Effective self-assessment of key skills

Key Skills
SUPPORT PROGRAMME

enhancing skills
for life and work

department for
education and skills

learning
and skills
development
agency

EUROPEAN UNION
European Social Fund

Contents

Preface

What is the purpose of this guide?

The quality of key skills provision affects the overall quality of all curriculum areas because key skills are the underpinning skills that learners need to succeed. This guide aims to show how further education (FE) colleges can integrate the self-assessment of key skills into their existing quality assurance systems and how they can plan for improvement of their key skills provision.

Who is this guide for?

This guide is aimed at staff in FE and sixth form colleges who have responsibility for the self-assessment and quality improvement of key skills, including:

- key skills coordinators
- programme managers
- quality managers.

What is this guide about?

This guide offers advice and guidance on how to improve the quality of key skills provision through self-assessment. It focuses on:

- how self-assessment of key skills should form part of the college's overall self-assessment and quality improvement cycle
- the self-assessment process
- using the findings of self-assessment to action plan for improvement
- inspectors' expectations of the self-assessment and quality improvement of key skills.

More detailed information about self-assessment can be found in the following Learning and Skills Council (LSC) document:

- *Quality improvement and self-assessment* (May 2005, ref LSC-P-NAT-050365).

Introduction to self-assessment

What is self-assessment?

Self-assessment is a systematic way of:

- reviewing how well you are doing and what you need to do to improve
- comparing your performance against that of previous years and/or national benchmarks
- finding out about the needs of your learners and other groups
- bringing together all the information you have about your performance
- preparing for annual LSC reviews and for inspection.

Why do you need to self-assess your college's key skills provision?

> *The ability to self-assess effectively, to identify strengths and weaknesses and to implement identified improvements is critical to the development of a continuously improving sector.*
>
> LSC (2005). *Quality improvement and self-assessment*, Learning and Skills Council, page 5, para 13.

By carrying out self-assessment you can judge how well you are doing and how to improve.

The LSC requires an annual self-assessment report, which should cover all provision inspected by Ofsted or the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI). Inspectors use the self-assessment report to help to plan for the inspection and will grade your college's capacity to make further improvements. The effectiveness of the college's quality assurance systems and the accuracy of your self-assessment report will be an important factor in the judgement that leads to this grade and in judgements about leadership and management.

> Inspectors would judge the capacity to make further improvements as outstanding if: 'The self-assessment report is accurate, realistic and provides a clear agenda for improvement [and] it is a full and candid evaluation of a wide range of appropriate evidence.'
>
> Ofsted (2005). *Handbook for inspecting colleges* (draft), page 37, para 123.

The self-assessment process can be broken down into six stages, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The self-assessment process

Planning self-assessment

- Who will be involved in the self-assessment?
- What do you need to find out?
- What do you already know about key skills?
- How will you collect information?
- What are your sources of evidence?

Gathering evidence

- Collect data and documentary evidence.
- Consult learners, employers and other stakeholders.
- Carry out observations of teaching and learning.
- Triangulate your evidence (see page 10).

Making judgements

- Collate and analyse data and information.
- Set standards.
- Compare your evidence with your standards.
- Identify strengths and areas for improvement.
- Write your self-assessment report.
- Grade your provision.
- Moderate and validate judgements and grades.

Acting on judgements

- Write and prioritise SMART targets for improvement.
- Check that you have appropriate teaching and support staff and other resources to carry through your plans for improvement.

Reviewing the effectiveness of actions

- Monitor and review your self-assessment process and quality improvement plan. Ask:
  - Have actions been completed?
  - What impact have they had?
  - What worked?
  - What did not work?
  - What changes do we need to make to the self-assessment and quality improvement planning process?

Planning self-assessment

This chapter looks at how you will plan your self-assessment and considers issues such as who should be involved in the self-assessment, what you need to find out and what information you will need to collect and how.

Who should be involved?

All staff who are involved with key skills should have an input into the self-assessment process **from the start** rather than be given just an opportunity to comment on the final draft of the self-assessment report.

You should also obtain and take into account the views of learners, parents, employers and other stakeholders.

> *External facilitators can be useful in the self-assessment process but don't get someone else to write the report for you.*
>
> *Excalibur*: Adult Learning Inspectorate good practice database.
> http://data.ali.gov.uk/excalibur/bbp/html_content/quality/colleges/selfassessment_HandT.htm –
> accessed 4 January 2006.

