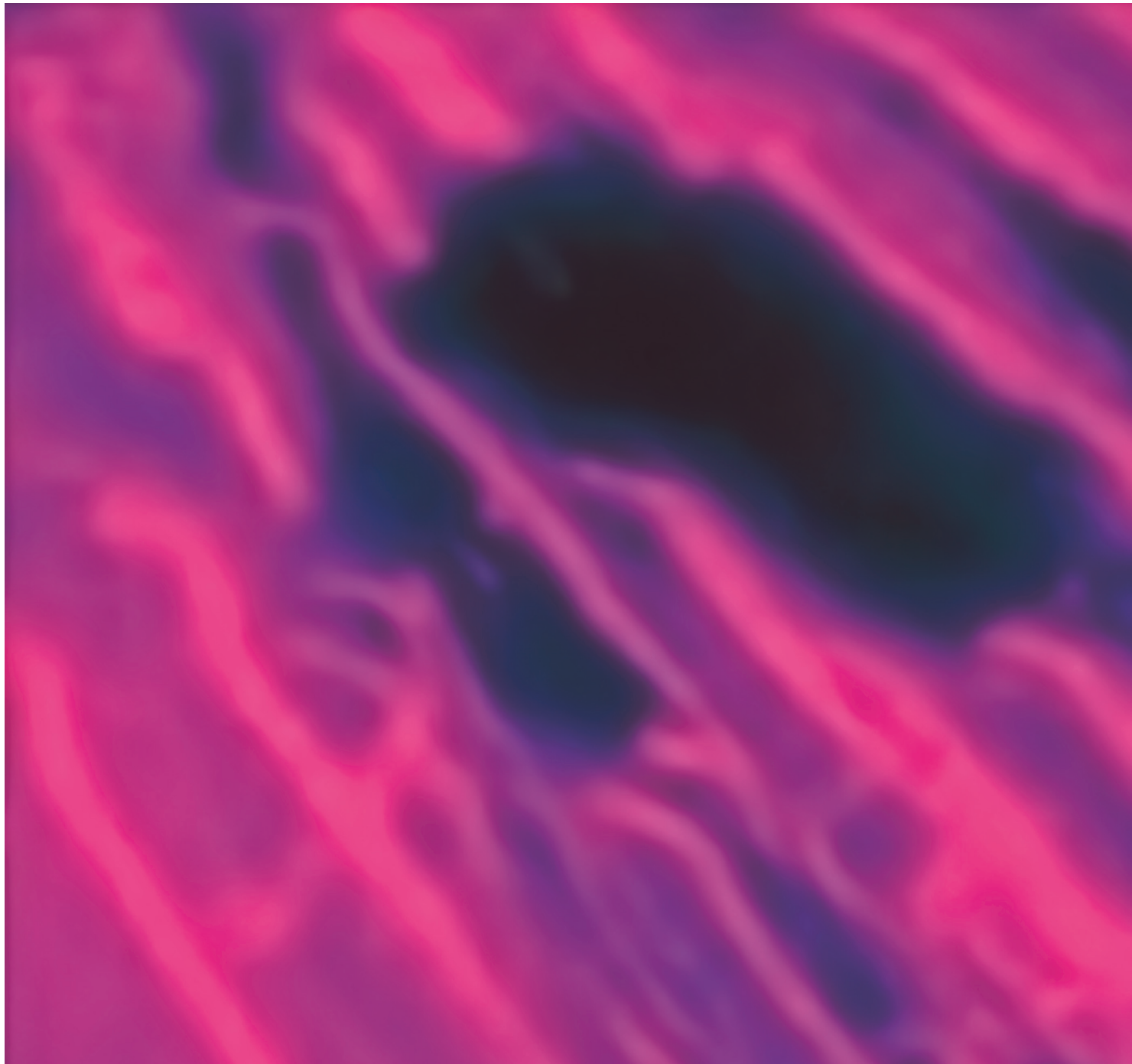# National PRD conference

Our future together

Support for Excellence – 19th May 2009

LSIS LEARNING AND SKILLS IMPROVEMENT SERVICE

Support for Excellence

This report provides an overview of the second National Support for Excellence – Peer Review and Development (PRD) Conference, held on Tuesday 19th May 2009 at the Congress Centre in London.

