

SfE National Conference 2008



The SfE national conference took place on Thursday, 5 June at the Congress Centre in London. The day was exceptionally well attended with over 170 delegates from Peer Review and Development (PRD) groups and stakeholder bodies coming together to

share their experience of Year One of the programme and begin to prepare to make Year Two even more successful.

Linda Wilson,
Programme Director



Key Note Speakers

The conference attendees heard from seven speakers, all of whom placed the importance of Peer Review and Development (PRD) within the work of their own organisations. It was evident that PRD will be a key tool in helping providers in their move towards becoming self-regulating

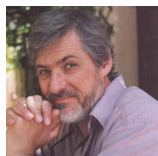
Chris Lambert, from City College Norwich and Conference Chair, described himself as a self-confessed PRD “evangelic”.



“Much of the success of self-regulation will depend on what you are doing.” Sue Dutton, interim CE of the Learning and Skills Improvement Service.



“What QIA aimed to do with SfE was very innovative and ambitious. A community of practice is being built.” David Parsons, HOST Policy Research.



“PRD has enormous benefits, providing a high level methodology for improvement through sharing good practice, benchmarking and improving performance through collaboration. SfE exists to test the rigour of the methodology.” Phil Cox, representing the Single Voice.

Penny Silvester of Ofsted discussed early thinking around the future of inspection, which will continue to have strong focus on self-assessment, enhanced learner’s voice, focus on teaching and learning and on responsiveness to different user groups.



“Both the Framework for Excellence and PRD can tell you something you didn’t already know, they build trust and understanding and provide consistency throughout the next turbulent period.” Verity Bullough, LSC Director of Funding, Planning and Performance.



What’s next for PRD?

The conference concluded with a look at the next year of the programme. Whilst Year One was focused on establishing PRD groups, Year Two will be about embedding and developing PRD in a sustainable way.

- Existing groups will continue to be funded in Year Two of the programme
- the programme aims to recruit 36 new groups, especially from those parts of the

sector currently under represented such as WBL, the voluntary sector and specialist colleges

- groups will be supported by a responsive operations team that will include programme advisers and sector specialists all dedicated to supporting groups in the implementation of PRD.

Workshop highlights

The conference gave delegates the opportunity to attend a choice of eight provider-led workshops which allowed delegates to network, share practice and enter into lively debate around some of the key issues affecting PRD. Here are a few key points from the workshops:

PRD group self-evaluation – embedding continuous improvement

PRD groups need to be flexible in how they work together with a commitment to continuous review and evaluation of the process. Time invested in reviewing the experience of the host, the review team and other stakeholders will lead to significant improvements in the process.

[Read more on page 3](#)

Performance Management within a self regulating further education system

The attendance and involvement of the participants demonstrated beyond doubt the commitment that key players in the further education system have to PRD. Building capacity over the next year, including sustainability, is a key challenge for us all.

[Read more on page 8](#)

Integrating the LSC Framework for Excellence (FfE) into GFE colleges

Don't underestimate the importance of FfE. The actions you take now will influence your rating in March 2009. *"Peer review identified areas for development including ownership within teams, rigour of review process and benchmarking against high percentiles"*, Chris Payne, Castle College.

[Read more on page 4](#)

The impact of PRD on the FE sector and providers

The message from this workshop was that few could have imagined how far the impact of PRD has reached across an organisation. It has exceeded all expectations.

[Read more on page 9](#)

Integrating PRD into Work Based Learning

PRD is a really useful tool in driving quality and more work-based learning providers should be encouraged to take part in the process.

[Read more on page 5](#)

Action Research Case Studies for PRD

After key themes from the 11 case studies were outlined by Carolyn Watkinson from CEL, two very different groups shared their experiences; the overriding message being that *"you can't buy what we've been given"*.

[Read more on page 6](#)

Delivering feedback in a PRD environment

Feedback was identified by all groups as a key element in PRD. A total of 30 providers were asked by Stan Cowell, Deputy Principal at South Cheshire College, whether they would continue to do PRD in Year Two. All said yes.

[Read more on page 7](#)

Achieving a whole organisation approach to PRD

It is vital to have senior management support in order for the benefit of PRD to be felt throughout the organisation and for the change to be effective.

