

# Module 4 Quality and standards

For suggestions on how to get the most out of these self-study materials, see the booklet on Using the materials.

## Introduction

As a governor you have a major responsibility for improving the quality of all aspects of provision in your college and for raising standards of learner attainment. This module explains recent changes to the policies, structures and processes for improving quality and standards across the whole of post-16 education and training.

The module considers how these changes will affect the work of colleges. It identifies some of the critical issues that governors will need to consider in evaluating their college's response to these changes and in reviewing their own responsibilities for overseeing and monitoring (but not managing) the quality and standards of college provision.

The module will therefore be of interest to all governors, old and new.

## Summary of changes to the 2002 edition

As a result of government initiatives for improving quality and standards across the whole of post-16 (non-university) learning, new quality policies and processes are now being implemented across a new and greatly expanded range of 'learning providers'.

Providers will have the main responsibility for quality improvement. For this purpose they will continue to carry out an annual self-assessment and produce a development plan that addresses issues identified in the self-assessment report. The scope and purpose of self-assessment is significantly changed to reflect new policy drivers for raising standards and new external processes for assessing provider performance.

Colleges are required to ensure that their self assessment report reflects the common inspection framework and to ensure that their development plan meets the needs of external agencies. They will, however, be required to ensure that their approach is responsive to the needs of external agencies, particularly the new Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and local LSC committees, Employment Services (ES), the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI). *Raising standards in post-16 learning – self-assessment and development plans* (DfEE March 2001) provides definitive guidelines.

LSC/ES is responsible for monitoring and reviewing provider performance on a continuous basis. Contracts and funding with providers will ultimately be contingent on the outcomes of these exercises. Both agencies also have a remit to plan local provision (in liaison with providers and other agencies) and to carry out their own quality improvement strategies.

The new inspection agencies, OFSTED and ALI, jointly or separately undertake independent inspections of provider performance, against terms set out in the new

common inspection framework. Both agencies also carry out area inspections to assess the overall quality of post-16 education and training across geographical areas.

All providers are therefore now subject to a greater level of external regulation. They will also need to take account of new policy directives aimed at continuous improvement, a focus on the needs of the learner, an enhanced commitment to equality and diversity, and greater collaboration between providers.

These changes are reflected in the content of this revised edition.

## Aims

By the end of this module you should be able to:

- describe new structures and processes for raising standards in post-16 learning
- explain the major policy drivers underpinning these structures and processes
- monitor how well your college is meeting new requirements for annual self-assessment
- identify the critical success factors for development planning and continuous improvement
- outline the impact of LSC quality improvement strategies on colleges
- describe the scope and purpose of the common inspection framework
- outline the purpose and nature of area inspections
- explain the implications for the work of governors of new arrangements for raising standards in post-16 learning.

## Contents

Mark the sections you want to study and tick them off as you complete them.

*To do*    *Done*

- |                          |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Section 1 Raising standards – overview of new structures and processes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Section 2 Policy drivers for improving quality and standards           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Section 3 College responsibilities for self-assessment                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Section 4 College responsibilities for development planning            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Section 5 The role of the LSC in quality improvement                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Section 6 The common inspection framework                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Section 7 Area inspections   |

## Working on the self-study activities

These materials have been designed for flexible use. You can work through them with other governors in training and development sessions. You can also work through

sections and activities in your own time and at your own pace if you find it difficult to attend external training sessions. Governors who have used these materials point out how valuable it is to work on at least some of the suggested activities together with another governor or group of governors, as there is such potential to learn from each other's experience. For suggestions on how to organise this kind of support for yourself, see the booklet on *Using the materials*.

## What you will need

To complete activities in this module you will need to obtain the following documents:

- your college's latest self-assessment report
- your college's latest development plan
- your college's latest inspection report
- an area inspection report (if available)
- your college's mission statement and list of strategic objectives.

Further documents on quality and standards are listed in 'Useful resources' in *Using the materials*.

Where you need to make notes in response to activity questions, we suggest you do this in a notebook or on separate sheets of loose-leaf paper, and store the information you compile along with the module for future reference.

## Section 1 Raising standards – overview of new structures and processes

Government initiatives for improving quality and standards across post-16 education and training as a whole have led to new policies and processes being implemented across the new and greatly expanded range of learning providers, including:

- FE colleges
- sixth-form colleges
- work-based learning providers
- adult and community learning providers
- University for Industry (Ufi)/ learndirect centres or hubs
- specialist designated institutions.

**Colleges and other learning providers** have primary responsibility for improving the quality and standards of provision. They are now required to carry out an annual self-assessment to evaluate all aspects of their provision. They are also required to produce a development plan, with improvement targets, which builds on strengths and addresses weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. All this work must be

integrated into the wider quality assurance and planning processes of the college or learning provider.

The **LSC** carries out regular monitoring visits to colleges through its 47 local Councils, to assess the rigour of self-assessment and progress against targets/milestones set out in the development plan. The performance of providers is reviewed three times a year based on information from monitoring visits and other evidence. The LSC has the power to intervene to reward excellence, support colleges causing concern, or impose sanctions on weak providers who fail to improve. The LSC also aims to raise standards through its own quality improvement strategies and through collaboration with other national/local agencies (local authorities, learning partnerships, regional development agencies, etc.). The new Standards Fund is used to identify, support and disseminate good practice.