Contents

Welcome and introduction

The conference was chaired jointly by Christopher Lambert, Vice Principal of City College Norwich, and Chris Payne, CEO of Payne Associates. Together they set the theme and challenges for the conference, which brought together 155 delegates from across 169 PRD groups that are part of the Support for Excellence Programme.

The theme of our conference this year was 'Our Future Together' and therefore the objectives of the day were to:

• Celebrate PRD activity

• share experiences with each other

• forge new connections in order to build a PRD community

• discuss the future of PRD.

The discussions for the day centred on impact, rigour and sustainability; all of these were debated in the workshops. The key note speaker, Roger McClure, Chief Executive LSIS, set out his vision of LSIS and the challenges faced by the sector.

In addition to the workshops, this year we included a fun, interactive activity: Making Connections; based on feedback from last year's conference that PRD practitioners were keen to share their experiences and connect with others outside of their own groups. The Making Connections activities therefore, gave delegates the opportunity to discuss and debate topics that mattered most to them.

Given the interesting juncture the programme finds itself at, the conference also had a panel of sector representatives discussing the future of PRD and taking questions from the floor.

Roger McClure

Chief Executive, LSIS

Roger McClure, the key note speaker, began the conference on a very positive note, sharing how impressed he was with the scale of the SfE programme, represented by the large number of people at the conference and the involvement of a large number of organisations (808) in the SfE programme. He reinforced the point that PRD is exactly the kind of self-improvement tool that LSIS supports, in line with their 'sector-led sector-owned' National Improvement Strategy. Independent evaluation has shown the programme to be successful. The LSIS Council is currently reviewing performance across all the LSIS programmes; the outcome of these discussions will determine the shape of future LSIS activities.

The future for PRD, Roger concluded, would be about collaborative development, scaling up PRD activity across the sector, increasing penetration in less represented areas of the sector and analysing different approaches. PRD fits into a self-improving sector along with shared regulation and is a core behaviour of a high quality provider. LSIS is committed to supporting PRD groups and Roger was unambiguous in stating that providers 'must own PRD' through developing partnerships and building on their own success.

PRD showcase

To celebrate the progress made in PRD over the past year, three providers from across the sector shared their experiences and successes. The variety in their approaches to PRD highlighted the advantage in the flexibility of PRD.

Joni Cunningham
Redbridge Institute for
Adult Learning
Joni's organisation is part of a proactive group of Adult Community Learning providers, who have focused on enhancing the Learner Journey. The East London group has come far in embedding PRD within their organisations through peer reviews involving larger numbers of staff, staff networking events and the creation of a database of peer reviewers where the right expertise and skills can be chosen for each review. They have paired expert reviewers with reviewers who are less experienced in each area of focus so that one can learn the process from the other. The result for the group has been a valuable report broken down into the stages of the learner journey and Ofsted recognition of good *Capacity to Improve*.

Jo North
In Touch Care, ALP board member
With two care and three engineering organisations in her PRD group, Jo demonstrated that work based learning (WBL) companies can collaborate across sectors and succeed. The group has built a positive working relationship through looking at self-assessment processes and their quality improvement plans; this has led them to focus on common challenges for WBL providers. The group has thus far collaborated on a number of projects including bidding for the learning innovation grant, embedding the Framework for Excellence and Training Quality Standards, heightening staff awareness of Equality & Diversity through named coordinators (ENCOs) and securing the Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector.