The checklist in Figure 2 features some of the internal and external stakeholders that should contribute to the self-assessment of your college's key skills provision. Use it to reflect on who already has an input and who might usefully contribute to future self-assessments.

Figure 2. Who has an input into the self-assessment of your college's key skills provision?

	Inputs now	Might contribute in the future
Senior management	☐	☐
Key skills coordinator(s)	☐	☐
Key skills assessors	☐	☐
Key skills teachers	☐	☐
Key skills internal verifiers/moderators	☐	☐
Additional support staff	☐	☐
Tutors	☐	☐
Main programme teachers	☐	☐
Learners	☐	☐
Employers	☐	☐
Parents	☐	☐
Higher education institutions	☐	☐
Other stakeholders	☐	☐

What do you need to find out?

> *The basis of self-assessment will derive from the five key questions in the Common Inspection Framework.*
>
>   LSC (2005). *Quality improvement and self-assessment*, Learning and Skills Council, page 4, para 8.

Basing self-assessment on the Common Inspection Framework

The Common Inspection Framework features five key questions associated with quality:

1 How well do learners achieve?

2 How effective are teaching, training and learning?

3 How well do programmes and activities meet the needs and interests of learners?

4 How well are learners guided and supported?

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

Other issues to consider

Although colleges should use the five key questions as the basis of their self-assessment, the questions should be interpreted flexibly in the light of a college's own mission, goals and context.

> *Self-assessment should specifically address the effectiveness of providers in ensuring that learners have the necessary workplace skills for employment and indicate how providers are responding to needs identified and agreed with their planning and funding bodies.*
>
>   LSC (2005). *Quality improvement and self-assessment*, Learning and Skills Council, page 6, para 16.

Therefore, you should also evaluate, and include in your self-assessment report, how far your key skills provision:

- meets your mission statement
- is responsive to the needs of employers
- meets your college's *Skills for Life* target.

What inspectors will be looking for

In evaluating the college's overall effectiveness and efficiency, inspectors will evaluate, among other things … the development of learners' key skills and basic skills.

> Ofsted (2005). *Handbook for inspecting colleges* (draft), page 32, para 117.

The inspection of key skills will normally be included in the inspection of individual areas of learning. Judgements about key skills will also be summarised in the main section on the overall quality of provision.

> Ofsted (2005). *Handbook for inspecting colleges* (draft), page 56, para 186.

Your self-assessment report should, therefore, contain judgements on both:

- the overall effectiveness of your key skills provision
- the quality and effectiveness of key skills provision in each curriculum area.

Pages 6–9 of this guide contain a range of questions you might use to evaluate the overall quality of your key skills provision against each of the five key questions in the Common Inspection Framework. Possible sources of information that might help you to answer the questions are also included.

On page 10 there is a list of questions based on the *Handbook for inspecting colleges* – draft (Ofsted 2005), which curriculum managers might use to evaluate key skills provision in their curriculum area.

The Common Inspection Framework is available on the Ofsted website at **www.ofsted.gov.uk** and on the ALI website at **www.ali.gov.uk** In both cases, click on 'publications'.

Questions for evaluating the overall effectiveness of your key skills provision

KEY QUESTION 1. How well do learners achieve?
To what extent:
• do learners have opportunities to achieve key skills qualifications in line with government guidelines?
• do learners complete key skills programmes and achieve qualifications at an appropriate level?
• are key skills achievement rates improving over time?
• do learners enjoy key skills sessions and attend regularly?
• are there challenging targets for key skills achievement at individual and course level?
• are there significant variations between the key skills achievements of groups of learners?
• does the standard of learners' work meet or exceed the standard required by the key skills standards?
• do learners make progress in key skills, compared with their initial assessment and/or entry qualifications?
• does learners' key skills achievement have an impact on achievement in their main learning goals?

Possible sources of information

These might include:

- retention and achievement rates showing trends over time
- a comparison of qualifications on entry and initial assessment results with key skills achieved to show distance travelled
- registers and attendance figures
- internal and external verification/moderation reports
- lesson observations
- learners' portfolios
- feedback from learners.

KEY QUESTION 2. How effective are teaching, training and learning?

- To what extent do teachers:
    - have the expertise and knowledge to teach and assess key skills?
    - use an appropriate range of teaching methods, modes of delivery and materials?
    - correct spelling, grammatical errors and inaccuracies in work with number in all qualifications?
    - provide detailed feedback to learners on key skills performance and achievement in all qualifications?

