DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 443 958 CE 080 500

AUTHOR	Dixon, Stella; Moorse, Rosemary
TITLE	Self-Assessment for Improvement [and] Preparing for Accreditation: Colleges and Self-Assessment.
INSTITUTION	Further Education Development Agency, London (England).
ISBN	ISBN-1-85338-560-3; ISBN-1-85338-569-7
PUB DATE	2000-00-00
NOTE	94p.; With Elizabeth Walker.
AVAILABLE FROM	Further Education Development Agency, 3 Citadel Place, Tinworth Street, London SE11 5EH, United Kingdom, Tel: 020 7840 5302/4, Fax: 020 7840 5401, E-mail: publications@feda.ac.uk Web site: http://www.feda.ac.uk (15 pounds). For full text of "Preparing for Accreditation: Colleges and Self-Assessment": http://www.feda.ac.uk/PDF/ISBN1853385697.PDF.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; Accreditation (Institutions); College Programs; Educational Attainment; *Educational Improvement; *Educational Quality; *Evaluation Methods; Foreign Countries; Guidelines; Postsecondary Education; Program Administration; *Program Evaluation; Quality Control; School Holding Power; *Self Evaluation (Groups); Teacher Improvement; *Technical Institutes; Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS	*United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

This self-assessment manual and its companion publication on preparing for accreditation explains how further education (FE) colleges throughout the United Kingdom can use self-assessment to achieve and document measurable improvements in their operation and services to increase their chances for accreditation. The following are among the topics discussed in the manual's six sections: (1) the importance of self-assessment in FE colleges; (2) the role of observation in assessing and improving teaching and learning;(3) dual-purpose observations for self-assessment and appraisal; (4) the process of quality improvement with special reference to retention and achievement; (5) the self-assessment and improvement of quality assurance; and (6) the self-assessment and improvement of governance. The companion publication includes (among other items) sections on undertaking the self-assessment, action planning, and compiling the evidence. Included also are criteria for accreditation, the self-assessment instrument and an evidence matrix. The bibliography contains 17 references. (MN)

Self-Assessment for Improvement

By Stella Dixon with Elizabeth Walker

And

Preparing for Accreditation: Colleges and Self-Assessment

By Rosemary Moorse

Further Education Development Agency

feda quality learning skills

Self-assessment for improvement

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Published by FEDA

Feedback and orders should be sent to FEDA publications
3 Citadel Place, Tinworth Street, London SE11 5EF
Tel: 020 7840 5302/4 Fax: 020 7840 5401
FEDA on the Internet – www.feda.ac.uk

Registered with the Charity Commissioners

Editor: Jennifer Rhys
Designers: Dave Shaw and Pat Kahn
Printer: Stephen Austin and Sons Ltd, Hertford

ISBN 1 85338 560 3

Note
A companion publication *Preparing for accreditation: colleges and self-assessment* is available as a free download from FEDA's website at www.feda.ac.uk (requires Adobe Acrobat Reader, available free from www.adobe.com).

Contents

Acknowledgements

FEDA would like to thank all the colleges that contributed to the research described in this publication. Thanks, too, to the people who provided helpful feedback on earlier drafts – especially Gavin Thomas, from Fforwm, who checked and added to the references to arrangements in Wales.

Thanks for help with specific chapters is given below.

Chapter 2 FEDA is grateful to members of its Quality Forums and the Quality Network for Wales, and to the staff in the many colleges with whom we have worked on a consultancy basis, for contributing to the development of these ideas.

Chapter 3 FEDA is grateful to the senior managers for quality and human resources of:

- Burnley College
- Capel Manor College
- Dudley College
- Farnham College
- Yale College

for their contributions to this project and to the staff for providing valuable feedback. The project leaders and authors of this chapter were Dr Elizabeth Walker and Dr Stella Dixon.

Chapter 4 FEDA is grateful to the senior managers, team leaders and teachers of:

- Barnfield College
- Hugh Baird College
- Wigston College

for their contributions to the project. The project leader was Dr Stella Dixon.

Chapter 5 FEDA is grateful to the principals and other senior managers of:

- Canterbury College
- Havering College of Further and Higher Education
- Knowsley Community College
- Northern College for Residential Adult Education
- Priestley College

for their contributions to this project. The project leader was Dr Stella Dixon.

Chapter 6 FEDA is grateful to the clerks, chairs of corporation and principals of:

- Canterbury College
- Havering College of Further and Higher Education
- Knowsley Community College
- Northern College for Residential Adult Education
- Priestley College

for their contributions to this project. The project leader was Dr Stella Dixon.

Foreword

Self-assessment is a powerful tool. Undertaken rigorously on the basis of evidence, it can help colleges identify the strengths they can celebrate and the weaknesses they need to address. Followed by action-planning, systematically monitored implementation and the setting of challenging but achievable targets, self-assessment can help achieve real, measurable improvements. Its other virtues include its potential to involve all staff in a genuine culture of continuous improvement; the evidence it gives of a growing maturity in the sector; the ability to take responsibility for the quality of its own provision, and the corresponding opportunity to be subject to a 'lighter touch' in external assessments.

The recent White Paper, *Learning to succeed* (DfEE, 1999), proposes fundamental changes to the ways in which quality will be assessed in post-16 education and training, without clarifying the part, if any, formal self-assessment and college accreditation will play. The Welsh agenda is being driven by the Education and Training Plan (ETAP). As in England, there is no clarification yet of the future of self-assessment and college accreditation, but what is certain is the government's determination to continue to drive up standards. College responses to the White Paper demonstrate commitment to the continuance of self-assessment. The research projects in this publication demonstrate that this commitment must be real: teachers and managers alike need to treat self-assessment seriously so that it can fulfil its potential to lead to tangible improvements for learners.

This book is a companion to *Self-assessment in practice* (FEDA, 1998). It is based on research and development activity undertaken by FEDA's quality programme team in 1998 and 1999. Although the chapters are discrete and can be read separately, the focus throughout is on ensuring that self-assessment does indeed lead to measurable improvement in standards. Readers who want more basic guidance on how to go about self-assessment should refer to *Self-assessment in practice* (ibid.), which includes a manual of staff development materials, a disk and a video of lessons and the inspector's commentary, and *Effective self-assessment* (FEFC good practice guide, 1999).

With the launch of the Learning and Skills Council, new arrangements for accreditation are currently under discussion. Accreditation is therefore not included in this manual but comprehensively covered in a companion publication *Preparing for accreditation: colleges and self-assessment* available as a free download from FEDA's website www.feda.ac.uk

Dr Stella Dixon

Introduction

1

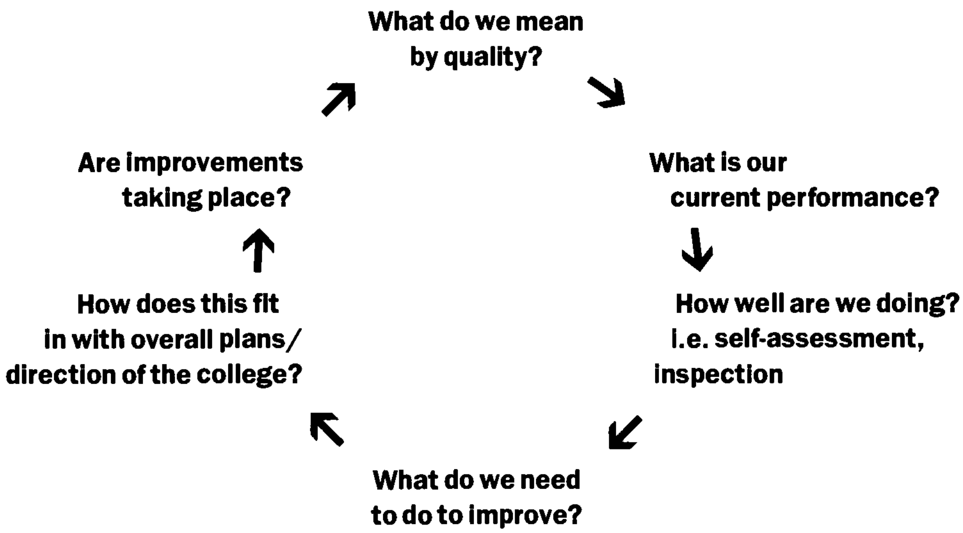
Self-assessment was first introduced into the further education (FE) sector in England as a requirement in September 1994 (see FEFC circular 93/28: *Assessing achievement*). In Wales, self-assessment became a formal requirement at the beginning of the second cycle of assessments in May 1997, although since 1995 many institutions have voluntarily introduced the process of self-assessment (see FEFCW bulletin B97/09).

Many early self-assessment reports:

- were written solely in preparation for inspection
- tended to be descriptive and/or promotional
- were not based on evidence
- did not involve many staff
- were not integrated with other quality assurance (QA) processes in the college
- were not integrated with planning cycles
- did not include an action plan.

Since then much progress has been made and the revised FEFC inspection framework is based on validating the college's self-assessment (*Validating self-assessment* FEFC circular 97/12). Self-assessment is likely to play an important part in the Quality Improvement Strategy of the Learning and Skills Council from April 2001. Sector colleges are becoming far more sophisticated and skilled in making judgements about their performance on the basis of evidence and using those judgements to identify and plan for action for further improvement. At the same time the quality and range of information available to colleges relating to their own performance and that of others have also improved, so that judgements are easier to make. In many colleges a self-critical, improving culture has been created, in which most staff value the role of regular, rigorous annual self-assessment in helping them improve further. Self-assessment has come of age and in many colleges it is now an integral part of the college annual review and planning cycles. This is expressed diagrammatically as a quality improvement cycle in Figure 1, overleaf.

Figure 1 | The quality improvement cycle



Taking these headings in the quality improvement cycle in turn and exploring them in more detail:

What do we mean by quality?

For most colleges the definition of quality comes largely from the inspection frameworks. For example, the FEFC inspection framework and the ESTYN (Welsh HMI) framework in Wales contain quality statements about teaching and learning, as well as other aspects of colleges. In addition, however, colleges may wish to add some of their own definitions, depending perhaps on their missions. For example, although a selective, academic sixth-form college may share many ideas about quality with a general FE college in a community with low post-16 participation rates and a mission to widen participation, it may also have some differences.

What is our current performance?

Once a definition of quality has been agreed, the next step is to collect information or data to show how well the college is currently performing. Common performance data in colleges include: attendance, retention and achievement data, and student and other customer satisfaction data.

How well are we doing?

Once quality has been defined and data collected about current performance, it is possible to make a judgement about the quality of performance, especially if benchmarking data are also available so that a college can compare its performance with that of other colleges. These judgements can either be made internally as part of an annual self-assessment process or externally in an inspection. In colleges these judgements are usually expressed as key strengths and weaknesses.

What do we need to do to improve?

Identifying key strengths and weaknesses makes it relatively easy to identify areas that need improvement and benchmarking data can help indicate the extent of the improvement needed, which can in turn inform the target set.

How does this fit with overall plans/direction of the college?

It is important that areas for improvement are integrated into annual operational plans and that they are consistent with and help inform the overall strategic direction of the college. It is then also important to draw up detailed action plans specifying action to be taken, who is responsible, the target for improvement, the timescale and the arrangements for monitoring progress and evaluating success.

Are improvements taking place?

Once plans are in place, their implementation needs to be systematically monitored and decisions made about their effectiveness. Once targets are achieved, the college may wish to set its definition of quality slightly higher as it starts to go round the quality improvement cycle for the second time.

Despite the progress many colleges have made in integrating self-assessment, quality assurance and planning cycles, self-assessment has yet to deliver its full potential in helping to bring about real and measurable improvements, particularly in relation to students' achievements. This manual builds on *Self-assessment in practice* (FEDA, 1998); exploring some of the issues still facing the sector and suggesting ways to improve matters.

The role of observation in assessing and improving teaching and learning

2

Background

Since the publication of the new FEFC inspection framework, *Validating self-assessment* (FEFC circular 97/12) and the FEFCW *Quality assessment handbook* (second edition, August 1999), internal observation of teaching and learning has become commonplace in many colleges. Observation grades have become a major source of evidence on which to base the self-assessment of teaching and learning in a college. Many colleges are also beginning to extend observation to non-classroom-based learning. For example, learning that takes place in tutorials, in the workplace or in drop-in workshops. Inspection findings suggest, however, that many colleges' internal observations tend to be graded more generously than inspectors'. There is also evidence that little systematic use is made of observations to help lead to improvement in teaching and learning.

Key issues

2·1 | How can colleges ensure that their observers assess and grade consistently with inspectors?

2·2 | How can observations be used more systematically to help improve the quality of teaching and learning?

2·3 | How can non-classroom-based learning be assessed and improved?

Useful initial reading

Dixon S with Moorse R (FEDA, 1998) *Self-assessment in practice*: Section 6 provides guidance on how to set up observation systems including an exploration of criteria, protocols and documentation. The pack also includes a video for training internal observers in consistent observation, assessment and feedback.

Quality and standards in FE in England 1998–99: Chief Inspector's annual report (FEFC, 1999) provides evidence of the differences in grade profile between college observers and inspectors.

Effective self-assessment (FEFC good practice guide, 1999) provides an analysis of good practice from the self-assessment reports of colleges inspected in 1997/98.

KEY ISSUE 2·1

How can colleges ensure that their observers assess and grade consistently with inspectors?

Where internal observers' grades are significantly more generous than inspectors', colleges can be lulled into a false sense of security about the quality of their teaching and learning. They may, for example, believe teaching and learning have improved since the previous inspection and use the comparisons of the two grade profiles as evidence, without considering whether they are comparing like with like.