Anita Gentry
East Norfolk Sixth Form College
The Eastern/ Norfolk Partnership are a mixed PRD group made up of Sixth Form Colleges, GFE Colleges and a Land Based College. Anita discussed the group's unique 'speed dating' approach to review, where reviewers come together to review all member organisations over a series of meetings. The group has focused on 'How to add value to student performance at subject level' through discussing LAT scores, interviewing staff who were deemed good at adding value and, most rewardingly, interviewing students, particularly those who do not find learning easy. Their findings have prompted them to make improvements around use of technology, providing purpose to homework, giving praise and motivating students; their next focus will be learner voice.

Workshop: Who needs rigour? A debate about the 'standards' applied to PRD activity

Facilitators: Tony Lau Walker, Kevin Francis & Alison Kay

Key points

The workshop (delivered twice during the day) debated the issues concerning rigour in PRD: what it is, why we need it and how it can be achieved. The key message from the session was that rigour can help groups gain more value from PRD and demonstrate this value to internal and external stakeholders.

Key points made by the facilitators

• Once trust has developed, groups can move to a more rigorous structure where openness, honesty and (constructive) criticism is highly valued.

• The level and nature of rigour needed in a PRD group depends on the internal/ external value recognition of that group.
A transparent and rigorous PRD process can demonstrate the value of PRD judgments to external stakeholders e.g. Governors, CEO, Ofsted.
A balance needs to be struck between complete external value (doing it for Ofsted not for yourselves) and complete internal value (and therefore without adequate challenge).

• PRD does not need to be conducted in the style of Ofsted. It is a different process set in a different context and therefore needs different approaches.

• PRD isn't just about sharing good practice; it is about using a process to share practice, test it, demonstrate its worth and improve on it. Rigour provides a challenge to PRD, it ensures that the group remains critical and keeps to an agreed process. In this way rigour is of great value to external stakeholders.

The focus groups on this topic held in February/ March 2009 began the debate by identifying some characteristics of rigour at each of the stages on the PRD cycle, which were amended and extended in these workshops. Themes focused around:

• Well-defined protocols which encourage criticism

• addressing scope

• refreshing group membership

• training staff on reviewing

• triangulating judgements and giving feedback

• choosing appropriate skill sets

• putting robust and transparent processes in place with action plans and measurement

• clear guidelines on scope and behaviour

• an agreed system for development.

Next steps

• The feedback from these workshops will be used to inform the development of a tool on Rigour in PRD which will be placed on the SfE website before the end of July.

• The slides from this session are now available on the SfE website at http://www.excellencegateway. org.uk/page.aspx?o=sfeevents# Nationalconference

Workshop: Are you making a difference? Demonstrating the impact of PRD

Facilitators: Patricia Bell, Sharon Young & Tom Milligan

Key points

This workshop (which incidentally was also the most popular) provided groups with a deeper understanding of the meaning of impact and how their specific PRD activities have impacted their PRD group, themselves personally, their organisation and the learner. Delegates openly shared practice of their PRD groups in impact assessment as well as the learning around some of the issues of impact measurement.

The facilitator began the workshop with some descriptors of the word impact and the LSIS definition of impact – "a change in behaviour as a result of engagement with PRD activity". This notion of a *change in behaviour* was linked to the outcomes identified in the earlier PRD showcase presentations, a key example of impact being *capacity to improve*. The discussion moved on to ways of measuring impact with the distinction between hard and soft measures.

Delegates shared their experiences and examples of impact under four areas. The most pertinent examples were:

The PRD group	The organisation
• Value for money through sharing of expertise, tools and joint projects	• Transformed management styles and practices
• More challenging targets set as a result of competition	• More rigorous SAR process with increase in judgment accuracy
• Equality and Diversity good practice cascaded to other groups	• Winning of joint contracts
• Improved honesty and trust resulting in more collaborative working	• Improved preparation and positioning for external scrutiny
• Improved PRD process and practice	• Improved performance
The individual	**The learner**
• Improvements in individual CPD	• Improved tutorials and retention levels
• Greater confidence to address issues	• Improved confidence levels for learners who have participated in a PRD Group
• Opportunity for personal reflection	• Solidarity of group to ensure young people employed from apprenticeships
• Personal reflection leading to changed behaviour	• Identification of gaps in learning and negotiated progression routes

Next steps

Delegates will be taking back many examples on the impact of PRD and the specific ways in which to measure these. In addition, the view was that baseline impact measures will be established upfront as part of preparing for the review. The workshop concluded by highlighting the relevance of timing in the assessment of impact and how over the longer term it will be easier to attribute change and improvement to specific PRD activities.