**OFSTED** and **ALI** offer independent accounts of the quality of learning and the standards achieved by learners within individual colleges. They also assess the efficiency and effectiveness with which resources are managed by providers. Inspections normally take place every four years. OFSTED leads on inspections where there is a mix of 16–19 year olds and adult learners. ALI leads on inspections for training providers, New Deal, adult and community education and Ufl. Inspections are carried out against processes and criteria defined in the *Common Inspection Framework* (February 2001).

OFSTED also carry out area inspections, i.e. inspections across geographical areas. Area inspections, initially focused on 16–19 provision, allow judgements to be made on the overall quality of education and training available to young people within a particular area, as well as the overall organisation and sufficiency of that provision.

The responsibilities of colleges (Sections 3 and 4), the LSC (Section 5) and the inspectorates (Sections 6 and 7) are explained in more detail in the rest of this module.

The aim over time is to develop a single, coherent strategy and set of quality assurance arrangements that are relevant across the full range of post-16 education and training, and to do this in a way that minimises bureaucracy. This requires a high level of co-ordination between the various structures and processes that make up the new system. For example, the LSC and the inspectorates have defined joint protocols on issues such as inspection scheduling and the transmission of information about provider performance.

For colleges and other providers, the key challenge is to retain 'quality ownership' in a system with a high level of external planning and regulation. However, colleges need to ensure that they also meet external requirements and the expectations of the LSC, OFSTED and ALI. Colleges should also be mindful of evidence from Learning Skills Development Agency (LSDA) programmes that the most successful colleges are those that develop **their own** strategies and processes for quality improvement.

**Activity** What is the impact of these initiatives on your college?

Work through the questions on the next page to assess how much you know about the impact of these initiatives on your college. Tick one of the boxes to answer 'yes', 'no', or 'not sure'.

Do you know:

- | Yes                      | No                       | Not sure                 |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | the process in your college for carrying out an annual self-assessment?                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | the process in your college for producing a development plan?                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | how the development plan is integrated into the wider planning processes of the college? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | how the college is responding to the quality requirements of the LSC?                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | how the college is responding the new inspection requirements?                           |

### Viewpoint

We hope this activity has given you an initial insight into how your college is responding to the new structures and processes for improving quality and standards in post-16 learning.

If you answered 'yes' to all or most questions, you might want to check out your thoughts with the clerk or perhaps with another governor who is particularly interested in quality and standards. As a college governor, these are all questions you should know the answers to, so if you answered 'no' or 'not sure' to two or more of them, talk to the clerk or other governors about how you can find out more about the impact of these initiatives on your college. You may find it useful to look at your college's latest self-assessment report and development plan, the mission statement and strategic plan and, if you have one, an area inspection report.

If you have any questions or action points that you want to follow up, make a note of them in the 'Action planner' in *Using the materials*.

In the next section we shall be looking in more detail at the key policy drivers for quality and standards and how they might affect your college's provision.

## Section 2 Policy drivers for improving quality and standards

Underpinning all the national strategies, frameworks and processes for raising standards in post-16 learning, are a number of key policy drivers that must be addressed by all learning providers. This section summarises them and looks at how they might affect your college's provision. At the end of this section you will have an opportunity to assess how well your college is responding to these policy drivers.

### Learner-centred improvement

The government is committed to putting the needs, entitlements and achievements of learners at the heart of the new system for post-16 provision. New strategies for raising quality and standards are intended to ensure that **all** learners receive high quality education and training and are able to succeed in their learning.

Attention is now focused on how teaching, learning and other college processes enhance the learning experience and contribute to learner success. All providers should address the basic question (underpinning the new inspection framework) 'How effective and efficient is the provision of education and training in meeting the needs of the learners, and why?' All college activities, including the work of governors, should be looked at in the light of this overarching question.

Providers will also be expected to ensure that learning opportunities are appropriately matched to the needs of prospective learners. Appropriate mechanisms should be in place for identifying the needs, expectations and capabilities of new learners. Learner entitlements and responsibilities should also be clearly defined, including opportunities for learners to make judgements (and complaints) on the quality and standards of provision. The LSC will in due course carry out a national survey to assess and benchmark learner satisfaction.

### Equality and diversity

Although all colleges have developed policies and practices in this area, more work will be needed to 'mainstream' equality and diversity into all aspects of college life. Mainstreaming builds equality into policy-making and planning processes at all levels and stages, ensuring that no one particular group is disadvantaged and addressing disadvantage where it already exists. It involves a commitment to address all the factors that prevent full participation in learning due to racial background, gender, disability or age. As part of this drive, colleges must develop 'inclusive learning', which aims to fit provision to the needs of the individual learner rather than vice versa.

Strategies for widening participation should include the provision of learning opportunities that take account of the difficulties faced by particular local groups. This may involve establishing learning centres with other providers as part of neighbourhood renewal schemes and in consultation with learners and community organisations. Participation, retention and achievement rates for learners of different backgrounds should be closely monitored. Development plans should include

challenging targets to increase participation from under-represented groups and to close equality gaps in learning and job outcomes. The LSC and the inspectorates increasingly attach great importance to the success of colleges in these areas.

There is more on inclusiveness in *Module 3 Curriculum*, Section 2 'The students and their courses'.

