



**External quality  
arrangements for  
Scotland's colleges**  
September 2008



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# 1 FOREWORD

This is an innovative and radical landmark in the development of external quality arrangements for Scotland's colleges. The quality framework and arrangements for annual engagement, subject-based aspect reports and external review reflect new thinking nationally, within HMIE, in the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council (SFC) and in colleges themselves.

Colleges are increasingly taking responsibility for assuring and enhancing the quality of their provision. We are now four years beyond the tenth anniversary of incorporation and that anniversary stimulated a huge amount of reflection on how far the sector had come. Reporting on the situation about then, HMIE's report, *Improving Scottish Education*, recognised that:

*In most colleges, quality assurance and improvement arrangements have developed and become more comprehensive over the past four years. Where programme teams have implemented rigorous and well-informed self-evaluation processes, this has often led to improvements in the learner experience. Similarly, where programme teams evaluate learning and teaching and share good practice in teaching approaches, this often leads to individual staff adopting more effective methods.*

*A number of specific benefits have accrued from self-evaluation and improvement activity including: improved retention rates, leading to improved attainment in some subjects; improvements in learning and teaching approaches; and better use of access to ICT to develop self-confidence or independence in learning.*

This well-attested maturing of the college sector led to fairly radical changes in quality arrangements for the 2004-2008 cycle, including a simplified cross-college framework; reporting only by exception through *other significant factors* on most aspects of activity at the subject level; a common phase-one review for all colleges; and a proportionate follow-through phase that in many cases focused only on exploring sector-leading and innovative practice.

Further and even more radical changes to quality arrangements in the college sector are now necessary. A prompt for change, of course, was the establishment of the single Scottish Funding Council for both colleges and universities. This was quickly followed by the establishment of the Joint Quality Review Group that agreed the three key principles and other important values that underpin these new arrangements: ownership of quality by colleges; accountability for quality by Boards of Management; the embedding of equality and diversity in all provision; proportionality in approaches to external review; and review outcomes expressed as confidence statements.

Some of the big messages for the future are common to changes in HMIE's activity across all of the sectors in which it inspects and reviews: overall lightening of external scrutiny activity; further development of proportionate approaches; an increasing role for professional engagement between reviewers and staff; further-developing user focus, for example, with the introduction of student team members to reviews; simpler and less scale-focused evaluation and reporting.

All of these big messages, along with the principles and approaches advocated by the Joint Quality Review Group, are reflected in these new *External quality arrangements for Scotland's colleges*.

Graham Donaldson  
HM Senior Chief Inspector



# 2 HMIE QUALITY FRAMEWORK

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The indicators in this edition of *External quality arrangements for Scotland's colleges, September 2008* are arranged under the **three key principles**, established by the report of SFC's Joint Quality Review Group<sup>1</sup>, addressing **four high-level questions** which HMIE is adopting for evaluation purposes:

### High quality learning

- ✦ How well are learners progressing and achieving relevant, high quality outcomes?
- ✦ How effective are the college's learning and teaching processes?

### Learner engagement

- ✦ How well are learners engaged in enhancing their own learning and the work and life of the college?

### Quality culture

- ✦ How well is the college led and how well is it enhancing the quality of its services for learners and other stakeholders?

These four powerful questions are set out in a quality framework of **nine elements** in:

- ✦ *HMIE quality framework, September 2008<sup>2</sup>: for reference during the external review of Scotland's colleges*

and further in the form of challenge questions in:

- ✦ *HMIE quality framework, September 2008: for reference during the external review of Scotland's colleges (interrogative version)<sup>3</sup>.*

<sup>1</sup> Final Report from Joint Quality Review Group to Council, August 2007

<sup>2</sup> See Page 5

<sup>3</sup> See Page 6

# HMIE quality framework, September 2008: for reference during the external review of Scotland's colleges

Leadership and the enhancement of the quality of college services for learners and other stakeholders\*\*\*

Engagement of learners in enhancing their own learning and the work and life of the college\*\*

Learner progress and achievement of relevant, high quality outcomes\*

Learning and teaching processes\*

## 1. Key performance outcomes

- 1.1 Achievement of educational aims, objectives and targets
- 1.2 Retention, attainment and progression trends
- 1.3 Fulfilment of statutory duties

## 2. Impact on learners and other users of college services

- 2.1 Accessibility, flexibility and inclusiveness
- 2.2 Relevance of programmes and services to learner needs
- 2.3 Progress, attainment and wider achievement

## 3. Impact on staff

- 3.1 Motivation and engagement
- 3.2 Reflection and professional discussion
- 3.3 Impact of teamwork

## 4. Impact on employers and communities

- 4.1 Relevance of programmes and services to the economy and to employer needs
- 4.2 Relevance of programmes and services to the needs of communities

## 5. Education, training and lifelong learning

- 5.1 Equality and diversity
- 5.2 The learning process
- 5.3 Teaching for effective learning
- 5.4 Context and planning for learning and teaching
- 5.5 Assessment for learning
- 5.6 Information, guidance and support
- 5.7 Enhancement through self-evaluation and internal review

## 6. Providing direction and facilitating change

- 6.1 Planning
- 6.2 Action to achieve aims, objectives and targets of plans
- 6.3 Managing and responding to changing environments
- 6.4 Planning for and managing change

## 7. Management and support of staff

- 7.1 Qualifications and experience of staff
- 7.2 Working relationships with colleagues, learners and external stakeholders
- 7.3 Recruitment, selection and retention of staff
- 7.4 Workforce planning
- 7.5 Continuing professional development and review

## 8. Partnerships and resources

- 8.1 Partnership working with communities, other learning providers, employers and other agencies
- 8.2 Management and use of resources and learning environments

## 9. Educational leadership and direction

- 9.1 Educational aims, objectives and targets
- 9.2 Leadership for learning and teaching
- 9.3 Leadership for services to support learners
- 9.4 Developing and maintaining a quality culture

\* relates to the key principle of *High quality learning* and the associated confidence statements

\*\* relates to the key principle of *Learner engagement* and the associated confidence statement

\*\*\* relates to the key principle of *Quality culture* and the associated confidence statement



# HMIE quality framework, September 2008: for reference during the external review of Scotland's colleges (interrogative version)

How well is the college led and how well is it enhancing the quality of its services for learners and other stakeholders?\*\*\*

How well are learners engaged in enhancing their own learning and the work and life of the college?\*\*

How well are learners progressing and achieving relevant, high quality outcomes?\*

How effective are the college's learning and teaching processes?\*

## 1. Key performance outcomes

- 1.1 How well does the college perform against its educational aims, objectives and targets?
- 1.2 How effective is the college at achieving and maintaining high levels of retention, attainment and progression?
- 1.3 How well does the college fulfil its statutory duties?