• The slides from this session are now available on the SfE website at http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=sfeevents#National conference

Workshop: How do you ensure the sustainability of your PRD group?

Facilitators: Christopher Lambert, David Syson & Julie Mercer

Key points

PRD groups have long been discussing sustainability as a challenge. Moving on from the focus groups held in November, Chris Lambert took attendees through the key components of sustainable PRD and encouraged them to consider actions as to how sustainability challenges can be addressed in their organisations.

Sustainability was defined as "the ability to continue any given activity into the future within the likely existing resources of an organisation, as part of its ongoing budgetary and management processes".

Key points made by the facilitator included the following:

• Sustainability is not just about continuation of funding; groups need to consider the 'cost' to their organisation of not being involved in PRD

• the flexibility of PRD is key to its sustainability

• groups need to consider the effectiveness of working with the same organisations in comparison to refreshing members

• groups need to consider if PRD is person- or process-dependent and which it needs to be

• demonstrating impact is a must in order to be sustainable.

Key issues relating to sustainability shared by the groups included the following:

• It is crucial to continue involving new people and organisations in PRD in order to maintain motivation and also allow for succession planning

• SMT buy-in is important but to ensure sustainability it is vital to involve staff at all levels e.g. tutors

• commitment of all group members to the long term vision of the PRD group is vital

• PRD needs to be embedded in the organisations' quality improvement processes

• there is not a 'one size fits all' with regards to a group's sustainability.

Suggestions for achieving sustainability discussed by the groups included:

• Developing a 'pool' of PRD groups that groups could draw on and invite to their review depending on the theme

• building PRD activities into the organisation's long term plan

• developing a wide group of potential reviewers which are chosen based on their expertise relating to the theme

• creating cross-sector (i.e. mixed) groups

• developing a 'PRD group benefits' document that can be shared internally and externally

• evaluating the group continuously and refreshing group membership as appropriate.

Next steps

An activity was carried out during the workshop that participants found very beneficial. The facilitator recommended that delegates carry out specific activities with their PRD group so that they can consider how as a group they will address the sustainability challenge. The activities can be accessed through the slides for the session, now available on the SfE website at http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=sfeevents#Nationalconference

Workshop: How is PRD meeting the needs of the smaller provider?

Facilitators: Chris Payne, Alison Pike & Paula Dunkley

Key points

Representatives of smaller providers from across the sector came together to discuss outputs of the Smaller Provider Learn and Share events held earlier in the year and to discuss next steps in taking peer review and peer development forwards. Key points raised were:

• The importance of supporting smaller providers who have an extensive reach and fewer resources

• the distinction between peer review and peer development and the collaborative nature of PRD

• the importance of embedding PRD activities into an organisation's quality improvement cycle

• the possibility of building a 'PRD community' of organisations and networks who are involved in PRD to enable new members and the sharing of practice between groups.

Delegates shared their approaches to PRD and looked at how these activities mapped to the quality improvement cycle. They discussed the benefits of collaborative working, distinguishing review and development activities and how these can change and evolve with group maturity as well as the value of PRD activity and the potential value to be gained from extending PRD activity to include other groups. Delegates also reviewed a 'Quick Reference Guide' which was developed with smaller providers in mind.

Important conclusions made by the group included the following:

• There is no one way to do PRD; every organisation is different and works to different time scales

• mapping PRD activities to the quality improvement cycle is an important, but difficult and time consuming task

• there are other groups of similar providers practicing PRD who are a valuable resource to be used going forward.