- Are opportunities for key skills explicitly identified in schemes of work, lesson plans and assignment briefs for all qualifications?

- Is key skills teaching closely linked to the learners' main programmes?

- Is learners' work presented as professionally as it is reasonable to expect at the current stage of their course?

- Do learners work collaboratively with their peers and others?

- Do individual learning plans and reviews of progress include key skills development needs?

- Is learners' progress in key skills regularly assessed, monitored and reviewed?

- Do learners use information and communications technology as an integral part of their courses, where appropriate?

Possible sources of information

These might include:

- lesson observations
- learners' marked work
- feedback from learners
- internal and external verification/moderation reports
- schemes of work and session plans
- individual learning plans.

KEY QUESTION 3. How well do programmes and activities meet the needs and interests of learners?

- Are learners working towards key skills qualifications at levels that are appropriate to their prior achievement? Are learners who have achieved at Level 2 progressing to a Level 3 qualification?

- Is the choice of Level 3 key skills appropriate to the learners' individual needs?

- Are key skills delivery styles designed to maintain interest and motivate learners?

- Are opportunities for developing and applying key skills appropriate to the vocational area?

Possible sources of information

These might include:

- feedback from learners and employers
- individual learning plans
- a comparison of qualifications on entry and initial assessment results with key skills registrations and achievements
- attendance figures
- schemes of work and session plans.

KEY QUESTION 4. How well are learners guided and supported?

- Are there systematic procedures for initial assessment, diagnostic assessment and additional learning support? Is the information arising from them used to provide appropriate individualised support for learners?

- Is the quality and accuracy of guidance given to learners sufficiently sound and accurate to steer them towards the most appropriate level of key skills to meet their needs?

- Do learners understand the relevance of key skills to their main qualifications?

Possible sources of information

These might include:

- observations of advice, guidance and support sessions, including initial interviews, induction and reviews of progress
- induction materials
- feedback from learners
- publicity materials and course brochures
- course handbooks and curriculum area guides
- individual learning plans.

KEY QUESTION 5. How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?

- Does the college have a key skills policy that applies to all programmes and all learners?
- Does the policy clearly set down a key skills entitlement, in line with government guidelines?
- Is the key skills policy being implemented effectively?
- How far is key skills support for learners across the organisation's provision strategically planned, resourced, led and managed?
- Does the college have a co-ordinated, cross-organisation approach that is actively supported by senior managers?
- Are there effective arrangements for internal verification/moderation?
- Does the college monitor and improve the quality of key skills support through quality assurance and self-assessment?
- Does the college's key skills programme promote equality of opportunity and tackle discrimination so that all learners achieve their potential?
- What is the impact of resources on key skills learning and achievements? (Resources include staff, learning resources and accommodation.)
- Are staffing arrangements effective, with responsibilities for co-ordination, specialist teaching, support and internal verification clearly allocated?
- Do staff have opportunities for continuing professional development and sharing good practice in key skills?

Possible sources of information

These might include:

- a key skills policy
- minutes of key skills meetings
- quality assurance policies and procedures
- a previous self-assessment report and quality improvement plan
- external verification/moderation reports
- lesson observations
- staff curricula vitae
- staff training records.

Questions for evaluating the quality and effectiveness of key skills provision in each curriculum area

- Are learners learning the skills necessary to cope with the course they are following?
- Is work being marked carefully, with correction of spelling and grammatical errors and of inaccuracies in work with numbers?
- Do learners use information and communications technology as an integral part of their courses, when appropriate?
- Is work presented to a reasonably professional standard?
- Do learners work collaboratively with their peers and others?

Based on: Ofsted (2005). *Handbook for inspecting colleges* (draft), paras 153, 186–189.

Where will you find your evidence?

Providers are expected to draw upon a wide range of performance data to inform their self-assessment report...

LSC (2005). *Quality improvement and self-assessment*, Learning and Skills Council, page 5, para 12.

The self-assessment of your provision must be backed up by evidence that is:

valid   Does the evidence directly support the strength or area for improvement identified?

quantifiable   Can you measure how you are doing? Are there benchmarks against which you can compare your college's performance?

sufficient   Have you considered all the evidence available?

current   Is your evidence recent enough to give an accurate picture of your provision?

accurate   Does your evidence come from reliable sources? Can you check the accuracy of your evidence?

