

Using Alps at Reepham College

By John Randall, Vice Principal, Reepham High School & College

Context

Reepham College opened in September 2009 in a brand new £6 million building, secured through a capital funding grant. The change in designation had been given a 'presumption of success' after many years of outstanding results as a successful and popular 11-16 high school. Following approval, many decisions needed to be made, a key one being how we measured performance. Initially, we trialled three different packages, before unanimously deciding that we would use Alps exclusively from the second year onwards. The reasons were straightforward:

- It was sufficiently personalised and would set aspirational targets for students.
- It wasn't unnecessarily complicated (no mention of residuals) and was straightforward for teachers to understand, yet powerful and sophisticated enough to set differentiated targets for different subjects.
- Importantly, performance and target setting data were readily available at the start of term.
- Comparisons were drawn from a large cohort nationally on a like for like basis.
- Staff enjoyed the Alps training session, and felt involved in the decision and confident using the system.

We now have close to 200 students in the sixth form, with the majority progressing from our own Year 11, but about 40% arrive from other schools. Over 95% of our students are bussed in from a catchment area spanning over 400 square kilometres, which in itself can present significant challenges. The entry requirement for the sixth form has always been a minimum of 5 GCSE subject passes at grades A* to C. However, this was raised to 7 last year, because empirical research indicated that the lower threshold was leading to some students making less informed choices. We have continually refined our use of Alps and it is now firmly embedded in all processes: departmental review meetings; student and subject target setting and performance management appraisals.

Continuous Improvement

Annual conversations with subject leaders to discuss the results and set targets centre on the Alps data and specifically look at how strengths will remain strengths and what plans are in place to improve areas identified as requiring development. Subject leaders arrive at the meeting having closely examined the Alps data alongside exam board detailed analyses, and will have evaluated results in comparison with other organisations and on a question by question basis. The latter evaluation will enable them to interpret whether students are scoring less well on particular questions or topics, and by cross-reference to the Examiner's Report, will help to identify misconceptions. Subject leaders then explain any adaptations they propose to the teaching and learning, how any issues will be addressed and the improvement expected in terms of the Alps grade.

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Advanced Level Performance Systems



The Student Centred Approach

Target Setting

In terms of target setting, one of the key factors in driving improvement is the level of expectations. It needs to be aspirational, while at the same time being realistic and achievable. For this reason, and to maintain a sense of parity, all subject target grades at AS level are set at Alps grade 3. A2 targets are, in some subjects, still dependent on AS results, so are agreed on an individual basis. These targets are then converted to the Alps score required to reach that grade and discussions focus on how that is going to be achieved on a student by student basis.

For example, we agreed a target of Alps grade 3 for A2 Economics. This required a score of 1.05 which, for the 9 students in that group, translated to an equivalent of six students achieving their target grade and three exceeding their target grade by one. With reference to their AS results, subject leaders identify how they think this can be achieved on an individual student level: which students are most at risk; who requires intervention; who needs additional work or revision sessions and which students require closer monitoring.

Monitoring

Students have regular brief one to one sessions with each of their subject teachers to discuss their target grades. We agree on the minimum grade, as derived from their average GCSE point score, but give each subject the flexibility to raise the grade if both teacher and student believe it to be achievable.

We use the Alps 'What if' spreadsheet to monitor student and subject performance on a regular basis. By inputting grades from interim or full reports, or from mock examinations, we are able to assess progress regularly against target grades and introduce remedial measures if required. This information gives departments a reliable snapshot of where each student is, and where they as a department are, in terms of achievement, throughout the year.

The ability that Alps gives you to scrutinise very closely sub-sections of performance, analyse what needs to be done to effect improvement and measure the impact of your actions, is invaluable. In terms of achievement, our figures for some groups of more able students between 2011/12 and 2013/14 were highlighted by Alps as being well below average. We examined the data, and realised that there was a group of students that had not necessarily stood out as requiring intervention, because they had always been successful, always behaved well, and were hard-working and generally well-motivated. Consequently, if an early indicator was showing slightly below average performance, our 'professional judgement' overruled this, as these students had always been successful in the long term. However, cold hard facts now showed that while their attainment was still impressive, the progress made was far lower than we should have been expecting. We identified the group, ensured that they were monitored far more closely, provided intervention as soon as work fell below target and the results have been extremely pleasing.

Impact

The Alps report provides invaluable external verification of our post-16 performance. It ensures that all staff have the opportunity to reflect on their practice, measure performance against a national dataset and focus on the key drivers to raise achievement.

The tables opposite demonstrate that student performance has increased significantly over time; not the sudden and volatile fluctuations that are often unsustainable, but a steady, gradual increase brought about by carefully considered long-term improvements.

Our pass rates this year included all-time highs of 36% of grades at either A* or A, with an impressive 66% of grades being at grade B or higher – all from a completely comprehensive intake without prohibitive entry criteria.

UCAS points per student can to some extent be manipulated by simply entering students for additional, arguably less valuable, qualifications. This is not our philosophy and our UCAS points per subject are equally pleasing.