## 2. Impact on learners and other users of college services

- 2.1 How accessible, flexible and inclusive are college programmes and services?
- 2.2 How well do programmes and services meet learner needs?
- 2.3 How well do learners make progress, attain qualifications and achieve more widely?

## 3. Impact on staff

- 3.1 How well does the college motivate staff and secure their engagement in setting and achieving college targets?
- 3.2 How well do staff reflect on, and participate in, professional discussion to enhance learning, teaching and other services?
- 3.3 How well do staff work together in their own teams, and more widely in the college?

## 4. Impact on employers and communities

- 4.1 How well does the college serve local and national employers?
- 4.2 How well does the college serve its communities?

## 5. Education, training and lifelong learning

- 5.1 How well does the college develop and deliver programmes and services to meet the needs of learners from all backgrounds?
- 5.2 How well do learners learn?
- 5.3 How well do teaching and the use of resources ensure effective learning?
- 5.4 How effective is the context and planning for learning and teaching?
- 5.5 How well is assessment used to promote effective learning?
- 5.6 How well are potential and current learners provided with information, advice and support?
- 5.7 How well does the college sustain continuous enhancement through self-evaluation and internal review activities?

## 6. Providing direction and facilitating change

- 6.1 How effective are college planning processes?
- 6.2 How effective is action to achieve aims, objectives and targets of plans?
- 6.3 How well does the college recognise and respond to changes in its environments?
- 6.4 How well does the college plan for and manage change?

## 7. Management and support of staff

- 7.1 How relevant and current are staff qualifications, skills and experience?
- 7.2 How productive are the working relationships among staff, learners and external stakeholders?
- 7.3 How effective is the college in recruiting, selecting and retaining staff?
- 7.4 How effective is workforce planning?
- 7.5 How effective is the college in developing its staff?

## 8. Partnerships and resources

- 8.1 How extensive and effective are college partnerships with communities, other learning providers, employers and other agencies?
- 8.2 How well does the college manage and use its resources and learning environments?

## 9. Educational leadership and direction

- 9.1 How appropriate and influential are the college aims, objectives and targets?
- 9.2 How effective is the leadership for learning and teaching?
- 9.3 How effective is the leadership for services to support learners?
- 9.4 How well does the quality culture in the college lead to quality improvement and enhancement?

\* relates to the key principle of *High quality learning* and the associated confidence statements

\*\* relates to the key principle of *Learner engagement* and the associated confidence statement

\*\*\* relates to the key principle of *Quality culture* and the associated confidence statement

## 2.2 USING THE FRAMEWORK OF QUALITY INDICATORS<sup>4</sup> IN EXTERNAL REVIEW

The quality framework provides a structure for external review which can be used in different ways.

It includes indicators which HMIE can use to reach a professional judgement of the extent to which *High quality learning*; *Learner engagement*<sup>5</sup>; and *Quality culture* are being delivered in Scotland's colleges. This set of 17 **reference quality indicators** brings together evaluations of:

- Element 1:      **Key performance outcomes**
- Element 2:      **Impact on learners and other users of college services**
- Element 5:      **Education, training and lifelong learning**
- Element 9:      **Educational leadership and direction**

Together, the **reference quality indicators** within these four elements will enable HMIE to form evaluations summarised in confidence statements<sup>6</sup>. Other quality indicators in the framework may be used as required in a proportionate way when other significant factors are identified.

Evaluations in relation to *High quality learning* will be based on the combination of the **reference quality indicators** in Elements 1, 2 and 5.

Evaluations in relation to *Learner engagement* and *Quality culture* will be overarching, and based on the combination of all evaluations against the 17 **reference quality indicators**.

## 2.3 USING REFERENCE QUALITY INDICATORS AND SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

The gathering of evidence on which to base evaluations will be kept manageable by carefully planned sampling. The key sources of evidence during external review will come from professional discussions, from what reviewers actually observe, from data and information of various sorts, and from the views of people who are closely involved with the college, such as learners, employers and partner agencies, as well as staff. Where weaknesses in outcomes or practice are identified, reviewers will find it helpful to refer to the written guidance and documentation of the college. Such documentation could also include programmes of study, teaching staff plans, programme materials, policies, procedures, also guidelines and minutes of meetings. What is written down will be cross-referred with what actually happens. Similarly, progress reports on enhancement plans will be checked against what has actually been delivered. What really matters is the impact of all the key activities in the college on learners, their learning and the impact on other stakeholders.

<sup>4</sup> See Annex 1

<sup>5</sup> See Annex 2

<sup>6</sup> See Annex 3

# 3 EXTERNAL REVIEW METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 Introduction

This section describes the main features of the new HMIE external review methodology to be applied in Scotland's colleges over the period 1 August 2008 to 31 July 2012. The new review methodology and the quality framework around which it is structured take account of new thinking about the role of external review in the public sector and place more emphasis on high-level strategic issues such as the organisational capacity for and commitment to internal review and self-evaluation, a focus on performance outcomes and impact on users, and effective leadership and management. There is greater emphasis on institutional ownership of quality and recognition of greater diversity of practice in internal review and self-evaluation. SFC has already reminded colleges of this in its Circular SFC/33/2008: *Council guidance to colleges on quality*.<sup>7</sup> Opportunities for learner engagement in external review are strengthened in the new review methodology. Moreover, HMIE reviews will be more explicitly informed by considerations of risk<sup>8</sup> and proportionality.

## 3.2 Aims and objectives of external reviews

External reviews will be designed to:

- ✦ evaluate colleges against the three key principles of *High quality learning, Learner engagement* and *Quality culture*;
- ✦ support and promote quality enhancement in colleges to provide the best possible experience for the learner;
- ✦ provide information to Scottish Ministers, SFC and the public on the quality of colleges and the education and training they provide;
- ✦ provide an independent evaluation to assist colleges in informing prospective and current learners of the quality of the college's programmes and services;
- ✦ complement college-led internal review and self-evaluation;
- ✦ contribute to a strategic overview of quality across the sector for SFC; and
- ✦ identify excellence and sector-leading and innovative practice for wider dissemination.

In realising the above aims, the breadth and depth of the external review will be based on, and proportionate to, the intelligence held by SFC and HMIE on a college's capacity and commitment to deliver *High quality learning, Learner engagement*, and *Quality culture*.

## 3.3 Key features of external reviews

Scotland's colleges will continue to be reviewed over a four-year period. The scope of reviews in 2008-12 will be determined from intelligence established and updated through the annual engagement process. Adjustments may be made to the sequencing of reviews as against previous four-year cycles to reflect changing information about the context and effectiveness of each college.

