Preston College

Reinspection report

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Introduction

Preston College was inspected in November 2007. Inspectors carried out the inspection under Section 62 of the Learning and Skills Act. The quality of provision was found to be satisfactory or better in all areas inspected, except in engineering and manufacturing technologies which was found to be inadequate. Ofsted is responsible for re-inspecting all provision that is inadequate.

The less than satisfactory provision in engineering was re-inspected on 10 and 11 February 2009. The outcomes of the reinspection are as follows.

Curriculum Area	Original grade	Reinspection grade
Engineering: Subject Sector Area 4	4	3

Context

Full-time, part-time and day release courses at levels 1 to 4 are offered in engineering. This comprises manufacturing, electronics and motor vehicle courses. Qualifications include City and Guilds; the Institute of the Motor Industry (IMI) award and certificate; National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs); and the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national award, certificate and diploma. Currently 411 full-time learners are enrolled on courses in engineering. Of these, 155 are adult and 25 are female. The number of adult part-time learners is 118. Additionally, there are 135 modern apprentices and 194 Train to Gain learners on programmes. Vocational courses are offered for school pupils with 67 currently on programme.

Strengths

- Good support for individual learners
- Good management actions to raise success rates

Areas for improvement

- Underdeveloped health and safety risk assessment documentation for practical activities

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good. Success rates are high on many programmes including vehicle maintenance and repair at level 1 and 2; the NVQ in electrical level 2; the certificate in welding level 2; and computer aided design at level 3. Success rates for Train to Gain and the apprenticeship programme are high and timely. Retention rates are improving although they remain low on some courses. The standard of learners' practical skills is satisfactory. Learners demonstrate confidence in a range of activities and produce work to industry standards. Learners' behaviour and attitude to learning is good.

Quality of provision

Quality of provision is satisfactory. Teachers have vocational experience and are appropriately qualified. Teachers make good use of information and learning technologies (ILT) to enhance learning, using animated software to show complex processes. Teachers challenge and stretch learners, making effective use of question and answer techniques to check on progress and comprehension. Satisfactory links with employers, schools and external organisations are evident. The range of courses is satisfactory and meets local employer needs. Support and guidance for students is good. Individual support from teachers and learning assistants in lessons is good. Tutorial sessions are well planned. Student progress is closely monitored and individual action planning is effective.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Good management actions have raised success rates. The self-assessment report is accurate, although actions are not always specific and measurable. Health and safety risk-assessment for practical activities is embedded, although further development of the documentation is needed to identify specific risk reduction control measures. Promotion of equality opportunities is satisfactory.

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Preston College

Date of visit: 10 and 11 February 2009

Context

Preston College is a large general further education college serving the city of Preston and the surrounding area of central Lancashire. The college serve a population of approximately 250,000. The college has a main site (Fulwood Campus) in the north of the city, a nearby site for visual and performing arts provision and over 60 learning centres throughout the locality. The college provides courses in all areas of learning that are funded by the Learning and Skills Council, except land-based qualifications. In most of the sector subject areas, it is possible to progress from entry level to level 4. The college is a partner college of the University of Central Lancashire. In 2006/07, 19,877 learners attended the college. Of this total, 21% of learners were on full-time programmes; 78% were adult learners; 47% were men; and 18% were of minority ethnic origin. The average number of work-based learners in training was 244 and the average on Train to Gain programmes was 1,500. Preston College was last inspected in November 2007. Effectiveness of provision, achievement and standards and leadership and management were satisfactory. Capacity to improve, quality of provision and equality of opportunity were good. In sector subject areas, the college was awarded three good grades, four satisfactory grades and one unsatisfactory grade. The unsatisfactory grade was in engineering and manufacturing technologies.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving achievement and standards?	Reasonable Progress

Over the last four years the college has achieved and sustained improvements in success rates for both the 16 to 18 and 19+ cohorts. For example, for learners aged 16 to 18 success rates have improved at level 1 from 59% to 80%; at level 2 from 60% to 73%; and at level 3 from 66% to 71%. For 19+ learners success rates have improved at level 1 from 44% to 71%; at level 2 from 64% to 68% and at level 3 from 56% to 72%. For level 1 and 2 for both 16 to 18 and 19+ cohorts, success rates are at or just above those for similar colleges. Level 3 success rates for the 16 to 18 cohort remain below those for similar colleges. While GCE A-Level success rates have improved, those at GCE AS-level have declined to below national rates.

Achievement rates demonstrate significant improvement. When the college retains learners they do well and many make good and often excellent progress. For 16 to 18 learners on all long courses achievement rates have increased between 2005/06 to 2007/08 from 81% to 89%; for 19+ learners over the same period from 77% to

89%. For both cohorts these rates are above those for similar colleges. For example, there have been significant increases in pass rates at level 1 for learners aged 16 to 18 from 80% in 2004/05 to 93% in 2007/08. Similarly for this cohort, level 2 pass rates have increased from 81% to 88% over the same period.

Success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 on National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) programmes continue to improve and have been above national averages for the last two years. Success rates for learners aged 19+ on NVQ programmes have remained consistent and are above national rates. Pass rates on programmes funded through Train to Gain are high at 77%. There have been significant improvements to pass rates in work-based learning. Overall success for apprenticeships increased between 2006/07 to 2007/08 from 58% to 70%; in the same period timely success rates for apprentices increased from 31% to 64% and for advanced apprentices from 27% to 51%. All programmes now exceed minimum levels of performance. Key skills success rates are below the national average for both the 16 to 18 and 19+ cohorts, although over three years there is a faster rate of improvement for 19+ learners. Success rates for core key skills at level 1 demonstrate significant improvement. For example, in application of number, pass rates have improved since 2006/07 by 28%, and in ICT by 11%. Pass rates for key skills at level 3 remain significantly below the national average.