## Collaboration with other providers

The LSC has a remit to improve the consistency and coherence of learning provision at a national and local level. This will require all colleges to develop collaborative links with other providers to improve responsiveness to local needs (learners, employers and the local community). Collaboration may involve:

- strategies for identifying local needs
- joint ventures for new programmes
- pooling of learning resources
- protocols for the transfer and progression of learners
- arrangements for comparing work practices (process benchmarking)
- promoting good practice.

Colleges are also expected to identify their own specific strengths and best contributions within a local area. There is more on this in *Module 3 Curriculum*, Section 3 'Curriculum initiatives for 16–19 year olds'.

The LSC will work with other agencies (such as learning partnerships) to promote self-managed provider collaboration and quality improvement. They will also undertake joint planning with providers to identify and respond to local needs. Area inspections enable judgements to be made on the quality of overall education and training in an area and the overall organisation and sufficiency of that provision. There is more on this in Section 7 of this module.

## Continuous improvement

Learners have a right to high quality learning whatever route/provider they choose. All providers are therefore subject to the same degree of rigour in quality assessment, while respecting the particular aims of providers and the needs of their learners.

The LSC seeks to contract with providers with a good and improving performance. Beyond the evidence provided through periodic inspection visits, providers will need to demonstrate the capacity for continuous improvement. This requires both a rigorous, ongoing **process** of self-assessment that is embedded throughout the college and the production of development plans, with clear objectives and measurable outcomes. The LSC will assess the quality and rigour of self-assessment process and development planning and the capacity for continuous improvement, as part of its arrangements for provider performance review. There is more on this in Sections 3, 4 and 5.

The LSC also seeks to create a culture that encourages innovation as well as incremental change. For colleges this means developing improvement strategies which involve new ways of doing things and not just doing the same things better.

The Centres of Vocational Excellence (COVE) initiative anticipates that by 2004/5 around half of general FE colleges will have at least one centre of vocational excellence. There is more on this in *Module 3 Curriculum*, Section 3 'Curriculum initiatives for 16–19 year olds'.

## External intervention

As we saw earlier, powers of external intervention have been increased under the new arrangements. The LSC only awards contracts to providers offering quality of service and value for money. Preferred provider status will, in time, be awarded to high performing colleges. Rewards are expected to include longer contracts, funding for new initiatives and, eventually, a lighter touch to external assessment.

Support is offered to all providers who need it, including providers whose performance is poor or 'coasting'. Eventually, however, sanctions will be taken against providers who fail to achieve required improvements within agreed timescales.

### Activity Is your college responding to these policy drivers?

Governors need to ensure that the college understands and is responding actively to these new policy drivers. In this activity you will be finding out more about how your college is responding. You may already have some of this information from your work as a governor. If not, or if there are gaps in your information, refer to your college's quality handbook or manual to assess its response to the following questions. Make notes on a separate sheet of paper.

- 1 Does the college put the needs of the learners at the heart of its quality processes?
- 2 How does the college identify the needs of learners?
- 3 How does the college respond to the views and judgements of learners?
- 4 How does the college propose to close equality gaps in learning and job outcomes?
- 5 Are partnerships formed with other colleges and business partners to improve quality?
- 6 In what areas of activity is the college unable to demonstrate good and improving performance?

### Viewpoint

This activity will help you build up a picture of how well your college is responding to the policy drivers that we have outlined in this section. This picture should be consistent with the college's mission and development plan. If you need to find out more, make a note of your questions in the 'Action planner' in *Using the materials*. You can then ask the clerk to direct you to whoever is best placed to discuss your questions with you – this may be the clerk, another governor or a college manager.

## Section 3 Responsibilities for self-assessment

In *Module 3 Curriculum* we looked at a number of ways in which you as a governor can judge whether the teaching and learning at your college is effective. In this section we shall be looking at self-assessment in general, and at your specific role as a governor in the process of self-assessment.

### The self-assessment framework

As a college governor you will be familiar with the role of self-assessment and your own responsibilities within this process. Under the new arrangements colleges have to carry out an annual self-assessment culminating in a self-assessment report that identifies strengths, weaknesses and other improvement needs. The report (together with the development plan) must be submitted to the LSC on an annual basis.

Self-assessment is primarily about improving college performance and should therefore be driven by the goals of the college and the needs of its learners. There is no prescribed framework for self-assessment. Instead, providers are encouraged to develop an approach to self-assessment that is most appropriate to their organisational needs. There are, however four conditions that all self-assessment frameworks must satisfy.

- Self-assessment should deal with all aspects of the organisation's activities, and should focus on the quality of learners' experiences and the standards they achieve.
- Providers must address the quality statements in the common inspection framework and LSC/ES quality and financial probity requirements.
- Self-assessment should be responsive to the quality improvement strategies of the LSC and its framework for provider performance review.
- The structure of reports should, as far as possible, be similar to that of published inspection reports.

There is more on LSC and inspection requirements in Sections 5 and 6.

Your governing body will also need to consider the key policy drivers for raising quality and standards when considering the college approach to self-assessment (see Section 2).

The self-assessment reports will be used by the LSC, together with other evidence, to inform judgements on provider performance, including judgements on the quality and rigour of the self-assessment process. Though inspection will no longer be concerned with validating self-assessment, the inspectorates will also use self-assessment reports as a critical part of the evidence base in preparing for inspection and in forming 'hypotheses' about provider performance.