- Local Authorities (LAs) should recognise that this issue needs to be considered within the wider LA agenda, particularly where LA structures can be an issue.
- Having group agreement on the protocols prior to undertaking the review is a key to success.
- Openness and honesty is vital for successful PRD. There needs to be a high level of trust within the group.

[Read more on page 10](#)

Slides and handouts from the day will be available shortly by following the links in the newsletter which will be on the [Excellence Gateway](#). For queries, please contact qiasfe@deloitte.co.uk

Workshop Summary

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|------------------|---|
| Name | PRD group self evaluation – embedding continuous improvement |
| Presenter | David Parsons |

Key Points from the Presenter

PRD providers should address the need to embed continuous improvement in their own organisations.

Key questions are:

- Is it possible to change a whole organisation?
- What impact does PRD have on individual organisations?
- What is the impact of PRD on the learner?

Lessons Learned and Shared within the Group

A range of groups were able to feed back on their experiences of PRD to date. This included:

One GFE group reported that they had adopted a 360 degree approach to PRD by getting the host organisation to reflect on what it felt like to be reviewed, as well as providing feedback.

Another group reported that on the first review they had probably not planned as effectively as

they should have. When they looked at how they did as a review team they realised they needed more training on skills for reviewers.

A third group created a core PRD group isolated from the members of the review/host teams. This created an opportunity to create energy and excitement in the staff participating in the review.

Outcomes from the Workshop

What makes the PRD process work?

- Commitment to flexibility
- Groups setting ground rules to avoid sensitivities

- Trust: once established it has the potential to drive improvement more effectively than inspection because it's more honest
- Effective planning
- Time: giving the PRD process enough time to implement it properly

Key Quote

“There is a benefit in local partnerships for development of PRD and national partnerships for validation of processes and methodologies necessary to embed PRD in continuous improvement.”

Workshop Summary

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| Name | Integrating the LSC FfE into a GFE college |
| Presenter | Chris Payne, Christine Doubtfire, Tony Cooper |

Key Points from the Presenter

Six Framework for Excellence (FfE) case studies have been produced on a number of different providers during the period of the FfE pilot. These will be available on the Excellence Gateway. The groups involved demonstrated a spectrum of approaches to the use of the FfE within self-assessment including: SAR mapped to FfE; mapped to CIF; and combining CIF and organisational objectives.

Castle College was one such case study, which had developed a sophisticated model of accountability and a rigorous internal review process. The college took part in the FfE pilot

and used the dimensions of this framework as a basis for their Self Assessment Report (SAR). There is a common self-assessment process for both curriculum and support areas. Teams were asked to self-assess against responsiveness, effectiveness and financial efficiency. This self-assessment was supported by high quality data. Internal mediation was conducted during three quarterly assessments of all the curriculum and support areas. External mediation was completed through peer review and other partnerships with external organisations. The new SAR process was reviewed after one year and amended.

Lessons Learned and Shared within the Group

Useful guidance was provided for Colleges on the integration of the FfE into self-assessment:

- The LSC FfE website publishes boundaries for judgements but providers will need to drill down to see how the scores are calculated
- the financial measures described in the FfE are new and providers must endeavour to understand exactly how each measure is designed
- there is very little in the framework for support areas to self assess, so Castle College used a service standards system for this
- it is important that providers record the full cost of work with employers to avoid being disadvantaged by a reduced employer engagement score
- learner surveys need to be managed well as this can make a difference to the scores

- Castle College was given a rigid profile of learners to involve in the survey. This proved difficult to manage with certain types of learners, such as LDD and ESOL
- on the enrolment form, ensure to select 'opt out' rather than 'opt in' on LSC student surveys as this allows LSC to survey their destinations
- the cost of participation for the college in the FfE pilot was estimated at £12,000 although this did include staff time at workshops and training

Castle College are a high achieving organisation with the ambition of being outstanding. For this reason they benchmarked themselves against the higher percentile rather than the average.

Outcomes from the Workshop

The conclusion from this workshop was that organisations should not underestimate the importance of FfE. The actions taken now will affect your rating in March 2009.

Key Quote

“Peer review identified areas for development including ownership within teams, rigour of the review process and benchmarking against high percentiles.”