What progress has been made in improving retention rates?	Significant progress

Comprehensive strategies are in place to improve retention. These include changes to the structure of learner support and guidance, increasing the effectiveness and promotion of additional learning support and the developing role of learner coach mentors. Learners' progress is now systematically tracked and there is greater consistency in the application of intervention strategies for learners at risk of underachieving or not completing. These strategies are beginning to impact on retention rates. Retention for those receiving additional learning support increased from 80% in 2006/07 to 86% in 2007/08. Retention rates for learners aged 16 to 18 have improved between 2006/07 and 2007/08 at level 1 from 76% to 86%; and at level 2 from 77% to 82%. Improvement at level 3 has been less marked and these rates remain just below those for similar colleges. For 19+ learners retention rates for level 1 and 2 remain at the national rate while for level 3 they have risen to just above. Most recent data indicates significant improvement in retention rates across academies for the first term and the month of January of 2008/09 when compared with a similar period in 2007/08. Improved consistency across the college in the development, application and impact of retention strategies are well supported by very good practice in the hair, beauty and related therapies academy and the heath, social care and early years academy. In the former, retention has improved from 72% in 2005/06 to 88% in 2007/08; in the latter, retention has improved from 68% in 2004/05 to 82% in 2007/08.

Quality of provision

What actions have been taken to improve the inadequate provision in engineering?	Reasonable Progress

Provision in engineering is now satisfactory. Since the previous inspection the embedding of quality assurance systems have enabled a more consistent approach to the management of provision. Success rates on many courses are now above the national average. Significant investment in new teaching resources in motor vehicle, welding and information and learning technologies (ILT) has enhanced the learner experience. Greater emphasis on tutorials, learning action plans and learner support has improved retention. The college acknowledges that retention rates on a minority of courses require further improvement. Self-assessment is accurate and clearly identifies areas for improvement, although actions are not always specific and measurable. Satisfactory links with local industry are evident which has lead to an expansion of the apprenticeship and Train to Gain programmes. Health and safety risk-assessment for practical activities is embedded, although further development of the documentation is needed to identify specific risk reduction control measures.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in improving the governors systematic monitoring of academic achievement?	Significant Progress

Governors have been successful in developing a far sharper focus on monitoring achievement and standards. Changes to the composition of the governing body have seen the appointment of more governors with a professional background in education including educational administration and management. Governors have developed a far greater understanding of the significance of success, achievement and retention rates, and the importance of benchmarking these against similar institutions. Governors now regularly interrogate senior managers on achievement and standards and the strategies and the success or otherwise of college initiatives to promote improvement. Minutes of meetings indicate a systematic approach to monitoring and a strong sense of the need for managers to be accountable. Governors accurately identify key areas for improvement and are playing a far greater role in self-assessment. Managers at all levels welcome this governor input. Governors receive appropriate data on achievement and standards which allows then to drill down to explore the detail of issues. In particular governors have played a central role in aiding the development of the learner voice. Learners are represented on the Students, Quality and Standards Committee of the Governing Body: they play a key role in its deliberations.

What progress has been made in ensuring the consistent application of quality assurance across the college?	Significant progress

The college continues to make significant progress in ensuring that quality assurance is consistent across the college. Initiatives introduced after the inspection, to strengthen quality assurance procedures, are increasing the robustness of the system. For example, learners' views are used increasingly to inform the process through regular surveys and student representation at key meetings. This is resulting in areas of concern being highlighted earlier so that remedial action can be taken quickly. It also enables learners to identify ways to improve aspects of provision. Governors, including student and staff governors, are increasingly involved in the self-assessment process and are enhancing it by bringing a new and different perspective. The college is also improving the consistency of self-assessment by working in partnership with four other local colleges to standardise judgements, particularly those that are borderline. The introduction of an electronic quality assurance system in September 2008 has done much to improve consistency in the application of quality assurance procedures. Managers and staff have immediate access to the most recent reports and relevant documentation. Managers can evaluate reports and action plans easily and they can check that staff are complying with procedures very quickly.

What progress has the college made to ensure the consistency of curriculum management across the college?	Reasonable Progress

Further action has been taken to improve the consistency of curriculum management. The new curriculum quality group (CQG) has done much to improve communication between curriculum managers and relevant service area managers. However, the college has recognised the need for curriculum managers to meet in a smaller forum in order to share expertise more effectively. They established the curriculum excellence group (CEG) at the start of 2009. The sharing of good practice is becoming much more widespread and a few managers are gaining experience by working in other faculties. Additional cross-college co-ordinators have been appointed to ensure greater consistency across the college's provision. Curriculum managers are using external consultants to provide bespoke training and/or support that is tailored to their area's needs. The majority of middle managers have been on a management course provided by the Centre for Excellence in Leadership in partnership with the local university. Senior managers have been trained as coaches. New managers are inducted and mentored well. Despite all the well planned strategies, however, the most recent self-assessment report shows that some gaps in the quality of middle management remain across the college.