In order to form sound judgements on your college's provision, you should triangulate evidence by asking for, observing and studying information from a variety of sources. Triangulation is a method of establishing the accuracy of information by comparing three or more types of data sources. Figure 3 illustrates the process.

Figure 3. Triangulating evidence

ASK:
- learners
- teachers
- other users.

OBSERVE:
- taught sessions
- tutorials
- workshops
- induction
- assessments.

Triangulate

STUDY:
- registers
- achievement and retention trends
- recruitment figures
- minutes of meetings
- the key skills policy
- the previous self-assessment report and quality improvement plan
- staff curricula vitae
- schemes of work.
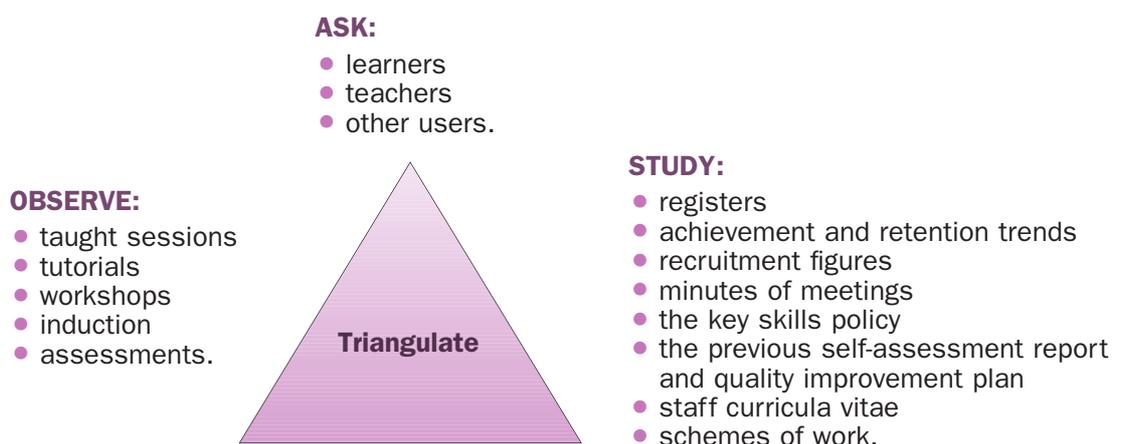
You will probably already have much of the evidence.

Use the checklist in Figure 4 to identify information that is already available to you.

Figure 4. What evidence is already available?

Possible sources of evidence	Could be used to answer the Common Inspection Framework key question(s):	We already have this information (tick)
Retention and achievement rates showing trends over time	1	
Registers and attendance figures	1, 3	
Comparison of qualifications on entry and initial assessment results with key skills achieved to show distance travelled	1, 3	
Lesson observations	1, 2, 5	
Learners' portfolios and marked work	1, 2	
Observations of initial interviews, induction and reviews of progress	4	
Schemes of work and session plans	2, 3	
Feedback from learners	1, 2, 3, 4	
Feedback from employers	3	
Individual learning plans	2, 3, 4	
Internal and external verification/moderation reports	1, 2, 5	
Publicity and induction materials; course brochures and curriculum area guides	4	
Key skills policy	5	
Minutes of key skills meetings	5	
Quality assurance policies and procedures	5	
Previous self-assessment reports and quality improvement plans	5	
Staff curricula vitae	5	
Staff training records	5	

Once you have planned your self-assessment you are ready to move on to gathering your evidence.

The next chapter looks at ways of gathering data about key skills using your existing quality systems.

Gathering evidence

This chapter looks at the quantitative and qualitative data you will need to collect to form an evidence base.

Interpreting data

Your key skills achievement data should tell you how many learners are achieving key skills in line with the expectations of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), as illustrated in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Finding out whether your learners are achieving DfES guidelines