Workshop Summary

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Name | Integrating PRD into Work Based Learning (WBL) |
| Presenter | Dr Chris Payne & Paul Eeles |

Key Points from the Presenter

PRD is a crucial component in the move towards a self-regulating sector.

The first year of the SfE programme has been highly successful; a large number of groups have

been brokered and a high degree of activity has been undertaken.

As the second year commences it is critical that the integration of WBL providers into PRD is ramped up.

Lessons Learned and Shared within the Group

Effectiveness of PRD

- WBL providers have had a positive experience in their PRD participation; it has enabled them to work with a diverse range of organisations
- engagement of senior management is essential if PRD is to be effective
- successful PRD can positively impact on the outcome of an Ofsted inspection and strengthen the robustness of a SAR

Practical Application of PRD

- successful PRD requires effective planning, constant monitoring and effective management
- PRD requires funding and investment to get it up and running

Capacity Building for PRD

- existing groups under-estimated the time required to actively participate in PRD
- resource constraints arose in many groups when planning, conducting and reflecting on reviews; this was particularly evident in small organisations
- geographical barriers created constraints whilst conducting PRD

Commercial Sensitivities of PRD

- a shared code of practice ensures commercially sensitive information is handled with care
- a culture of sharing emerges when protocols are agreed.

Outcomes from the Workshop

- PRD is a self-sustaining quality improvement mechanism
- PRD raises the profile of WBL organisations and their involvement aids their success at winning tenders
- PRD promotes a culture of readiness to change; this is exemplified by involvement in other initiatives such as CIF and FfE
- With the required level of commitment, organisations will see improvements to their performance, operations and bottom line

- PRD helps organisations succeed in their inspections
- The learner benefits from PRD as services are improved
- A collaborative approach helps organisations survive as they continuously improve and benchmark
- Single Voice can represent the sector more robustly by supporting crucial programmes such as PRD

Key Quote

“PRD can seem a scary prospect when you first see the commitment required, but it’s a worthwhile process when you win the hearts and minds of organisations and help them move forward in a collaborative way.”

Workshop Summary

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| Name | Action Research case studies for PRD |
| Presenter | Carolyn Watkinson |

Key Points from the Presenter

Action research case studies were carried out with 11 groups which were geographically dispersed and were representative of the range of experience and provider types in the sector. The groups had adopted diverse yet successful approaches to PRD and there is no suggestion that any one model would or should fit all.

The emerging patterns showed that

- strong leadership was very important
- focus on planning, including decisions around

what documents would be used, and how it will be recorded, is needed to make the review work

- some groups developed criteria for evaluation in advance, which was seen as a benefit
- it was easy to slip into either 'inspectorial' or 'cosy chat' mode.

The skills which were particularly useful were very practical e.g. how you handle the data, who makes notes, and good at listening, playing back, summarising and challenging..

Lessons Learned and Shared within the Group

Black Country Training Group, a group of training providers working in a competitive environment, shared their experiences on their Equality & Diversity review. When asked what they wanted to get out of the process, all declared that they wanted to be more trusting of one another.

- It was vitally important to get management commitment at the start in order to acknowledge the time required by those involved
- getting the Quality Managers on board moved the process forward rapidly; Principals need to be committed to and supportive of the process but generally do not have the time to be heavily involved
- momentum built through thorough planning near to the review was key; it was key to properly define the scope of the review
- learners and employers were engaged as part of the review

- two key lessons were: to involve employers more across the board; and to improve their documenting activity
- the review was also motivating for people who exhibited best practice and did not previously recognise this.

East Surrey group were a mixed group of training providers and colleges, geographically dispersed and did not previously know each other. They focused on the 'learner experience' and how it fed through to inform grading and judgement in the self assessment report. They found that review teams working in pairs, one concentrating on learners and one on staff, was extremely effective. So what did they get out of the review? The host provider claimed there were some great things that they as a provider had missed previously, from dealing with Train to Gain and learners as groups through to making their glossy materials more user friendly.

Outcomes from the Workshop

It was concluded that 'Feedback' implies that the reviewed person is passive. In PRD, we use more of a 'feed forward' approach – involving the reviewed person and discussing with them to agree what the future changes and actions should be.

