, evidencing positive feedback from learners and practitioners regarding the IAG systems in place (See Element 8).

The formal assessment procedure took a full day for the Hull site and a further half day for the Goole site. For both days, the assessor was provided with a very full programme which included interviews with senior managers and all key IAG personnel. During the assessment, the following additional activities were undertaken: observation of guidance practice, interviews with learners (randomly selected by the assessor) visual inspection of the available facilities for delivery of information, advice and guidance. All interviews and observations were later cross-referenced against the portfolio of paper evidence pre-submitted by the college. The relevant collected evidence demonstrating each Element and Component of the Hull Gold Standard for Information, Advice and Guidance is described in summary below:

Element 1 – Accessible and Visible Information

Component 1: There will be one or more information areas, open at clearly displayed times, accessible to all learners and providing a range of appropriate, current and impartial information which meets all needs

The main Learner Support Services (LSS) centre on the Hull site is situated on the ground floor of the new Chester's building on the Queen's Gardens site and there are satellite LSS facilities available at all other sites. At Goole, the central library and LSS facilities are similarly located on the ground floor with ramp access for wheelchair users. Opening times and availability of specialist support staff (e.g. Connexions Personal Advisers, HE advisers, health professionals) are clearly stated and known by learners. Learners are able to access information on any aspect affecting them – personal, learning, progression or health - and Information leaflets are readily available, located in and around both sites. Learners may access more detailed hard copy, electronic or internet-based information via the college's libraries and computer facilities. The college places a very strong emphasis on learner accessibility to information and, whenever the college produces its own information, wide consultation takes place before publication or posting to ensure all abilities and levels of understanding have been considered. The college has an intranet site intranet.hull-college.ac.uk containing up-to-date information about college activities of interest to learners. All learners receive information about IAG access points in the college's prospectuses and learner handbooks, as well as during induction. All learners interviewed were aware of when, where and who to go for information on a wide range of topics.

Component 2: All staff involved in providing information will be familiar with its content and purpose

The main college site has in post a huge team of learning support staff; all learners have a named personal tutor and access to a Learning Mentor. This breadth of support is mirrored on the Goole site although delivered by a much smaller central team. All staff with a responsibility for the provision of information, advice, guidance or learner support interviewed as a part of the assessment process demonstrated clear understanding of the breadth of information available. There are regular professional development opportunities in place to ensure this understanding is maintained.

Element 2 – Accessible Advice and Guidance

Component 1: Internal and external advice and guidance practitioners will collectively possess the necessary skills, knowledge, training and qualifications to identify and respond to each learner's needs.

The internal college Learner Support Service staff all receive mandatory training in the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda and Child Protection. Those with a defined guidance responsibility possess at least a Level 3 qualification in Advice and Guidance and some have specialist qualifications. The team of Learning Mentors is drawn from a very wide range of backgrounds and each individual brings a unique set of experiences to contribute to the support needs of all learners. In discussion, learners valued very highly the individual help available to them via the Learning Mentors and felt them to be very approachable and non-judgemental. A professional counsellor is available to all learners. Learners at the Goole site have access to all specialist help as required. External Advice and Guidance professionals are qualified and experienced in practising in their particular fields.

Component 2: All advice and guidance practitioners will know about the work of other IAG providers who may be better placed to meet learners' needs

The team of practitioners working in the LSS teams are from a wide range of internal and external IAG providers. All are aware of the remit of others and referrals are made easily between advice and guidance personnel in order to ensure that specific questions on topics such as EMA, finance, accommodation or health are addressed by the most appropriate practitioner.

Element 3 – Linked IAG Provision

Component 1: The provision of linked advice and guidance will be part of the remit and role of a senior manager within the organisation or service

Hull College Learner Support Services Manager, David Greenway, is the first point of contact for all internal and external people and agencies working on college sites and he has responsibility for oversight of the whole college IAG provision. On the Goole site, LSS responsibility is carried by David Caldicott, Goole College Manager, and provision of services is overseen by Paula Luff, Goole College Support Services Manager. The following senior people also have significant roles in the provision of IAG across the college: Teresa Chalmers, Director of Marketing & Customer Services; Sue Winterton, Team Leader – Enrichment & Student Union; Matt Lilley, Marketing Manager and Lesley Hawkins, Cross-College Tutorial Co-ordinator. Lynne Richardson, the Director of Learning 14-19 is also heavily involved in supporting the IAG provision for young people and the college principal, Elaine McMahon, fully endorses the provision of high quality IAG.