Next steps
The delegates will be sent questions regarding the 'Quick Reference Guide' so that they can review and provide feedback to the Support for Excellence team; they will also be asked to provide feedback and ideas for the PRD Community. Finally, an electronic copy of a toolkit and documents developed by smaller providers which were referred to in the workshop will also be shared with them.

• The slides from this session are now available on the SfE website at http://www.excellencegateway. org.uk/page.aspx?o=sfeevents #Nationalconference

Workshop: Evolving approaches to PRD: Does your PRD group need to evolve?

Facilitators: Stan Cowell & David Twiss

Key points

The workshops highlighted a range of different approaches that have been identified, from the PRD groups, during the first 18 months of the Support for Excellence Programme. These approaches are, PRD Standard, PRD Light, Flexible PRD, Validation Approach, Peer Review Individual Development and Peer Development. A paper explaining these approaches in detail will be published on the SfE website shortly. In the meantime, a quick reference table with a list of the approaches and their key characteristics is available with the slides for the workshop on the SfE website at http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/ page.aspx?o=sfeevents# Nationalconference. The workshop also explored the tasks that sit behind each step of the PRD cycle; as a result development needs for PRD groups were highlighted as next steps.

Key points from the workshop are as follows:

• It is important to consider the financial and resource implications when choosing a preferred approach to PRD, particularly in the current economic climate

• it was clarified that there was no preferred approach i.e. one approach is not better than another

• delegates noted that they could broadly decipher which PRD approach (see above) they were following. However, in most instances, it was a combination of a few approaches and not a pure application of one approach

• delegates agreed that it was important for Peer Reviewers to have the appropriate skill-set for conducting a review and giving feedback. It is preferable for feedback to be given on the day of the review. Preparation, and in some case training, needs to be used to ensure the correct protocol is being followed

• It was noted that, at present, impact measurement is ad-hoc and going forward needs to be built-in at an earlier stage in the PRD cycle. All delegates agreed that the measurement of impact will help in 'selling' the business case for PRD (to senior management) thereby ensuring that PRD is sustainable within their own organisations across the learning and skills sector

• The S7 consortium has developed a website that has a dedicated PRD section (www.s7colleges.com). The website has a speed dating section that enables providers to share good practice and identify suitable PRD group members (it is recommended that providers visit this website). The S7 consortium noted that they are in the process of developing a virtual learning environment; individual member resources will be available to all group members

Next steps

• It was recommended that a calendar of events is developed by all PRD groups to ensure a full programme of reviews and associated events

• PRD groups were encouraged to share any documents around the 'Development' and 'Monitoring and Evaluation' phases of the PRD cycle and the SfE programme team recognised the need for support materials in this area; this will help providers develop the PRD business case and ensure sustainability

• The slides from this session, as well as the quick reference table of PRD approaches are now available on the SfE website at http://www.excellencegateway. org.uk/page.aspx?o=sfeevents# Nationalconference

Making connections

Facilitator Annette Zera guided delegates through an interactive networking session called 'Knowledge Café', where participants revolved around four tables each focusing on a different PRD topic.

The topics were chosen to allow delegates to share their experiences and the format allowed delegates to spend time on each table making new acquaintances while noting their thoughts down on the paper tablecloths. At the end delegates were asked to sum up the most interesting answers and to vote on the answers which were most relevant and true for them.

Making connections Topic 1: What do you do that works?

Key points	Votes
Involving learners (as a data source) and as customers	12
A skilled adviser with no baggage and sector expertise	9
Locate and share the free advice and expertise (trusted) within PRD cluster you may be surprised how much there is!	6
Honesty – culture of open and shared values	3
Small clear themes and concentrate resource on this – clear outcome	2
Clarity in feedback given so specific action points can follow	2
Coordinator to work with the PRD group (money sourced from PRD)	1
Making sure everyone gets something out of it, so get as well as given	1
Focus on what is very relevant to key mission/purpose of organisation	1
Benchmarking – external level playing field	1
Overcoming barriers together (Outside the box! Commitment)	1
Staff involvement in (CPD) training to do the job well	
Effective use of funding	
Networking opportunities	
Cooperation and equal contributions	
All 31 Landbased Colleges involved for improvement/not experience	
Cascading – large and small providers	

Making Connections Topic 2: What will you do differently next year?