<sup>7</sup> link to website: [http://www.sfc.ac.uk/information/info\\_circulars/sfc/2008/sfc3308/sfc3308.html](http://www.sfc.ac.uk/information/info_circulars/sfc/2008/sfc3308/sfc3308.html)

<sup>8</sup> See Annex 4

External reviews will be structured according to the quality framework *HMIE quality framework, September 2008: for reference during the external review of Scotland's colleges*. The reviews will be proportionate in nature. Colleges having a strong track record and where the conclusions of annual engagement are consistent with college effectiveness will normally receive the minimum form of review. This form of external review will be based on the **reference quality indicators** within the four elements, that enable HMIE to evaluate the college against the three key principles of *High quality learning, Learner engagement, and Quality culture*. Other colleges may be reviewed with varyingly greater depth of investigation and/or wider samples of provision. In these circumstances, review teams will use other quality indicators in the framework in a proportionate way to form evaluations where other significant factors are identified.

The external review will include a generic review of learning and teaching. HMIE will agree with each college the sampling approach to be used on a particular review. The review will aim to provide an independent judgement of the quality of learning and teaching in the college and evidence on the effectiveness of college-led internal review and self-evaluation of learning and teaching. However, where intelligence and risk analysis signal concerns in specific subject areas, the review of a college may be supplemented by the additional subject review of learning and teaching in these specific areas.

The generic approach will allow reviewers to be less constrained by defined subject areas and to sample across all curriculum areas, levels and modes of learning. It is intended to broaden and promote professional dialogue about learning and teaching and pedagogy beyond the confines and expectations of specific subject areas. The generic approach also aims to encourage the dissemination of good practice in learning and teaching across curriculum areas.

Reviewers will continue to report the outcome of external review in terms of strengths and areas for further development. They will use confidence statements to summarise their evaluations of the college.

### 3.4 The external review process

The phasing of external reviews of colleges in academic year 2008-09 will be over the period February to April 2009. Thereafter, reviews will generally commence in late October and continue through to May in each academic year. Approximately eight weeks before the review, HMIE will brief the college principal, the chair of the Board of Management, managers and staff, the student association and learner representatives about the external review process. At this stage, the managing inspector (MI) will confirm the scope of the review, which will be based on the outcomes of the annual engagement process, updated by latest intelligence on the college.

In the pre-review period, the managing inspector will liaise with the college and explain the scope of the review including the nature and extent of any additional activity necessary beyond the minimum form of review. The college will be invited to provide current information for the review team. The managing inspector will agree with the college the sampling approach to be used for the generic review of learning and teaching.

The external review will normally last for three days, usually over the period Monday to Wednesday. On Monday morning, the review team will meet with the principal, senior management team and student association representative. Over the three-day period, the review team will:

- ✦ engage with learners;
- ✦ observe episodes of learning and teaching and provide opportunity for professional dialogue on the sessions observed with each member of teaching staff or other learning facilitator on strengths and areas for development;

- ✦ conduct interviews and undertake other activity required to determine the extent of concordance between documentary evidence and practice;
- ✦ evaluate evidence against the 17 **reference quality indicators**; and
- ✦ identify key strengths and areas for development.

On Friday, a sub-group of the review team will return to the college to provide oral feedback on the findings of the external review, including the provisional confidence statements. In the third working week following the review, HMIE will convey in writing the findings of the review and the confirmed confidence statements. A report on the review will normally be published within 13 working weeks following the completion of an external review.

### 3.5 Composition and deployment of review teams

Where annual engagement activity signals college effectiveness, the review team will involve typically a student team member and five reviewers. There will be a managing inspector and four team members, usually two HMI and two associate assessors. The number of reviewers will be adjusted to take account of the size and complexity of the college. For example, where colleges deliver in excess of 100,000 SUMs<sup>9</sup> there are likely to be at least six reviewers. Where colleges deliver 10,000 SUMs and below the number of reviewers is likely to be reduced to four. Sometimes, HMIE may make arrangements with colleges for an international or other observer to join the external review team.

Where risks or weaknesses are evident through the annual engagement process, additional reviewers will be appointed to extend or enhance coverage of subject and/or cross-college themes. These additional proportionate review activities will normally be carried out at the same time as the activities in the minimum form of review. At the planning stage, HMIE will give due consideration to requests from colleges for additional engagement by HMIE to undertake additional review activities.

### 3.6 The college-nominated review co-ordinator

Before the review, HMIE will discuss and agree with each college the proposed nature and levels of reviewer engagement with managers and staff. HMIE will encourage college senior managers to work in partnership with reviewers to identify appropriate evidence.

HMIE will continue with the practice whereby colleges identify a senior manager with a comprehensive strategic overview to fulfil the role of review co-ordinator. This senior manager will play a key role in supporting the smooth operation of the review. The role of review co-ordinator is to:

- ✦ act as the primary contact and liaison between the HMIE review team and the college;
- ✦ clarify managers', staff and team roles and responsibilities; and
- ✦ direct reviewers to sources of evidence across the college, including the appropriate staff with whom to discuss specific issues.

<sup>9</sup> A SUM equates to a notional 40 hours of student learning

### 3.7 Concerns and complaints

Colleges that believe reviewers have not received all available relevant evidence before arriving at an evaluation or confidence statement should submit any additional evidence in writing to the MI within five working days of the oral feedback by the review team. The MI, consulting members of the review team as necessary, will consider any additional evidence and reply in writing, with a decision on any changes to be made.

College managers who have a concern or complaint about the conduct or the outcomes of a review should raise it in the first instance with the MI. If the matter is not resolved to the satisfaction of the college, it should be raised with HM Assistant Chief Inspector responsible for the college review programme, who will seek to resolve the issue.

If the concern or complaint is not satisfactorily resolved at this stage the college should pursue it through HMIE's published complaints procedure. Colleges will receive printed copies of the procedure in advance of the review, and it is also available at [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk).

### 3.8 Follow-up to external reviews

Colleges will be required to address areas for development and main points for action identified during external review. SFC will consider the external review report and write to the college indicating the scope and nature of further engagement by the college with SFC and HMIE. In some circumstances, SFC may request HMIE to conduct formal follow-up reviews of colleges. The scope of such reviews will be customised to address the specific context of each college.



# 4 ANNUAL ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN HMIE AND EACH COLLEGE

## 4.1 General principles for Pre-visit analyses and Annual engagement visits

- ✦ provide mechanisms for identifying and evaluating potential excellence and potential risks<sup>10</sup>;
- ✦ focus on the three key principles of *High quality learning*; *Learner engagement*; and *Quality culture*;
- ✦ primary emphasis during Pre-visit analyses on impact on learners and outcomes for learners (rather than inputs and processes, which may also be included in Annual engagement visits);
- ✦ prognostic/predictive validity of data, information and methods used;
- ✦ the use for Pre-visit analyses of only publicly available data and information, and such other data and information that colleges provide to SFC or the college HMI;
- ✦ signals of potential excellence and potential risks identified by HMIE (mainly prior to Annual engagement visits); and
- ✦ signals of potential excellence and potential risks evaluated during Annual engagement visits through discussion with managers and staff, and engagement with learners.