Component 2: All IAG practitioners will make clear to learners the links between IAG services and support learners in their transition between these services

The role of Tutors and Learning Mentors is pivotal in linking all IAG services available to learners. Tutors are clear about what is available from IAG services; Learning Mentors advocate on behalf of learners where necessary and help with individual referrals to specialist agencies. Learners interviewed were all able to describe the systems for getting help. Data protection policies and protocols for referral are in place and can be accessed by staff on the college intranet.

Component 3: All IAG practitioners will recognise professional boundaries and know which alternative provision is appropriate for signposting or referral to meet each learner's guidance needs

A comprehensive learner handbook is given to all learners (full time and part time) at induction. This provides a good reference to all the services available. Connexions, as the principal on-site external IAG provider, has in place Agreements detailing the work and boundaries of Personal Advisers based on both college sites. There are also clear college IAG policies, procedures and protocols in place which define the work of all providers. Referral procedures to internal or external guidance agencies are clear and understood by practitioners.

Element 4 - IAG Responsiveness to the needs of clients

Component 1: IAG provision will promote equality of opportunity and access

The college employs a large team of Learning Advisers (Additional Learning Support Service) headed up by Lesley Mills, Learner Support Manager. This team has a whole-college responsibility for assessing learners' needs, supporting all learners with identified additional needs, ensuring that the needs of learners with visual or hearing impairments are met and supporting learners with hidden disabilities or mental health issues. It also provides disability awareness sessions - for all staff - and informs all relevant personnel of Disability Act (DDA) considerations. Consequently, there is in place a student charter which ensures that all the college's learning provision, including IAG, strongly promotes equality of opportunity and access.

Component 2: IAG will be accessible to all, with specific resources directed to learners identified as having additional needs.

Complementing the work of the Additional Learning Support Team described above, there is a dedicated Equality and Diversity Officer, Kerry Lynn, who ensures that all learning materials and resources used within the college are appropriate for and accessible by all learners. Her role includes ensuring that ESOL learner's needs are met and that no learner is disadvantaged through not being able to understand or access learning materials.

Element 5 - Quality and Delivery of IAG

Component 1: IAG will be underpinned by a development programme of planned personal learning based upon national recommendations

Every full-time learner is allocated a personal tutor to whom they can refer for help and support with any aspect of their learning. There is a tutorial programme, linked to the five Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes where learners are given the opportunity to gain information about economic well-being, social and health issues affecting them. Adding tremendous value to the quality and delivery of IAG for younger learners in the college is the work of the Club 16-18 team. All learners entering the college – either at Hull or Goole – and aged between 16 and 18 automatically become members of Club 16-18 which allows them to participate in a range of enrichment activities from sport to outdoor pursuits to visiting places far beyond the boundaries of Hull or Goole. Engaging in these activities allows young people to expand their horizons and develop personal and social skills which will serve them well when choosing their progression routes from college. The Club 16-18 team are skilled in devising activities which to the casual observer could appear to be simply 'fun' activities but they are crucial to building confidence, self esteem and a positive outlook which are fundamental for many young people in both Hull and Goole.

Component 2: IAG will be targeted at the needs of learners and informed by social and economic priorities at local regional and national levels

Hull College is situated in a city that has a high percentage of its wards ranked in the top 25% of most deprived in England and Wales and is also very high in the national rankings for local concentrations of multiple deprivation. The proportion of school leavers with five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C is amongst the smallest in the country and Hull has often appeared at the bottom of the national league GCSE attainment table. Goole College is situated in a similarly deprived ward within the East Riding of Yorkshire. At the same time, however, the college serves learners from the whole of the East Riding which is consistently at the upper end of the GCSE table and, has fewer areas that can be described as disadvantaged. Hull College is also serving an increasing number of European and international learners. The learning offer provided by the college is correspondingly broad with a wide range of full-time and part-time general and vocational programmes from pre-entry to degree level. Consequently, the need for robust provision of information advice and guidance for such a diverse clientele is essential. Hull College fully acknowledges its responsibility to provide this and all IAG is given in the context of learners' backgrounds, interests and aspirations..