## Self-assessment evidence and judgements

Colleges are required to monitor and evaluate their provision and performance against the quality criteria agreed for the self-assessment framework. Gradings based on those used in the new inspection framework should be used to record self-assessment judgements. In reviewing/approving self-assessment reports the governing body will need to consider the following points.

- Performance data should be available for all the key criteria used in the self-assessment framework and for all the activities/areas that are subject to assessment.
- Data should record performance trends (to confirm year-on-year improvements) and performance comparisons against other providers (benchmark data).
- Evidence should support the judgements made, i.e. data should be valid, quantifiable (where possible), sufficient (for the volume/range of provision), current and accurate.
- Reports should be evaluative (identifying strengths and weaknesses) rather than descriptive. 'Strengths' should represent performance above expected or normal practice.
- Self-assessment should be objective, self-critical and deal even-handedly with weaknesses as well as strengths. Judgements should be internally/externally moderated for this purpose.

Governors need to be aware that inspection reports continue to criticise shortcomings in the use of evidence to support judgements and the tendency for colleges (and governors) to overgrade their own performance.

## The self-assessment process

Self-assessment should be viewed as an integral part of organisational planning and not as an add-on extra. Providers should seek to establish a culture of continuous improvement in which self-assessment is a regular part of the daily work of all staff and not a one-off event. Annual self-assessment reports and development plans may be submitted to the LSC at a time appropriate to the planning cycle of the provider.

Governors take an active part in the self-assessment process by reviewing their own performance as well as that of the college as a whole. They also have to approve the college self-assessment report and evaluate the effectiveness of the self-assessment process.

In evaluating the organisation of the self-assessment process, governors will need to consider:

- the level of staff engagement in the process (all levels, all activities, all functions)
- opportunities for training in the tools and techniques of self-assessment
- how learners, employers and community organisations are involved in the process
- the development of a team-based approach (at course, department and cross-college levels).

For governors, undertaking their own healthcheck will enable them to sharpen their own self-assessment capacity and provide them with further insights into the wider college process.

### Activity Evaluating your college's self-assessment process

Use the questions below to start to evaluate your college's self-assessment process. Use the latest self-assessment report to help you answer the questions. Tick a box to answer 'yes', 'no' or 'not sure'.

Yes	No	Not sure	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are learners actively involved in the self-assessment process? If so, how is this achieved?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Has a cycle of self-assessment been established which facilitates continuous improvement?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is self-assessment built into the quality assurance and planning processes of the college?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are performance measures against the new quality criteria available?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Does performance compare favourably with targets and performance benchmarks?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the self-assessment report evaluate or simply describe? Is it objective and rigorous in its judgements?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are the college's strengths real strengths or just expected practice?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do they really enhance learners' experiences and achievements and, if so, how?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the self-assessment report (and supporting evidence) confirm that the college is successful in embedding equality of opportunity in all aspects of college life?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are all activities covered by the self-assessment report?

### Viewpoint

If you find that the self-assessment report does not allow you to answer all these questions, you may find it useful (where possible) to discuss some of them with members of staff.

This activity should help you focus on the quality of your college's self-assessment. If you answered mainly 'yes', your college is probably meeting high standards in self-assessment, although it will be important to continue to monitor this to ensure that standards remain high. If you answered 'no' or 'not sure' to two or more questions, your college probably has more work to do in this respect. It is important that the governing body and management approach the self-assessment process as a positive development and not as nuisance taking up time and resources. If you have questions you would like to discuss with the clerk, another governor or a college manager, make a note of your questions in the 'Action planner' in *Using the materials*.

In the next section we shall be looking at governors' responsibilities within the development planning process.

## Section 4 College responsibilities for development planning

As we saw in Section 3, self-assessment should not be an end in itself but a means for ensuring continuous improvement. Development plans should therefore build on issues identified in the self-assessment report and inform (and be informed by) the overall planning processes of the college. In this section we look at different aspects of your responsibilities for reviewing (and informing) development plans. Remember that your role as governor is to take a strategic overview of your college's development planning; you will need to **monitor** the production and implementation of the development plan, but the plan will be produced and implemented by managers.

### General requirements

All providers are required to produce an overall development plan with explicit links to issues arising from the self-assessment. The plan must be submitted to the LSC for approval, together with the self-assessment report, at an agreed time. The LSC will discuss and agree targets and milestones as set out in the plan and may require amendments as a condition of approval. They will also monitor progress against the activities and targets set out in the plans. Development plans must be updated following inspection visits, not later than two months following the published report. Providers undergoing re-inspection will have to produce another post-inspection plan, again within two months of the published report.

Critical issues that need to be considered and addressed in development planning are summarised below.

### Identifying and prioritising areas for improvement

Development plans must be manageable in terms of their scope. Self-assessment will generate many areas for improvement. Attempts to address every area may prove self-defeating and lead to a loss of staff morale. Priorities should therefore be set, focusing on those areas for improvement that:

- are paramount to the quality of the learning experience and learner achievement
- consolidate strengths and rectify weaknesses promptly
- offer opportunities for simple 'quick win' solutions
- offer major long-term benefits (for which careful planning is essential)
- reflect national or local priorities.

Development plans should also address actions not completed in previous planning cycles.

## Defining objectives and targets for improvement

Providers are expected to set clear objectives and targets for improvement, with success criteria for judging the outcomes of agreed actions. Objectives or targets for improvement should be SMART:

- Specific (objectives/targets clearly defined)
- Measurable (objectives/targets can be measured)
- Achievable (50%+ probability of achieving objective/target)
- Results-orientated (plans aim at improvement)
- Timebound (dates/times set for achieving targets).