It is not surprising that colleagues tend to be more generous than inspectors in the grades they give. Unlike inspectors, they cannot walk away after they have provided feedback; they have to continue to work in the college. The use of associate assessors in Wales seems to have ensured that this issue is less problematic there.

A few colleges avoid this dilemma by not grading at all, focusing instead solely on the identification of key strengths and weaknesses. Many colleges, however, find that grading does enable them to draw up a grade profile for a curriculum area that provides them with valuable quantitative evidence to inform their self-assessments.

Colleges can help internal observers to grade more consistently by:

- arriving at a shared agreement and understanding between observers and observees, of the criteria and grade descriptors to be used, and relating these to the quality statements in FEFC circular 97/12
- being clear that what is being assessed is the effectiveness of the learning in a particular session, rather than the effectiveness of the teacher *per se*
- establishing and agreeing clear protocols about procedures
- training observers and observees in observation, assessment and the provision of feedback, using the staff development activity in the FEDA manual and video, *Self-assessment in practice*, to compare observers' judgements with those of inspectors
- undertaking periodic paired observations with other internal observers/external consultants/observers from another college to ensure that judgements are consistent
- comparing the internal grade profile for a curriculum area with the profile obtained at the last college inspection and the grade profile for the programme area in the Chief Inspector's annual report, and judging whether it seems about right, given all the other evidence about the performance of the curriculum area, including the retention and achievement rates. If, as a result, the internal grade profile appears over-generous, consider additional training for observers and/or paired observations.

KEY ISSUE 2·2

How can observations be used more systematically to help improve the quality of teaching and learning?

With the introduction of any new information about performance in an organisation, there is a tendency to use it initially to 'prove' and only later to 'improve' quality. Many colleges are at the 'prove' stage: observation grades are used to assess the quality of teaching and learning, but the detailed information hidden in the pro formas tends not to be used to identify areas for improvement. Other colleges are further forward and systematically use evidence from observations to lead to improvement at individual, team and college levels.

Colleges can maximise the potential for improvement by:

- ensuring that constructive individual feedback involves observees in considering how they might develop their practice further and what implications this may have for their continuing professional development (CPD) needs (this will have implications for the training of observers: giving such feedback requires sensitivity and skill)
- focusing less at course team level on overall grade profile and more on the key strengths and weaknesses identified during observations, and deciding within the team the key areas to focus on for improvement
- ensuring that curriculum area self-assessments make reference to these key strengths and weaknesses and that the action plan builds on the strengths and addresses the weaknesses systematically. (This also has the advantage that even if the internal grades appear to lack consistency or be over-generous, the observations can still legitimately be used for self-assessment and improvement)
- ensuring that there is a mechanism to use curriculum area self-assessments of teaching and learning to inform professional development plans
- considering at college level how observations can be used not only for self-assessment and professional development plans, but also as additional information to inform appraisal interviews (see Chapter 3).

KEY ISSUE 2·3

How can non-classroom-based learning be assessed and improved?

Many colleges wish to assess the effectiveness of the learning that goes on not just in traditional classes but also in workshops, tutorials and in the workplace. Distance learning and resource-based learning also need to be assessed. Guidance has tended so far to focus on the observation of classroom-based teaching and learning but wherever learning takes place its effectiveness needs to be assessed if it is to be improved. Sometimes this can be done by observation, but other possibilities include seeking student feedback through satisfaction surveys, telephone surveys, on-line evaluations or focus groups, as well, of course, as the analysis of retention and achievement rates. Whatever the method, it will be necessary to identify the criteria likely to lead to effective learning. Staff are often surprised to discover that these may be similar, whatever the setting. For example, the following may be common:

- making the planned learning outcomes explicit and shared with the learners
- linking what is to be learned with previous learning
- making a clear exposition, with appropriate methods and technology, designed and structured to ensure that the learning outcomes are achieved
- ensuring that individual needs are met (in a group situation this is likely to include differentiation of some sort)
- actively involving learners
- checking that learning is occurring/has occurred
- at the end of a session summarising the learning, linking it back to the learning outcomes shared at the beginning of the session and indicating how it will lead to further work.

Once the effectiveness of the learning has been assessed, the key messages need to be identified in exactly the same way as for classroom-based learning and that information used to make an overall self-assessment about the quality of teaching and learning and the areas that need further improvement.

Dual-purpose observations for self-assessment and appraisal

3

Background

Observation of teaching and learning for appraisal has often developed separately from observation for self-assessment. There are various reasons (see key issue 3·1, overleaf), but whatever the short-term rationale, completely separate arrangements are unlikely to prove economically sustainable in the longer term. Moreover, there is a growing recognition of the need to make more links between and/or to integrate systems. This reflects the increasing understanding that self-assessment, appraisal, staff development and future planning are all part of the same process of improving standards.

Key issues

3·1 | Why have separate systems for observing self-assessment and appraisal developed in colleges?

3·2 | What are the similarities and differences between observation for appraisal and self-assessment, and is a dual-purpose model possible?

3·3 | Does/would a dual-purpose model work in practice?

Detailed guidelines for the effective design and implementation of a dual-purpose model of observation follow.

Useful initial reading

Walker E (FEDA, 1997) *Appraisal in FE – Where are we now?*

Dixon S with Moorse R (FEDA, 1998) *Self-assessment in practice* Section 6

KEY ISSUE 3·1

Why have separate systems for observing self-assessment and appraisal developed in colleges?

Research suggests that observation systems for appraisal and self-assessment have developed separately for the following reasons:

- appraisal observations carry confidentiality agreements and there can be a reluctance to allow them to be used for self-assessment purposes as well
- fear that observations for self-assessment and/or appraisal may be used as evidence for capability, disciplinary, competence, or redundancy purposes
- appraisal observations have often been promoted within colleges as wholly developmental and not involving an overall assessment or grade
- appraisal observation was often introduced before observation for self-assessment but not always implemented systematically across the whole college
- appraisal and self-assessment are often managed by different people in colleges (typically the human resources manager and the quality manager respectively) who seldom work together; the observation systems have thus developed separately and reflect different ways of working
- partly as a consequence of this, appraisal and self-assessment observations may be undertaken by different people. Appraisal observations are typically undertaken by line managers, whereas self-assessment observations may also be undertaken by peers, an internal team of specially trained observers and/or external observers.

KEY ISSUE 3-2

What are the similarities and differences between observation for appraisal and self-assessment, and is a dual-purpose model possible?

Observing teaching and learning, whether for self-assessment or appraisal, is part of the general quality assurance process. It is designed to assess the effectiveness of performance so that it can be further improved.

In the context of appraisal, recorded observations provide evidence that can contribute to the appraisal dialogue and the identification of individuals' professional development needs. In the context of self-assessment, the key messages from recorded observations are summarised at team level and contribute to the identification of strengths and weaknesses and often a grade profile for the self-assessment of the curriculum area. This in turn informs the development of an action plan for the improvement of teaching and learning in the area. See the table below.

Table 1 | Observation for appraisal and observation for self-assessment

Appraisal	Self-assessment
Contributes to appraisal dialogue	Provides key messages at team level
Identifies individuals' professional needs	Identifies strengths, weaknesses and often a grade profile for self-assessment
	Informs action plan for improving teaching and learning

Thus recorded observations provide one source of evidence, among many, for both appraisal and self-assessment; and they are used by each to help assess performance and identify areas for further improvement. The focus, however, is different. In appraisal interviews it is on the *individual's* assessment and development; in relation to self-assessment the focus is on the assessment and improvement of teaching and learning at *team* level.

This difference has implications for how the observation records are used. In appraisal, documentation may be used by the appraiser or the appraisee to help identify development needs. It is therefore crucial that the individual is identified on the record and likely that there will be a detailed exploration of the issues raised. This dialogue tends to be more important than any overall grade awarded.

In self-assessment of a team or curriculum area, however, the detailed comments about individuals are less important than key strengths and weaknesses across the team. These and the grade profile are likely to be more important.

Appraisal and self-assessment policies and procedures in colleges have also frequently been developed separately and without reference to the other; appraisal as part of the HR system and self-assessment as part of the college's approach to quality assurance (see Table 2, overleaf). Any dual-purpose model will need to take into account these separate developments and be compatible with them (see Table 3, overleaf).

Table 2 | The use of observations in the contexts of appraisal and self-assessment

Human resources system	Quality system
Appraisal system	Quality policy of review and improvement
Appraisal policy	Self-assessment
Appraisal procedures	Self-assessment procedures
Documentation used in appraisal interviews: • appraisee preparation form • individual observation record • other documentary evidence of individual performance • record of appraisal interview and conclusions	Documentation used in curriculum area self-assessment: • retention and achievement data • summaries of key strengths and weaknesses from observations of team members • grade profile of observations • student feedback and other documentary evidence of performance • self-assessment summary form with action plan

Table 3, below, shows how a single system of observation could be used for both self-assessment and appraisal purposes. Basically, the observation record is copied and then used differently for each.

Table 3 | Towards a dual-purpose model of observation

Observation

↓

Verbal feedback

↓

Form copied or access to form provided

↓ ↓

Use of observation evidence in self-assessment	**Use of observation evidence in appraisal**
• Don't need individual names but do need grades and summaries • Key strengths and weaknesses aggregated to team level with grade profile • Summaries considered by team with other evidence • Identification of key strengths and weaknesses, with evidence for team self-assessment report and action plan • Original forms but not summaries could be destroyed after inspection report published	• Do need name, may not need grade • Observation form to individual within *x* days of observation for approval • Form to appraiser within *y* days of observation • Observation record used in appraisal interview within a specified shelf-life as basis for part of discussion and together with other evidence • Copy of original observation form could be destroyed after appraisal record agreed

KEY ISSUE 3·3

Does/would the model work in practice?

FEDA was convinced that a single system of observation could contribute evidence about performance to both appraisal and self-assessment, but the ideas needed to be tried in practice. Interested colleges were invited to bid to be involved in the trial and the interest shown was overwhelming. All the colleges chosen were committed to the development of a dual-purpose system of observation within the timeframe of the project and had both human resource and quality managers prepared to work together on its development. Some of the colleges had already introduced observation for one or other purpose; others had two separate systems currently in place, and yet others were introducing observation for the first time.

Human resources and quality managers were invited to a seminar – significantly it was for many of them the first time they had jointly undertaken a major college development. This in itself was of great interest and led to the identification of other areas for potential collaboration. A dual-purpose observation model was presented to them; the practical implications of adapting it for different colleges were explored; and they all undertook to introduce it into their colleges.

A further seminar was held after the planning and implementation phase, at which variations in the college approaches were explored, their effectiveness evaluated and further guidelines were developed. The general consensus was that, with care, a dual-purpose model could be developed successfully. The guidelines are presented below.

Guidelines for the effective design, implementation and evaluation of a dual-purpose model of observation

The guidelines are based on FEDA's years of experience of observation, appraisal and self-assessment, as well as on the experiences of the project colleges.

Table 4 | Issues that need to be addressed

Issue	Not yet addressed	Partially addressed	Procedures in place
1 | Clarifying the relationship between dual-purpose observation and observation for other purposes	☐	☐	☐
2 | Identifying who should be observed	☐	☐	☐
3 | Identifying who should observe	☐	☐	☐
4 | Providing some choice of observer	☐	☐	☐
5 | Establishing criteria for observation	☐	☐	☐
6 | Designing the observation pro forma	☐	☐	☐
7 | Selecting the sessions to be observed	☐	☐	☐
8 | Notice of observation	☐	☐	☐
9 | Grading	☐	☐	☐
10 | Giving feedback	☐	☐	☐
11 | Appeals against judgements	☐	☐	☐
12 | Agreeing the system with staff and unions	☐	☐	☐
13 | Resources	☐	☐	☐
14 | Training for observation	☐	☐	☐
15 | Monitoring and evaluating the system	☐	☐	☐

1 | The relationship between dual-purpose observation and observation for other purposes

Dual-purpose observation for appraisal and self-assessment should be kept quite separate from observation as part of competence, capability, disciplinary or redundancy procedures.

FEDA's appraisal survey (1997) found that most appraisal systems were separate from competence and disciplinary procedures. The rationale for this is that competence issues should not be left to an appraisal interview which may only take place every two years and which assumes a basic ability 'to do the job'. Rather, line managers should be aware of any significant competence issues and should use supportive competence procedures to address these with the member of staff as and when they occur. Part of these procedures may include arrangements to observe the member of staff so that all concerned may better understand the issues involved. However, this is a different type of observation, which needs to be part of a separate confidential personnel procedure and documented in accordance with college personnel requirements.

It is usual to defer normal appraisal interview arrangements during a competence procedure. However, if a dual-purpose observation were already planned, it should go ahead but only be used for self-assessment. If the planned observation were cancelled in these circumstances, the sample of observations for self-assessment would be skewed and the data distorted.

All of this assumes that competence issues are already known before the observation takes place. The situation is different if the possibility of a significant competence issue is discovered through the normal observation process. A single observation alone is clearly not a reasonable basis from which to infer lack of competence. In these circumstances it is probably more important to check that line managers have the resources and skills to identify and address competence issues for all the staff they manage, and to encourage them to ask themselves why, if there really is a competence issue at stake, they did not already know about it.

There are more likely to be difficulties in keeping observation for self-assessment and appraisal separate from competence issues if these issues are not being effectively addressed elsewhere. It is therefore important to ensure that policy, procedure and practice in relation to competence issues are effective.

Our experience has been that explicitly clarifying the separation of dual-purpose observation from competence procedures does much to allay staff concerns about observation.

2 | Identifying who should be observed

This includes all those directly involved in teaching and learning.

In different colleges this might involve different groups of staff but the groups need to be clearly defined in the context of the college. Any member of staff who interacts with students in a relatively structured way to help them learn should be included. There may be some members of staff whose observations will only be used for self-assessment and not for appraisal, for example, agency staff.