The notion of tension between rigour and development may be a misconception. Rigour and transparency in review is in fact essential if worthwhile lessons are to be learned and for review to genuinely inform improvement priorities.

Key Quotes

“There’s as much to be learned by the reviewers as there is by the reviewed organisation.”

“[Reviewing] becomes a shared activity, not a ‘done to’ activity”

Workshop Summary

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Name | Delivering Feedback in a PRD Environment |
| Presenter | Stan Cowell |

Key Points from the Presenter

The purpose of the workshop was to identify things that worked well and things that did not work well during Year One, and to discover what groups would do differently given the chance.

As the programme matures and heads into Years Two and Three, it will be the groups themselves who shape the programme and build upon it.

Lessons Learned and Shared within the Group

- At times during reviews, providers were too nice to each other; it is important to ensure the process is unbiased and rigorous
- as time scales are tight for these reviews, a programme manager should be appointed at the start of the process
- there was a view that there is a fine line between a review (if comprehensive and detailed) and an inspection but the opportunity for professional dialogue and collaborative development provided through PRD makes the difference;
- the networks established through PRD are invaluable

- developing and agreeing a set of protocols at the start of the process is important. Specific skills are required for PRD. Some groups spent their funding on developing these skills. Particular groups chose to build their skill set before attempting to undertake a review, while others chose to try a review and learn 'on the job'.
- Staff from different levels in the organisation, as well as learners, have been used during reviews. However, it was felt important that a senior member of staff collates the information together in the final report.

Outcomes from the Workshop

The conclusions from the participants were that members of groups need to be candid with each other and results should be proven by tangible evidence. This is essential for realising the full benefits of PRD. There may also be a danger of groups becoming too comfortable with one another and it was agreed that changing/adding to group membership occasionally might avoid this.

Other comments were:

- Year One has been worthwhile; the further education system has bought into PRD on the whole
- funding is important but does not cover the associated costs of PRD

- despite this, groups would still do PRD for its own sake as they find it beneficial
- peer review worked well, but the development side has still to be realised
- guidance was not available to groups at the start of the programme; while this was a conscious decision to avoid being too prescriptive, it needs to be communicated early and clearly going forwards as a lack of guidance can be daunting
- 'Learner voice' should be embedded in peer reviews; it falls under FfE and feeds directly into the SAR.
- all provider types can learn from each other.

Key Quote

"We were reluctant prior to the first review, but after we had completed it every group member got something out of it and I was very pleased with the whole process."

Workshop Summary

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|------------------|---|
| Name | PRD in a self-regulating FE system |
| Presenter | Phil Cox |

Key Points from the Presenter

The workshop broached questions raised in Phil’s keynote input about the role of PRD within a self-regulating system. The discussion included how we might scale up PRD activity and build reviewing skills throughout the sector. Key points made were:

- the difference between PRD and inspection is the emphasis on dialogue (i.e. going beyond judgement)

- the level of performance of a provider is not a barrier to mutual learning
- there are benefits to cross-sectoral learning that cannot be ignored
- the Landex model for PRD uses professionally trained peer reviewers working alongside others who are not; it aims to build the sector’s capacity to undertake PRD
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Lessons Learned and Shared within the Group

- The South West Confederation model has merits through working together as a strategic alliance
- clusters of peer groups can benefit from economies of scale and therefore should be encouraged
- Groups could hold SLAs with each other
- very few providers know about self regulation; this needs to be changed
- fears over competition issues which might have undermined the establishment of some peer groups had been unfounded and the benefits far outweighed any perceived issues

- *“We could focus on the development aspect, build up trust, act as critical friends and stay away from the ‘judging’ aspect”.*
- we need to think of PRD as a parallel system: assessing performance on the one hand and developmental on the other
- in the first year, we were interested in getting processes in place; now we are asking questions like *“how do we add to the learning?”* and *“how do we get the process to deliver this?”*
- peer review is forward thinking
- we are a powerful sector that needs to do things for ourselves.

