In this issue:

The Framework for Excellence pilot

‘Sharing the Thinking’ conference report

QIA’s Support for Excellence programme
Where we are today

The Framework for Excellence is beginning to assume a much more definite form, in the shape of a workable prototype.

One hundred providers, listed on page 7 of this newsletter, have generously agreed to pilot this prototype from September. Many of these providers – and the communities of learners and employers that they serve – have also been closely involved in shaping the policy, and we are extremely grateful for their participation.

There have been consultations, testing and trialling events and, most recently, 15 ‘solutions groups’ to consider the practicalities of the proposals and to advise on possible solutions.

Above all, the Framework remains close to its guiding principles of delivering a solution that is as uncomplicated as possible, that minimises the additional burden on providers, and that is of value to everyone who will use it. The pilot will help us to ensure that these aims are achieved.

Roger Marriott
Director of Quality and Evaluation
Highlights from the latest policy document, *Framework for Excellence: How the Framework Will Work*

There is some excitement – tempered with a little confusion – about what the Framework will actually deliver. How is it different to the current inspection regime and existing systems of quality assurance?

**Clarity and transparency**

The structure of the Framework has been designed so that there is clarity and transparency when determining the overall performance rating. At a glance, you can identify either one overall rating for a provider, or the provider’s score in one of three dimensions, or the relevant scores that make up that dimension.

‘Outstanding’ is the equivalent of a grade 1, ‘good’ is grade 2, ‘satisfactory’ is grade 3, and ‘inadequate’ is grade 4. (This is the same as the Common Inspection Framework’s grading scale.)

For example, a provider with an ‘outstanding’ overall performance rating will have to have scored ‘outstanding’ in at least two of the three dimensions, and either ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ in the third. The sum of grades for the three dimensions is 3 or 4.

An overall rating of ‘good’ would require a combined score of 5, 6 or 7 – with no score at 4, or ‘inadequate’. In other words, two ratings of ‘outstanding’ plus one rating of ‘inadequate’ would not be enough for a ‘good’.

**Assessment criteria**

A performance indicator in the Framework for Excellence is more than just a measure of performance; it also includes information on the expected standard of performance.

For example, a provider might have achieved a score of 83 per cent for learner views. The Framework will specify assessment criteria for learner views: if the assessment criteria for this particular indicator specify that 80–89 per cent is ‘good’, then that provider will receive a grade of ‘good’ for this performance indicator. For another indicator, 83 per cent could just as easily represent either an ‘outstanding’ or a ‘satisfactory’ score.

The assessment criteria will be at levels that ensure that Framework ratings are broadly consistent with existing Ofsted results. They will be based on absolute values, and will not be changed during the first four years of the operation of the Framework (that is, until 2012).

**Exemptions**

Common sense will apply with regard to exemptions. During the pilot, rules will be developed to help to determine whether a provider is – or ought to be – exempt from a particular key performance area. For example, a rule for exemption from ‘Responsiveness to employers’ could be that if fee income from employers was less than a certain percentage of total income, then ‘Responsiveness to employers’ would not apply.

**Consortia**

The Framework will not apply to consortia, but rather to the individual constituent providers within a consortium. This is because the Framework affords each individual college or provider the opportunity to demonstrate their performance across their own directly contracted provision.

The full policy statement, *Framework for Excellence: How the Framework Will Work* can be found online (at http://ffe.lsc.gov.uk), and technical guidance will also be available via the same website shortly.
Conferences

24 May saw more than 250 delegates attend a Framework for Excellence conference entitled ‘Sharing the Thinking’. This conference, jointly hosted by the Association of Colleges and the LSC, gave participants an overview of the Framework for Excellence and what it will mean in practice for providers.

Sir George Sweeney explained how the Framework for Excellence is helping to bring about the long-term goal of self-regulation of the FE system. There were also presentations from the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) and Ofsted, explaining how the Framework fits with the Improvement Strategy and the Common Inspection Framework respectively.

Other speakers included representatives from some of the providers that will be piloting the Framework from September. During a sequence of breakout sessions delegates were able to engage with some of the key architects and advisors who have been putting the Framework together.

With so many questions being answered immediately, the conference was judged to be a great success by most of the participants.

Framework for Excellence diary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thursday 28/ Friday 29 June</td>
<td>Association of Colleges 16–19 summer conference (Henry Ball will be speaking on 29 June)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday 4 July</td>
<td>Launch event for pilot providers (Leeds)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday 6 July</td>
<td>Launch event for pilot providers (Birmingham)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday 10 July</td>
<td>Launch event for pilot providers (London)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
QIA’s Support for Excellence programme: self-assessment, self-improvement and self-regulation

The Quality Improvement Agency’s (QIA’s) new Support for Excellence programme – which is due to launch in August – is designed to help providers to improve their self-assessment, develop their capacity for self-improvement and prepare for the FE system’s move towards greater self-regulation. Further information is available on the QIA website (at www.qia.org.uk/programmesandservices/supportforexcellence.html).