3 | Identifying who should observe

Observers should be trained and meet college criteria and requirements.

Dual-purpose observers need to have appropriate skills and specific training (see guideline 14, page 19). They also need credibility with the people whom they observe. This is more likely if they are:

- generally recognised as effective practitioners
- specifically trained for dual-purpose observation

- skilled in making valid and reliable observations, assessments and grading
- skilled in providing constructive feedback
- skilled in active listening, consultation and negotiation
- committed to the principles of the scheme
- able to maintain confidentiality.

Colleges have adopted a variety of approaches to selecting observers. Sometimes staff with expertise in observing on teaching certificate qualifications are used, or those who are part-time registered inspectors (in England) or associate assessors (in Wales). Others select from the pool of internal verifiers. For example:

- **Yale College, Wales** Across the college there are now 20 staff with associate assessor training who have experience of working with HMI on other college assessments. These staff have been used as internal observers wherever possible, but additional training has been available for others, so that approximately 50 staff are now experienced in this role.

- **Capel Manor College** A lecturer with a teaching qualification (BEd, PGCE, Cert Ed, City and Guilds 7306 or equivalent) together with a D34 award and at least one year's teaching experience across an appropriate range or a lecturer with D34 plus three years' teaching experience across an appropriate range.

Another approach is to have observations carried out by the line managers, who are also the most likely to appraise the staff. Some, but not all, observations for self-assessment are also carried out by line managers. If they are not used as observers, line managers still need to be involved in the design and setting up of the system, so that they have confidence in it. They may need training in the effective use of others' observations in appraisal interviews.

There is an unresolved debate about the extent to which observers need specialist subject knowledge. FEDA's recent research suggests that detailed specialist knowledge may be less important than high-level skills in observing and assessing the effectiveness of learning and providing feedback.

4 | Providing some choice of observer

Some limited choice within clearly defined parameters is important.

Evidence from FEDA's appraisal survey and earlier research on observation for self-assessment suggests that the right to request an alternative appraiser/observer is rarely exercised, but is highly valued by staff. The degree of choice, the circumstances in which it can be exercised and the identification of the person to whom such a request is made all need to be clearly specified in advance.

5 | Establishing criteria for observation

The criteria by which teaching and learning will be judged need to be agreed and made explicit at college level. The more staff are involved in the identification of criteria, the greater the ownership of them will be.

Identifying common criteria by which the effectiveness of learning will be judged requires a shared understanding of what constitutes good practice. Arriving at this can itself be a developmental activity and can provide colleagues with a shared understanding and vocabulary with which to discuss professional issues. A staff development activity, designed to enable observation criteria to be explored, and then cross-referenced with the quality statements in 97/12, is included in *Self-assessment in practice*, pages 6–8. Observation criteria are often included on the pro forma itself or summarised on the back to reinforce them and encourage their consistent application.

6 | Designing the observation pro forma

One single observation pro forma needs to be completed for each observation, but is thereafter used differently for self-assessment and appraisal purposes. The design of the pro forma needs to reflect these two separate uses.

Colleges have designed a variety of documents to record observations. Some are very simple, like those employed by FEFC inspectors, with most space devoted to recording key strengths and weaknesses. Others have the agreed criteria printed on the back as a reminder, and yet others require the observer to assess each criterion separately and are consequently long and complex. Colleges often want the security of specified criteria when they first introduce observation, but as they become more confident they abandon the tick box approach for a simpler pro forma asking for key strengths and weaknesses.

If criteria are specified they may need separating physically into those within the control of the teacher and those not. Both, of course, can affect learning. Thus, both a lack of basic learning equipment and a teacher's poor questioning skills may need to be recorded if they reduce the effectiveness of learning, and together they will influence any grade awarded. Although both will be relevant in the self-assessment of teaching and learning, especially if they are identified as issues in several observations, appraisers will tend to focus on the teacher's questioning skills alone. It may therefore make the documentation easier to use in appraisal if the two groups of criteria are separated on the pro forma.

It has already been established (see key issue 3·2, pages 11–12) that names are essential for appraisal purposes, but not for self-assessment; and that grades are less relevant for appraisal than they are for self-assessment. It would be possible to design an observation pro forma where the name was recorded on one copy and the grade on another. Alternatively very limited access to the original forms for self-assessment purposes could be stipulated, so that summaries can be made (in which the observees are anonymous) and a grade profile drawn up for the curriculum area. The person who does this would be the only one to see the original forms.

Whatever the design of the observation pro forma, it is important to take into account the two separate ways it will be used. Any previous documentation for one or the other will need to be reviewed to ensure that it meets the needs of both. For example:

- **Farnham College** The observation forms were very successful for all courses. Observers found that the format allowed scope for checking practical work and equal opportunities. We found the paperwork more effective than others we considered. One drawback was that the observation form involved doing too many things at once. Some found that having to write more than they wanted to affected the quality of their observations.

7 | Selecting the sessions to be observed

The characteristics of the sessions observed need to reflect the information requirements of both self-assessment and appraisal.

This is an area in which there is tension between the requirements of self-assessment and appraisal. For self-assessment, observations are needed from a representative sample of the curriculum provision. This may include sessions taught by staff not directly employed by the college, such as agency staff. For appraisal, an observation of each employee with an appropriate role will be needed. FEDA's appraisal survey showed that many part-timers were excluded from such procedures, but an observation sample for self-assessment would need to include them.

Any selection of sessions also needs to take into account the requirements of both self-assessment and appraisal in any one year. For example, in many colleges observation for self-assessment takes place every year, but any one curriculum area may only be observed every two or three years. If appraisal takes place annually there may be an issue of the 'shelf-life' of the observation being used.

8 | Notice of observation

Some colleges negotiate the exact time and date of the session to be observed, but many mimic the inspection process and identify a week or fortnight during which any class may be observed. Observees are invited to raise any potentially tricky issues relating to sessions occurring within the observation period.

This second option seems to provide a compromise between the need for planning, the need for flexibility and the needs of staff to know what to expect.

9 | Grading

Identifying a grade for the effectiveness of learning that takes place within a session is very useful for the purposes of self-assessment of a curriculum area. The grade may or may not be shared with the observee or the appraiser.

A few colleges avoid grading altogether. However, most find that grades aggregated to the team or curriculum area level are useful, together with summaries of key strengths and weaknesses, for self-assessment purposes. If grades are given, then observers must be trained, to ensure consistency.

There is a debate about whether it is useful to share grades with observees. Like the FEFC inspectorate, some colleges do not share grades, arguing that this enables the focus of attention to be on key strengths and weaknesses, rather than whether the grade is fair. Others argue that withholding the grade militates against transparency and trust in the process. An overall grade for the effectiveness of learning in one session is likely to be less important to an appraiser than a detailed exploration of the aspects of the session that were under the control of the teacher. There is an argument therefore for grades being withheld from appraisers.

10 | Giving feedback

Feedback needs to be given to individuals promptly and in the context of constructive dialogue.

Feedback should always be constructive; that is, it should help rather than hinder further development. The potentially damaging aspect of feedback is its ability to undermine confidence and lower morale. This would tend to reduce the quality of teaching and learning rather than improve it. Getting feedback right, especially when sessions observed are problematic, requires a high level of skill. It therefore needs to have priority in the selection, training and support of observers and the monitoring and evaluation of the system. Effective feedback is probably the aspect of an observation system with the greatest potential to improve or undermine individual performance. See also sharing grades (guideline 9, above).

More guidelines on providing effective feedback are given on pages 89–90 of *Self-assessment in practice* (FEDA, 1998). There is also a staff development activity on pages 93–94 of the manual.

11 | Appeals against judgements

Many colleges provide specific and limited opportunity to appeal to a designated person or team.

Appeals against the judgements of observers are likely to be rare but it is important to allow for the possibility of something going wrong. If this happens and there are no arrangements to deal with it, the result could be a significant loss of confidence in the whole system and its credibility. There are several approaches to appeals, two of which are exemplified in the following case studies:

- **Capel Manor College** Any appeal should be made via the tutor observation feedback form by ticking the appropriate box or in writing within five days of the receipt of the observation pro forma (which in this college is shared with the observee). In either case the appeal should be lodged with Personnel who will then pass it on to the Deputy Chief Executive for resolution.

  Appeals can be made on the following grounds:

  - that the judgement/grade does not reflect the evidence as recorded
  - that the judgement or the grade failed to take into account all the evidence available.

  In the latter case further evidence will need to be supplied with the appeal by the person appealing.

  The appeal will be heard by the Deputy Chief Executive, unless the appeal is against that person in which case it will be heard by the Chief Executive. In attendance will be the observer(s) and the member of staff appealing and another member of staff of his/her choosing.

  If the appeal is upheld then the observation will be considered null and void. If the appeal is not upheld then the observation will stand.

- **Dudley College** After each observation, the observee will receive feedback from the observer. Observees will have the opportunity to provide their own comments and if they can substantiate their claim with evidence may seek to change the grade.

12 | Agreeing the dual-purpose observation system with staff and unions

If a dual-purpose system is to be successful, it is important to involve, consult and negotiate with all staff involved and with relevant trade unions.

Observation systems need to be agreed and owned by all participants if they are to contribute positively to professional development and quality improvement generally. To impose an observation system against the wishes of the staff is unlikely to create a climate in which constructive observations can occur. Colleges will vary in the approach they take to agreeing new developments with staff and recognised trade unions. Staff and union involvement throughout the planning and design phases can often allow potential areas of difficulty to be raised and resolved at an early stage. For example, staff will need to see draft versions of the system and have clear ways of raising concerns or suggesting improvements.

- **Burnley College** For this system to work it is important that the college reaches an agreement with the relevant unions so that the results of the observations can be used for both appraisal and self-assessment purposes. This was actually achieved at Burnley College before involvement in the FEDA project, with the proviso that observation records would be made anonymous before being used for self-assessment purposes.

13 | Resources

Dual-purpose observation systems need to be adequately resourced. The resources required to design and implement an effective observation system consist largely of time and expertise. Time is needed for development, consultation, training, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Some colleges will have the necessary expertise in-house, others may need or wish to buy it in, particularly at the development stage. For example:

- **Capel Manor College**
  Development time: One and a half days by outside trainer plus release for staff to attend; six two-hour meetings of the steering group; work time outside meetings to prepare meetings.
  Implementation time: Two hours for each observer to observe, report and feed back personnel time for collating and record keeping.
- **Burnley College** Observers spent approximately 30 minutes preparing for the observation; one hour observing and providing feedback; and 15 minutes completing the pro forma. The pilot period lasted 15 weeks as determined by the planned appraisal schedule.

14 | Training for observation

Observers need training for dual-purpose observation systems, even if they have been trained for observation for self-assessment or appraisal. Observees will also need briefing/training, and appraisers and self-assessors may need training on how to use the observation records effectively.

Observers need to be selected carefully. Some criteria for selection are suggested above (see guideline 3, page 14). Thereafter they need systematic training and support in their new role. Even if they have been trained for observation for self-assessment or appraisal they will need retraining for dual-purpose observation.

The role of the observer remains the same whatever the purpose of the observation: to observe and assess the effectiveness of the learning in a session and to provide constructive feedback. Nonetheless it is important that observers in a dual-purpose system are clear about the two separate uses to which the observation record will be put. This will enable them to complete the observation record in a way that will maximise its usefulness subsequently, particularly if they will not be using the records themselves. This may well be the case for both appraisal and self-assessment. Table 2 (see page 12) shows how observation records are used during the appraisal and self-assessment processes and could be customised for individual colleges and used to explain the dual-purpose observation system to new observers.

Experience suggests that assessing consistently and providing appropriate and constructive feedback are among the most important skills to be developed. Many colleges have found the staff training activities Section 6 of the manual and video, *Self-assessment in practice* useful.

Inexperienced observers often gain confidence quickly by undertaking paired observations with more experienced colleagues, first shadowing and, as their confidence grows, rehearsing their judgements with their colleague, then leading the feedback with someone there to help out if things get tough.

Observees will also need briefing or training in any new observation system. They will need copies of all documentation to be used and will also need to know how the observation records will be used for both appraisal and self-assessment. There also needs to be an opportunity for them to raise any concerns and discuss them in small groups with a trusted person.

A more time-consuming but valuable approach is to train observers and observees together. This enables everyone to participate in the identification of good practice, maximising the chances of ownership of and commitment to the new scheme as well as ensuring its transparency.

Appraisers may also need additional training. Even if they are not to be observers they need to trust the observations and be convinced they will be valuable in the appraisal interview. They may need training in how to use others' observations, together with other evidence, as starting points for discussions about future needs for professional development.

Training in using observations for self-assessment: again staff may need help in aggregating observation records to the team or curriculum level, both quantitatively in terms of a grade profile and more qualitatively in terms of key strengths and weaknesses. They may then need help in using this evidence, together with other information such as retention and achievements data, to arrive at an overall assessment of the area and an action plan to improve it further.

15 | Monitoring and evaluating a dual-purpose observation system

Monitoring and evaluation are important and should encompass both the process and the outcomes of the system. They should be planned for and built in when the system is being designed.

Ongoing monitoring should take place to ensure that:

- observations are taking place and meet the needs of both appraisal and self-assessment
- the observation process and guidelines are followed in practice
- observation records are completed and submitted to the appropriate place(s)/person(s) on time
- feedback is constructive.

Methods of collecting this information might include: surveys of observees; sampling observation records; observing observers, for example through paired observations; observer review sessions. All of these need careful planning and sensitivity, and due regard needs to be given to confidentiality requirements and potential conflicts of interest.

