

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Preston College

Date of visit: Monday 6 November 2006

This feedback contains brief findings from the annual assessment visit. It focuses on the themes explored during the visit and does not attempt to give a comprehensive overview of the college's performance.

Achievement and standards

Have the strategies implemented to improve success rates impacted on the 2005/06 results?

- College data for 2006 had not been fully finalised at the time of the visit. Initial results clearly indicate further improvements in success rates at all levels for both adults and learners aged 16 to 18. Success rates are above the national average in all areas except for adults on short courses and long courses at level 1. Success rates of full-time students aged 16 to 18 on level 3 courses are well above the national average. However the pass rate on level 3 courses for part-time students remains an issue recognised by the college.

Have the retention and pass rates on level 1 courses for adult learners improved in 2006?

- College data for 2006 indicates a 10% increase in pass rates and a slight improvement in retention rates. Despite these improvements the overall success rate remains well below the national average on level 1 courses for adults.

The success rates vary across curriculum areas. Have the college correctly identified underperforming courses and taken effective action to bring about improvements in results in 2006?

- The college uses data and correctly identifies underperforming courses and in most cases clear action plans are in place to bring about improvements. Curriculum managers discuss performance of courses in their area as part of the college's business planning cycle. However,

underperforming courses are not always clearly identified in the self assessment report.

How much progress are students making? What do value-added data tell us?

The college uses the ALIS value added system. Students' achievement on GCE AS and A-level courses has improved and in 2006 students made good progress in relation to their GCSE results. In a minority of GCE AS courses in law, English, biology and chemistry, students did not do as well as expected.

Quality of education and training

How does the college evaluate the impact of the college's strategy to improve the quality of teaching and learning? What do lesson observation records say about the quality of teaching and learning?

- The new lesson observation system introduced in September 2005 is more comprehensive and almost all teachers were observed during the academic year. External consultants were used to provide a view on teaching and learning in each curriculum area which has supported the college in moderating its internal observation grades. The process is more robust. The profile of grades is now in line with that found in similar colleges. Strategies are now in place to support teaching that is judged to be unsatisfactory with training, mentoring and re-observation. Key areas for development across the college have been identified; staff development sessions on these topics, for example, active learning and managing challenging behaviour, are well attended. Course teams share good practice at team meetings but there are insufficient opportunities to share teaching methodology across the college. A system of peer observations is being developed.

What are the outcomes of the college's recent changes to its curriculum?

- A 7 step curriculum has been developed in each of the college's faculties. A pathways programme for learners at entry or level 1 is more appropriate to their needs; both retention and pass rates on these courses have improved. The success of learners on national diploma and national certificate courses has generally improved.

Learners on advanced engineering courses complete a national certificate in their first year and if successful continue to the diploma. The college is considering extending this successful strategy to other curriculum areas.

How effectively have individual learning plans (ILPs) and student target setting been embedded across the college?

- The college has successfully raised the profile and use of ILPs and target setting with full-time learners aged 16 to 18. These learners regularly meet their tutor to discuss progress against targets. The number of staff with a personal tutor role has been reduced to improve the consistency of the delivery of the tutorial programme for full-time students. Revised documentation and a comprehensive tracking system support the close monitoring of individual students' progress and the early identification of "at risk" students. Attendance and punctuality of students to lessons has improved. Additional learning support is now used in a more systematic way across all curriculum areas. The centralised tracking and monitoring system has not yet been implemented for part-time students and adults studying at the college. Several curriculum areas have revised their induction programme for adult students but it is too early to judge the impact of this strategy.

What steps have been taken to further improve the quality of WBL provision?

- In work-based learning (WBL), framework or NVQ achievement improved from 52% in 2004/05 to 54% in 2005/06. Overall the proportion of apprentices completing the framework increased from 36% in 2004/05 to 46% in 2005/06, with some good achievements for example, in engineering. Framework achievements in advanced apprenticeships improved significantly in 2005/06 from 23% in 2004/05 to 37% in 2005/06. However, learners' progress in health, construction and business is particularly slow.
- A range of initiatives introduced last year have improved provision in WBL. These include more effective off the job the training, the development of diverse assessment methods and the use of regular meetings to standardise systems, sharing good practice, web-based

portfolios, mentors for learners and greater employer engagement to improve training.

What impact have the changes to the delivery of key skills had on achievements?

- Key skills again improved significantly in 2005/06. Overall pass rate trends are well above the national averages. The revised strategies for key skills have greatly improved success rates at level 1 and pass rates are now high for application of number and communication key skills at level 1. Whilst improved, the success rates on level 2 and level 3 key skills are around 35%. The college has revised further its key skills delivery and assessment strategies.

Leadership and management

Have college managers evaluated the impact of strategies and action plans implemented in 2005?

- The college is continuing to improve. The progress and impact of strategies are discussed at regular monitoring and planning meetings between senior and middle managers. Curriculum self assessment reports evaluate the previous year's action plans. It is not always clear how identified weaknesses, for example, poor performance of a specific course, are clearly addressed in the action plan. Managers are confident in the accuracy and use of management information in driving up standards.

Are college managers clear about the priorities for improvement?

- College managers understand the challenges facing the college and are taking effective action to address them. Within the new management structure there is a clear schedule of regular meetings at all levels across the college. Curriculum team meetings have clear agendas focussed on students' progress, teaching and learning and quality improvement. Curriculum managers have been well supported in their new roles and have received training to carry out their job effectively. Managers are clear about priorities for improvement in their area and for the whole college.

Have the college revised its safeguarding children procedures in line with the new guidelines?

- The college reviews its child protection policy annually with governors. The college's arrangements for protecting and safeguarding children and vulnerable adults meet statutory regulations and recent guidelines. All staff have received child protection training and procedures for vetting staff are in place.

Any other observations from the visit not identified in the pre-visit analysis:

- The college finances have continued to improve. In 2005/06 the college had an operating surplus for the first time in 6 years and has successfully met its LSC funding target.
- Initial advice and guidance has been further improved and is a strong feature of placing students on to appropriate courses. The college has been re-assessed and accredited the Matrix Award for advice and guidance.
- The A*-C GCSE pass rate improved significantly in 2006 to 73%.
- The college has invested heavily in IT equipment and the implementation of a virtual learning environment to support teaching and learning. Good progress has been made in some curriculum areas but there is not yet consistent use across the college. An e-learning team and staff development sessions are in place to share good practice.