Key points	Votes
Planning for impact, measuring impact	8
More sharing of good practice involving and linking expertise of staff	3
Clear and effective target setting, target approaches to improvements	3
Whole organisation approach – including learners	2
Using PRD members as critical friends	1
Validating the QA process	
Succession plans	
Setting clear targets (outcomes – to help measure impact)	
Getting Senior Management involved as early as possible	
Being reflective	
Succession planning	
Shared training	

Making Connections Topic 3: How can we keep the challenges and relationships fresh into the longer term?

Key points	Votes
Keep existing groups but network with other PRD groups	17
Challenge = loss of funding may prevent smaller providers continuing to engage with the process	4
Focus on impact	4
Crossing the boundaries/involving experienced and less experienced PRD folk at different levels/crossing sectors	3
Avoid getting too cosy – need critical friends	3
Publicising the impact/continuous process/raise the profile	2
Challenge = time spent on PRD by college leads is not recognised generally across college	1
Bringing in different staff within organisations • Internally to groups • Ditch those with lack of commitment	1
Changing focus of review groups – more challenging outputs/outcomes	
Realise the full benefit of PRD working rather than cost	
Embedding as part of practice	
Challenge = reduced funding (possibly) at a time when impact being assessed/evaluated	
Keep renewing the passion and drive for Quality Improvement and building provider expertise	
Themes – 'what's in it for me?' Benefits: individual/organisational – positioning the group to realise the benefits for all	
Continual measurable success, eg Ofsted endorsing findings	

Making Connections Topic 4: What were the surprises from PRD?

Key points	Votes
Genuine support and trust – people passionate about making it work	5
Openness/honesty with rigour. Mirror – recognition of own strengths areas for improvement. Broader focus than Ofsted	2
Recognising variety of expertise in sector	1
Buy-in – your approach involving all. Your strategy – is it working?	
Some reluctance to share	
Not challenging enough, reassuring, trust	
Flexible PRD group interaction will provide benefits through sharing and openness with different providers	

Shaping the future discussion panel

The panel began with a brief statement on their view of the benefit of PRD – now and in the future. All were in agreement that PRD was beneficial and posed further challenges to the audience.

As the representative for ALP who was also involved in the programme from its inception, **Paul Eeles** admitted that he was delighted when proved wrong in his initial concern that PRD may not work for WBL providers; 217 WBL providers are currently in the programme. Paul confirmed that ALP is pleased that PRD has enabled so much improvement and has not been prescriptive. The key issue, according to Paul, is the link between regulation and improvement.

Julie Mercer has been part of the SfE programme since the initial tender and was enthusiastic about PRD because it uses sector capacity and celebrates the differences across the sector.

As Single Voice board member, **Bob Powell** said he was happy to see 140 ACL providers currently active in PRD; he would now like to consider options on bringing the remaining 40 onboard. He also shared his appreciation for greater cross-fertilisation between sectors and different types of organisations. According to Bob, the focus of the programme this year has moved towards development and identifying impact. His future view for PRD is of it being a normal part of self-improvement activity and a core activity of a high performing organisation. He asked groups to think about sustainability, assume no funding next year and pressed the importance of demonstrating impact.

For **Linda Wilson**, her future challenge was to ensure that the momentum built around PRD continues. Linda confirmed that LSIS is currently considering what they can afford vis-a-vis budgets and therefore how they can use PRD to address other LSIS programme aims (e.g. addressing the economic downturn).

David Collins, speaking on behalf of the Association of Colleges, said that the AoC are fully supportive of whole process, believing it to be one of the most beneficial programmes around. The hope, according to him, is that PRD will become core to the sector. Having seen that the issues surrounding poor colleges come down to management and leadership, he was keen to see PRD tackle these issues as well.