The Support for Excellence programme will support colleges and providers to:

- adopt a whole-organisation approach to review and development;
- develop and embed a culture of continuous self-improvement;
- improve their self-assessment processes and outcomes;
- work in peer groups to validate self-assessment judgements, share practice and undertake collaborative work to support improvement; and
- prepare for and implement the Framework for Excellence.

QIA guidance on peer review and development

The principal process to be used within the new programme will be peer review and development. For the purpose of work now being taken forward by QIA, peer review and development is defined as ‘a process whereby professionals of similar status or standing exercise collective judgements about the quality and standards of provision, as well as shared responsibilities for their improvement’.

Peer review and development has both an assessment function (which includes benchmarking and the validation of self-assessment judgements) and an improvement function (which includes joint action planning, and support in the sharing and transfer of good practice). Both elements are necessary to meet the requirements of a self-regulating system, in which providers are capable of working together to make rigorous judgements on quality and standards and to assume shared responsibilities for improvement. In order to more accurately reflect the scope and purpose of this work, QIA has recently adopted the term ‘peer review and development’ to replace ‘peer referencing’.

Further QIA guidance on peer review and development as a methodology and as a way of working can be found online (at www.qia.org.uk/programmesandservices/peerreviewanddevelopment.html).

Invitation to become involved in peer review and development

QIA requires providers to participate in 100 peer groups of around five organisations per group. The geographical and sectoral spread should reflect the structure of the FE system, including offender learning and Department for Work and Pensions peer groups. The groups will need to:

- generate appropriate levels of commitment by getting senior staff directly involved;
- be flexible and explore different solutions, taking into account the variety of size and circumstances of providers;
- develop the skills capabilities of college and provider staff to undertake peer review and development;
- ensure the sustainability of the peer groups after the support available through the programme comes to an end;
- become champions of peer review and development activity, encouraging other organisations to become involved;
- consider the role of existing peer groups already active within the system; and
- consider the specific needs of providers new to the system and how these might be engaged within peer group activities.

If you are interested in participating in a peer group, simply visit the QIA website (at www.qia.org.uk/programmesandservices/supportforexcellence.html) and complete an ‘Expression of interest’ form.
One hundred providers will be piloting the Framework for Excellence in 2007/08. A full list follows.

**National Employer Service**
- BMW Group Academy UK
- British Gas Services Ltd
- Carter and Carter Group Plc

**East Midlands**
- Bilborough College
- Castle College
- Chesterfield College
- Derbyshire County Council Adult Community Education
- Loughborough College
- North Nottinghamshire College
- Portland College
- Sheffield Trainers Ltd
- Wyggeston and Queen Elizabeth I College

**East of England**
- Bedford College
- British Racing School
- City College Norwich
- Eagit Ltd
- Luton Adult Education (Luton Borough Council)
- SEEVIC College
- The Sixth Form College, Colchester
- West Suffolk College

**North East**
- City of Sunderland College
- Newcastle College
- North East Chamber of Commerce, Trade and Industry
- Northumberland County Council
- Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College
- South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council
- Stockton Adult Education Service (Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council)
- The NETA Training Group
- Zodiac Training

**North West**
- Carmel College
- Hanovia Style Ltd (Toni & Guy Academy)
- Kendal College
- Knowsley Community College
- Loreto College
- Manchester Training Ltd
- Nelson and Colne College
- Pendleton Sixth Form College
- Sir John Deane’s College
- St Helens College
- The Oldham College
- Training 2000 Ltd

**North East**
- Alton College
- Basingstoke College of Technology
- Bracknell and Wokingham College
- Chichester College
- East Surrey College
- Eastleigh College
- Godalming College
- Hadlow College
- Mid-Kent College
- Oxford and Cherwell Valley College
- Portsmouth College
- Sussex Downs College
- The Isle of Wight College
- The Sixth Form College Farnborough
- Treloar College

**South West**
- City College, Plymouth
- Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology
- Kingston Maurward College
- Locomotion Ltd
- North Devon College
- Paragon + ITE Training Group
- Richard Huish College
- S&B Training Ltd (Bristol)
- Weston College
- Work-based Learning Network for Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole

**West Midlands**
- Burton College
- Hereford Sixth Form College
- Herefordshire Group Training Association
- Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form College
- Midland Group Training Services Ltd
- Rodbaston College
- Shrewsbury Sixth Form College
- Telford College of Arts and Technology
- The Royal National College for the Blind (Hereford)

**Yorkshire and the Humber**
- Barnsley College
- Bradford College
- Calderdale College
- Consortium for Learning
- Greenhead College
- Harrogate College (Leeds Metropolitan University)
- John Leggott College
- Leeds College of Art and Design
- N G Bailey (Leeds)
- Northern College for Residential and Non-residential Adult Education
- Open Door Adult Learning Centre (Sheffield)