Outcomes from the Workshop

- We need to be smarter about the way we expand groups: setting up clusters and consortia in bigger groups which can maintain the flexibility and fluidity required. Landex is a good example of this.
- it would be helpful if the Ofsted stance on PRD could be clarified

- we need to avoid the scenario where PRD becomes another form of inspection
- the differences between inspection and PRD were clearly highlighted; PRD enables collaborative support to be provided by peers
- Judgements coming from peers appear to be more valued.

Key Quotes

“Working together can build capacity and a continuous improvement cycle.”
“Direct validation of self-assessment is very useful.”
“We need to find a convergent path between the National Improvement Strategy and External Regulation.”

Workshop Summary

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|------------------|---|
| Name | The Impact of PRD on the FE sector and providers |
| Presenter | Chris Lambert |

Key Points from the Presenter

As the SfE programme develops, more and more providers are beginning to see the benefits of PRD.

Here are some of those benefits discussed by providers participating in the workshop.

Lessons Learned and Shared within the Group

- PRD not only improves quality of Teaching and Learning but also organisational review and development
- PRD improves reporting mechanisms and supports readiness for FfE, including employer responsiveness and engagement
- the programme has permeated through all tiers of the organisation, where staff are arranging visits to each others departments and colleges and sharing practice
- PRD had a definite impact in supporting a provider move from Inadequate to Satisfactory rating
- training for those who are running the review is essential
- being able to benchmark against other organisations was a huge benefit
- tight deadlines of Year One were difficult but were also the key drivers for success as it made groups focus and get on with the job

Outcomes from the Workshop

Providers overwhelmingly agreed that PRD is a great initiative and has a positive impact upon organisations. The impact can be found in all areas of an organisation, including:

- Staff development - Contributing heavily to CPD
- Finances - any cost/benefit analysis will show PRD in a positive light and is well worth the investment
- Benchmarking - being able to benchmark against like organisations is invaluable for providers in an increasingly competitive environment.

Key Quotes

“PRD broke down barriers - all participants have a common goal to improve the experience of the learner.”

“People are becoming evangelical about PRD and its benefits.”

Workshop Summary

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|------------------|---|
| Name | Achieving a whole organisation approach to PRD |
| Presenter | Bob Powell, Chris Webb and Guest Speakers Terry McHale (Open Door) and Nick Moore (City Lit) |

Key Points from the Presenters

Seven ingredients are required for whole organisation support:

1. Evaluating the effectiveness of the process – robust testing is essential
2. evaluating the capacity to improve
3. supporting FfE within the process
4. evaluating PRD for QA and QI purposes and external evaluation of SfE
5. capturing and sharing PRD learning
6. gaining buy-in and support from the Senior Management Team (SMT); who you feed back to makes a difference and gaining strategic support is vital to the longevity of success
7. collaborative support and knowledge transfer: has there been any impact, good or bad, that you can learn from and share with others.

Lessons Learned and Shared within the Group

Terry McHale found that obtaining Board support at a strategic level was vital for embedding PRD into the organisation and achieving on-going success. This took a while to achieve, as it was difficult to move away from the operational detail, but the benefit made it a necessary change.

Attributes of the peer group’s success are the small number of core staff, diverse background, good communication and locality.

The members are decision-makers, which enables them to be dynamic and responsive.

They provided feedback to all staff groups to promote a feeling of inclusiveness

Diversity of the members is seen as a strength and allows for broad learning from each other;

- Nick Moore encouraged utilising the experience of ‘excellent’ members within the PRD teams
- experienced observers undertook their review and the benefits were valuable to the project
- the review process can be an uncomfortable one but is extremely valuable.

Outcomes from the Workshop

- We concluded that senior management support is vital for knowledge sharing and the on-going success of PRD
- decision-maker participation is crucial for a responsive outcome
- locality is a contributor to success that should not be underestimated; logistics and diaries are hard enough to manage
- training for reviewers may be required to gain the most benefit from the PRD process
- each member organisation has a contribution to make, not just the ‘excellent’ members
- people can learn from the experiences others have had, whether good or bad.

Key Quotes

“Our protocols were decided and agreed before the review. As a result, our two-day review operation was highly effective. The subject organisation felt assured with the protocols in place, and trust is a very important part of successful PRD.” Consortium Member

“I thought the review was so valuable, I wished it had been integrated throughout the organisation.”