HMIE will seek to answer, annually, three questions in conversation with the college. Does our analysis and engagement suggest that:

- ✦ learners will (continue to) progress well and achieve relevant, high quality outcomes?
- ✦ learners will (continue to) engage in and enhance their own learning and the work and life of the college?
- ✦ college leadership will (continue to) enhance the quality of services for learners and other stakeholders?

## 4.2 Pre-visit analysis

### Purpose

- ✦ to analyse available data and information to create a draft agenda for the subsequent Annual engagement visit; and
- ✦ to identify any signals of potential excellence, signals of potential risk or important aspects on which there is no, insufficient or apparently contradictory data or information.

### Focus and nature of activity

- ✦ a desk exercise carried out by HMIE and, possibly, AAs;
- ✦ will use existing data and information such as from recent reviews and post-review action plans, college HMI visits, reports from HMIE aspect tasks, and from other scrutiny and quality bodies;
- ✦ will use annual college reports to the Council and public-domain information such as PIs (informed by trend analysis where feasible) and college reports on the impact of equalities policies; and
- ✦ HMIE will not expect colleges to provide any data or information that is not already in (or is legally required to be in) the public domain or provided to SFC.

<sup>10</sup> See Annex 4

### Scale and timing

- ✦ normally one day of activity for two HMI/AAs; and
- ✦ the programme of Pre-visit analyses will generally begin in September each year and will normally be completed by June the following year.

#### Indicative sources of data and information for *Pre-visit analysis*:

- ✦ FES data analysed for trends;
- ✦ college plans;
- ✦ college reports on the impact of their published equalities schemes;
- ✦ college annual (BoM) report to SFC;
- ✦ any other published self-evaluation or internal review reports;
- ✦ recent HMIE external review reports and college post-review action plans;
- ✦ any previous HMIE annual engagement summary;
- ✦ fieldwork for subject-based aspect reports;
- ✦ reports on the college by other scrutiny or quality bodies, such as IIP;
- ✦ information from public bodies such as Skills Development Scotland;
- ✦ college audited accounts or financial reports;
- ✦ any other public or SFC-provided information or information provided by the college to the college HMI.

### 4.3 Annual engagement visit

#### Purpose

- ✦ to share the findings of the Pre-visit analysis with the college;
- ✦ to explore any signals of potential excellence, potential risk or important aspects on which HMIE have no, insufficient or apparently contradictory data or information;
- ✦ to support enhancement;
- ✦ to inform HMIE's annual sectoral report to SFC; and
- ✦ to underpin the proportionality, scope, depth and timing of external reviews by HMIE.

#### Focus and nature of activity

- ✦ will be evaluative, but not be a mini external review;
- ✦ will focus on:
  - ✦ the three key principles including, in terms of outcomes, the wider achievement of learners and the progression of learners; and
  - ✦ how the college has addressed any issues from the previous external review or previous annual engagement activity;
- ✦ will include consideration of:
  - ✦ equality and diversity;
  - ✦ international aspects; and
  - ✦ sector-leading and innovative practice (SLIP);
- ✦ will comprise:
  - ✦ professional dialogue with managers and staff;
  - ✦ engagement with learner representatives, other groups of learners and, possibly, other key stakeholders; and
  - ✦ consideration of other college documents as appropriate.



#### Scale and timing

- ✦ will normally:
  - ✦ involve two HMI for one day (or one HMI and one AA); and
  - ✦ be led by the college HMI (as an extension of the college HMI role)
- ✦ will exceptionally be on a larger scale if:
  - ✦ concerns were expressed in confidence statements from the last external review;
  - ✦ findings from the Pre-visit analysis indicate major concerns;
  - ✦ the college has requested and HMIE has agreed to a more extensive or detailed engagement.
- ✦ HMIE will:
  - ✦ carry out visits starting in October each year and completing by June of the following year;
  - ✦ contact the college at least six weeks before the visit to agree a suitable date;
  - ✦ contact the college four weeks before the visit to present a draft agenda for discussion;
  - ✦ agree the final agenda with the college two weeks before the visit;
  - ✦ invite the college to nominate examples of SLIP, of which up to two may be considered during the visit, and any others logged for prioritisation and possible exploration at a later date; and
  - ✦ give short, oral feedback to the principal, senior managers and learner representatives at the end of the visit.

#### 4.4 After annual engagement

- ✦ HMIE will:
  - ✦ complete written feedback on the annual engagement activity;
  - ✦ send a written summary of the findings of the annual engagement activity to the college and SFC;
  - ✦ agree any desirable actions with the college and any role for the college HMI and possibly other specialist HMI staff in support;
  - ✦ present the written summary at a subsequent meeting with the principal and the college Board of Management (or a relevant Board sub-committee); and
  - ✦ ask the college to contribute to preparing SLIP for dissemination or provide access for SLIP to be filmed for inclusion on a *Showcase for Excellence* website, as appropriate.

# 5 SUBJECT-BASED ASPECT REPORTS

## 5.1 Overview

The new arrangements will involve HMIE carrying out a number of in-depth subject-based aspect reports each year. These reports will include evaluations of the effectiveness of learning and teaching processes and of how well learners are progressing and achieving high quality outcomes in a number of colleges involved in fieldwork visits, based on the *HMIE quality framework, September 2008: for reference during the external review of Scotland's colleges*. As appropriate and feasible, they will also draw upon evidence from external reviews.

Partnership working and evidence from bodies such as subject networks, sector skills councils, employers, SQA, *Scotland's Colleges* and other agencies will also inform the final reports. Published reports will include examples of excellence and SLIP. Main recommendations for colleges and other stakeholders will also be identified. The published reports and subsequent engagement with learners, staff and managers in the college sector and other agencies will be designed to build capacity in the sector and achieve real improvement and enhancement for learners.

The new arrangements will allow minority curriculum areas to be included in subject-based aspect reports. For curriculum areas delivered by the majority of Scotland's colleges, arrangements will be made to ensure that a representative sample of colleges is included in the fieldwork.

## 5.2 General principles for subject-based aspect reports

Within individual subject areas each report will emphasise:

- ✦ a Scotland-wide perspective on the quality of learning – including both the process of learning and the outcomes of learning;
- ✦ the identification and dissemination of excellence and SLIP; and
- ✦ quality enhancement of learning and teaching.

Each report will focus on the three key principles of:

- ✦ high quality learning;
- ✦ learner engagement; and
- ✦ quality culture.

## 5.3 Purpose of the reports (sector-wide)

The published reports will inform the sector on:

- ✦ how well learners learn;
- ✦ how well they are taught;
- ✦ how successful learners are;
- ✦ the extent to which programmes meet the requirements of learners, industry, community, HEIs, and government;
- ✦ how well programmes are resourced;
- ✦ innovation and excellence in the curriculum;

- ✦ progression routes for learners;
- ✦ development activities; and
- ✦ recommendations for improvement or enhancement.