Table 7a - UCAS points per student

GCSE score	QCA score	UCAS pts target	2011/12 [†]			2012/13 [†]			2013/14 [*]			2014/15 [*]		
			Student numbers	UCAS pts scored	Alps grade	Student numbers	UCAS pts scored	Alps grade	Student numbers	UCAS pts scored	Alps grade	Student numbers	UCAS pts scored	Alps grade
7.5 - 8.0	55.0 - 58.0	421.25	3	433.33	4	6	430.00	4	6	356.67	7	6	473.33	2
7.0 -< 7.5	52.0 -< 55.0	350.77	6	316.67	7	9	277.78	8	11	345.45	4	18	354.44	3
6.7 -< 7.0	50.2 -< 52.0	320.00	4	365.00	2	11	316.36	5	12	308.33	4	15	322.67	3
6.4 -< 6.7	48.4 -< 50.2	293.85	8	290.00	5	18	333.33	2	7	291.43	4	9	317.78	2
6.1 -< 6.4	46.6 -< 48.4	274.76	17	267.06	4	7	268.57	4	17	285.88	3	14	271.43	4
5.8 -< 6.1	44.8 -< 46.6	255.56	11	281.82	2	8	252.50	4	15	237.33	5	10	250.00	4
5.5 -< 5.8	43.0 -< 44.8	240.00	7	222.86	4	7	245.71	3	15	226.67	5	9	246.67	3
5.2 -< 5.5	41.2 -< 43.0	222.50	10	238.00	2	7	245.71	2	4	240.00	3	4	225.00	3
4.7 -< 5.2	38.2 -< 41.2	205.00	10	192.00	3	8	190.00	3	2	180.00	5	10	224.00	3
4.0 -< 4.7	34.0 -< 38.2	186.67	2	150.00	5	1	140.00	5	-	-	-	-	-	-
0.0 -< 4.0	10.0 -< 34.0	180.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 7b - UCAS points per subject

GCSE score	QCA score	UCAS pts target	2011/12 [†]			2012/13 [†]			2013/14 [*]			2014/15 [*]		
			Student numbers	UCAS pts scored	Alps grade	Student numbers	UCAS pts scored	Alps grade	Student numbers	UCAS pts scored	Alps grade	Student numbers	UCAS pts scored	Alps grade
7.5 - 8.0	55.0 - 58.0	125.17	3	130.00	2	6	129.00	2	6	118.89	6	6	129.09	2
7.0 -< 7.5	52.0 -< 55.0	112.47	6	100.00	8	9	96.15	8	11	111.76	4	18	116.00	2
6.7 -< 7.0	50.2 -< 52.0	104.58	4	112.31	2	11	105.45	4	12	105.71	3	15	107.56	3
6.4 -< 6.7	48.4 -< 50.2	97.73	8	96.67	5	18	109.09	2	7	97.14	4	9	102.14	2
6.1 -< 6.4	46.6 -< 48.4	92.50	17	90.80	4	7	89.52	5	17	97.20	3	14	90.48	4
5.8 -< 6.1	44.8 -< 46.6	86.79	11	96.88	2	8	84.17	4	15	86.83	3	10	86.21	4
5.5 -< 5.8	43.0 -< 44.8	82.61	7	78.00	5	7	86.00	3	15	79.07	5	9	85.38	3
5.2 -< 5.5	41.2 -< 43.0	78.33	10	79.33	3	7	81.90	3	4	80.00	3	4	75.00	4
4.7 -< 5.2	38.2 -< 41.2	74.17	10	76.80	2	8	69.09	4	2	72.00	4	10	82.96	2
4.0 -< 4.7	34.0 -< 38.2	70.00	2	60.00	5	1	70.00	3	-	-	-	-	-	-
0.0 -< 4.0	10.0 -< 34.0	68.89	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Philosophy

The Alps system ties in with our philosophy that life in the sixth form should be productive and for it to be successful, requires significant amounts of hard work. Key principles that we share are that aspiration, inspiration and motivation are pivotal when working with young people, if they are to be successful. Powerful leadership, and high quality teaching and learning, coupled with high quality target-setting, monitoring, guidance and support, are the three elements that define good schools and colleges. As preparation for university or the world of work, we ask all students to start on 4 AS level subjects, with the option to reduce to three at the end of Year 12. The increased flexibility this gives students, especially those who are not certain where their strengths lie, outweigh other considerations at present. Whether this will remain the case, as the prospect of a fully linear examination system draws steadily nearer, will have to be seen. In order to develop the self-direction required at this level (and beyond), non-contact periods are timetabled in the Learning Resource Centre for all Year 12 students with staff supervision to support those in need of assistance. Additional freedoms and responsibilities, such as home study, are earned through meeting those challenging target grades. It is this continual process of achievement linked to reward that has been a key factor in our students' success.

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External Verification

The increased focus on sixth form performance and the reforms to the 16-19 accountability systems give greater importance to the need for accurate, external data to support internal assessments. At our last inspection in May 2013, inspectors gave the Alps report equal weighting to both the sixth form PANDA and the L3VA data. In fact, the availability of Alps' more detailed information on individual subject areas and student progress, I feel, tipped the balance for our 'Outstanding' judgement. The latest Alps report gives us the confidence to make judgements, knowing that they stem from robust and rigorous data that will support our findings – a powerful tool in any school's armoury.

		2011/12 [†]	2012/13 [†]	2013/14 [*]	2014/15 [*]
1	T score - single year score	2.67	2.67	3.00	2.00
	T score - single year grade	2	2	3	2
2	RED teaching & learning %	60.4%	45.7%	43.8%	61.5%
	RED teaching & learning grade	2	3	3	2
3	BLUE teaching & learning %	5.7%	2.4%	3.8%	1.4%
	BLUE teaching & learning grade	3	2	3	2
4	Provider A level value added Quality & Breadth score	0.99	0.96	0.90	1.08
	Provider A level value added Quality & Breadth grade	3	3	3	2
5	T score - Three year score	2.56			
	T score - Three year grade	2			
6	A levels on target %	-	-	76.2%	79.0%
	A levels on target grade	-	-	3	2

Contact us

The Alps office is open Monday to Friday 9am - 5.00pm. Please feel free to contact us to discuss any aspect of Alps.

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