

Petroc

Focused monitoring visit report

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

North Devon and East Devon colleges merged on 1 August 2008. The merged college was renamed as Petroc in September 2009. Petroc is the largest college in Devon and has two main sites, at Tiverton and Barnstaple. Petroc offers courses in all sector areas, with limited provision in agriculture, horticulture and animal care. Petroc provides work-based learning and Train to Gain courses. Petroc serves a predominantly rural population in an area with limited transport links and significant economic challenges.

All grades awarded at the inspection of North Devon College in October 2006 were outstanding. East Devon College was inspected in February 2007, when leadership and management were judged to be inadequate. Overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, achievement and standards and quality of provision were satisfactory. Two subject areas were satisfactory, but science and mathematics and preparation for life and work were inadequate. Reinspection in July 2008 confirmed the inadequate grades at the previous inspection. A monitoring visit in June 2009 identified reasonable progress at Tiverton. This report focuses on progress made by Petroc in improving provision since the merger.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has the college made in using self-assessment and quality improvement planning to raise standards across the merged college? Reasonable progress

The self-assessment report for 2008/09 is the first to fully integrate provision across the merged college. The new quality team introduced a systematic approach to self-assessment which was based upon the existing inspection framework and which reported by subject area. The current self-assessment report does not include details of the identified strengths and areas for development by subject area. This information is gathered, and although it does not appear in the self-assessment report, it informs the quality improvement plans for each subject area. The seven newly-appointed heads of school have responsibility for monitoring progress in the subject areas for which they are responsible. Currently, each is developing their own mechanisms for monitoring progress against their development plans.

The overarching quality improvement plan for Petroc is based upon four key themes for development across the college. This plan is well conceived and provides a good steer for further improvement of provision. The new approach to self-assessment is not yet fully established. However, it provides a coherent and rigorous framework for further development.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has the college made in improving outcomes for learners at the Tiverton campus and Petroc college overall, with specific focus on science and mathematics and preparation for life and work at the Tiverton campus? Reasonable progress

The monitoring visit of June 2009 judged that reasonable progress had been made in improving success rates at Tiverton. Success rates at Tiverton for 2008/09 demonstrate substantial progress, although they are generally still below national averages. Significant progress has been made in improving success rates in the inadequate areas of science and mathematics and preparation for life and work. However, they are generally below national averages.

Success rates for Petroc are currently satisfactory. Retention rates improved in 2008/09, but success rates were generally lower than in 2007/08. In 2008/09, long-course success rates were above the national average at level 1 for learners aged 16 to 18, but below for learners aged 19+. At level 2, they were below the national average. At level 3, success rates were above national averages, but value-added scores were not consistently positive. Petroc has improved progress monitoring processes and is introducing more in-depth analysis of value-added data; it anticipates improved success rates as a result of actions taken.

On work-based learning programmes, overall success rates were generally above the national average in 2008/09 with timely success rates significantly above. On Train to Gain programmes, success rates were high overall.

Quality of provision

What progress has the college made in implementing arrangements to improve teaching and learning, with a particular focus on the effectiveness of continuing professional development? Significant progress

A well-established lesson observation system regularly and accurately assesses the quality of teachers' work with learners. The quality of these assessments has continued to improve since the previous monitoring visit, but some still need to focus more on learners' attainments. These assessments inform decisions regarding the continuing professional development needed by each teacher. Teachers have good access to high-quality continuing professional development to help them to improve their teaching. For example, a conference for all teachers held in January 2010 offered a wide range of sessions on topics directly relevant to their work. The Technology Innovation Fair, held in autumn 2009, provided teachers with good support in using information learning technology more effectively in their teaching. The standard of teaching and learning is generally good. For example, the college won a teaching award for sustainability in the south west region and the Science Learning Centres have filmed examples of good practice in science teaching for use nationally.

Petroc has developed an outstanding teacher framework which supports teachers to improve their practice. However, according to internal assessment, some subject areas still have too much satisfactory teaching.

What progress has the college made in implementing improved tutorial provision across the merged college? Reasonable progress

Petroc is effectively combining the best approaches from each of the former colleges to create tutorial systems that work to the benefit of all learners. The new directorate for learners, and associated changes to senior and lead tutor roles, provide improved tutorial support for learners. The former North Devon College approach to online tracking of learners' progress is now implemented across the merged college to good effect. Students are very positive about the support they receive from their tutors. Senior tutors carefully check and verify tutorial activity and progress reviews. The tutorial programme is under review to ensure improved coverage of the respect agenda.

Petroc has yet to ensure that learners receive the most effective support to help them plan and prepare for their future after college. Only 60% of learners reported that this support was good or very good in the Ofsted survey associated with this monitoring visit. Employers' responses to Ofsted's survey also showed that employers do not feel sufficiently closely involved with the progress reviews of their own learners. Petroc has already identified this view from employers in its own survey activity, and is taking appropriate action.

What progress has the college made in improving the effectiveness of learner and employer views in raising standards across the merged college? Significant progress

Petroc has a very careful and effective approach to gathering the views of its learners and the employers it works with. Learners met during inspection were clear that they found it easy to express their views and that the college responded to their comments. The college uses well-designed surveys, available to learners online, to gauge the quality of, for example, learners' induction programmes and the standards of teaching and learning. Each course also has a student representative and these representatives meet together in learner focus groups to feed back the views of their peers to college managers. Petroc closely analyses the outcomes of all of these approaches.

Petroc collects employers' views through an online system and through interviews with employers in the workplace. Petroc pays close attention to employers' views, especially as it works across an extensive and widening geographical area. Employer views, which are generally very positive, are carefully analysed and are acted upon where appropriate. However, the college's self-assessment report does not clearly reflect the views of employers.

Leadership and management

What progress has the college made in implementing the restructuring of the management team to ensure consistency and raise standards across the merged college? Reasonable progress

Petroc introduced a new senior management team in September 2009. The senior management team includes the principal and directors for learners, resources, curriculum and innovation, and employers as well as seven heads of school. All heads of school are new to their roles and are developing their familiarity with their teams and the subject areas for which they are now responsible. Each head of school is responsible for provision across both main sites of the merged college. In order to integrate provision and consolidate their teams they all teach on both main campuses.

A new layer of middle management has been introduced to support the heads of school at subject or programme level. The details of the responsibilities attached to each post have yet to be fully defined and agreed. In principle, the restructured management team has the capacity to ensure consistency and raise standards across the merged college. The heads of school are highly motivated and committed to improving the quality of provision for which they have responsibility. However, it is too early to identify the impact of these changes on the learners' experience to date.

What progress has the college made in achieving its target of reaching outstanding status by September 2011? Reasonable progress

Petroc successfully implemented plans to harmonise staffing arrangements and extend a coherent management information system across the college in the first year after merger. It has recently made good progress in restructuring the management team and is about to introduce a programme of leadership and management training to develop leadership skills across the college. Petroc has responded well to the decision not to fund a capital new build at the Barnstaple campus, the plans for which had been well established. It is replacing its plans to provide 'world class buildings' with plans to implement 'leading edge facilities' in the knowledge that this will have a speedier impact on learners' experience. However, it is too early to identify the impact of this change in priorities on learners' experiences to date.

Success rates are currently generally satisfactory. Petroc is implementing a number of initiatives to improve success rates in 2009/10, with further improvements anticipated in 2010/11. It is too early to identify the impact on learners' achievement to date, although retention rates have improved and learners report increased satisfaction with the quality of provision at the college.

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