#### 5.4 Purpose of the reports (colleges involved in fieldwork)

For colleges involved in fieldwork the process will:

- ✦ provide an external evaluation of subject provision;
- ✦ support an agenda for improvement and enhancement;
- ✦ create opportunities to explore developmental issues through professional dialogue;
- ✦ identify examples of excellence and SLIP;
- ✦ allow excellence and SLIP to be shared across the sector in the final report; and
- ✦ inform subsequent Annual engagement visits or External review.

#### 5.5 Selection of colleges

Fieldwork will involve a representative sample of colleges. These will be identified through analysis of FES data, to include colleges with a high proportion of activity compared to sector norms and colleges with rural and urban catchments. Additionally, HMIE will invite colleges to request involvement in specific subject-based aspect reports. Fieldwork will normally involve a maximum of ten colleges in any aspect report. In some aspect reports, fieldwork may also involve a questionnaire to all colleges offering a particular subject area.

#### 5.6 Focus and nature of activity

The subject-based aspect tasks will normally involve two reviewers visiting each selected college twice in a year. Each task will have a task manager who will be responsible for making arrangements for reviewers to visit colleges, preparing the paperwork for the visits and producing the published report.

The task manager will contact the principal of the college to discuss the college's involvement in the subject-based aspect report. The principal will be asked to nominate appropriate staff to contact before the visit commences in order to make suitable preparations for reviewer activities.

The task manager will ensure that a timetable for visits covering an appropriate range of activity is agreed with the relevant curriculum managers. The types of activity that will be planned at this stage will include scheduling observations to cover the range of provision in the curriculum area, setting up meetings with groups of learners and staff, and facilitating discussions with local employers and/or community groups.

Colleges will normally be contacted by the task manager between August and September to negotiate their involvement and make appropriate arrangements for the visits. Before the visits commence, the task manager

will request the nominated member of staff to provide the most recent internal review or self-evaluation report for the relevant curriculum area. The college will also be asked to verify a performance indicator analysis undertaken by HMIE for the curriculum area.

During the visits, activities will focus primarily on learning and teaching including equality and diversity. These will involve:

- ✦ a maximum of eight observations to be undertaken over the two visits;
- ✦ discussions with representative groups of learners;
- ✦ professional dialogue with curriculum managers and teaching staff;
- ✦ examination of appropriate documentation;
- ✦ professional dialogue with teaching staff on strengths and areas for development identified during observations of learning and teaching;
- ✦ verbal feedback of strengths and areas for development to managers at the end of each visit; and
- ✦ written feedback provided within two weeks after the final visit.

The task manager or college HMI may be present at second visits to provide moderation of findings.

In each academic year the visits will commence around October and normally be completed by the following April. The SLA between SFC and HMIE will detail the individual curriculum or other areas chosen for the tasks.

## ANNEX 1 THE QUALITY INDICATORS: indicative themes for external reviewers

### ELEMENT 1: KEY PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

This element is concerned with the college's progress in achieving key educational aims, objectives and targets and with the extent to which the college takes action that results in enhancement. It is also concerned with progress against targets and performance indicators associated with learner retention, progress and attainment over a three-year period, and explores the extent of learner progression to further learning or employment. It also considers how well the college has responded to legislation and national directives.

#### QUALITY INDICATORS

#### THEMES

- |     |   |  |
|-----|---|--|
| 1.1 | Achievement of educational aims, objectives and targets | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Progress on key aims and objectives</li> <li>➤ Achievement of targets and key performance indicators</li> </ul> |
|-----|---|--|

*How well does the college perform against its educational aims, objectives and targets?*

- |     |  |   |
|-----|--|---|
| 1.2 | Retention, attainment and progression trends | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Retention and attainment over a three-year period</li> <li>➤ Progression to further learning or employment over a three-year period</li> </ul> |
|-----|--|---|

*How effective is the college at achieving and maintaining high levels of retention, attainment and progression?*

- |     |                                |   |
|-----|--------------------------------|---|
| 1.3 | Fulfilment of statutory duties | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Relevant legislation</li> <li>➤ Relevant directives and regulations</li> <li>➤ Requirements of statutory bodies</li> </ul> |
|-----|--------------------------------|---|

*How well does the college fulfil its statutory duties?*

## ELEMENT 2: IMPACT ON LEARNERS AND OTHER USERS OF COLLEGE SERVICES

This element is concerned with how well the college identifies and responds to the needs of learners and other users and provides opportunities for engagement with learners. It looks at the appropriateness, accessibility and effectiveness of its programmes and its services to support learners and learning. It considers how well the range, levels and modes of delivery and assessment assist participation, transition and engagement. It considers how effectively learning opportunities are promoted and targeted to under-represented or minority groups. It covers learner progress, attainment and wider achievements in vocational and essential skills, and learner progression to further learning and employment. It considers learner satisfaction with the programmes and services of the college.

### QUALITY INDICATORS

### THEMES

#### 2.1 Accessibility, flexibility and inclusiveness

- ✦ Identifying and responding to needs
- ✦ Arrangements to support learners and learning
- ✦ Range and flexibility of delivery and assessment modes
- ✦ Promoting and targeting learning opportunities

*How accessible, flexible and inclusive are college programmes and services?*

#### 2.2 Relevance of programmes and services to learner needs

- ✦ Range and levels of programmes
- ✦ Extent to which entry and exit points assist transition
- ✦ Learner engagement
- ✦ Preparation for employment and further learning
- ✦ Embedding of ethos of equality and diversity
- ✦ Embedding of sustainability
- ✦ Learner satisfaction

*How well do programmes and services meet learner needs?*

#### 2.3 Progress, attainment and wider achievement

- ✦ Progress from prior learning and attainment
- ✦ Attainment of qualifications
- ✦ Success in award schemes and competitions
- ✦ Achievement of essential skills including core, personal, learning, employability, citizenship
- ✦ Learner satisfaction

*How well do learners make progress, attain qualifications and achieve more widely?*

**ELEMENT 3: IMPACT ON STAFF**

This element is concerned with how well the college engages staff in meeting college aims and objectives. It focuses on the college's effectiveness in promoting a collegiate approach and keeping staff informed about college directions and priorities. It considers the motivation and engagement of staff in contributing to the work and life of the college. It explores how well staff reflect on and share effective practice, and the effectiveness of teamwork.