Statements of broad intentions or aspirations should be avoided.

Targets should, as a minimum, be set for learner participation, retention and achievement. These can then be extended over time to include targets for improvements in stakeholder satisfaction, equality and diversity, value for money, etc. Benchmarking activities should be carried out to support the target setting process.

## Specifying actions and responsibilities for achieving improvements

Development plans should provide a sound basis for bringing about improvement, specifying all the activities and tasks necessary to achieve proposed objectives and targets for improvement. A key question to ask is 'How is this activity going to make a difference?'

Responsibilities and timescales associated with carrying out the plan and monitoring progress should also be identified. The plan should be discussed with all those directly affected by the proposed changes, including partners of the college. The costs (and potential benefits) of the plan should also be estimated.

## Arrangements for monitoring and reporting on progress and outcomes

The implementation of development plans should be carefully monitored to ensure that:

- staff take ownership of the process
- actions taken conform to the plan
- the reasons for any departure from the plan are understood and agreed.

In evaluating the outcomes of development plans governors should consider whether college managers have produced progress reports that include:

- the results achieved
- comparisons with expected/desired results
- unintended outcomes (positive or negative)

- opportunities for sharing findings, experiences and best practice
- judgements on the effectiveness of the planning and implementation process.

### Activity Evaluating your college's development planning

As a governor you will need to take part in carefully monitoring the production and implementation of your college's development plans. To do this effectively you will need to answer the following questions. You will also need to refer to the college's latest development plan. Tick a box to answer 'yes', 'no' or 'not sure'.

Yes	No	Not sure	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Does your college's development plan build on strengths and address weaknesses identified in the self-assessment?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Does it focus on the needs and attainments of learners?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Does it relate to the strategic and operational goals of the college?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are objectives and targets for improvement clearly stated and prioritised?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are planned activities, responsibilities and timetables for improvement clearly documented?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are there effective arrangements for monitoring progress and reporting on outcomes?

### Viewpoint

This activity has given you an opportunity to have a critical look at your college's development planning. A good development plan is central to the life of the college and essential for continuous improvement, as required by the LSC. If you have any questions as a result of doing this activity, you should make a note of them in your 'Action planner' in *Using the materials*. You can then discuss them with the clerk, another governor or a college manager.

In the next section we shall be looking at the role of the LSC and how it monitors and helps to improve the quality of post-16 education and training.

## Section 5 The role of the LSC in quality improvement

The LSC now has the 'key responsibility to plan, fund, monitor and improve the quality of post-16 learning up to higher education' (remit letter from Secretary of State for Education, November 2000). In this section we look at the role of the LSC in carrying out this remit.

### The planning role of the LSC

The LSC has published a three-year corporate plan that sets out key objectives and targets for extending participation and raising achievement levels, for increasing the engagement of employers in workforce development and for improving quality and user satisfaction. A quality improvement strategy is being developed to support the last of these of these objectives. The LSC intend to develop baseline measures of performance (based on the outcomes of inspection visits, area inspections, provider reviews, satisfaction surveys, etc.) which can be tracked over time.

The corporate plan will inform the setting of strategic and operational plans by local LSC committees. These are likely to be based on a **participation strategy** (for meeting the needs of learners), a **skills strategy** (for meeting the needs of employers), and a **learning strategy** (for delivering education and training that meets the needs of employers and learners). Local LSCs will work with learning partnerships, regional development agencies and local authorities to develop these plans and to develop their own quality improvement strategies. They will also scrutinise provider plans for meeting the needs of learners, employers and the community. Contracts and funding will ultimately be based on the capacity of providers to respond to identified needs.

We can see from this that colleges now have less autonomy in determining the provision of learning opportunities within their local areas. However, they do have a powerful incentive for improving their understanding of learner/employer needs and ensuring that college provision is tailored to meet those needs.

Because of their strategic responsibilities, governors have a crucial part to play in developing appropriate participation, skills and learning strategies within their own colleges.

### Provider performance reviews

Provider performance reviews are a means of regularly and formally assessing the quality of post-16 education and training offered by providers. The reviews enable the local LSC to take regular stock of its relationships with providers, and to ensure that provision is of a good quality and provides value for money. They also allow the LSC to take appropriate action (support or sanctions) to raise standards or to reward and disseminate good practice. The outcomes of performance reviews will, over time, inform the planning of provision across post-16 education and training.

The performance of providers is assessed through regular monitoring visits by LSC staff and by four-monthly review exercises carried out by them. Monitoring visits are

used to examine the quality and rigour of the provider self-assessment process, and the progress made towards agreed targets and milestones set out in development plans. They allow discussions with learners, staff and sub-contractors to consider problems and improvement opportunities.

It is likely that governors will at some stage be involved in monitoring visits and be asked to account for their overseeing of college provision and performance. Governors should in any event ensure that college arrangements for participating in these events are properly managed.

The outcomes of monitoring visits will inform the performance review meetings which are carried out by the local LSC/ES at four-monthly intervals. In addition to evidence from self-assessment reports and development plans, the LSC/ES uses inspection reports, data on learner/provider performance (including benchmark data) and customer feedback/complaints.