DfES guidelines*		To find out whether your learners are achieving these guidelines you need to know:
'Providers are expected to deliver key skills appropriate to the needs of the individual learner' (para 3.2)		- Number of learners with entitlement funding - Initial assessment scores to ensure that learners are entered for key skills qualifications at a level that is appropriate to their needs
Learners' prior qualifications	**Expected accreditation**	
Learners who do not have grades A*–C in GCSE Maths, English or ICT	'…programmes should lead to the acquisition of relevant key skills qualifications at level 2' (para 3.2)	Number of learners who have not yet achieved a Level 2 qualification (ie a GCSE at grades A*–C or another proxy) in: - mathematics or number - English or communication - ICT
Learners starting on advanced-level study with the aim of pursuing a professional or higher qualification	'…institutions should support them [learners] in gaining at least one relevant key skill qualification at level 3' (para 3.2)	Number of learners on Level 3 courses who have already achieved Level 2 qualifications in mathematics or number, English or communication and ICT
Learners on a two-year programme re-taking GCSEs in English, Maths or ICT, who do not achieve a grade A*–C in these subjects by the end of their first year of post-16 study	'…expected in their second year to be working towards and registered for the relevant key skill qualification(s) at level 2' (para 7.1)	Number of learners who are re-taking a GCSE in English, Maths or ICT and therefore not expected to take the relevant key skill at Level 2 in their first year of study

* DfES (2005). *Key skills policy and practice: your questions answered*, Department for Education and Skills.

Calculating success rates

To make a judgement about achievement and standards at your college you need to know:

- the number of learners who started key skills qualifications; full-time learners aged 16–19 claiming entitlement funding should start appropriate key skills qualifications, unless they have met DfES expectations (see page 12).

- the percentage of starters who completed the course (retention rate)

  % retention rate = completers x 100
  starters

- the percentage of completers who achieved a qualification (pass rate)

  % pass rate = achievers x 100
  completers

- the percentage of learners who started a qualification, completed the course and achieved a qualification (success rate)

  % success rate = % retention rate x % pass rate
  100

or

  number of learners who claim achievement x 100
  number of starters

To make a judgement about your college's achievement and standards you need to know whether these rates are increasing or decreasing over time.

Example: A college has collected data on its key skills achievement over three years, shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Key skills achievement data 2003–06

Year	Key skill	Level	Starters	Completers	% retention rate	Portfolio achieved	Test achieved	Proxy claimed	Achievement claimed	% pass rate	% success rate
03–04	Comm	2	250	120	*48*	80	50	15	60	*50*	*24*
04–05	Comm	2	310	140	*45*	110	80	20	95	*68*	*31*
05–06	Comm	2	360	175	*49*	150	125	10	145	*83*	*40*

- The pass rate for Level 2 Communication in 2005–06 is high at 83% and shows a considerable improvement on previous years.

- Of the 360 learners who started the course in 2005–06, 175 completed it, so retention is 49% **(175 completers x 100)**.
  360 starters

Retention has not shown significant improvement over the last three years.

- The success rate is 40%: **49% retention rate x 83% pass rate**

  $$\frac{\text{49\% retention rate x 83\% pass rate}}{100}$$

or

$$\frac{\text{145 learners who claim achievement}}{\text{360 starters}} \times 100$$

- If the success rate is 40%, 60% of learners who started a key skill qualification in Communication at Level 2 did not achieve the qualification in 2005–06. The pass rate is, therefore, less of a strength than it first appears. However, because of the improving pass rate, the success rate is improving.

This data contributes to the judgement on achievement and standards (key question 1 of the Common Inspection Framework) as it enables the key skills team to evaluate whether:

- learners complete key skills programmes and achieve qualifications at an appropriate level

- key skills retention, pass and success rates are improving over time.

Using data on distance travelled

You can measure distance travelled in key skills by comparing the level learners reached at initial assessment or qualifications on entry with the level of their final key skills achievement. An example of this technique is given in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Measuring distance travelled

	X	Y	(Y minus X)
Name	**Initial assessment (communication)**	**Key skills Communication achievement**	**Distance travelled**
Student A	1	2	1
Student B	2	1	-1
Student C	1	2	1
Student D	2	3	1
Student E	2	3	1
Student F	3	3	0
Total	11	14	3
Average	**1.8**	**2.3**	**0.5**

Using a measure of distance travelled enables you to:

- compare performance between two points in time (eg from the beginning to the end of the course)
- measure the progress and achievement of individuals and groups of learners
- compare the performance of different areas of the college
- identify staff development needs
- plan for performance management for learners and staff
- compare your performance with that of other institutions
- make a judgement about the effect of key skills teaching on the achievement of main learning goals.

Measuring distance travelled can contribute to answering key question 1 of the Common Inspection Framework by providing information on whether:

- learners make progress in key skills compared with their initial assessment scores and/or qualifications on entry
- there are significant variations between groups of learners.

Distance travelled is one of the New Measures of Success developed by the LSC, DfES and the inspectorates.

