

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Prior Pursglove
Date of visit: 5 June 2007

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

Has the college maintained high success and retention rates in 2006?

- Retention rates for learners aged 16-18 on long qualifications show a continued improvement trend from the previous inspection in 2005, using college supplied data for 2005/06, in-year figures for May 2007, and sixth form college national averages from the most recent college performance report in 2005. Retention rates on level 1 courses show year-on-year improvement to significantly above average at 91% in May 2007, whilst over the same period retention rates at levels 2 and 3 also improved to around average at 84% and well above average at 95% respectively. For adult learners level 2 and 3 long courses show continued and significant improvement in both retention and success rates in 2005/06 to well above national averages. Level 1 success rates, whilst showing year-on-year improvements, remain significantly below national averages. The college recognises that data entry errors may have contributed to the level 1 figures.

The 2006 self assessment report judges the A2 high grade rate and value-added scores to be areas for improvement. What actions have been taken to improve standards on these courses and have they had a positive impact?

- The college has increased the opportunity for learners to receive subject support through attending extra classes, including on Saturdays. A revised review process has improved the use of minimum target grades for learners to increase motivation and measure progress. A clear target setting and monitoring process for subjects and departments based on cohort ability for that year has ensured realistic but challenging targets. College data for 2005/06 show the percentage of high grades to be above

national averages whilst, according to the 2005/06 learner achievement tracker report, value-added scores are at the national average.

Low retention rates on level 2 courses was judged to be an area for improvement in the 2005 inspection and remained so in the 2006 self-assessment report. What further actions have been taken to improve retention and have they had a positive impact? Does the college have a clear view on why learners leave? Are measures to identify and support learners who are at risk effective?

- There is much improved tracking of early leavers with detailed analysis of their reasons for leaving and their destinations. Revised advice and guidance, recruitment and induction processes are aimed at ensuring that learners at all levels are making the appropriate choice of course and understand the expectations and commitment required to succeed. Non-attendance is rigorously followed up for all learners, with letters sent to parents of learners aged 16-18 for all unscheduled non-attendance. Revised measures to support at risk learners have also been introduced. According to college data, retention rates at level 2 for 16-18 year old learners have improved from 80% in 2005/06 to 84% in May 2006/07.

The 2006 self-assessment report identifies the performance of males at AS level as being an area for improvement. What actions have been taken to improve performance and have they had a positive impact?

- Whilst male retention and achievement rates are satisfactory compared to sixth form college averages, further improving these has been identified as an area for improvement by the college. Improvements to male performance are part of the broader strategy to improve the college from good to outstanding. Specific actions include additional mentoring support. Whilst it is too early to judge the impact of the actions taken, the response of males from college questionnaires is positive and predicted grades for males at AS show an improvement in 2007 in comparison to 2006.

Quality of education and training

The college was judged to have a good standard of teaching and learning at the 2005 inspection. What actions are being taken to increase the proportion of outstanding lessons?

- The professional development programme during 2006/07 has strongly focussed on developing tutors' understanding of the standards required to achieve good or better results in observations of teaching and learning, together with developing the use of active and interactive teaching and learning methods. Further staff development on this is being planned for the next academic year, together with a strong focus on enabling students to be effective learners by setting clear and high expectations on independent learning. All teaching rooms are now equipped with data projectors and staff have received training in how to use these effectively within lessons. Internal lesson observation records show the proportion of outstanding lessons to have increased slightly from 7.7% in 2004/05 to 8.1% in 2005/06, with those judged to be good or better increasing from 75.8% to 80.8% in the same period.

What actions have been taken to improve the identification of additional learning needs and the delivery of additional learning support? How well do learners receiving additional support achieve in comparison to the whole college population?

- There is a greater focus during selection, interview and induction on ensuring that learners have chosen the right course of study. A revised six-week induction period has been implemented and is used to identify learners' individual support needs and ensure course choice is correct, culminating in a signed agreement setting out expectations and responsibilities. Changes have been made to timetabling to make more use of non-class contact time to provide support through timetabled subject support sessions and personal study time. However, there is insufficient systematic analysis of the impact of additional support on retention and achievement, although some early analysis of the impact suggests that level 3 learners taking up additional support achieve an average of one grade higher than those declining additional support.

Unsatisfactory arrangements for the development of key skills were an area for improvement in the 2005 inspection, and low key skills outcomes are reported in the 2006 self-assessment report. What further actions have been taken to improve outcomes and have they had a positive impact?

- The college has changed the qualification used to deliver level 2 key skills in information technology and piloted its introduction and implementation during 2006/07. Early evaluation of the pilot shows positive responses by learners to the change, but it is too early to judge the impact on achievement. Integration of communications key skills into the curriculum has further improved and they are an integral part of the tutorial programme. Additional communication workshops focussing on portfolio preparation were introduced in 2006 with a much improved completion of portfolio components. Achievement of full portfolios in 2005/06 showed a significant increase on previous years but was still poor. Improving key skills outcomes remains a key area for development within the college and further initiatives planned for 2007 include a change in the timing of the portfolio assessment to a "January to January" model and the introduction of a four week intensive focus during tutorials in January and February.

Leadership and management

In May 2006 the college introduced a "good to outstanding" development plan. What progress has been made in implementing this plan and is there evidence of impact?

- The college is making good progress in implementing this eighteen month strategy. The strategy was developed following full consultation with staff, who show a high level of commitment to it. The strategy focuses on reviewing and improving all aspects of the learner experience before and during their time at the college and further supporting staff to achieve this improvement. The college is presently extending its buildings to further improve accommodation and meet the demands of increasing learner numbers. Whilst it is too early to judge the impact of the strategy on learner achievement, both attendance and retention have shown continued improvement during the last twelve months.

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

- The college is widening its range of provision to further increase employer engagement and meet local community needs. Co-financed European Social Funding is being used to deliver skills for life and work preparation programmes, primarily aimed at unemployed people. The college is in its third year of delivering Learndirect programmes both from the college main site and at six outreach centres. National vocational qualifications (NVQs) in health and social care are presently being delivered and further NVQ developments aimed at local business and business start-ups include information technology and business improvement techniques. Initial assessment and information, advice and guidance were provided to 120 offenders in probation centres in 2005/06 and 70 to date in 2006/07. Adult evening and weekend provision is delivered from the college main site and in community venues. Planned developments within the college-based curriculum for September 2007 include national diplomas in performing arts, sports, and media studies.