#### **Performance is assessed against ten aspects of provision**

- 1 Delivery of the volume of provision agreed with the local LSC
- 2 Quality of education and training and the standards achieved by learners
- 3 Equality of opportunity
- 4 Health and safety
- 5 Quality of leadership and management of learning
- 6 Continuous improvement
- 7 Quality of strategic planning
- 8 Financial assurance
- 9 Data management
- 10 Other priorities including national initiatives such as basic skills.

Most of these aspects of provision fall clearly within the remit of the governing body. Governors may therefore wish to review their remit in the light of this new framework. They should also ensure that their college arrangements for quality assurance, including self-assessment and development planning, are in line with the LSC's requirements

Providers are categorised in terms of their overall level of performance and their performance in each of the ten areas of assessment. There are five categories:

- excellent
- good
- satisfactory
- some concerns
- serious concerns.

The outcomes of performance reviews including the reasons for particular judgements and actions necessary to secure improvement, are reported to providers on a

confidential basis. Where appropriate, a feedback meeting between the local LSC and the provider takes place to agree follow-up actions for each party.

Governors may wish to take an interest in any actions that the LSC wishes the college to take in order to improve. To do this, they should request summary reports on the outcomes of provider reviews, including any required changes to development plans. Governors should be particularly aware of review findings that affect strategic objectives, reveal weaknesses that may affect future funding, or indicate that improvement targets are not being met.

- For providers offering *excellent* provision, the LSC/ES may offer preferred provider status, accompanied by medium-term contracts and a 'lighter touch' with respect to external monitoring.
- Providers categorised as giving cause for *some concern* will receive more frequent visits for support purposes and for monitoring the progress of development plans.
- Providers giving rise to *serious concerns* may be subject to special investigations or the suspension of funding. In colleges, powers may be exercised to appoint new governors and managers

Additional LSC governors can be appointed onto college governing bodies where there are concerns about poor provider performance (see *Module 1 Introduction*, Section 4 'The composition of the governing body and its committees' and *Module 9 The search committee*, Section 2 'Membership of the governing body').

Local LSC committees report annually on progress made by local providers in improving performance and on the support given to them for this purpose. They also publish annual reports on action taken to raise standards. The LSC monitors centrally and reports on review outcomes to:

- ensure consistency of judgements
- report on the quality of provision purchased by LSC
- analyse actions taken to improve provision and disseminate good practice.

Governors should use these reports to obtain ideas on improving the quality and standards of provision within their college.

### **Activity** Ensuring your college meets LSC requirements

As we have seen, governors are likely to be involved in LSC monitoring visits and asked to demonstrate that they are fulfilling their responsibility for overseeing college provision and performance. To prepare for this, you may find it helpful to work through the questions, liaising with your clerk where necessary. Make notes on a separate piece of paper.

- How does the college work with the LSC, other agencies and other providers to identify the local needs of prospective learners, employers and the community?
- How does this needs analysis inform the learning strategies and other development plans of the college?
- Are the college's arrangements for quality assurance, including self-assessment reports and development plans, in line with LSC requirements?
- How was your college's performance at the last provider performance review?

## Viewpoint

Thinking about these questions should help you prepare for your role in responding to the LSC's monitoring visits. If it has raised any doubts in your mind or questions that you want to ask, make a note of them in your 'Action planner' in *Using the materials* and follow them up before you need to start preparing for the next LSC visit.

In the next section we shall be looking at the role of OFSTED and ALI in inspecting provider performance in post-16 education and training.

## Section 6 The common inspection framework

The common inspection framework, published in February 2001, outlines:

- the purposes of inspection
- what is evaluated
- how provision is assessed and graded
- how the inspection process is carried out.

This section summarises the key features of the new framework and highlights the main ways in which it is different from the approach to inspection adopted under the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). It also examines the implications of these changes for your work as a governor.

### The purposes of inspection

As we saw in Section 1, the new inspectorates, OFSTED and ALI, make periodic inspection visits in order to offer **independent** accounts of the quality of learning, the standards achieved and the efficiency and effectiveness with which resources are managed by providers. Other key objectives are to:

- help bring about improvements by identifying strengths and weaknesses and highlighting good practice
- advise the Secretary of State and the LSC (and Employment Service) on the quality and standards of education and training
- promote a culture of self-assessment and improvement among providers.

For colleges, inspection is no longer concerned with validating the self-assessment process, although self-assessment reports, development plans and other college performance data are used as part of the evidence base in preparing for inspections.

***The inspection framework***

Seven key questions set out under three headings are used to guide the inspection process.

**Achievements and standards**

Q1 How well do learners achieve?

**Quality of education and training**

Q2 How effective are teaching, training and learning?

Q3 How are achievement and learning affected by resources?

Q4 How effective are the assessment and monitoring of learners' progress?

Q5 How well do the programmes and courses meet the needs and interests of learners?

Q6 How well are learners guided and supported?

**Leadership and management**

Q7 How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?

The inspection report on each provider includes overall judgements about the adequacy of provision with respect to each of these seven questions, plus judgements about each 'area of learning' offered by the college. A grade is assigned for each area of learning and for leadership and management in this range:

- outstanding (grade 1)
- good (grade 2)
- satisfactory (grade 3)
- unsatisfactory (grade 4)
- very weak (grade 5).

In evaluating college performance against the new inspection framework, governors should be aware of differences to the approach adopted by the FEFC. Key changes are summarised below.

