Framework for Excellence

Frequently Asked Questions (Updated November 2006)

Introduction

The Framework for Excellence is the Learning and Skills Council's initial response to the Further Education Reform White Paper, *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances* (Department for Education and Skills March 2006). It is being developed and is currently under consultation with our stakeholders and learning providers.

The following are the most frequently asked questions about the Framework for Excellence. Responses to these questions are correct as of the date above. The Framework for Excellence will build on the work that has been done on measures of success.

Further information on these measures and other FAQ's are available on the LSC website at www.lsc.gov.uk/ffe

How does the Framework for Excellence relate to the measures of success?

The Framework for Excellence comprises a relatively small, standard set of performance indicators which is being developed by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), in consultation with providers, inspectorates and other stakeholders. The Framework for Excellence builds on and includes the measures of success.

Q1 What is the fundamental, primary purpose of the framework?

The information from the framework will be the basis for planning and commissioning decisions. The LSC will monitor performance and set targets for improvement. In this way, excellence and the route to it are clearly defined, so that all colleges and providers should understand what is required for them to become good and then excellent.

Q2 How can you have a single, standard framework which deals with such a diverse group of institutions?
This is an important issue. There is a need to balance simplicity for ease of application with the complexity of the sector to ensure it can be applied across all provision.

Solutions may lie in:

- learning from the school sector about how to create capability to produce comparative information for similar institutions ('statistical neighbours')
- differential application of the Framework (for example only applying elements of responsiveness to employers to institutions whose mission includes the direct provision of services to employers)
- reviewing and replacing the ‘widening participation factor’ with a statistically more robust measure
- investigating a ‘social inclusiveness’ measure for institutions which have this as a key part of their mission.

Q3 Why doesn't the Framework apply to schools?

The first iteration of the Framework will not apply to schools. We will continue to work towards the development and implementation of a common approach for assessing and reporting the performance of all provision within the learning and skills sector, including school sixth forms.

Q4 What are the rewards for excellence?

We will be working with DfES, the Inspectorate and others to spell out the rewards for excellence, such as reduced level of inspection, greater self-regulation and increased funding.

Q5 What is the “balanced scorecard”?

The balance scorecard is the presentation of scores for each of the key performance indicators in Framework for Excellence. It provides a holistic view of performance across provision meeting the needs of learners, employers and the LSC. This replaces the narrower view of provision based on success rates and inspection outcomes alone.
Q6  Will there be a separate Value for Money indicator?

No. The framework for Excellence will provide financial key performance indicators.

Q7  How does Framework for Excellence relate to the Improvement Strategy being developed by the Quality Improvement Agency in partnership with the Learning and Skills Council and other stakeholders?

The Quality Improvement Strategy sets out the strategy and will provide best practice guides on its Excellence Gateway data portal. The Framework for Excellence being developed by the LSC defines the goal of excellence and tells providers what they need to do to reach that goal.

Q9. Why does the Framework use the same grades as inspection for key performance indicators, but a different set of five grades for overall assessment?

The issue of grades is complex. Established practice is the four-point scale used in the Common Inspection Framework (CIF). However, the Further Education Reform White Paper states that there is a need for a fresh look in this area to allow greater differentiation in the assessment of the quality of provision. It is proposed that the LSC, Ofsted, and DfES will work together to design a single approach to scales that will form the backbone of the Framework for Excellence. In the interim, it is proposed two grading scales will be used:

- The familiar four-point scale from the CIF, which will be used to create grades for the key performance indicators (KPIs);
- A new five point scale which will produce grades for the three dimensions and the overall performance rating. The new five-point scale will allow greater differentiation in quality assessment and enable the clearer identification of that provision which is underperforming.

Following consultation, the LSC will publish further guidance on this.

Q10. How does the framework take into account changes outside of a provider’s control - the opening of new school sixth forms, for example?
Structural changes to the external environment within which a provider operates will be reflected within the Development Plan agreed with each provider, perhaps through an adjustment to the number of learners and outputs expected in key areas of provision. The Development Plan is agreed by the LSC and each provider before the start of each year, and includes the expected performance levels for the level of investment being made. The Framework will assess a college’s or provider’s performance in terms of meeting requirements and priorities agreed in its Development Plan. In developing the responsiveness indicators, we will assess how to reflect unplanned changes that could impact upon a provider’s in-year performance and how to adjust plans.

Q11. Will the National Learner Satisfaction Survey be aggregated from providers’ surveys?

No. The national survey will continue in its current form with three main purposes:

- to provide a national picture of learner satisfaction
- to generate benchmarking and corporate data
- to provide an example of robust methodology.

Q12. How will the LSC identify minimum levels of performance?

Standards for each of the seven key performance indicators will be developed by the LSC in consultation with the sector. These standards will define excellence and minimum acceptable performance.

Q13. Why does the Framework refer to ‘effectiveness’ rather than ‘quality’?

In the Framework for Excellence, we want to encourage a wider basis for assessment of performance and have preferred to use the term ‘effectiveness’ to provide a summary indicator of learner outcomes and quality of provision.

Q14. Are there any other benefits from the Framework for Excellence?