Periodic evaluations also need to take place and modifications made to the system to ensure that it continues to be effective.

The process of quality improvement

with special reference to retention and achievement

4

Background

Practical strategies that are likely to be successful in bringing about improvements in retention and achievement have been reported elsewhere (see 'Useful initial reading', below). The work on which this chapter is based complemented that research by focusing more on the process of quality improvement. We decided to work with course teams in three colleges that had identified retention and/or achievement as problematic and look at the process by which they had set about improving them. In each college two teams were selected: one where the planned measurable improvement had been achieved and one where it had not. We hoped thus to identify the factors that made a difference. The hypothesis was that where a quality improvement cycle (see page 2) was in place at college level and implemented systematically at departmental and course levels, planned improvements were likely to be realised and targets achieved.

Key findings

4·1 | College-wide approaches to quality improvement

4·2 | The characteristics of teams that succeeded in raising retention and/or achievement

4·3 | The characteristics of teams that failed to bring about improvements

4·4 | Optimum conditions for improvement

Useful initial reading

Martinez P (FEDA, 1999) *Aiming at achievement*

Martinez P (FEDA, 1998) *Improving student retention: a guide to successful strategies*

Martinez P (FEDA, 2000) *Raising achievement*

KEY FINDING 4·1

College-wide approaches to quality improvement

All three colleges had college-wide quality assurance systems and a commitment to quality improvement. At course level this typically consisted of:

- provision of valid data to course teams
- annual course review and/or self-assessment procedures designed to help identify areas of strength and weakness compared with college and/or national benchmarks
- an exploration of why weaknesses occurred
- development of course action plans to address the weaknesses identified and targets for improvement
- mechanisms for monitoring progress.

For example, in one college registers are monitored monthly by more senior staff and retention discussed with course team leaders. In addition, full retention reviews are undertaken every half term.

At best, the colleges were also likely to have:

- supportive but firm management of staff
- explicit recognition of the strategic importance to the college of recruitment, selection, induction, attendance, punctuality, retention and achievement
- systematic links between self-assessment, planning, staff appraisal and development
- selection procedures to ensure that students are recruited onto the right programmes
- good induction, tutorial and other student support arrangements
- a focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning across the college.

KEY FINDING 4·2

The characteristics of teams that succeeded in raising retention and/or achievement

Some of the improvements brought about by the course teams were impressive. For example, one Intermediate GNVQ programme had improved retention from 71% in 1996/97 to 82% in 1997/98 and 87% in 1998/99. In another college, Foundation-level GNVQ retention improved from 56% in 1997/98 to 94% in 1998/99 with no appreciable decline in achievement rates, so that the success (i.e. retention × achievement) rate improved from 44% to 69%.

The strategies adopted were not new. They included:

- clear selection criteria applied systematically
- well-planned induction (especially clear and high expectations about attendance, homework, etc.)
- staff working hard with individual students
- good regular tutorial arrangements
- systematically following up absences
- ensuring more in-class or additional support was provided where needed.

When asked to what in particular they attributed their success, however, senior managers, team leaders and/or teachers mentioned other factors. These included:

- course teams taking the college quality assurance procedures seriously. For example, self-assessment carried out rigorously on the basis of evidence with the whole team
- the team acknowledging when there was a weakness and believing that they themselves could do something about it

  The staff knew retention had been poor before they formally reviewed it. They also knew that the students who had left had had a variety of personal problems such as homelessness or being the major carer at home. They had tried to provide more in-class and additional support but it had not worked.
- patterns in the data were explored and actions identified which were likely to address these. For example if retention was problematic in the first term, the actions identified also related to that period
- action plans were developed after discussion with the team and owned by them
- someone, usually the team leader or curriculum manager, systematically monitored the implementation of the action plan. For example, in one college the team leader monitored the implementation of the action plan to improve retention. She ensured it was on the agenda of every team meeting, monitored registers, checked that absences were followed up, monitored tutor logs and generally talked about retention all the time. The FEFC census points in November, February and May were significant in that they verified the retention data and enabled progress to be celebrated. 'We realised the situation was improving in November. *The student group was solid and this was confirmed at the later census points.*'
- the team leader was determined improvements would be achieved.

  I was so ashamed it was so low and determined to make it better.

  This commitment to improve matters and the sense of responsibility that went with it were key features of teams that succeeded in bringing about planned improvements. For example, one programme manager said:

  I saw it as my responsibility to do something about it.

KEY FINDING 4·3

The characteristics of teams that failed to bring about improvements

Some of the less successful teams in the project had achieved a limited improvement but all had failed to meet their targets. Many of them had apparently been through exactly the same quality improvement processes as the successful teams, in that they had a year earlier reviewed performance, identified areas of weakness, developed action plans and set targets for improvement. They had followed the colleges' quality assurance procedures and sometimes the actions they identified were similar to those identified by the other teams, e.g. better induction and following up absences. There were, however, key differences in approach:

- **the widespread acceptance and even expectation of high drop-out and/or low achievement** For example:

  In this sort of area with these students you expect them not to stay.

  In this sort of area sometimes parents just want their children to come to college so they can continue to claim benefits.

  We don't expect high retention on this course because they're adults from often difficult backgrounds.

  We accept everyone we interview so we expect drop-out.

- **the perception across all the team members/leaders interviewed that the reasons for poor retention and or achievement have little if anything to do with the teachers** Explanations given for drop-out or lack of achievement were almost entirely external. For example:
  - difficulties in the students' background e.g. homelessness, pregnancy, poverty, abuse
  - deterioration in students' attitude e.g. less motivated
  - the blame culture within the college
  - the deterioration of conditions for staff
  - cross-college decisions to change the pattern of provision which affected the student cohort badly
  - the awarding bodies for developing inappropriate qualifications: 'Students weren't committed to the new qualification'
  - universities for accepting students without the full qualification.

  There was little recognition or acceptance that the quality of the provision itself might have had anything to do with the situation, even though colleagues from the same college were retaining students from very similar backgrounds and helping many of them achieve.

- **the lack of commitment to quality assurance and improvement**

  In some but not all teams, there was a lack of ownership of cross-college systems to drive up standards; a sense that self-assessment, action-planning and target-setting were just more hoops imposed on hard-pressed staff. The self-assessments were done because they were required by the college; the action plans drawn up and the targets set, but without any genuine commitment to understanding the weakness or to doing anything differently. For example, one team identified retention as a weakness and drew up an action plan to address it, but because little analysis had been done on the pattern of drop-out throughout the year, the actions were focused on the part of the year where retention was relatively high. One member of staff said:

  > *Targets are something to aim for but it's in the lap of the gods whether the group is good or not.*

  Allied with this there was, perhaps unsurprisingly, little sense of responsibility or commitment to do anything about weaknesses identified.

  > *I want to retain students but if they leave I'm not going to lose sleep about it*
  >
  > *We hope they (the adult students who leave) might reappear later on.*

  Finally, with no apparent sense of irony, one team leader said:

  > *It (retention) would have been OK if four hadn't left.*

It is true that many of the staff interviewed are working in difficult circumstances with challenging student groups. They may well disagree with these conclusions based on our open and friendly conversations. FEDA can only thank them for talking so frankly and ask them to accept that we have to report the situation as it seems to us. In essence, there are other staff teams, either in their own colleges or elsewhere, who are succeeding in bringing about improvements in very similar circumstances and the key difference seems to be their determination to do so.

There may be some uncomfortable messages here for senior college managers too. For whatever reasons, although they may be implementing the letter of the quality requirements, some of these staff are not committed to the spirit of continuous improvement. They believe the explanations for poor performance and lack of improvement are almost wholly external. Without this commitment, improvement will not take place where it matters most – with students. One successful team leader who was committed to quality improvement systems made an impassioned plea for college managers to support and value hardworking staff and appreciate their efforts. He said that morale was poor and that without motivated staff retention and achievement would not improve, however good the systems.

KEY FINDING 4·4

Optimum conditions for improvement

On the basis of this small investigation, optimum conditions for improvement seem to apply when there is both a sound quality assurance system and enough individual staff committed to making a difference. Without a sound system, committed staff may bring about small improvements but are unlikely to achieve significant improvements across the whole college. With a sound system the chances of significant improvement are enhanced but if individual staff just pay lip-service to the system and continue to believe there is nothing they can do to improve, real improvement will be limited. Both are needed if change is to be both widespread and sustained. This is an important message in the drive to raise standards.

We can describe the characteristics of the quality assurance system system. It has been illustrated on page 2 as a quality improvement cycle and comprises:

- a clear and shared understanding of what quality means in the context of the college mission and strategic direction
- valid, reliable and timely information about performance
- rigorous self-assessment against relevant benchmarks
- action-planning to build on strengths and address weaknesses (integrated with operational plans)
- challenging but achievable targets
- systematic monitoring of improvement.

Staff commitment to a culture of continuous improvement is more difficult but unless it is addressed students will continue to do less well than they might, and the government's drive to raise standards is likely to be of limited success. Research shows that individual teachers can make a difference to student retention and achievement. Equally research has demonstrated that managers can make a difference to organisational culture and staff morale (see *Strategic approaches to processes, culture and structures* FEDA, 1997). It is possible to make a difference and there are many studies around to say how it is likely to be done. However, the uncomfortable reality is that too often FE colleges fail to make this difference. The challenge for the sector is to use the additional resources in the Standards Fund to help provide the expertise and time to make it happen. Early experience of working with colleges receiving funding for post-inspection action-planning under strands 1 and 2 of the standards fund, suggests this is sometimes a painful process, an important part of which is accepting the need for change. There are also important messages for initial teacher training, management development and leadership in managing change.

The self-assessment and improvement of quality assurance

5

Background

Relatively few colleges in England gain good grades for quality assurance in FEFC inspections (the same is true in Wales and for Training Standards Council inspections). This has been true since quality assurance was first inspected in 1993 and remains so today. Colleges have been slow to develop coherent quality assurance arrangements and historically specific procedures, such as student satisfaction surveys and course review, have often developed in an inconsistent, *ad hoc* manner without reference to each other or to the self-assessment and planning cycles. As a consequence quality assurance arrangements in colleges have often been seen as ends in themselves and experienced as burdens on staff, rather than as an integral part of annual planning and review. For these reasons self-assessment and quality assurance arrangements generally have sometimes failed to achieve their full potential to raise standards.

This chapter is based on an analysis of discussions with senior staff (typically the principal, vice-principal responsible for quality and/or quality manager) from five colleges that achieved a grade 1 for quality assurance in 1997/98, the first year of the second FEFC inspection cycle, using the framework *Validating self-assessment* (FEFC circular 97/12). The colleges varied in size, type and geographical location. Two are general further education colleges; one a tertiary college; one an adult residential college and one a sixth-form college. The discussions took the form of interviews with key staff, using a semi-structured interview schedule. What follows is a summary of their responses to questions about key issues relating to quality assurance in colleges.

Key issues

5·1 | What are the characteristics of the quality assurance in grade 1 colleges?

5·2 | How do successful colleges ensure that quality assurance arrangements lead to measurable improvement in standards?

5·3 | How can all colleges improve their quality assurance arrangements?

Useful initial reading

Dixon S (FEDA, 1995) *Making quality your own*

Dixon S (FEDA, 1995) *Quality assurance in colleges*
explores this issue in the context of the first five colleges to be awarded a grade 1 for quality assurance in the first FEFC inspection cycle.

Dixon S (FEDA, 1998) *Self-assessment in practice* Section 1

FEFC (FEFC, 1999) *Chief Inspector's annual report*

KEY ISSUE 5·1

What are the characteristics of quality assurance in grade 1 colleges?

The project colleges varied widely, both in the details of their quality assurance arrangements and in their size, type and location. Nonetheless some common themes emerged as critical to the success of their quality assurance. The following were identified by two or more of them as significant:

- **a genuine and visible commitment to quality and its improvement by the principal and other senior staff** All the colleges spoke of the need to demonstrate that commitment to quality was real and not just rhetoric; many stressed the need to focus activity on improving the quality of the student experience. In one college, the principal always mentioned quality when she spoke to staff about anything; several colleges designated a very senior (often second tier) post for quality to show its importance; and in most college corporations, management and team agendas had quality as a standing item. Also time and resources were allocated to quality activities, for example annual self-assessment. One college calculated that it spends one per cent of annual budget – 950 staff days – on quality activities.
- **comprehensive arrangements well established** For most of the project colleges this was their second grade 1 for quality assurance. One had introduced observation eight years before; another had had systematic review boards and agreed costed action plans in place for many years. There was a popular view that the process of quality assurance had evolved over time and that staff continually became more skilful and committed to critical self-assessment and systematic improvement.
- **integrating quality assurance and self-assessment with annual planning cycles** Colleges spoke of the need for staff to see the benefits of self-assessment and other quality assurance arrangements, i.e. that action followed and led to real improvement for students. Key to this were the integration and careful timing of self-assessment and planning cycles, so that action plans were systematically coordinated and monitored, and did not proliferate unduly.
- **accurate and accessible management information available in a standardised format over several years (thus facilitating trend analysis and internal as well as external benchmarking)** The provision of accurate and timely data, often from a central facility, was crucial to enabling staff to make accurate judgements about their performance in order to improve it.
- **involvement by staff and students** This was crucial in establishing understanding and general ownership of and commitment to the quality assurance arrangements. Many colleges spoke of the need for simple staff guidelines communicated clearly and open to feedback. Many provided staff training on a regular basis.
- **regular and systematic review of the quality assurance process with staff** The process needs to evolve continually and staff need to feel they can influence its development so that its usefulness is maximised and the burden on staff minimised. Project colleges spoke of the need to simplify/streamline/integrate to ensure that the quality assurance process itself improves and meets changing needs. Some of these changes may relate to variations in the strategic direction of the college and others to external changes in, for example, government priorities, inspection or funding arrangements.