**QUALITY INDICATORS****THEMES****3.1 Motivation and engagement**

- ✦ Staff knowledge of and action to achieve college aims and objectives
- ✦ Communication arrangements
- ✦ Staff involvement in planning

*How well does the college motivate staff and secure their engagement in setting and achieving college targets?*

**3.2 Reflection and professional discussion**

- ✦ Evaluation of learning and teaching and other services
- ✦ Identifying good practice
- ✦ Sharing and adopting good practice

*How well do staff reflect on, and participate in, professional discussion to enhance learning, teaching and other services?*

**3.3 Impact of teamwork**

- ✦ Staffing arrangements within cross-college teams
- ✦ Information sharing within and among teams
- ✦ Collaborative working

*How well do staff work together in their own teams and more widely in the college?*

## ELEMENT 4: IMPACT ON EMPLOYERS AND COMMUNITIES

This element is concerned with how well the college's provision meets the needs of employers and of the communities it serves. It explores the effectiveness of arrangements for engaging with key interests and priorities at local and national levels and evaluates the college's responsiveness to current and anticipated needs. It considers the level of satisfaction of employers and communities with the programmes and services of the college. It also explores the effectiveness of arrangements for providing programmes and services to meet specific needs.

### QUALITY INDICATORS

### THEMES

#### 4.1 Relevance of programmes and services to the economy and to employer needs

- ✦ Links and partnerships with employers and industry bodies
- ✦ Use of labour market information and environmental demographics
- ✦ Employer participation and influence in the design and evaluation of programmes and services
- ✦ Arrangements to meet specific needs of employers
- ✦ Employer satisfaction with college programmes and services

*How well does the college serve local and national employers?*

#### 4.2 Relevance of programmes and services to the needs of communities

- ✦ Links and partnerships with community and voluntary organisations
- ✦ Participation and influence of community organisations in the design and evaluation of programmes and services
- ✦ Arrangements to meet specific needs in communities, including equality duties
- ✦ Satisfaction in communities with college programmes and services

*How well does the college serve its communities?*



## ELEMENT 5: EDUCATION, TRAINING AND LIFELONG LEARNING

This element is concerned with how well the college helps its learners to maximise their potential and to make informed choices about their learning and employment goals. It considers the effectiveness of arrangements to advise and prepare individuals before entry. The extent to which the college helps learners take responsibility for their own learning and in planning towards further learning and employment goals is explored. It considers the effectiveness of learning, teaching and assessment. It explores the extent to which programmes and services aid access and transition and provide support. The effectiveness of collaboration among teaching staff, support staff and external agencies in providing these programmes and services is also considered.

### QUALITY INDICATORS

### THEMES

#### 5.1 Equality and diversity

- ✦ Promotion of equality and diversity
- ✦ Curriculum content and resources
- ✦ Arrangements to meet needs of specific groups

*How well does the college develop and deliver programmes and services to meet the needs of learners from all backgrounds?*

#### 5.2 The learning process

- ✦ Learner motivation and active participation
- ✦ Use of resources by learners
- ✦ Development of independence in learning
- ✦ Learner progress

*How well do learners learn?*

#### 5.3 Teaching for effective learning

- ✦ Application of professional and subject knowledge
- ✦ Appropriateness and range of teaching approaches
- ✦ Use of resources by staff
- ✦ Promotion of achievement and standards

*How well do teaching and the use of resources ensure effective learning?*

#### 5.4 Context and planning for learning and teaching

- ✦ Quality of relations between and among staff and learners
- ✦ Planning of learning activities
- ✦ Learner involvement in planning
- ✦ Learning environment and climate for learning
- ✦ Sustainability

*How effective is the context and planning for learning and teaching?*

#### 5.5 Assessment for learning

- ✦ Planning and scheduling of assessment
- ✦ Methods of providing feedback and encouraging reflection on progress
- ✦ Arrangements for learners with additional support needs

*How well is assessment used to promote effective learning?*

## ELEMENT 5: EDUCATION, TRAINING AND LIFELONG LEARNING

## QUALITY INDICATORS

## THEMES

## 5.6 Information, guidance and support

- ✦ Information to potential learners
- ✦ Arrangements for learners to set goals and reflect on learning
- ✦ Curricular and vocational guidance
- ✦ Access to and use of services to support learning

*How well are potential and current learners provided with information, advice and support?*

## 5.7 Enhancement through self-evaluation and internal review

- ✦ Involvement of learners, staff and external stakeholders
- ✦ Analysis and evaluation of programmes and services
- ✦ Planning for improvement and enhancement
- ✦ Effectiveness of action taken

*How well does the college sustain continuous enhancement through self-evaluation and internal review activities?*

**ELEMENT 6: PROVIDING DIRECTION AND FACILITATING CHANGE**

This element is concerned with the effectiveness of college planning for the range of programmes and services it provides. It considers the range of policies, strategies and plans, the extent to which they are understood and acted on by staff and their impact on college operations. It explores planning for the delivery of programmes and services and the extent to which the college plans for and manages change.

**QUALITY INDICATORS****THEMES****6.1 Planning**

- ✦ Strategic planning
- ✦ Operational planning
- ✦ Team planning

*How effective are college planning processes?*

**6.2 Action to achieve aims, objectives and targets of plans**

- ✦ Communication of plans and associated action and targets
- ✦ Identification and agreement of standards for achievement of actions
- ✦ Management of the implementation of actions

*How effective is action to achieve aims, objectives and targets of plans?*

**6.3 Managing and responding to changing environments**

- ✦ Review and development of policies and procedures across college functions
- ✦ Review and development of portfolio of programmes
- ✦ Response to changing operating conditions, legislation, duties and directives
- ✦ Managing risk

*How well does the college recognise and respond to changes in its environments?*

**6.4 Planning for and managing change**

- ✦ Approach to innovation
- ✦ Communication with learners, staff and other stakeholders
- ✦ Monitoring and reviewing progress and effectiveness of new developments

*How well does the college plan for and manage change?*

**ELEMENT 7: MANAGEMENT AND SUPPORT OF STAFF**

This element is concerned with the qualifications and experience of staff and the quality of their relations with colleagues, learners and external stakeholders. It is concerned with recruitment, selection, deployment and retention of staff and with workforce planning. It addresses the relevance and effectiveness of continuing professional development and review of staff in supporting individuals and supporting the college's strategic direction.

**QUALITY INDICATORS****THEMES****7.1 Qualifications and experience of staff**

- ✦ Relevance and currency of staff qualifications, skills and experience
- ✦ Staff links with current practice in subject areas

*How relevant and current are staff qualifications, skills and experience?*

**7.2 Working relationships with colleagues, learners and external stakeholders**

- ✦ Among staff
- ✦ Between staff and learners
- ✦ With external stakeholders

*How productive are the working relationships among staff, learners and external stakeholders?*

**7.3 Recruitment, selection and retention of staff**

- ✦ Internal and external recruitment and selection
- ✦ Sufficiency of staff
- ✦ Clarity and relevance of staff remits
- ✦ Arrangements to avoid discrimination and promote equality
- ✦ Occupational health arrangements

*How effective is the college in recruiting, selecting and retaining staff?*

**7.4 Workforce planning**

- ✦ Identification of current and future skills requirements
- ✦ Deployment of individuals and teams to meet business needs
- ✦ Balance of skills, styles and behaviours within teams

*How effective is workforce planning?*

**7.5 Continuing professional development and review**

- ✦ Professional development of staff to meet business needs
- ✦ Professional review of staff to meet business needs
- ✦ Professional development of new staff and those undertaking new roles
- ✦ Arrangements to avoid discrimination and promote equality

*How effective is the college in developing its staff?*

**ELEMENT 8: PARTNERSHIPS AND RESOURCES**

This element is concerned with the effectiveness of the college's partnerships with communities, other learning providers, employers and other agencies. It considers how well the college seeks out appropriate links and uses them to develop programmes and services to enhance the learner experience. It focuses on collaboration to design programmes and services, support learners, enhance flexibility and promote equality. It also considers the management of resources for learning and the use of management information.