- The needs and attainments of learners lie at the heart of the new framework.
- There is an increased emphasis on the core 'learner-facing' processes of the college (questions 2 to 6) and how these processes enhance the learner experience and contribute to learner success.
- There is now only a single grade for leadership and management (question 7), with contributory grades for quality assurance and equality of opportunity, but no separate grade for governance. Value for money is also a key element of leadership and management.
- College-wide policies and procedures are assessed in terms of their impact on learner support and achievement.

- Leadership and management roles are examined at all levels of the college (from governor to curriculum leader). Inspectorate judgements are greatly informed by the effectiveness of leadership and management at curriculum/departmental levels.
- Governors are judged primarily in terms of their effectiveness in overseeing the provider's strategic direction and regularly monitoring the quality of its provision. In the context of the inspection framework the key question is 'Have governors had a positive effect on the quality of teaching, training and learning and learner attainment provided by the college?'

## LSC involvement in inspections

The common inspection framework signals the need for the inspectorates to work together and with the LSC and Employment Service. A concordat between the four parties has been agreed. The LSC has agreed to provide the inspectorates with financial information and/or expertise to inform inspections. This takes the form of advice by the LSC on the provisional inspection programme, preparation of briefings for inspections by the LSC, joint timetabling of visits wherever possible, sharing evidence and joint discussion, as appropriate, on the outcomes of the visits.

In practice, the Provider Financial Assurance (PFA) team will undertake a review of financial management and governance at the same time as the inspection. In 2001–02, this involves the completion of a comprehensive pre-visit questionnaire that seeks information on a wide range of financial management and governance activities. The questionnaire can be downloaded from the LSC website ([lsc.gov.uk](http://lsc.gov.uk)). The findings of the PFA review are not included in inspection reports but are the subject of a separate LSC report to the college and also inform the LSC provider review process.

## The inspection process

### *Before the inspection*

Providers now have much less time to prepare for inspection – a maximum of three months' notice. Much of the information on providers is forwarded to the inspectorates by the LSC, further limiting the scope for colleges to prepare for inspection. However, governors still have an important role in ensuring effective briefings before the visit and a positive approach towards the inspection.

Self-assessment reports, inspection and LSC review reports and other performance data are used by the inspectorates to produce a pre-inspection commentary (PIC) which identifies 'hypotheses' about college performance to be validated during the inspection visit itself. Opportunities for governors or college staff to challenge these hypotheses before the visit may be limited.

### *During the inspection*

The inspection itself focuses mainly on the work of teaching and learning support staff. The number of lesson observations undertaken during visits has been greatly increased. Students are questioned closely about the quality of teaching and learning and about their overall experience at the college.

The principal and college nominee have brief feedback meetings on a daily basis but are not allowed to be present at grading meetings. Other senior staff may have only limited contact with inspectors, except in the final feedback sessions.

Selected governors are likely to be questioned about their perceptions of the quality of teaching and learning and other aspects of the student experience. The LSC PFA team will also question them about both governance and financial management (see Module 5 *Financial management*).

### ***At the end of the inspection***

A feedback report is made at the end of the inspection visit and governors are normally invited to this. The college is invited to comment on the draft report for factual accuracy before publication and is given the opportunity to evaluate the process. The college is then required to produce a post-inspection action plan to take account of inspection findings; this must be produced within two months of publication of the inspection report. The LSC works closely with providers in developing, approving and monitoring post-inspection action plans, taking advice from inspectorates as appropriate. If provision remains inadequate after re-inspection, the LSC may invoke an emergency plan.

### **Activity** Assessing your own strategic and monitoring responsibilities

The common inspection framework requires governors to 'effectively oversee the provider's strategic direction and regularly monitor the quality of provision and their own performance'. In this activity you will be looking at how well you meet that challenge in your college. You might want to do this activity with other governors. Tick a box to answer 'yes', 'no' or 'not sure'.

As a governing body do you set clear objectives and policies that require a focus on:

Yes    No    Not sure

- |                          |                          |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | improving learner achievement (including target setting)?        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | delivering high quality teaching, training and learning support? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | enhancing the learner experience?                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | continuous year-on-year improvements in performance?             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | value for money?   |

Does the work of governors in monitoring and evaluating performance involve:

Yes No Not sure

- |                          |                          |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | assessment against clear (strategic and other) objectives?                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | the use of valid and reliable data?  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | the gathering of views from learners and other stakeholders?                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | comparison with other providers and past performance?                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | corrective action where there is no evidence of improvements in performance? |

### Viewpoint

Doing this activity may help to clarify your role as a governor both in taking a strategic overview of the college's direction and in monitoring the quality of the provision the college offers. If you felt unsure about any of the questions, make a note of areas of doubt in your 'Action planner' in *Using the materials*, and follow them up with whoever is responsible for this aspect of your work as a governor.

In the next section we shall be looking at the final element of the inspection framework – area inspections.

## Section 7 Area inspections

We saw in Section 1 that under the new arrangements, area inspections allow judgements to be made on the overall quality of education and training available to young people within a particular area, as well as the overall organisation and sufficiency of that provision. Although area inspections may seem remote from the immediate task of governors in overseeing the direction and performance of their particular college, their importance should not be underestimated, as they offer a powerful vehicle in the government's drive to plan provision more effectively in relation to local needs. In this section we shall look in more detail at area inspections and what they mean for you as a governor.