Several colleges spoke of the importance of the language used for job titles and/or quality groups in communicating clearly the approach to quality and its improvement. For example, one college has a post entitled 'performance review manager' that it felt that more accurately described the role than the more usual title of quality manager. The same college has an information manager rather than a management information systems (MIS) manager: the message here is that it is the information that needs managing. Another college has recently appointed a senior manager whose title is head of quality assurance and management information, a title illustrating the close link between quality and information.

KEY ISSUE 5·2

How do successful colleges ensure that quality assurance arrangements lead to measurable improvements?

All the colleges in the project could identify significant areas of improvement, which they believed had been achieved over time as a consequence of their quality assurance arrangements generally, and by self-assessment, action-planning and target-setting in particular. They included measurable improvements in retention and achievement rates, value-added scores, inspection grades and student satisfaction. One college commented that the number of improvements achieved itself became part of the evidence for assessing quality assurance arrangements. The ways in which they achieved these improvements included:

- action plans as an integral part of self-assessment
- the systematic use of standardised action-planning pro formas, which, as well as identifying the actions needed to address weaknesses/build on strengths, also specify who is responsible and who will monitor implementation and set measurable targets and timescales
- action plans and achievement of targets being systematically monitored at every level (individual, team, faculty, college and corporation). Achievements are recorded and become evidence for the next annual cycle of self-assessment.

What distinguished the colleges' responses to this question was not the activities themselves, which can be found in any textbook, but the seriousness with which they are undertaken. One college, for example, formally sets aside one day a year, to monitor the main college action plan.The achievement of targets is also often integrated with other systems and procedures. For instance, in another college, if a manager is specified as responsible for the achievement of a target, not only will it be monitored systematically by someone else, it also becomes part of the focus of that person's individual appraisal. This is one small example of the integration of different systems: in this case the integration and coherence of quality and appraisal systems. Thus the *expectation* of quality improvement is built into quality assurance arrangements and it is not surprising that measurable improvement does follow.

KEY ISSUE 5·3

How can all colleges improve their quality assurance arrangements?

Project colleges were naturally reluctant to comment on other colleges' performance. When pressed, the key messages were:

- Ensure commitment to quality improvement is real, that it permeates everything and is clearly visible.
- Integrate planning and quality cycles and have a published timetable of meetings which will enable it to work.
- Link self-assessment, course review, management information, observation findings, appraisal and staff development more systematically.
- Create a rigorous, self-critical and improving culture (avoid a blame culture).
- Appoint a senior person to drive forward quality improvement.
- Ensure procedures are clearly communicated and are consistently implemented.
- Ensure staff have the accurate, timely information they need to make judgements about their performance and set targets for improvement.
- Monitor action plans systematically.
- Continually review the quality assurance process and seek always to embed, integrate and simplify.

The self-assessment and improvement of governance

6

Background

In the first FEFC inspection cycle, from 1993–97, governance and management were assessed together and a joint grade given. In Wales they were also assessed together but no grade was given. A decision was made in England to assess them separately in the second inspection cycle. Responses to the consultation circular suggested, however, that this was not universally supported in the sector, with particular concerns about the voluntary nature of governance in further education. Thus for many colleges, 1997/98 was the first time a separate self-assessment report for governance was written.

At around the same time the strategic importance of raising students' achievements was increasingly being recognised, and with it the role of governors in monitoring it at a college level. The probity issues raised by Nolan provided another agenda for college corporations.

Since incorporation many college corporations had, understandably, focused on the financial health of the institution and, indeed, many governors were selected because of their expertise in this area and/or other areas also new to colleges at that time, for example human resources and legal matters. The consequence of this was that many governing bodies were less well equipped to monitor academic performance and few had experience of self-assessment. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that in the first year of the new inspection cycle, 1997/98, governance was the aspect of college provision where the discrepancy between claimed grades and the grades awarded by inspectors was greatest. Invariably corporations were grading themselves more generously than inspectors, often by one grade but not infrequently by two. A common weakness identified was the lack of academic monitoring of the college's achievements. This came as a painful shock to governing bodies who felt, with some justification, that they had been doing the job for which they had been appointed well; that is, overseeing the financial health of the college. The extent of the disparity of views is illustrated in the Chief Inspector's *Annual report* (FEFC, 1999), which says that 90% of corporations graded governance 1 or 2, but only 68% were awarded these grades by the inspectorate.

The self-assessment and improvement of governance issues facing colleges are thus rather different from the quality assurance issues explored in the last chapter. We wanted to learn from colleges that had not only achieved high grades for governance in inspection, but also had the ability to assess accurately the strengths and weaknesses of their governance. We selected colleges with a grade 1 or 2 for governance where the inspection report commented favourably on the accuracy of their self-assessment. Because the colleges were the same as in Chapter 5, they also had a grade 1 for quality assurance. The people interviewed varied from college to college. Typically the principal and either the clerk or the chair of governors were involved. Their responses to questions about key issues facing governors are summarised overleaf.

Key issues

6·1 | What are the characteristics of good college governance and how is it achieved?

6·2 | How can college governors effectively carry out their responsibilities in relation to self-assessment, particularly:

- overseeing the college's self-assessment process
- undertaking rigorous assessments of their own performance
- following self-assessment with action for improvement?

6·3 | How can more colleges achieve a high grade for governance?

Useful initial reading

Dixon S and Moorse R (FEDA, 1998) *Self-assessment in practice*: Section 4 explores gathering evidence for self-assessment, see particularly pages 37–44 and page 53.

Davies P and Horsfall C (FEDA and AoC, 1999) *Governing colleges today: raising quality and achievement*

KEY ISSUE 6·1

What are the characteristics of good college governance and how is it achieved?

Although college responses varied in detail, the many common themes included:

- **a clear and shared understanding of the difference between governance and management** by the chair, clerk and principal. One college principal in particular spoke of the need for principals to work hard to create the understanding that the governors' role is to focus on strategy and be concerned not only with finance but also the academic character of the college.
- **good clerking arrangements** Several of the colleges had independent clerks, and there was general understanding of the post-Nolan issues involved and the importance of independence. One principal stressed the importance of the clerk's independence from both the principal and the chair.
- **meetings efficiently prepared and managed** Frequent reference was made to a meeting schedule, up to two years in advance, which enabled the corporation to undertake its business effectively; appropriate paperwork being sent out within a specified number of days before a meeting; clear expectations that members would read papers in advance, attend regularly and contribute appropriately; and good chairing skills. Many colleges spoke of the importance of efficient clerking arrangements.
- **information given/reports written at the appropriate level of detail** This was seen as a key responsibility of the college. Governors need information to contribute effectively to strategic planning but they do not have time to read, nor do they need, the detail required by operational managers. Many colleges went to a great deal of trouble to ensure the level of detail was right. For example, in one college, whenever a new topic was introduced, there was first a debate about the level of reporting needed and this was subsequently reviewed. Another provided only enough information to enable members to understand and discuss the issues and expected members to ask for more detail if they wanted it. Other colleges were clear that the level of detail needed by a subcommittee was more detailed than that required by the full board. Governors were still more confident dealing with data about financial performance than academic performance. The college was seen as having particular responsibility for providing the right level of reporting for the latter.
- **a committee structure that helps governors fulfil their role effectively** Most of the colleges in the sample had some time ago set up a subcommittee(s) to oversee quality and academic performance, as well as the more traditional subcommittees such as employment, policy and/or finance. Moreover, these were reviewed from time to time to ensure that they continued to reflect current needs. Some colleges spoke of the need to coordinate the agenda items of the subcommittees with those of the main corporation, which in turn needed to be integrated with the college's planning and review cycles.

- **good search/selection procedures** Most colleges had search committees and well-designed selection arrangements which ensured that members with appropriate skills and attributes were selected. Many spoke of the need for governors with the right level of expertise and the ability to speak effectively on behalf of different sections of the community. One college said members should be in control of their own diaries if they were to be effective. Another spoke of the need to increase the number of governors from ethnic minority groups, given the mission of the college and its student population.
- **good induction** As well as being an introduction to the college itself, induction focused on the responsibilities that came with the role (providing strategic direction, academic and financial oversight) and expectations about probity, attendance, contribution, involvement in the college outside meetings and so on.
- **challenging and supportive members who are committed to the college** This combination was mentioned by several colleges. It was recognised that members needed to challenge in order to fulfil their role (one principal said it was his function to help them be able to challenge him, as the role of principal makes people arrogant and that needs to be challenged in the interests of the college!). However, at the same time, governors need to be committed to the college and supportive of its ethos, staff and students. Colleges found different ways of helping members achieve the balance between challenge and support. Many paired governors with particular curriculum areas; others took care to invite them to a selection of college events. Reporting at the right level of detail was also seen as helpful in this respect.
- **systematic training** All colleges spoke of the need for updates, briefings and training for governors. Some used part of each full board meeting for a presentation on current issues; many used part of an annual residential for this purpose, which usually coincided with approving the strategic plan. A few mentioned attendance at open training events.

KEY ISSUE 6·2

How can college governors effectively carry out their responsibilities in relation to self-assessment?

- **overseeing the college's self-assessment process**
  Again, practice varied but common responses included:
  - *providing governors with training on self-assessment and their responsibilities in relation to it:* Colleges recognised that self-assessment was not a familiar concept for many governors, with some notable exceptions. For example, some governors come from industries where the use of self-assessment in the Business Excellence model is well established.
  - *including governors in a self-assessment review group, the task of which was to plan and oversee the effectiveness of the self-assessment process and sometimes validate or verify the report:* Some college corporations had a quality subcommittee to undertake this role, others set up an *ad hoc* group which included members of the corporation before inspection for this purpose. Other colleges had a quality committee without governors, which was charged with this task and which reported to the corporation.
  - *the board approving the self-assessment report:* The self-assessment report in all the colleges was seen by the governors, and in several was formally approved by them.
  - *the self-assessment report used to inform strategic planning:* In many colleges the self-assessment report's conclusions were systematically used to inform the strategic planning process.
- **undertaking rigorous assessments of their own performance**
  For all the colleges 1997/98 was the first year in which a separate self-assessment report for governance had been written, and in each case it preceded inspection. Common themes were:
  - *the use of the college's standard self-assessment model:* The self-assessment report for governance was expected to follow the same format/documentation as the rest of the report to ensure consistent presentation.
  - *evidence and benchmarking were seen as problematic:* Several colleges commented that the inspection framework (see circular 97/12, which provides a quality statement for governance and circular 97/22 which includes an additional one) is less helpful for governance than for other aspects of colleges. The quality statements are few and evidence is not easily identified. One principal said that knowledge of other colleges' practice was often limited and there were few benchmarks to help, except for easily measured factors such as attendance and the time before meetings that papers are sent out. Another college used as evidence the percentage of previous overall college targets met, including the targets given to the principal following her appraisal by the governors. Several colleges used questionnaires, filled in by governors themselves, regarding their perceptions of their performance to provide evidence for the self-assessment. Some of these questionnaires were developed within the college, some were developed by other colleges or based on good practice guides.

- *authorship of the first draft varied but often included the clerk*: In several colleges the clerk was responsible for drafting the governance self-assessment report, sometimes alone and sometimes with the principal or vice-principal responsible for quality. In one college, a senior member of staff and a governor wrote the first draft; it then typically went to a sub-committee for discussion and amendment and to the full board for approval and often a final decision on the grade.
- *ownership of the final report and the action plan:* Several colleges involved all governors in drawing up the action plan, which often included a training plan for governors to help them achieve the targets they had set themselves.
- *the difficulty of challenging governors' judgements*: One principal spoke of the difficulty of challenging governors if it was felt that the judgements were not substantiated; another spoke of challenging to a limited extent, using phrases like, 'have you considered?' One college set up a training day that included some activities based upon critical challenge (see, for example, the questions critical colleagues can ask on pages 145–6 of *Self-assessment in practice*).

• following self-assessment with action for improvement

- *action plans with targets:* Project colleges spoke of the importance of action plans and targets to address weaknesses. They also highlighted the value of the self-assessment process in raising awareness of, for example, the importance of regular attendance. One college, as well as setting targets to improve attendance, decided to publish governors' attendance rates in its annual report. Another college described how governors had realised that, despite the mission of the college, there was insufficient provision at foundation level. Ensuring this was addressed, through a discussion with the principal at her appraisal and ensuring it became one of her targets, became one of their action points.
- *specific improvements achieved:* These fell into two main categories, those that relate to how governors conduct their own business and those that relate to ensuring that improvements take place in the college. An example of the latter was the college mentioned in the paragraph above which successfully extended the range of its provision at foundation level. An interesting example of governors following self-assessment with improvement of their own performance came from one college, where they realised that one of their weaknesses was a tendency to repeat subcommittee debates in unnecessary detail at full meetings of the corporation. They decided to include working groups' minutes in the board's papers, but to put 'to be noted' against the agenda item to which it related. Governors were expected to read the report and raise any further issues with the clerk before the board meeting. Only if the issues could not be sorted out verbally would they be added to the agenda for the full board meeting. This resulted in far more efficient meetings.

KEY ISSUE 6·3

How can more colleges achieve a high grade for governance?