**QUALITY INDICATORS****THEMES**

**8.1** Partnership working with communities, other learning providers, employers and other agencies

- ✚ Strategic links
- ✚ Collaborative arrangements to promote access and inclusion
- ✚ Responsiveness to requirements of other agencies and equality duties
- ✚ Involvement of external agencies

*How extensive and effective are college partnerships with communities, other learning providers, employers and other agencies?*

**8.2** Management and use of resources and learning environments

- ✚ Planning, deployment and monitoring of resources
- ✚ Use of management information
- ✚ Sufficiency, adequacy and accessibility of accommodation and facilities
- ✚ Sufficiency, adequacy and accessibility of ICT resources
- ✚ Sufficiency, adequacy and accessibility of learning equipment and materials
- ✚ Arrangements for learners with additional support needs
- ✚ Arrangements to promote sustainability of resources

*How well does the college manage and use its resources and learning environments?*

## ELEMENT 9: EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND DIRECTION

This element is concerned with the leadership of the college's educational provision. It considers the extent to which national policies and local factors influence the Board of Management and the senior management team in setting educational aims and objectives. It determines the effectiveness of the leadership of planning and delivery of the college's programmes and of its services to support learners, learning and teaching. It also explores the extent to which there is a culture of quality improvement and enhancement in the college.

### QUALITY INDICATORS

### THEMES

#### 9.1 Educational aims, objectives and targets

- ✦ Clarity and comprehensiveness
- ✦ Responsiveness to legislation, national policies and local issues including equalities and environmental sustainability
- ✦ Staff understanding and commitment
- ✦ Match between strategic aims and objectives, and operational planning

*How appropriate and influential are the college aims, objectives and targets?*

#### 9.2 Leadership for learning and teaching

- ✦ Vision and direction of the curriculum
- ✦ Strategies for improving learning and teaching, retention, achievement and attainment
- ✦ Team leadership
- ✦ Staff development strategies
- ✦ Involvement and motivation of staff

*How effective is the leadership for learning and teaching?*

#### 9.3 Leadership for services to support learners

- ✦ Vision and direction
- ✦ Responsiveness to legislation and national guidance
- ✦ Planning and coordination of services
- ✦ Links to external agencies providing resources, services and information

*How effective is the leadership for services to support learners?*

#### 9.4 Developing and maintaining a quality culture

- ✦ Learner engagement in college internal review and self-evaluation arrangements
- ✦ Staff engagement in college internal review and self-evaluation arrangements
- ✦ Quality criteria and procedures
- ✦ Internal review and self-evaluation policy and arrangements
- ✦ Roles and responsibilities for quality enhancement
- ✦ Implementation of quality procedures
- ✦ Identification of areas for improvement and enhancement
- ✦ Action plans
- ✦ Improvement and enhancement trends

*How well does the quality culture in the college lead to quality improvement and enhancement?*

## ANNEX 2

### Learner engagement: an overview

*Learner engagement* is one of the three key principles on which the revised quality arrangements are based and is reflected in the *HMIE quality framework: for reference during the external review of Scotland's colleges, September 2008* as:

- ✦ *Engagement of learners in enhancing their own learning and the work and life of the college.*

and

- ✦ *How well are learners engaged in enhancing their own learning and the work and life of the college?*

This key principle is overarching and will inform one of the four confidence statements generated through external review by HMIE.

Across the sector, many colleges in Scotland are already engaging effectively with their learners to enable improvements to be made both at programme and whole-college level. The high priority now given to this key principle will help to ensure that learners have the potential to engage in all areas of college operations and that colleges acknowledge learners' contributions effectively.

#### Policy/strategy

All colleges should have appropriate arrangements to ensure that they are enhancing their learners' experience across a number of particular themes. These include:

- ✦ learners having a strong sense of influence and ownership of their learning experience through greater engagement;
- ✦ the learning experience should not be a product but a process in which learners participate;
- ✦ learners should be supported to engage constructively with their own learning;
- ✦ learners are involved in decision-making about their curricula, learning and teaching, and all aspects of their learning experience; and
- ✦ when learners progress from college they are as well equipped as possible with the skills, attributes and attitudes which will enable them to become effective lifelong learners.

As a result, learners can be supported to become more active participants in both their learning and in the work and life of the college. In order to have an appropriate impact, all of this should be delivered in a culture where:

- ✦ all staff are conscious of their impact on learners' experiences and strive to provide a high quality professional service;
- ✦ learners themselves feel valued individually and collectively;
- ✦ issues raised are dealt with sensitively and appropriately;
- ✦ learners' expectations are managed effectively by the college; and
- ✦ staff members in teaching and support teams or individually should regularly reflect self-critically on their own activities and achievements and act imaginatively to make improvements.

Through these developments real progress can be made in ensuring that learners are involved effectively in their own learning and in the work and the life of the college.

#### Learner representation

Colleges provide learning opportunities for many thousands of learners on a wide range of programmes at different venues and through various modes of attendance. Each college should determine which particular

discussion forums – in addition to the statutory Board of Management learner representation – learners should be present at throughout the year. Cognisance should be given to ensure that all aspects of the learners' experience are captured through this process. Consideration of the quality of learners' experience should include all learners whatever their race, gender, sexual orientation, faith, belief, age or disability. It should include learners who attend classes on and off campus, part-time, full-time and other modes of attendance. Learners' views and inputs on relevant issues should feature significantly in the learner engagement process, with colleges ensuring that they have effective systems for monitoring and evaluating engagement. This process should enable improvements to be made at programme, faculty/department and at whole-college level. Learner views should form an important part of college internal review and self-evaluation activities. Actions taken and enhancements made should demonstrate the impact of learner engagement across all curriculum and support areas to the college's key stakeholders.

Learner representation does not always have to take place through a formalised process. Informal and cross-college approaches can often yield valuable input to enable improvements to be made to the learners' college experience. It is up to each individual college in consultation with the student association and learner representatives to determine which approaches are deemed to work best to meet the diverse needs of their own learners.