The questions put to the panel were as follows:

Looking at the professionalisation of the sector, how is LSIS going to bring LLUK to the table?
LLUK have fully supported the development of a peer reviewer qualification* and are in close conversation with LSIS on the National Improvement Partnership board. Bob Powell added that LSIS and LLUK are starting to ensure closer, better and more aligned integration at the top national strategy level even if this has not yet filtered down to delivery.

How can we get non-participating organisations into the programme?
David Collins suggested that using basic levers of flexing the amount of auditing, funding and inspection will always work to engage non-participants. Linda Wilson, in contrast, hoped that this might be done by extolling the virtues, proving the benefits and impacts and through PRD group members bringing in new providers. Bob Powell added that by acting as exemplars, others will get involved. Julie Mercer considered other angles of promoting the value of PRD to others, by using it as a method or channel to roll out other programmes or government initiatives. Paul Eeles concluded that although a valuable tool, PRD may not necessarily be practical for all. If it is made compulsory, it will lose some of the magic that makes it so good. The lack of drop out is a crucial demonstration of how well PRD works.

*N.B. Peer Reviewer Qualification
As noted during the conference, a qualification at both Level 5 and Level 7 for those involved in delivering Peer Review is now available through the QCF National Database for Accredited Qualifications. The Award and the Certificate may be of interest to any organisation or groups who wish to provide a formal qualification for those members of their teams involved in Peer Review and may further contribute to the rigour, impact and sustainability of Peer Review and Development. The links for this qualification are:

Level 5:
http://www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk/qualification/50057054.seo.aspx

Level 7:
http://www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk/qualification/50057066.seo.aspx

City College Norwich will be the Awarding Organisation for this award and will act as the External Verifying Body. If you are interested in developing this programme and offering it as a qualification, please contact Stephanie Mather at City College Norwich for further information:
stephanie.mather@ccn.ac.uk

Concluding remarks and Online Resources

The conference was closed by the co-chairs, Chris Lambert and Chris Payne, with thanks to the speakers, organisers, attendees and PRD groups and summing up the day.

The day ended with an update on and a request for feedback on the current draft of the new LSIS user guide to self-assessment and improvement planning, which is currently being developed.
The consultation draft of the guide is available at http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=self-assessment-guide.

The East Surrey College film students will be producing a short video of the day. Look out for this on the Excellence Gateway at EGTV.

Soundbites

"Good enjoyable conference – good pace, interesting discussions."

"Interactive and interesting. Case studies interesting, full of ideas and not too long."

"Encouraging to meet so many passionate people. We want to engage with other PRD groups and have a joint PRD group project."

"PRD has proved to be invaluable in improving quality. We need to continue funding to sustain this – plus to send the message to organisations that LSIS values and places importance on the PRD process."

Making Connections
"[We] Made just the connection that we needed to."

"A well organised activity that clearly stimulated discussion and concluded main ideas."

Workshops
"Really gave insight into topic and lots of ideas to take back to the group."

"A very useful session highlighting the importance of maintaining balance in PRD activities."

"Very useful for reflection on our own peer review group and process."

Links to Online Resources

Link to the slides and materials from the day on the SfE Website:
http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=sfeevents#Nationalconference

User guide to self-assessment and improvement planning – Presented by Michael Gray:
http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=self-assessment-guide

The PRD Resource Centre for shared documents to support your PRD group:
http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=resourcecentre

Ofsted Good Practice Database page on PRD:
http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=167928

LSIS National Improvement Strategy:
http://www.lsis.org.uk/consultation/NISPrinciples/DiscussionFeedbackNewNIS.aspx

http://www.lsis.org.uk/Libraries/Documents/LSIS023NISconsultation.sflb

Excellence Gateway TV (EGTV) where the East Surrey College film students conference video will be available in the future:
http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=egtv

User guide for self-assessment and improvement planning

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