Again, project colleges were reluctant to tell other colleges how they should improve, when they frequently knew little about the ways in which governance in other colleges was conducted. Several expressed sympathy for corporations dealing with financial difficulties as well as raising achievement. When pressed, however, their advice included:

- ensure the clerk can exercise independence and can concentrate on fundamental strategic issues, e.g. the essential character of the college and its future direction; monitoring academic and financial performance and ensuring their continuing improvement
- ensure that everyone concerned, but particularly the chair, the clerk and the principal, is clear about the difference between governance and management
- make sure the relationship between clerk, chair and principal is effective
- try to ensure there is a culture of and/or mechanisms for mutual challenge and support
- consider in advance how to de-select governors who do not meet expectations
- provide governors with training on self-assessment (one college noted that the sector had trained for and practised assessing and grading teaching and learning for years, and that the same needed to happen for governance)
- ensure the principal understands the importance of his/her role in relation to good governance (one principal said, 'poor governance is a reflection on principals: they need to concentrate more on it')
- ensure they receive the training and information they need to do the job well
- promote a self-critical improving culture throughout the college and expect it to extend to management and governance as well.

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How can you ensure that self-assessment leads to a measurable improvement in standards? This book, based on research and development activity undertaken by FEDA's quality programme team in 1998 and 1999, builds on *Self-assessment in practice* (FEDA, 1998). *Self-assessment for improvement* explores some of the issues still facing colleges and suggests strategies for raising quality standards.

N 1 85338 560 3 £15

feda quality learning skills

Preparing for accreditation: colleges and self-assessment

Rosemary Moorse

a companion publication to Self-assessment for improvement

Published by FEDA

Feedback should be sent to
FEDA publications, 3 Citadel Place
Tinworth Street, London SE11 5EF
Tel: 0207 840 5302/4 Fax: 0207 840 5401
FEDA on the Internet – www.feda.ac.uk

Registered with the Charity Commissioners

Editor: Jennifer Rhys
Designer: Dave Shaw

ISBN 1 85338 569 7

Acknowledgements
FEDA is grateful to the senior staff of Carlisle College, Loughborough College and Southgate College for the time they spent trialling FEDA's self-assessment instrument and for their thoughtful feedback. The project leader was Rosemary Moorse, who also wrote this publication.

Contents

Introduction

Accreditation is the process by which the FEFC currently approves colleges in the FE sector to take greater responsibility for their own self-assessment and quality assurance. With the launch of the new Learning and Skills Council, new arrangements for accreditation are currently under discussion but at time of writing accredited status is still being awarded to colleges. In the past, once accredited colleges were no longer subject to the full four-yearly inspection but were visited regularly by inspectors; their record and achievements formally reviewed and a report published by the Council every six years.

Preparing for accreditation is designed to give theoretical backup and practical help to colleges for as long as accreditation continues to operate. It includes FEFC criteria and requirements, guidelines and suggested processes; a comprehensive draft self-assessment instrument devised by FEDA; college examples and sample evidence matrices.

To gain accredited status colleges have to demonstrate to the FEFC that they have established comprehensive, effective and rigorous systems of management control and quality assurance covering all aspects of their work. They have to provide evidence that they meet the following five FEFC criteria:

- **Criterion 1**: the existence in the college of formal and effective control, quality assurance and monitoring arrangements
- **Criterion 2**: regular and rigorous self-assessment, validated during the course of inspection
- **Criterion 3**: the setting and consistent achievement of appropriate targets for institutional performance
- **Criterion 4**: demonstration that standards of student achievements are being improved and/or maintained at a high level over a three-year* period
- **Criterion 5**: effective action to address weaknesses and demonstrate the college'saccountability

* for applications in 1998/99, achievements over the two years 1995/96 and 1996/97 only were required.

Details of the five criteria and associated requirements are given in Appendix 1.

In keeping with the spirit of self-assessment, colleges have to provide evidence to demonstrate how they meet the criteria. When considering whether they are ready to apply for accreditation colleges will therefore have to:

- judge whether they meet each of the five criteria
- consider whether they have enough robust evidence to support their judgements.

To apply for accreditation a college has to:

- draw up an accreditation plan identifying actions needed to meet the Council's requirements and a timetable for carrying out the plan
- work with a designated inspector or inspectors, who will make a series of visits to the college and demonstrate that appropriate progress is being made towards accreditation
- submit a formal application for accredited status to the Council.

Useful initial reading

FEFC circular 98/22: *Accrediting colleges*

FEFC circular 98/41: *Applying for accredited status*

Supporting colleges in preparing for accreditation

FEDA designed a self-assessment instrument to support colleges in preparing for accreditation. Appendix 2 contains the whole draft instrument designed to help colleges assess their readiness to apply for accreditation. Appendix 3 contains guidelines for its use. Three colleges trialled the instrument and provided case-study material that is included in this guidance.

The self-assessment instrument specifically helps colleges to identify:

- the extent to which they meet the five criteria for accreditation
- the initial issues and areas for action that can form the basis of an internal college action plan
- evidence to support their eventual application.

It does not deal with the next stage of accreditation – submitting a formal application.

Once the instrument has been used to complete a self-assessment, a college can decide what actions, if any, are needed to be ready to apply for accreditation. The recommended sequence of events is as follows:

Figure 1: College self-assessment: sequence of events

Undertaking the self-assessment
identify team
use self-assessment instrument
interpret the findings
identify actions needed, if any

↓

Action-planning
interrogate existing action plans
record further actions if required

↓

Compiling the evidence
complete evidence matrix
assemble portfolio of evidence if appropriate

↓

Next steps
decide on target date for accreditation
draw up accreditation plan and discuss with college inspector
make formal application for accreditation

Figure 2: extracts from a completed instrument used during the project

Draft instrument *(italics are guidance for those using the instrument)*

FEFC accreditation criterion 1: the existence in the college of formal and effective control, quality assurance and monitoring arrangements

Additional information from circular 98/22 in relation to criterion 1

Qualities of arrangements	**Scope of arrangements**
– robust – systematic – rigorous	– academic – financial (including using appropriately and accounting for public funds – strategic

FEFC requirements relating to criterion 1	**Self-assessment (tick appropriate response)** *When selecting your response consider also whether you have evidence to support your judgement (see indicative sources of evidence and key questions relating to evidence)*			**Indicative sources of evidence** *Key questions re evidence:* • *does evidence exist?* • *is it sufficient and of an appropriate range?* • *is it easily accessible in an appropriate format to all who need it?* • *does the evidence relate to explicit PIs/standards/targets and is it quantified?*	**Comments relating to 1a.** *Identify issues and possible areas for action, e.g: lack of common data collection processes*
1a. arrangements ensure that the college is consistently able to meet the Council's requirements and its own needs	**YES**	**PARTLY**	**NO**	1. strategic plan and other corporate plans ✓ 2. self-assessment report(s) ✓ 3. college inspection report(s) ✓ 4. documented procedures for QA for each ✓ aspect of the college, associated PIs, targets or standards, and outcomes against these e.g: a) College Charter, associated standards and ✓ outcomes ✓ b) standards for internal services and outcomes c) College complaints procedure and outcomes d) course review and evaluation procedures and outcomes ✓ e) lesson observation scheme and outcomes ✓ f) satisfaction surveys (students, employers, staff) ✓ g) internal financial audit arrangements and outcomes ✓ h) QA systems and outcomes for outward collaborative provision ✓ 5. EV reports - aspects relating to QA systems 6. evidence of evaluation of systems 7. management information ✓ 8. financial forecasts and accounts 9. correspondence with Council ✓ *Add below any further sources of evidence you can identify*	Quality manual Quality standards for all teams need to be provided QAM to meet teams *complaints procedures for stakeholders other than students and staff ____ Actin complaints ____ Admissions PA to QAM ____ Dean ____ PA to QAM Annual reports to SAMG re complaints Satisfaction surveys for staff, employers CMIS work on info to course teams in units
Do arrangements exist?					
Do they cover all aspects of the college's work?	✓	✓			
Are they sound? Do they produce valid/reliable results for internal and external use that are easy to interpret?	✓				
Are they known and applied consistently by all staff?	✓		✓		
Are there clear timescales and deadlines for the production of monitoring information for internal/external use?					
Are these deadlines consistently met?	✓				
Have the Council's requirements been consistently met? (see 3b and 5d)	✓				
Note any further questions you think are key in relation to 1a					

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Undertaking the self-assessment

Whom to involve

The self-assessment instrument is designed for use by a small team of senior/middle managers with responsibility for the following areas:

- quality assurance
- resources/management information systems
- curriculum.

Time needed

It should take between two and three hours to complete a self-assessment of the college's current position using the instrument. This will depend on the amount of discussion generated but should allow sufficient time for discussing issues. Approaches used by three different colleges are outlined below:

College A: A team consisting of the Vice-Principal (Curriculum and Quality), the Assistant Principal (Resources) and Quality Manager completes the self-assessment. They present their findings to the senior management team for discussion and agreement of next steps.

College B: The Quality Manager begins the self-assessment. Where further expertise is needed she consults with appropriate colleagues to complete the self-assessment. The findings are discussed at the next senior management team awayday.

College C: The Director of Quality and Curriculum and the Quality Manager complete the self-assessment and take the findings to the Senior Management Team for discussion and agreement of next steps.

Using the self-assessment instrument

Appendix 2 contains the whole draft self-assessment instrument. Appendix 3 shows a sample section with explanatory notes in italics on how to complete it.

When using the instrument it is important to spend sufficient time discussing issues as they are identified and making notes in the Comments column. Notes might include any of the following:

- particular issues identified
- possible areas for action
- identification of actions already underway to address issues, for example as part of the college's self-assessment report
- case studies demonstrating good practice.

Comprehensive notes taken at this stage will reduce the time needed later for action-planning or for identifying material to include in the application for accreditation.

Some of the criteria require specific quantified evidence to demonstrate they have been met. This applies particularly to criterion 4. For example, a college cannot meet criterion 4 without demonstrating that its retention and achievement levels reach the level specified by the FEFC. It would be advisable, therefore, to address this criterion first, as failure to reach this standard will necessarily delay accreditation by at least a year.

Figure 2 shows an example section completed by a college that used the instrument during the project. Figure 3 shows a project college's calculation using the guidelines set out in Annex C of FEFC circular 98/41 to see whether it meets the retention and achievement requirements for accreditation.

Figure3: Meeting retention and achievement requirements – college example (in italics)

FEFC circular 98/41 provides guidelines on the criteria which colleges must satisfy to achieve accredited status. Criterion 4 particularly, looks at achievement and retention and states that there should be 'Demonstration that standards of students' achievements are being improved and/or maintained at a high level over a three-year period'.

To do this the college must demonstrate:

a) The quality of at least half the curriculum inspected during the most recent college inspection has been judged to be good or outstanding (grade 1 or 2) and that none has been judged unsatisfactory (grade 4 or 5).
Our curriculum area inspection grades were 3 at grade 2 and 3 at grade 3; therefore we just meet this criterion.

b) Appropriate targets are set for student retention and achievements and senior management and the corporation regularly monitor that performance against these targets.
This process is still to become embedded but will be driven forward this year because we have to present retention and achievement targets by programme area to the Inspectorate.

For (c) and (d) see attached spreadsheet.

c) Levels of retention and achievement have met performance levels associated with accreditation for three successive years leading up to application for accreditation.
National retention and achievement rates are currently only available for 1995/96 and 1996/97; therefore, the attached table shows *two-year* averages. (This is the process that colleges applying for accreditation in 1998/9 will use. In subsequent years colleges will use three-year averages.)

Analysis of the data (see Variation from national columns) shows that:
In all cases *the college average retention and achievement rate* exceeds *national average rates. In the case of achievement, this is by a significant amount in each case. We are meeting the required performance level.*

d) There is a clear trend of improvement in both retention and achievement or that high levels of retention and achievement have been sustained.
Analysis of the data (variations 96/97 from college average and variation of overall rates from national 75th percentile columns) show that:

In all cases 1996/97 retention and achievement rates *are either the same as, or less than,* the previous year – to satisfy this criterion 1997/98 figures must show a distinct improvement and be not only better than the 1996/97 figures but also better than the three-year average. (Part of the problem here may be that 1995/96 ISR figures were inaccurate and, therefore, overstate both achievement and retention rates for that year.)

The test to see whether high levels of achievement and retention have been sustained is to compare the college 2/3-year average rates with the national 75th percentile for all FE colleges. This comparison has also been done and it can be seen that half of the retention rates are below the 75th percentile but all but one of our achievement rates are significantly above the national 75th percentile (the exception is the 19+ level 1 qualifications which has been let down by a poor achievement rate in 1996/97).
To achieve this criterion we need to improve retention rates significantly and strive to maintain our excellent achievement rates.

