

# Preston College

## Focused monitoring visit report

---

**Unique reference number:** 130740

**Name of lead inspector:** Bev Barlow HMI

**Last day of inspection:** 27 January 2010

**Type of provider:** General Further Education College

**Address:** St. Vincent's Road  
Fulwood  
Preston  
Lancashire  
PR2 8UR

**Telephone number:** 01772 225031

## **FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS**

### **Context and focus of visit**

Preston College is a large further education college serving the city of Preston and the surrounding area of central Lancashire. The college serves a population of around 250,000 and has an income of around £34 million. The college has one main site at Fulwood to the north of the city. The Park campus a short walk away delivers visual and performing arts courses and there are three main learning centres in the locality to deliver community programmes. The college offers a broad curriculum in all areas of learning funded by the Learning and Skills Council except land-based qualifications. Higher education programmes are delivered in conjunction with the University of Central Lancashire. The majority of the college's learners are adults on part-time courses. Most of the 3,000 students aged 16 to 18 are enrolled on full-time courses. Around 20% of learners are from minority ethnic groups; this is above the proportion in the local community. The number of learners on apprenticeships has increased to 269 and the Train to Gain provision has expanded significantly with 4,480 funded learners in 2008/09. The college's mission statement is to "Inspire learners to develop skills, knowledge and understanding that will contribute to a successful economy and society".

The college was last inspected in November 2007. At that inspection the college was judged to be satisfactory overall. Its capacity to improve, quality of provision and equality of opportunity were judged to be good; all other aspects were satisfactory. Provision in the sector subject areas inspected was judged to be good in three, satisfactory in four and inadequate in one area, engineering. The monitoring visit in February 2009 re-inspected engineering and it was judged to be satisfactory. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

### **Themes**

#### **Self-assessment and improvement planning**

<b>What progress has been made in improving the arrangements for self-assessment and quality improvement since the last inspection?</b>	<b>Reasonable progress</b>
---	----------------------------

The electronic quality assurance system has now been embedded; staff have good access to the documentation and are clear about college priorities. The format of the college's self-assessment report (SAR) has been changed and is now summarised by sector subject area (SSA) and covers all aspects of the new common inspection framework. The process is inclusive and involves staff at all levels using appropriate evidence from across the academies. Managers from different academies with courses in a specific SSA now spend more time working together to identify areas to improve and share good practice. Validation panels include college managers, governors, students and staff from peer review group colleges who challenge grades and the evidence. In a few areas too much emphasis is placed on the improvement

in success rates with insufficient attention to actual rates. Actions from the quality improvement plan can be tracked back to areas for improvement in the SAR at whole college, subject area and course level. Managers closely monitor completion of action plans.

A strong emphasis is placed on learners' views as part of the self-assessment and quality improvement process. Where appropriate, immediate action is taken, for example, changes to timetables and delivery times to maximise attendance and student enjoyment.

In addition to the self-assessment process, curriculum inspection audits were introduced in September 2009 and four had been completed by time of the visit. All SSAs will receive an audit by the end of the academic year. A specialist team of trained staff carry out a three-day review of the area that includes lesson observations, meetings with staff and students, reviewing students' files, course documentation and the minutes of meetings. The managers in the SSA are given instant verbal feedback on the findings of the audit team. The written reports are well constructed and focus on the strengths and areas for improvement, although there is too much overlap between action plans. The audits have been effective in identifying areas to improve that have not always been recognised by the curriculum teams through self-assessment. Feedback from directors who have so far participated in the audits is positive and they are benefiting from working in each other's areas. The audits are too new to judge their full impact.

### **Outcomes for learners**

**What do data for 2008/09 show about the progress made in improving success rates, particularly at level 1 and for adults at level 2? Reasonable progress**

Overall success rates have continued to improve at a rate of four percentage points per year over the last three years and are now at 78% for the college's overall LSC-funded provision. The success rate for learners aged 16 to 18, who represent two thirds of the college's learner responsive provision, has seen a sustained increase to around the national average. The success rate for adult responsive provision has remained relatively static over the last three years and is below the national average. The significant improvement in success rates on courses at level 1 for learners aged 16 to 18 in 2007/08 was not maintained and in 2008/09 they declined to just below the national average. The success rate for learners aged 16 to 18 at levels 2 and 3 have consistently increased to around the national average. The slight fall in success rates at level 1 and for adults at level 2 is recognised by the college and appropriate actions have been put in place from September 2009. Success rates on A-level provision remain an area for improvement.

**What progress has the college achieved in further improving or maintaining the improvements in retention rates recognised at the last monitoring visit?** **Reasonable progress**

Retention rates for learners aged 16 to 18 on level 2 and 3 courses continued to increase in 2008/09 and along with the adult retention rates they are around the national averages. However, retention on level 1 courses declined to well below the national average. Staff at all levels have retention as a key area for improvement in 2009/10. Changes to course entry criteria have been implemented more consistently at enrolment. A revised attendance policy and more systematic use of electronic data to monitor in-year performance have led to some improvements. Managers patrol college social areas and use their mobile phones to check and discuss a learner's timetable and attendance straight away.

Under the leadership of a new cross-college manager, the college's level 1 'pathways programme' has been restructured into smaller accredited units of learning, pastoral and support systems have improved and the course is delivered over three days to better meet the needs of learners. A range of concerns have been identified and appropriate actions put in place to improve retention on level 2 adult courses. For example, the low success rates in information technology have led to a reduction in the community offer and the introduction of the more appropriate unit ECDL course. It is too soon to judge the full impact of these initiatives.