### Why have area inspections?

Area inspections enable judgements to be made on the overall quality of education and training in a particular area, and on the overall organisation and sufficiency of that provision. An 'area' does not have to be contiguous with a local education authority (LEA). Area inspections have to date focused on 16–19 provision, and the earliest initiatives took place in areas where the challenge to raise achievement and participation was particularly acute. It is likely that the scope of area inspections will eventually be extended under the new arrangements.

Area inspections do not alter the fundamental principle that each provider has the primary responsibility for reviewing and improving the quality of its own provision.

They do, however, provide an opportunity to make significant changes to the pattern of provision within a local area. More specifically, they are able to identify:

- measures needed to raise participation, achievement, and standards of provision
- strengths that can be used as models of good practice
- the need for structural change
- opportunities for better collaboration.

## Who carries out area inspections?

OFSTED leads area inspections in partnership with ALI (for work-based learning providers and Ufl/learndirect). Since April 2001, the LSC and the relevant LEA have been legally responsible for follow-up to area inspections (previously overseen by the then Department for Education and Employment (DfEE)). The LSC will bring together a local partnership of providers and other services in putting together the outline and final post-area inspection action plan within three months of publication of the inspection report.

## What does an area inspection look at?

An area inspection typically looks at:

- the quality and standards of provision in the area
- the strategic management and organisation of provision by local organisations
- the range and coherence of provision, including gaps and duplication
- guidance given to learners, particularly in careers information
- value for money
- local market and skill needs.

## What happens after an area inspection?

A post-area inspection action plan is produced by the LSC in liaison with the LEA and other strategic partners. Providers are also represented. OFSTED and ALI consider the rigour and effectiveness of the action plan. Plans are monitored by the LSC (by the LEA in school sixth forms) and are subject to three-monthly review. Progress made by individual providers in response to area inspections is examined as part of provider performance reviews.

### Activity Preparing for an area inspection

Although an area inspection may not be imminent for your college, it is a good idea to prepare for it well in advance. The following questions will help you do this. You may find it useful to work through them with other governors. If you have had an area inspection you might want to refer to the report.

Evaluate the effectiveness of the college in the following areas by deciding on a mark between 1 (low) and 5 (high).

How well does your college:

Score 1 to 5

- carry out joint planning with other providers and local agencies to avoid unnecessary competition, duplication or significant gaps in provision?
- develop types/levels of provision which are lacking at local level?
- tackle unacceptable variability in student retention and achievement rates?
- collaborate with partners to raise participation, retention and achievement?
- liaise with advisors to improve the quality of guidance for young people?
- demonstrate value for money?

### Viewpoint

Doing this activity should give you confidence that your college is ready for an area inspection. If you gave your college high scores, you simply need to maintain those high standards by continuously monitoring and reviewing your performance. If you gave the college a low score for any of the questions, you will need to consider how you are going to improve that aspect of your provision before the next area inspection. Make notes on any areas that need improvement and ideas for action in the 'Action planner' in *Using the materials*.

## Module review

This module has looked at key changes to the policies, structures and processes for improving quality and standards across the whole of post-16 (non-university) learning.

If you have worked through the whole module you should be confident that you can:

- describe new structures and processes for raising standards in post-16 learning
- explain the major policy drivers underpinning these structures and processes
- monitor how well your college is meeting new requirements for annual self-assessment
- identify the critical success factors for development planning and continuous improvement
- outline the impact of LSC quality improvement strategies on colleges
- describe the scope and purpose of the common inspection framework
- outline the purpose and nature of area inspections
- explain the implications for the work of governors of new arrangements for raising standards in post-16 learning.

If you are not sure that you have achieved a particular goal, look back at the contents list in the Introduction to the module. You may find it useful to reread the relevant section.

## Summary of key learning points

All providers of post-16 (non-university) learning are responsible for improving quality and standards under new government initiatives.

Quality improvement should be focused on the needs of learners, employers and the community.

All providers are expected to develop 'inclusive learning' that aims to fit provision to the needs of the individual learner rather than vice versa.

Colleges and other learning providers are required to carry out an annual self-assessment to evaluate all aspects of their provision. Development plans build on issues identified in self-assessment reports.

All colleges are expected to collaborate with local LSCs and with other agencies and providers in order to improve responsiveness to local needs.

The LSC carries out regular monitoring through its local councils and uses the Standards Fund to identify, support and disseminate good practice.

OFSTED and ALI, through the common inspection framework, produce independent accounts of the quality of learning and the standards achieved by learners within individual colleges.

Area inspections enable judgements to be made on the overall quality of education and training in a particular area, which need not necessarily correspond to a particular LEA.

## Where next?

You have now completed work on *Module 4 Quality and standards*. If there are areas in which you need more guidance or information, they may be covered in other modules. Turn to the section 'Check your current knowledge and skills' in *Using the materials*. This self-assessment questionnaire will help you to decide which modules or sections of modules may help to fill these gaps. Tick the useful sections for further study.

If you cannot find the information you need within these materials, turn to the 'Action planner' in *Using the Materials*. Note down what further information, support or guidance you would like. The *Action planner* gives advice on who may be able to help, and how.

## Putting it into action

We hope that working through this module has raised useful questions, increased your awareness of issues and given you ideas for practical action that you would like to follow up. The 'Action planner' in *Using the Materials* contains a section where you can note down any questions or action points that you want to follow up within your own college.