…tes over two years											Average Achievement Rates over two years						
Expected Completions (no)							Retention Rate (%)							Achievement Rate (%)			
95-96	96-97	all years		95-96	96-97	all years	National Retention Rate	*Variation from National*	*Variation 96-97 from college average*	*Variation of overall retention rate from national 75th percentile (84%)*	95-96	96-97	all years	National Achievement Rate	*Variation from National*	*Variation 96-97 from college average*	*Variation of overall achievement rate from national 75th percentile (70%)*
549	410	959		87%	86%	87%	81%	6%	-1%	3%	89%	78%	84%	59%	25%	-6%	14%
588	643	1231		85%	77%	81%	77%	4%	-4%	-3%	92%	88%	90%	62%	28%	-2%	20%
640	660	1300		93%	76%	84%	79%	5%	-8%	0%	95%	77%	86%	75%	11%	-9%	16%
18	20	38		94%	95%	95%	88%	9%	0%	11%	93%	67%	79%	69%	10%	-12%	9%
											Achievement Rate (%)						
95-96	96-97	all years		95-96	96-97	all years					95-96	96-97	all years				
445	802	1247		84%	81%	82%	81%	1%	-1%	-2%	95%	45%	63%	57%	6%	-18%	-7%
464	638	1102		81%	81%	81%	78%	3%	0%	-3%	93%	89%	91%	59%	32%	-2%	21%
784	854	1638		84%	81%	82%	78%	4%	-1%	-2%	90%	77%	83%	58%	25%	-6%	13%
221	296	517		95%	88%	91%	86%	5%	-3%	7%	96%	80%	87%	59%	28%	-7%	.17%

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Figure 4: College accreditation action plan

Priority area for action (from self-assessment exercise using instrument)

ACTION	STAFF RESPONSIBLE	TIMESCALE	TARGETS/INDICATORS OF SUCCESS	ACCREDITATION CRITERIA
Devise a quality manual	QASDM	6.99	Manual	1a
Establish quality standards in all quality teams	QASDM	9.99	A set of quality standards from each quality team	1a 3b 5b
Complaints procedure for stakeholders who are not students or employees	QASM	6.99	Procedure and communication	1a
Establish a system whereby all complaints are logged with QAM	QASDM	5.99	Record kept with PA to QASDM	1a
Promotion of good practice in action-planning and setting targets	QASDM with line managers	7.99	Record of events at faculty meetings and quality teams	2a
Gather evidence from employers and other key stakeholders	SAMG	7.99	Employer questionnaire and results Comments from EVs/case managers Comments from advisories	2b 5c
Prepare guidelines for target setting	QASDM	6.99	Guidelines in quality manual	3a

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Interpreting the findings and identifying actions needed

Once the self-assessment has been completed, Column 2 of the self-assessment instrument should give a clear idea how ready a college is to apply for accreditation. It will also indicate priority areas for action.

Where a YES response has been given to most of the prompt questions relating to a particular criterion or sub-set of a criterion, a college will clearly be in a strong position. A preponderance of NO responses for any one criterion will indicate areas where significant improvement is needed.

The notes in the Comments column should be used as a basis for an action plan.

Action-planning

Interrogating existing action plans

The FEFC constantly stresses the need to integrate self-assessment and action-planning for improvement into the college'splanning cycle to avoid fragmentation and duplication of effort. Rather than immediately drawing up a separate action plan, colleges should first interrogate those existing (for example, in the self-assessment report) and annotate them where actions relating to accreditation are underway. They can then pull off these actions into a separate action plan for ease of reference or decide that it is not necessary. Figure 4 shows the action plan produced by one college.

Recording further actions if required

Where no actions have been identified to address areas of weakness in relation to accreditation, these gaps will have to be filled and recorded.

Compiling the evidence

Completing the evidence matrix

For ease of reference colleges may want to pull together all the sources of evidence relating to accreditation and indicate which of the accreditation criteria each source of evidence addresses. A blank evidence matrix format for this is given at Appendix 4 in two versions. The first shows only the main criteria for accreditation and the second shows subheadings as well.

Next steps

Deciding a target date for accreditation

Once the action plan has been produced it should give a clear indication of how long a college will realistically need to prepare for accreditation. In some cases the criteria will define the timescale. For example, if a college did not meet the retention and achievement requirements for accreditation it would usually have to delay application by a year. If, however, there are exceptional circumstances that the college can address in its application, delay may not be necessary.

In all cases the college should discuss the date and possible barriers to applying for accreditation with its college inspector. Clearly, a college's governing body would also need to be involved in discussing the action plan and to endorse any application for accreditation.

Finalising the accreditation plan and making a formal application

The accreditation plan can be quite brief and is simply a college's formal statement of its intention to apply for accreditation with a broad indication of the timescale for doing so. Colleges may wish to discuss an appropriate format with their college inspector.

Appendix 1: Criteria for accreditation and associated requirements

(reference FEFC circulars 98/22 and 98/41)

Criterion 1: the existence in the college of formal and effective control, quality assurance and monitoring arrangements

Evidence should be provided by colleges that demonstrates that:

- their arrangements ensure that they are consistently able to meet the Council's requirements and their own needs
- their arrangements are sufficient to manage development and change
- governance, management and financial control, and quality assurance are all judged to be good or outstanding by the Council's inspectorate and audit service, that the effectiveness of these aspects appears to the Council to be sustainable, and that no aspects of cross-college provision are judged to be unsatisfactory.

Criterion 2: regular and rigorous self-assessment, validated during the course of inspection

Evidence should be provided that demonstrates that:

- self-assessment is integral to quality assurance and the management of the college, and clearly links to strategic and operational planning, including action plans to remedy weaknesses in provision
- comprehensive self-assessment is carried out annually and takes into account evidence from both internal and external sources
- at least two annual cycles of self-assessment have been completed successfully.

Criterion 3: the setting and consistent achievement of appropriate targets for institutional performance

Evidence should be provided that demonstrates that:

- targets set for institutional performance are well informed, taking adequate account of information about the college's local community and its needs
- the college has a good record of providing timely and accurate information to the Council and other bodies
- most institutional targets are consistently met and the reasons for not meeting any of them are fully investigated with the aim of improving performance.

Criterion 4: demonstration that standards of students' achievements are being improved and/or maintained at a high level over a three-year period

Evidence should be provided that demonstrates that:

- the quality of at least half the curriculum provision inspected during their most recent college inspection has been judged to be good or outstanding, and that none of the provision has been judged unsatisfactory
- appropriate targets are set for student retention and achievements and that performance against these is regularly monitored by senior management and the corporation
- levels of retention for students, both those in the 16–18 age range and older students, studying at all levels of qualification have met the performance levels associated with accreditation for three successive years leading up to the college's application for accredited status

- the achievement of qualifications by students, both those in the 16–18 age range and older students, studying at all levels of qualification have met the performance levels associated with accreditation for three successive years leading up to the college's application for accredited status
- there is a clear trend of improvement in both retention and achievement or that high levels of retention and achievement have been sustained
- the college's performance is generally consistent across all areas of the curriculum

Criterion 5: effective action to address weaknesses and demonstrate the college's accountability

Evidence should be provided that demonstrates that:

- a rigorous and comprehensive approach is adopted to action planning as a result of self-assessment
- actions are regularly monitored and lead to measurable and timely improvements in quality and standards
- in determining how best to improve provision, the views of all staff, students, the community and other external stakeholders are regularly taken into account
- information provided about the college, its operations and achievements is accurate and of high quality.

Appendix 2: Self-assessment instrument **Preparing for accreditation**

(*Italics* are guidance for those using the instrument)

<table>
<tr><td colspan="6">FEFC accreditation criterion 1: the existence in the college of formal and effective control, quality assurance and monitoring arrangements
Additional information from circulars 98/22 and 98/41 in relation to criterion 1

Qualities of control, quality assurance and monitoring arrangements
- robust
- systematic
- rigorous

Scope of control, quality assurance and monitoring arrangements
- academic
- financial (including using appropriately and accounting for public funds)
- strategic</td></tr>
<tr><td>FEFC requirements relating to criterion 1</td><td colspan="3">Self-assessment (tick appropriate response)
When selecting your response consider also whether you have evidence to support your judgement (see indicative sources of evidence and key questions relating to evidence)</td><td>Indicative sources of evidence
Key questions re evidence:
• does evidence exist?
• is it sufficient and of an appropriate range?
• is it easily accessible in an appropriate format for all who need it?
• to does the evidence relate to explicit PIs/standards/targets and is it quantified?</td><td>Comments relating to 1a
Identify issues and possible areas for action, e.g. lack of common data collection processes</td></tr>
<tr><td>1a. Arrangements for control, quality assurance and monitoring ensure that the college is consistently able to meet the Council's requirements and its own needs

I. Do such arrangements exist, covering all aspects of the college's work?

II. Are they sound? Do they produce valid/reliable results for internal and external use that are easy to interpret?

III. Are they known and applied consistently by all staff?

IV. Are there clear time scales and deadlines for the production of monitoring information for internal/external use?

V. Are these deadlines consistently met?

VI. Have the Council's control, quality assurance and monitoring requirements been consistently met? (see 3b and 5d)

Note any further questions you think are key in relation to 1a</td><td>YES</td><td>PARTLY</td><td>NO</td><td>1. Strategic plan and other corporate plans
2. Self-assessment report(s)
3. College inspection report(s)
4. Planning procedures linked to control, QA and monitoring arrangements
5. Documented procedures for control, QA and monitoring of each aspect of the college, associated PIs, targets or standards, and outcomes against these e.g:
a) College Charter, associated standards and Outcomes
b) Standards for internal services and outcomes
c) College complaints procedure and outcomes
d) Course review and evaluation procedures and outcomes
e) Lesson observation scheme and outcomes
f) Satisfaction surveys (students, employers, staff)
g) Internal financial audit arrangements and outcomes
h) QA systems and outcomes for outward collaborative provision
6. EV reports – aspects relating to QA systems
7. Evaluation of arrangements for control, QA and monitoring
8. Management information
9. Financial forecasts and accounts
10. Reports to governors
11. Correspondence with Council

Add below any further sources of evidence you can identify</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

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1b. Arrangements are sufficient to manage development and change I. Are changing internal and external demands and needs identified periodically? II. Are the arrangements for control, QA and monitoring reviewed regularly? III. Are arrangements updated or modified as a result? *Note any further questions you think are key in relation to 1b*	YES	PARTLY	NO	1. Notes of meetings where new developments and demands are discussed 2. User satisfaction re arrangements:surveys/feedback/minutes 3. Evaluation of arrangements for control, QA and monitoring 4. Revised/updated versions 5. Action plans and progress *Add below any further sources of evidence you can identify*	
1c. Governance, management and financial control, and quality assurance are all judged to be good or outstanding by the Council's Inspectorate and audit service, that the effectiveness of these arrangements appears to the Council to be sustainable, and that no aspects of cross-college provision are judged to be unsatisfactory I. Was a high grade awarded during the last inspection for Governance? II. Where the above performance was not achieved has there been significant measurable improvement? III. Was a high grade awarded during the last inspection for management? IV. Where the above performance was not achieved has there been significant measurable improvement? V. Was a high grade awarded during the last inspection for financial control? VI. Where the above performance was not achieved has there been significant measurable improvement? VII. Was a high grade awarded during the last inspection for quality assurance?	YES	PARTLY N/A N/A N/A N/A	NO	1. Last inspection report 2. College SAR and supporting evidence 3. Clear targets (relating to PIs where appropriate) in action plan for improving/maintaining performance 4. Documented progress in meeting these targets *Add below any further sources of evidence you can identify*	

<table>
<tr>
<td>VIII. Where the above performance was not achieved has there been significant measurable improvement?

IX. Were all other cross-college aspects judged satisfactory or better?

X. Where the above performance was not achieved has there been significant measurable improvement?

Note: For colleges that have not yet undergone a second round of inspection the same questions can be asked in relation to the first inspection report

Note any further questions you think are key in relation to 1c</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td colspan="5">FEFC accreditation criterion 2: regular and rigorous self-assessment validated during the course of inspection

Additional information from circulars 98/22 and 98/41 in relation to criterion 1

Qualities of self-assessment procedures/processes
- objective
- rigorous
- regular

Scope
- all aspects of college's operations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEFC requirements relating to criterion 2</td>
<td colspan="3">Self-assessment (tick appropriate response)
When selecting your response consider also whether you have evidence to support your judgement (see indicative sources of evidence and key questions relating to evidence)</td>
<td>Indicative sources of evidence
Key questions re: evidence:
• does evidence exist?
• is it sufficient and of an appropriate range?
• is it easily accessible in an appropriate format to all who need it?
• does the evidence relate to explicit PIs/standards/targets and is it quantified?</td>
<td>Comments
Identify issues and possible areas for action, eg: lack of common data collection processes</td>
</tr>
</table>

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2a. Self-assessment is integral to quality assurance and the management of the college, and clearly links to strategic and operational planning, including action plans to remedy weaknesses in provision I. Is there a clear cycle of self-assessment and associated procedures? II. Does this link explicitly to QA and management processes? III. Are staff's contributions to the SA processes clearly defined? IV. Are all staff aware of their contribution to self-assessment processes? V. Are there action plans for all areas and at appropriate levels or a composite action plan? VI. Are processes for self-assessment aligned and is documentation compatible, to avoid repetition and overlap? (see 5a.) VII. Are processes for action planning aligned and is documentation compatible, to avoid repetition and overlap? (see 5a) *Note any further questions you think are key in relation to 2a*	YES	PARTLY	NO	1. College inspection report(s) 2. Self-assessment, QA and monitoring Procedures 3. Schedules showing links between self-assessment and strategic/operational planning 4. Relevant reports to SMT or corporation, e.g. from self-assessment group 5. Examples of self-assessment reports and action plans at different levels and in different areas *Add below any further sources of evidence you can identify*	

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2b. Comprehensive self-assessment is carried out annually and takes into account evidence from both internal and external sources I. Does self-assessment cover all aspects of provision? II. Is it carried out annually in all areas? III. Are the processes objective and rigorous? IV. Are there arrangements for internal validation of judgements? V. Is there a range of evidence from internal and external sources? (see 5c) Note any further questions you think are key in relation to 2b	YES	PARTLY	NO	1. College inspection report(s) 2. Self-assessment reports 3. SA plans/schedules 4. Arrangements for internal verification of SAR 5. Notes of meetings where new developments and demands are discussed 6. User satisfaction: internal and external customer surveys, minutes of meetings, TEC, EV,IIP reports and documents 7. Use of external benchmarking data 8. Formal reviews of arrangements for self-assessments and internal validation 9. Revised/updated versions *Add below any further sources of evidence you can identify*	
2c. At least two annual cycles of self-assessment have been completed successfully I. Have two cycles of self-assessment been completed? II. Were the outcomes of each SA internally validated? III. Did they lead to measurable improvement? IV. Did they inform strategic and operational planning? V. Has a recent SAR been validated by a full inspection? *Note any further questions you think are key in relation to 2c*	YES	PARTLY N/A N/A	NO	1. College inspection report(s) 2. At least two SARs and associated action plans 3. Updated action plans showing measurable improvements (actual performance against PIs) 4. Records of strategic planning meetings 5. Internal validation of SAR *Add below any further sources of evidence you can identify*	