**What progress has been made in further improving success rates on work-based learning programmes?** **Reasonable progress**

Apprentice success rates have improved consistently over the last three years and are now in line with national averages. Overall timely success rates are well above national averages. However, success rates of apprentices aged 16 to 18 remain low. Work-based forum meetings which include managers from across the college are held monthly to discuss the programmes offered in employer responsive provision and their performance against targets, identify issues and share good practice. Data are used more effectively to monitor apprentice completions, identify any underperforming groups and put in place extra support and work with employers to further improve success rates. College data for 2009/10 indicate expected improvements.

**What progress has been made in maintaining high success rates on the rapidly expanded T2G programmes?** **Significant progress**

The number of learners on the college's Train to Gain programmes has increased significantly since the last inspection. The college has developed delivery and monitoring systems to improve further the high success rates on Train to Gain. Over the last two years success rates have been well above national averages. The college's employer engagement team has developed very good links and

commitment from the employers through a broad range of networks. However, the slightly lower success of learners on Skills for Life programmes is attributable to the work with one employer with whom the college no longer contracts. Managers use data effectively to monitor closely the progress of learners.

### **Quality of provision**

**What progress has been made in reducing the amount of satisfactory teaching and ensuring that teaching meets the needs of all learners?** **Reasonable progress**

The internal lesson observations conducted by the college in 2008/09 show a further reduction in the proportion of satisfactory teaching and an increase in good or better teaching. Grades are moderated for consistency and accuracy. The students' views on the quality of teaching match that of the college. However, in some curriculum areas the improvements in the quality of teaching have not yet led to sufficient improvements in learners' outcomes. The new curriculum audits have replaced the formal lesson observation system and in the four areas completed so far this has led to an increase in the proportion of satisfactory teaching. This can be partly explained by the fact that the audit process focuses on areas for improvement thus skewing the sample of lessons observed.

Teachers whose lessons are graded satisfactory are supported well and work on an individually designed development plan to address weaknesses. Teachers are re-observed, progress is monitored centrally and records indicate improvements. Teaching and learning coaches work well with individual curriculum areas to help teachers to plan lessons to meet the needs of all their learners. However, a lack of differentiation remains an identified area for improvement in weaker lessons. Peer observations, bespoke training sessions and team meetings are used effectively to spread good practice. Teachers are becoming increasingly proficient in the use of e-learning to support more personalised learning.

**How much progress has the college made in improving the consistency of assessment practice and target setting to monitor learners' progress?** **Reasonable progress**

Students are aware of their targets and progress. Students of all ages from a wide range of courses use and can explain a common system for target setting, monitoring and review. Students have minimum and aspirational targets, regular one-to-one reviews and written reports. Weekly attendance checks and any underperformance or behaviour issues are quickly followed up. Where appropriate, targets are adjusted and extra individual support is provided.

Data to support the target setting and monitoring process are readily available on the college network. Online access to reports is widely used by tutors and is motivating students to improve their own performance. Managers monitor closely trends and

identify any areas of concern. However, in subject areas where a curriculum audit has taken place, some weaknesses in target setting and monitoring have been identified, highlighting the need for more rigorous cross-college checking of the monitoring of students' progress to ensure consistency.

## Leadership and management

### **What actions have taken place to improve the varying quality of curriculum management?**

**Reasonable progress**

Overall the college has improved its self-assessment grade for leadership and management from satisfactory to good. However, the grades across the curriculum areas vary from outstanding to inadequate. The curriculum excellence group established at the start of 2009 is working effectively to share good practice and improve consistency. A good range of management training and support has continued and is being extended to middle managers in the summer term. Additional cross-college management roles have been created to monitor closely specific aspects of underperformance and work across academies. Managers, working in curriculum audit teams, have benefited from opportunities to work in other academies as part of the quality assurance arrangements. Mentors provide support to new tutors and where only one tutor delivers a course. Opportunities to work with staff from other colleges to share best practice have been developed but not all tutors have yet had the chance to participate.

### **What progress has the college made in further developing arrangements to safeguard learners?**

**Significant progress**

Students feel safe in college and say that any instances of bullying or discrimination are dealt with very quickly and effectively. They report that the college's no tolerance approach to discrimination and bullying is made very clear in induction. Appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures are in place. A detailed action plan includes responsibilities and review dates. A risk assessment of the action plan has been undertaken. A designated named person with responsibility for safeguarding, several other safeguarding officers and a governor with responsibility for safeguarding are in place and all have received appropriate additional training. All staff, with the exception of those on long-term illness, have completed basic safeguarding training. The safeguarding procedures for work placements are sound. The college works in close partnership with relevant organisations and refers cases where appropriate. The college maintains an up-to-date single central record.

### **What progress has the college made in developing further its strategy to engage with learners and employers to support and promote improvement?**

**Significant progress**

Engagement with learners and employers has developed very well since the last inspection. A broad range of opportunities for students and their representatives has

been developed to provide formal channels through which they can express their views and influence college decisions. Students say that there is a good two-way flow of information between them, their representatives, college staff and the outcomes of meetings and surveys. Students are well represented on college committees, such as Quality and Standards and Equality and Diversity. Care is taken to ensure that lower-attaining students and those with learning difficulties have the opportunity to give their views and be heard. Students feel that they have a strong voice within college and have influence. They gave inspectors examples of how course delivery has been changed after they raised issues with course tutors.

Employer engagement is good and improving. Questionnaires, employer forums, breakfast meetings and feedback from assessors are all used well to inform course development and improvement. There are many examples of employers influencing course content and delivery models. The college is aware of the differing needs of the vocational areas and is flexible and responsive. The few inconsistencies in the quality of employer engagement practices identified whilst preparing for the Training Quality Standard have been addressed.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this report in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 08456 404040, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

Royal Exchange Buildings  
St Ann's Square  
Manchester, M2 7LA

T: 08456 404040  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

© Crown copyright 2010