In addition to the benefits identified in the consultation document, Framework for Excellence:
• supports a fair and transparent way of distributing funding
• enables genuine like-for-like comparisons
• will lead to better retention and achievement through progression and destination data
• will provide a standard set of performance indicators with which to monitor the performance of different groups of learners, for example by gender, ethnicity, age, learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
• supports improved teaching through the RARPA standards since it focuses the teacher on the learner and the learner’s progress
• could support marketing and curriculum development

Q15. What is necessary to realise the benefits of Framework for Excellence?

The preconditions for realising the benefits of Framework for Excellence are that:

• institutions really want to realise benefits
• providers are required to supply data once, in an agreed format
• institutions need the clearest possible focus in their missions and strategy in order to use the Framework to assess their progress
• the Framework replaces other frameworks and does not sit alongside them
• all staff need to be able to understand and use the relevant data and have access to it
• resources are made available to put in the Management Information structure in many providers, notably adult education services and some work based learning providers
• capability and capacity are developed to use data intelligently
• staff development and effective communications take place within each provider.

Q16. How will the Framework help colleges and providers compare themselves against standards of excellence and support continuous improvement through self assessment?

The Framework supports continuous improvement by providing, where applicable, appropriate national data, standards and benchmarks for comparative purposes. The use, wherever possible, of absolute standards rather than relative benchmarks allows all colleges and providers to aspire to and become good or excellent.

The Framework will enable colleges and providers to examine performance at increasingly finer gradations of provision and detail. They will be able to look more closely at the judgements of effectiveness, finance and responsiveness and drill down to see where there are strengths to develop and issues to resolve. This will aid analysis and monitoring of improvement initiatives. Colleges and providers will be able to see clearly where they are strong, where they need to improve, and the effect that will have on their public rating.

Q17. How will the Framework define the level of interaction between the LSC, other agencies, and colleges and providers?

The LSC will use the outcomes from the Framework together with the findings from inspection and annual assessment visits, to support assessment of risks to local and regional delivery. The LSC, as part of its discussions with colleges, providers and other stakeholders, will also investigate using the outcomes from the Framework to monitor wider aspects of performance locally, regionally and nationally as well as for assessing individual provider performance.

As the Framework incorporates the measures of success, financial assessment and the key questions of the Common Inspection Framework, it will provide the quantitative input into risk assessment at local and regional levels. It also specifically includes assessment of the extent to which each college’s and provider’s provision is being directed at national and local priorities, which are critical to informing the commissioning process.

Q18. How will the Framework provide coherence and enable processes to be integrated across the sector?
The Framework will give colleges and providers a common perspective on what should be measured and how. It will bring together the hitherto separate assessments of financial performance, academic quality and community relevance. The rigorous use of a single framework by colleges, providers, the LSC and the inspectorates to describe performance will substantially increase coherence and transparency across the sector.

Q19. **How will the implementation of the Framework minimise bureaucracy?**

The existence of a sector-wide framework will support simplification as the Framework will bring together into a single set the myriad different measures currently used by different stakeholders to assess the same aspects of performance. This process of simplification will also support valid comparisons of different providers and modes of delivery.

The data and other evidence used to derive the grades for each key performance indicator will be that which is collected and analysed by the institution for its own planning and development purposes. For example, information on qualification success rates, value added and distance travelled (where applicable) and self-assessment grades using the criteria in the Common Inspection Framework (CIF) will provide much of the information an institution will need to make a judgement on its effectiveness. Similarly, financial information already provided by each institution to the LSC will provide the basis for a judgement on the finance theme.

Q20. **How will the Framework raise the visibility of the sector and enhance the reputation of the sector?**

The implementation of the Framework will enable colleges and other providers to demonstrate excellence where it already exists and as it develops.

Q21. **How will the Framework enable self-regulation?**

The Framework provides a common basis for an overall performance assessment. This will greatly help providers to work together to review, improve and demonstrate the rigour of their self-assessment and the use of good practice. This combination of a common framework of performance measures with peer review of self-assessment will help facilitate progress towards self-regulation in the sector.

Q22. **How will the use of the Framework across colleges and other providers enable employers and members of the public to make informed choices about the best provider for their needs?**
The Framework will provide a comprehensive set of scores covering responsiveness, effectiveness and finance alongside an overall performance rating. The overall performance rating and its constituent grades will be published externally. Employers, learners and other stakeholders will be able to compare colleges and other providers using a consistent and readily understood set of measures, with the assurance that they will get what they expect to receive. The LSC will also be able to aggregate the results of college and provider grades at local, regional and national levels, which will allow them to demonstrate the sector’s standards and value to all stakeholders.

Q23. How will the Framework support equality and diversity?

We will perform and publish a full Equality Impact Assessment of the Framework to exploit any opportunities to promote equality and diversity and identify and address any potential risks. We are already developing the measures making up the key performance indicators, to ensure they can be disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, age, learning difficulties and/or disabilities wherever appropriate. Colleges, providers, the LSC and stakeholders will be expected to use this data to monitor the performance of different groups of learners and identify any risks to equality and diversity.

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