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FEFC accreditation criterion 3: the setting and consistent of appropriate targets for institutional performance

Additional information from circulars 98/22 and 98/41 in relation to criterion 3

Qualities of target setting
- able to predict performance accurately
- high standards set within the context of the college's strategic development and day-to-day operations

Scope
- all aspects of college's operations as they reflect its mission and its strategic and operational plans

FEFC requirements relating to criterion 3	**Self-assessment (tick appropriate response)** *When selecting your response consider also whether you have evidence to support your judgement (see indicative sources of evidence and key questions relating to evidence)*			**Indicative sources of evidence** *Key questions re: evidence:* • *does evidence exist?* • *is it sufficient and of an appropriate range?* • *is it easily accessible in an appropriate format to all who need it?* • *does the evidence relate to explicit PIs/standards/targets and is it quantified?*	**Comments** *Identify issues and possible areas for action, e.g: lack of common data collection processes*
3a. Targets set for institutional performance are well informed, taking adequate account of information about the college's local community and its needs I. Are there targets for all aspects of the college's work? II. Are there clearly identified and sound sources of information to inform target setting? (see 4b) III. Is there an appropriate range of information, e.g. internal and external benchmarking data, predictive information, client survey data, market information? (see 4b and 5c) IV. Are targets sufficiently challenging yet achievable? (see 4b) V. Are targets reviewed regularly? *Note any further questions you think are key in relation to 3a*	YES	PARTLY	NO	1. Documented targets/spreadsheets 2. Local market information and methods of gathering 3. Results of external customer surveys 4. Use of benchmarking and/or value added data 5. Guidelines on target-setting processes 6. Notes of target setting meetings and resulting reports 7. Staff training and associated evaluations *Add below any further sources of evidence you can identify*	

3b. The college has a good record of providing timely and accurate information to the Council and other bodies I. Is information provided to the Council and other bodies accurate? (see 1a and 5d) II. Is it produced to deadline? (see 1a and 5d) III. Are there systems for monitoring the above? IV. Are those responsible for producing the information clear about time scales and format? *Note any further questions you think are key in relation to 3b*	YES	PARTLY	NO	1. Records of returns to Council and other bodies (e.g. TEC awarding bodies) 2. Correspondence with Council 3. Quality standards for management information and performance against these *Add below any further sources of evidence you can identify*	
3c. Most institutional targets are consistently met and the reasons for not meeting any of them are fully investigated with the aim of improving performance I. Have most institutional targets been met over the last three years? II. Are there effective systems for monitoring performance against targets? III. Are reasons for not meeting targets investigated and appropriate actions taken? *Note any further questions you think are key in relation to 3c*	YES	PARTLY	NO	1. documented progress towards targets – reports/spreadsheets 2. reports to senior management and corporation 3. updated action plans *Add below any further sources of evidence you can identify*	
FEFC accreditation criterion 4: demonstration that standards of students' achievements are being improved and/or maintained at a high level over a three-year period *Additional information from circulars 98/22 and 98/41 in relation to criterion:* - retention and achievement levels measured against FEFC benchmarks - guidelines for calculating levels of retention and achievement required for 4c – 4f are given in Annex C of circular 98/41					

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FEFC requirements relating to criterion 4	**Self-assessment (tick appropriate response)** *When selecting your response consider also whether you have evidence to support your judgement (see indicative sources of evidence and key questions relating to evidence)*			**Indicative sources of evidence** *Key questions re: evidence:* • *does evidence exist?* • *is it sufficient and of an appropriate range?* • *is it easily accessible in an appropriate format to all who need it?* • *does the evidence relate to explicit PIs/standards/targets and is it quantified?*	**Comments** *Identify issues and possible areas for action e.g. lack of common data collection processes, evidence not readily available*
4a. The quality of at least half the curriculum provision inspected during the most recent college inspection has been judged to be good or outstanding, and none of the provision has been judged unsatisfactory I. Was at least half the curriculum provision inspected during the most recent college inspection judged to be good or outstanding? II. Was none of the provision judged unsatisfactory? III. Where the above performance was not achieved has there been significant measurable improvement? Note: For colleges that have not yet undergone a second round of inspect the same questions can be asked in relation to the first inspection report *Note any further questions you think are key in relation to 4a.*	YES	PARTLY N/A N/A	NO	1. college inspection report(s) 2. self-assessment reports 3. action plans and documented progress 4. lesson observation summaries 5. EV reports *Add below any further sources of evidence you can identify*	

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4b. appropriate targets are set for student retention and achievements and performance against these is regularly monitored by senior management and the corporation I. Are there clearly identified and sound sources of information to inform target setting? (see 3a) II. Is there an appropriate range of information, e.g. Internal and external benchmarking data, predictive information? (see 3a) III. Are targets sufficiently challenging yet achievable? (see 3a) IV. Is performance against targets monitored and reviewed regularly by senior management and the corporation? V Are targets reviewed regularly? *Note any further questions you think are key in relation to 4b*	YES	PARTLY	NO	1. documented targets against national benchmarks 2. earlier targets 3. reports to SMT and corporation 4. notes of discussions or guidelines on target setting 5. written rationale/justification for targets set 6. documented reviews of targets *Add below any further sources of evidence you can identify*	
4c. Levels of retention for students, both those in the 16-18 range and older students, studying at all levels associated with accreditation for three successive years leading up to the college's application for accredited status	YES	PARTLY	NO	1. completed calculation using retention and achievement data as explained in Annex C of FEFC circular 98/41. 2. most recent evidence of retention and achievement rates	
4d. The achievement of qualifications by students, both those in the 16-18 age range and older students, studying at all levels of qualification has met the performance levels associated with accreditation for three successive years leading up to the college's application for accredited status	YES	PARTLY	NO		
4e. There is a clear trend of improvement in both retention and achievement or that high levels of retention and achievement have been sustained	YES	PARTLY	NO		

4f. The college's performance is generally consistent across all areas of the curriculum	YES	PARTLY	NO		
See guidelines for calculating the following performance levels in Annex C of FEFC circular 98/41					
I. Has average retention met or exceeded the FEFC benchmarking data for at least 50% of the college's provision in the (two) three years leading up to its application for accreditation?		N/A			
II. Has there been an overall improvement in performance over the same (two) three year period or have rates been maintained at a high level?		N/A			
III. Where the required performance was not achieved has there been significant measurable improvement?					
IV. Has average achievement met or exceeded the FEFC benchmarking data for at least 50% of the college's provision in the (two) three years leading up to its application for accreditation?		N/A			
V. Has there been an overall improvement in performance over the same (two) three year period or have rates been maintained at a high level?		N/A			
VI. Where the required performance was not achieved has there been significant measurable improvement?					

FEFC accreditation criterion 5: effective action to address weaknesses and demonstrate the college's accountability

Additional information from circulars 98/22 and 98/41 in relation to criterion 5

- actions completed
- measurable improvement
- effective communication

FEFC requirements relating to criterion 5	Self-assessment (tick appropriate response) *When selecting your response consider also whether you have evidence to support your judgement(see indicative sources of evidence and key questions relating to evidence)*			*Indicative sources of evidence* *Key questions re: evidence:* • *does evidence exist?* • *is it sufficient and of an appropriate format to all who need it?* • *does the evidence relate to explicit PIs/standards/targets and is it quantified?*	Comments Identify issues and possible areas for action, e.g. lack of common data collection processes
5a. A rigorous and comprehensive approach is adopted to action planning as a result of self-assessment I. Are action plans drawn up in all areas and at appropriate levels as a result of self-assessment? (see 2a) II. Do they include quantifiable targets for improvement? III. Do they show time scales for implementation and staff responsible? IV. Are processes streamlined and documentation compatible to avoid overlap and ensure appropriate actions are taken at operational and strategic levels? (see 2a) *Note any further questions you think are key in relation to 5a*	YES	PARTLY	NO	1. guidelines on action planning/staff training records 2. action plans at different levels in range of areas *Add below any further sources of evidence you can identify*	
5b.Actions are regularly monitored and lead to measurable and timely improvements in quality and standards I. Are there clear systems for monitoring progress with action plans? II. Are these used and is progress reported on regularly? III. Are measurable and timely improvements achieved? *Note any further questions you think are key in relation to 5b*	YES	PARTLY	NO	1. updated action plans 2. notes of monitoring meetings 3. reports to committee(s) *Add below any further sources of evidence you can identify*	
FEFC requirements relating to criterion 5 contd.	**Self-assessment (tick appropriate response)**			**Indicative sources of evidence**	**Comments**

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5c. In determining how best to improve provision, the views of all staff, students, the community and other external stakeholders are regularly taken into account I. Are there effective systems for regularly seeking the views of all stakeholders? (see 3a) II. Is this information used as an integral part of planning for improvement? (see 2b) *Note any further questions you think are key in relation to 5c*	YES	PARTLY	NO	1. procedures and timetables for gathering feedback 2. documents and reports including independent views of the college's work (results of internal and external customer surveys, TEC, EV, IIP reports and documents) 3. reports to committee(s) on how feedback is used for improvement *Add below any further sources of evidence you can identify*	
5d. Information provided about the college, its operation and achievements is accurate and of high quality I. Is information provided to the council and other bodies accurate? (see 1a and 3b) II. Is it produced to deadline? (see 1a and 3b) III. Is it clearly presented in an appropriate format? IV. Is information communicated effectively within the college and to external stakeholders? V. Is appropriate information readily available to all interested parties within the college? *Note any further questions you think are key in relation to 5d*	YES	PARTLY	NO	1. records of returns to Council and other bodies 2. correspondence with Council and other bodies 3. quality standards for management information and performance against these 4. newsletters, forums, briefings for dissemination of information *Add below any further sources of evidence you can identify*	

Appendix 3 **Preparing for accreditation: Guidance notes on using the self-assessment instrument**

Below is a sample section of the instrument. An explanation of each box or column, with examples where appropriate, is given in ***bold italics***.

FEFC accreditation criterion 1: the existence in the college of formal and effective CONTROL, QUALITY ASSURANCE AND MONITORING arrangements

Additional information from circulars 98/22 and 98/41 in relation to criterion 1

Qualities of control, quality assurance and monitoring arrangements
– robust
– systematic
– rigorous

Scope of control, quality assurance and monitoring arrangements
– academic
– financial (including using appropriately and accounting for public funds)
– strategic

This box shows:

- ***one of the five FEFC accreditation criteria with the main focus for the criterion shown in CAPITALS***
- ***additional information given in circulars 98/22 and 98/41 relating to that criterion***

<table>
<tr>
<td>Column 1
FEFC requirements relating to criterion 1

This column shows:
• each of the FEFC requirements relating to a particular criterion, numbered as in the circulars 98/22 and 98/41, e.g: 1a, 1b
• prompt questions relating to each requirement

In some cases prompt questions may be repeated in relation to several requirements. If so, they have been cross-referenced with each other.</td>
<td colspan="3">Column 2
Self-assessment (tick appropriate response)

This column asks you to make a broad self-assessment by ticking one of three responses. You may find it helpful to agree descriptors, for example:

YES sufficiently well for accreditation
PARTLY underway/will be achieved within planned timescale for accreditation application/policy decision taken but implementation needed
NO not yet addressed/major development work needed

When selecting your response you are asked also to consider whether you have evidence to support your judgement.</td>
<td>Column 3
Indicative sources of evidence

This column suggests indicative sources of evidence to support your judgements in Column 2. You may want to add to these. You may find it useful to tick or highlight as you go those sources of evidence that you can provide.

The same sources of evidence will appear against a number of different criteria. When completing Column 2 you are asked to consider whether you have appropriate evidence to support your judgements. Some key questions relating to evidence are given to help you assess the sufficiency and quality of your evidence:
• does evidence exist?
• is it sufficient and of an appropriate range?
• is it easily accessible in an appropriate format to all who need it?
does the evidence relate to explicit PIs/standards/targets and is it quantified?</td>
<td>Column 4
Comments relating to 1a.

This column is for you to make notes as you work through the criteria, for example particular issues and possible areas for action, areas where action is already underway or case studies of existing good practice. These can be referred to when drawing up your action plan and when formulating your application.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b. Arrangements for control, quality assurance and monitoring are sufficient to manage development and change</td>
<td>YES
←→</td>
<td>PARTLY
←→</td>
<td>NO
←→</td>
<td rowspan="4">1. notes of meetings where new developments and demands are discussed
2. user satisfaction re. arrangements: surveys/feedback/minutes of meetings
3. formal reviews of arrangements
4. revised/updated versions
5. Action plans and progress</td>
<td rowspan="4"><u>Example in relation to 1b</u>

Changing demands identified and reviewed but haphazardly rather than systematically
Some monitoring arrangements have been reviewed and updated

Possible action:
Set up a system for feedback and review of all monitoring arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Are changing internal and external demands and needs identified regularly?</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Are the arrangements for doing so reviewed regularly?</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Are the arrangements updated or modified as a result?</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</table>

Appendix 4 (I)

College accreditation: evidence matrix

Sources of evidence	College document Ref.	FEFC criteria for accreditation				
		1	2	3	4	5

Appendix 4 (ii) College accreditation: more detailed evidence matrix

Sources of evidence	College documentation Ref.	FEFC criteria for accreditation																		
		1a	1b	1c	2a	2b	2c	3a	3b	3c	4a	4b	4c	4d	4e	4f	5a	5b	5c	5d

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