Background and introduction

The Framework for Excellence (the Framework) is a new, comprehensive and radical approach to performance management in the FE sector. It will be the mechanism by which colleges and other providers can maintain good/excellent standards in their performance across a balanced scorecard of measures – and know what they have to do to improve to reach that level.

The FE Reform White Paper, *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances* (DfES, March 2006), stresses the importance of the need for the information available to learners and employers to be clearer and more accessible in order to more effectively support their choices and drive up quality in the system. The Framework takes forward the Government’s commitments to ensure that there is clearer information on performance and proposes a set of primary performance indicators that are aligned with the reforms in the White Paper and that will allow straightforward and meaningful comparisons.

The aim of the Framework is to support learners’ and employers’ choices and decisions, assist improvements among colleges and providers, and support accountability. It will provide a transparent basis for performance assessment that takes into account all aspects of college and provider activity, including measures of financial and business efficiency. It is intended to assist colleges and providers in their own quality assurance activities, help to assess value for money, and facilitate a proportionate approach to inspection and intervention. As such, it will assist colleges in their development towards self regulation.

The Framework will provide readily understood measures of performance that can be used publicly to promote excellence and the reputation of the sector. This
provision of a comprehensive yet simple universal framework is intended to reduce bureaucracy and the burden of assessment by different bodies.

The Framework will also provide a basis for colleges’ and providers’ own evaluation and improvement activities and help the new QIA to provide effective support. The LSC will use the outcomes of the assessment against the Framework to inform its commissioning decisions and the need for intervention, including the issuing of formal notices to improve. The Framework will complement the new improvement strategy, Pursuing Excellence, which was published in outline recently by the QIA in partnership with other bodies.

The basis of the Framework is a scorecard of seven key performance indicators (KPIs) that can be brought together to describe the three key dimensions of a college’s or provider’s performance: responsiveness; effectiveness of provision (quality); and financial effectiveness. Each of the seven KPIs will be derived from secondary measures and other evidence. Standards for each of the seven KPIs will be developed by the LSC in consultation with the sector. These standards will define both excellence and minimum acceptable performance.

A consultation on the underlying principles of the Framework was published on 21 July 2006. The consultation document gives an overview of the Framework, the way in which assessment will be conducted and the guiding principles behind the construction of the performance ratings from the set of KPIs. It also proposes a schedule for the introduction and implementation of the Framework.

A copy of the consultation document is attached to this paper. The Executive Summary, together with Sections 1 and 2 provide a description of the basis and use of the Framework.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to update the Council on the arrangements for consultation and development of the Framework and highlight the links to the wider agenda set by the White Paper for FE reform and other key areas of policy, for example the 14-19 reforms.

Principles and Benefits of the Framework

The consultation proposes a set of principles that will form the basis for the development of the Framework:

- To provide a comprehensive basis for performance assessment
- To maximise the use of existing information and data
- To support the imperative for performance improvement
- To provide the link between performance assessment and commissioning
- To provide a mechanism to support the development of self-regulation.

The LSC intends to develop the measures and the methodology for combination of measures into KPIs and the overall rating, in conjunction with the sector and in consultation with stakeholders.

**Consultation on the Framework**

The draft of the consultation document was reviewed by the LSC Agenda for Change planning funding and quality advisory group comprising a membership representative of the whole sector. Discussions were also held with the AoC and other stakeholders including Ofsted and sector skills councils. The arrangements for the initial consultation phase over the next three months include:

**Conferences and seminars for colleges and providers**

Colleges and providers have been invited to attend one of three joint national consultation events with the QIA on “Framework for Excellence” and “Pursuing Excellence”. The aims are to share the proposals and provide an opportunity for detailed discussion of the implications of both documents for colleges, providers and seek comment on the further development of the Framework. The events will be held on:

- Thursday 21 September at the Palace Hotel in Manchester
- Monday 25 September at the Marriott Kensington in London
- Friday 29 September at the Technocentre in Coventry

Subject to demand we will consider the need for further events.

The AoC conference in November will also include sessions on the Framework for Excellence. Discussion with an AoC quality focus group has also taken place recently.

The regional seminars will provide further opportunity for debate, in smaller focus groups, on the principles and gather views on the arrangements for the development of the Framework. These events are being managed in the LSC regions and will also engage with stakeholder organisations.

**Discussions with stakeholders**

Bilateral discussions with stakeholders are planned to include a meeting with the CBI to develop proposals for consultation with employers. It is intended to seek discussion with a wide range of employers including contacts with other employer organisations.

Arrangements for consultation directly with learners through learner panels and NIACE are being investigated in addition to meeting with NUS.

Meetings with sector skills councils, the Local Government Association and representatives of Higher Education Institutions that provide FE are also being
scheduled. Ongoing discussion and consultation with Ofsted, QCA and QIA are continuing.

Development of the Framework

A draft high level programme plan has been prepared. Detailed project plans are being developed. Initial proposals are for a phased introduction of the Framework and, as indicated in the consultation, the first phase will cover colleges and WBL providers. The governance and management arrangements have been broadly agreed. Additional resources to support the development have yet to be established although it is anticipated that substantial support for the technical development will be provided by external consultants. Work is taking place to scope the requirements for external consultancy and prepare the necessary documentation to support the allocation of contracts. The first consultancy contract should be completed by early October.

The development of the Framework will be undertaken jointly with the sector. Arrangements for trialling and subsequent consultation are being developed. Development work to derive definitions for the seven KPIs, together with appropriate standards and the combination rules for the dimensions and the overall performance rating, will be carried out by the LSC in consultation with colleges, providers and stakeholders. The initial development of the Framework will be completed by January 2007 and result in the publication of detailed proposals for the Framework. Options will be trialled by a small number of FE colleges, sixth-form colleges and WBL providers from Autumn 2006 through early 2007. The trials and further consultation will support its refinement and conclude with the publication of the Framework in June 2007. The trials will be managed in regions. Discussions are taking place to identify trial sites.

Key policy issues for the Framework

The White Paper stresses the importance of establishing a clear mission for the FE system and its providers which is focused on the employability and progression of learners. This is central to delivering the skills and qualifications that individuals, employers and the economy need. Two of the main Framework for Excellence KPIs will measure each provider’s responsiveness to learners and employers. The latter will take account of the development of the new standard for employer responsiveness and vocational excellence.

Framework for Excellence will not apply to school sixth forms at this stage, because performance information for them is produced via other means. The LSC will work with the DfES, the inspectorates, FE sector representatives
and other bodies to ensure that valid, robust and comparable information about the various institutions with 14-19 provision can be made available to learners and parents so that they can make clear comparisons and choices, for example via material in the form of local area indicators and 14-19 area prospectuses.

Framework for Excellence will complement the new Improvement Strategy, Pursuing Excellence (Agenda item for MSG 17 Oct), which was published in outline at the end of June by the QIA in partnership with other bodies. Framework for Excellence will assist the identification of underperforming providers and provision, so enabling improvement and intervention as appropriate.

**Recommendation**

It is recommended that Council note and discuss the contents of this paper.

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