It is recognised that for some learners, work or personal commitments will severely impact on their ability to engage more fully with the work and life of the college. Not all learners are sufficiently motivated and some lack spare time to contribute actively to these activities. However, colleges should ensure that flexible approaches are utilised to best effect to enable learners to be supported effectively to contribute as part of the learner engagement process.

**In building upon their existing arrangements for learner engagement, colleges may wish to consider the following high-level questions:**

- ✦ Are our arrangements and structures (for example: procedures, staff, committees, groups, fora, facilities) sufficient to **motivate and enable** learners to engage in: providing evaluation and feedback, suggesting improvements, contributing to decision-making, and generally to provide their views on all aspects of their college experience?
- ✦ Do our arrangements **proactively** seek the views of our diverse learner cohort, ensuring that the views of all learners are represented in terms of race, disability, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion and belief, mode of attendance, and location and duration of study?
- ✦ How do we ensure that our staff continue to work **in partnership** with their learners to foster engagement and bring about improvement and enhancement in learning and teaching, and support arrangements?
- ✦ How do we manage the expectations of our learners during engagement?
- ✦ Can we expect our learners to have the necessary skills for meaningful engagement? Do we need to develop those skills in them?
- ✦ How do we harness learners' views that result from meaningful engagement?
- ✦ How do we monitor progress and enhancement?
- ✦ How do we evaluate our learner engagement arrangements?



## ANNEX 3

### Confidence statements

HMIE will continue the use of confidence statements to summarise evaluations in the external review of colleges. These will be forward looking and prognostic, based on the trends and track record of the college. Confidence statements will be worded to provide stakeholders with reassurances, or otherwise, about the quality of a college's provision and its capacity to continue improving. The wording seeks to provide a high level of continuity with the current confidence statements, including caveats, whilst addressing the three key principles:

*HMIE is confident/has limited confidence/is not confident that:*

- ✦ *the college has in place high quality learning and teaching processes;*
- and
- ✦ *learners are progressing well and achieving relevant, high quality outcomes;*  
(both relating to **Key principle 1 – High quality learning**)
  - ✦ *learners are actively engaged in enhancing their own learning and the work and life of the college;*  
(relating to **Key principle 2 – Learner engagement**)
  - ✦ *the college is led well and is enhancing the quality of its services for learners and other stakeholders.*  
(relating to **Key principle 3 – Quality culture**)

... **is confident** ... indicates that the college, which includes staff and learners, has the strong track record, strategy and resources to maintain and enhance the quality of its provision and outcomes for learners. It implies that the college has the capacity and commitment to identify its strengths and areas for development and has effective arrangements in place to build on its strengths and address its areas for development, especially when the areas for development relate to weaknesses that have the potential to undermine the quality of learner experience and outcomes.

... **has limited confidence** ... indicates that the college has important weaknesses in one or more of: its learning and teaching processes; its outcomes for learners; learner engagement in enhancing their own learning and the life and work of the college; and its leadership and quality culture. These weaknesses, if unaddressed, will lead to deterioration in the quality of the learner experience. The college's track record of identifying and addressing weaknesses timeously and effectively, and of enhancing quality, may not be consistently strong but the college's current capacity and commitment to improve is evident.

... **is not confident** ... indicates that there are important or major weaknesses in the college's capacity or commitment either at institutional or programme level, or both, to secure, maintain and enhance the quality of its provision and outcomes for learners. There is a high probability that, without significant and comprehensive action with external monitoring and support, the college will fail to improve current low-quality provision and outcomes to an acceptable level. HMIE does not have evidence that the college has the capacity and commitment to identify and implement effective and comprehensive action. Evaluations that lead to a statement of no confidence will be evident in the text of the report of external review.

## ANNEX 4

### Rationale for identifying and evaluating potential excellence and potential risks

HMIE will identify and evaluate potential excellence and potential risks under the three key principles of *High quality learning*; *Learner engagement*; and *Quality culture* through a number of activities. These will take place over a period of time, and will lead to a cumulative, evaluative portrait of the college. This will inform the scope and timing of external review, or, where external review has already taken place, the scope and timing of further engagement with HMIE.

The portrait of a college will be constructed through:

- ✦ annual engagement;
- ✦ regular dialogue between the college and the college HMI;
- ✦ outcomes of external HMIE reviews;
- ✦ outcomes of HMIE subject-based aspect reports involving the college;
- ✦ identification of relevant issues concerning the college's performance following scrutiny by other quality bodies; and
- ✦ analysis of general, publicly available information about the college.

The process for highlighting potential excellence or potential risks around the extent to which *High quality learning*; *Learner engagement*; and *Quality culture* are being delivered in Scotland's colleges is based on the identification of **signals** around aspects of services to learners. These will:

- ✦ signal potential excellence in the college's current and future performance, which will require confirmation in external review or further engagement with HMIE, and/or may eventually be reported as sector-leading and innovative practice (SLIP); or
- ✦ signal that the college's current and future performance is at an acceptable level, and does not require further exploration; or
- ✦ signal that there are gaps in knowledge about important aspects of the college's performance; or
- ✦ signal potential risk that the college's current and future performance falls below an acceptable level, and therefore will require further exploration in external review or further engagement with HMIE; or
- ✦ signal potential risk that the college currently and in the future, is failing to deliver sufficiently in relation to the three key principles, and therefore will require further exploration in external review or further engagement with HMIE.

Examples of signals around *High quality learning* may be:

- ✦ significantly high learner attainment rates and rising trends over three years or significantly low learner attainment rates and falling trends, either overall, or in particular curriculum areas;
- ✦ significantly positive or negative issues about the quality of learning raised through feedback from learners and staff, and perhaps from employers, partners or other stakeholders;
- ✦ identification of excellence or SLIP or significant concerns from subject-based aspect reports.

Examples of signals around *Learner engagement* may be:

- ✦ what learners say about the extent and impact of their involvement in the design of their learning;
- ✦ what learners say about the extent and impact of their involvement in the work and life of the college generally;
- ✦ quality of the analysis of, and response to learner views in internal review and self-evaluation reports;

- ✦ quality of feedback to learners on actions taken following suggestions or complaints; and
- ✦ evidence and impact of consultation with learners for equalities schemes.

Examples of signals around *Quality culture* may be:

- ✦ level of analysis of, and response to Scottish Government and other stakeholder needs in the college strategic plan;
- ✦ outcome and impact of progress on previous plans;
- ✦ overall quality of self-evaluation and internal review activity;
- ✦ contribution of staff, learners, external commentators and other stakeholders to self-evaluation and internal review activity;
- ✦ feedback from other scrutiny bodies;
- ✦ extent and impact of sharing good practice;
- ✦ level of staff understanding and ownership of college aims and objectives; and
- ✦ media coverage.



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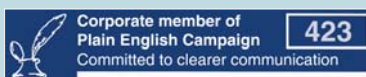
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