Element 6 - Impartiality of IAG Provision

Component 1: IAG will promote all available options based on the needs and circumstances of each individual

As indicated throughout this report and especially in component 2 below, there is no coercion for young people to make particular choices. There is a wealth of information available throughout college sites on all available progression options and specialist teams of people to provide support and guidance to learners in making choices. This was highlighted as a strength in the Matrix accreditation carried out in October 2007 and the findings of this assessment fully endorse that view.

Component 2: IAG will support learners in making informed decisions and not led by institutional targets or goals.

Impartiality of information, advice and guidance, especially with regard to career and progression is seen to be very important within the college. As mentioned above, IAG is offered to learners in line with their academic ability, career aspirations and interests. Most of the college's learners are post-16 and normally progress on to work or higher education. Information and advice on options for progression from all courses is impartial – e.g. IAG for progression includes information about provision available at other colleges and work-based learning providers. Hull College does not have any vested interest in retaining learners on courses or programmes that are not matched to their needs or ambitions.

Element 7 – IAG for Learning, Work and Progression

Component 1: IAG for learning, work and progression will support learners in exploring the implications of possible career choices when planning their futures.

As the vast majority of learners studying at the college are post-16, many work part-time; some are in jobs and are sponsored by their employer to attend the college for training. Many learners also undertake work experience as an element of their course and employers are actively engaged in working on projects with the college. Indeed, the college has within it many opportunities for learners to experience the world of work. There are real hair and beauty salons, restaurants, and engineering workshops on the Hull and Goole sites and a recording and multimedia studio in Hull. Implications of possible career choices are therefore firmly embedded in programmes of study.

Component 2: IAG practitioners with a career focus will work closely with local employers to ascertain up-to-date LMI

As Hull College is principally a general FE college, IAG practitioners are in touch with employers both locally and nationally. There is ample labour market information flowing into the college and noticeboards and information flyers around the college sites reflect this. Connexions PAs keep up to date with local and national employment trends and are able to advise learners accordingly. Learners undertake work placements in the city and beyond and there is a section of the college's intranet that gives learners news of local and regional job vacancies. All these opportunities are exploited to ensure that learners understand the labour market in the north Humber area and beyond.

Component 3: IAG provision will ensure that all learners have access to the information they need to make informed choices

The college has listed all its course provision in the local Area-Wide Prospectuses (AWP) www.learnhull.co.uk / www.learneastriding.co.uk and receives applications via the inbuilt common application process (CAP). The college is keen to develop this facility as it means that learners making applications to the college should be more informed about their choices and are more likely to embark upon appropriate provision. The Admissions Team at both Hull and Goole have had some concerns about the inability of the CAP system to link directly with the college's MI systems but are willing to continue to develop the system as it is upgraded and improved. As for access to information for learners already at the college, there is ample opportunity for them to access all they need regardless of proposed next destination. See Element 1.

Element 8 – Evaluation of IAG

Component 1: All IAG practitioners and learners are able to feed back their views on the provision within the organisation

The college operates a three-way system for evaluation of all it offers – including IAG provision. The SPOC (Student Perception of College) PPOC (Parents) and EPOC (Employers) feedback system allow formal evaluation to take place annually via a questionnaire. The results of these surveys are particularly evident on the Goole site

where responses are widely displayed on noticeboards around the college. Learners may also offer suggestions for improvement or complimentary comments regarding the service (the latter being more often the case) via the central LSS centres on both sites. The college has elected for other external evaluations and assessments of practice; it holds the Matrix Standard, Investors in People and other charter marks.

Recommendation

Having spent a day and a half at the two principal college sites, interviewing, questioning and observing in addition to consideration of the submitted paper and IT-based evidence supporting the quality of IAG at Hull College, I have no reservation in recommending the college receives the Kingston-upon-Hull Gold Standard Award for IAG.

Vince Barrett
26.06.08