Case study 1. Using data to make judgements

A college management information system (MIS) department produces several reports for the key skills manager and personal tutors (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Reports produced by the MIS department

Report	This enables the key skills manager to make a judgement about whether:	Contributes to judgements on key question:
A list of learners by course with their qualifications on entry	• learners make progress in key skills compared with their entry qualifications	1
	• learners are working towards key skills qualifications at levels that are appropriate to their prior achievement	3
	• guidance steers learners towards the most appropriate level of key skills to meet their needs	4
Achievement of key skills tests by course	• there are significant variations between the achievement of groups of learners	1
Enrolments for each key skill at each level by course	• learners have opportunities to achieve qualifications at an appropriate level	1
Test registrations	• learners have opportunities to achieve qualifications at an appropriate level	1
A report on key skills achievement showing the number of starters and the number of completers	• learners complete key skills programmes and achieve qualifications at an appropriate level	1
A chart showing key skills test performance by group for each curriculum area (see Figure 6 on page 13 for an example)	• there are differences in performance between curriculum areas	1

Figure 9 is an illustration of the type of information that the MIS department produces for the key skills coordinator. (It is not based on real figures.)

Figure 9. ICT key skills test attendance and achievement by group – example only
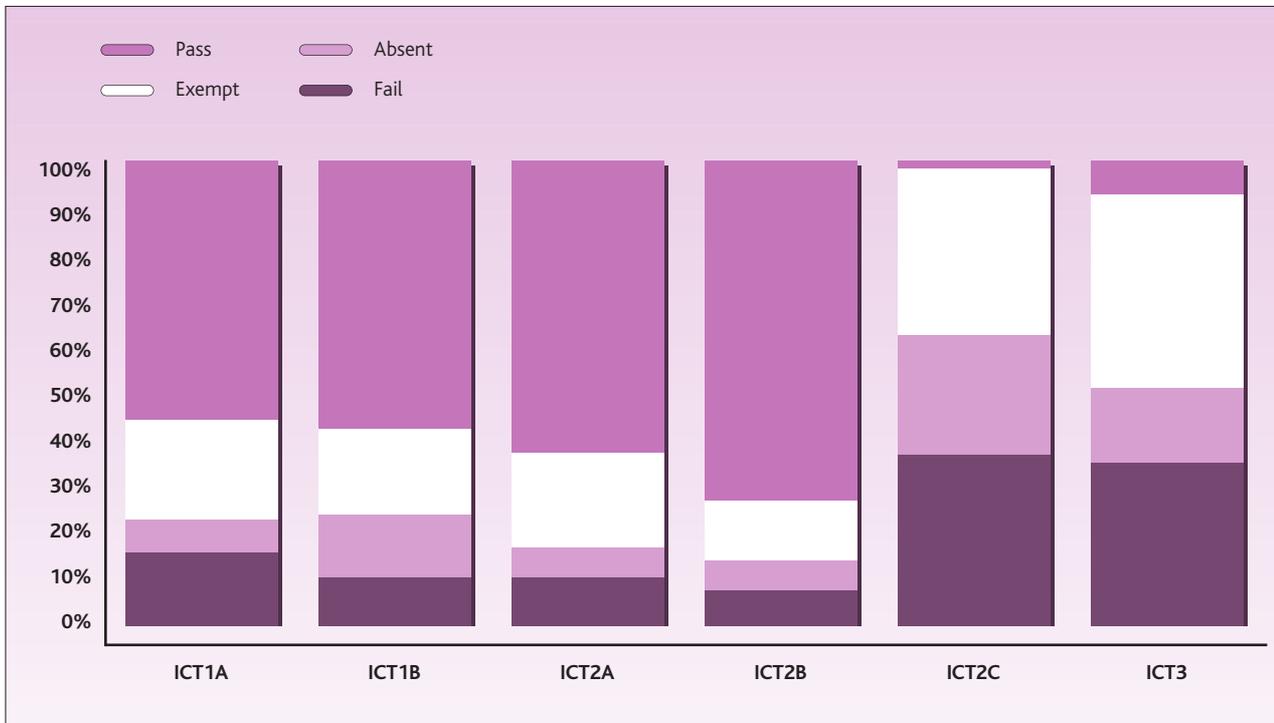
From Figure 9 we can deduce the following points.

- Test achievement is satisfactory at Level 1 and for most Level 2 groups.
- One Level 2 group (ICT2C) and the Level 3 group have low achievement and high rates of absenteeism from the test. The key skills team should investigate the reasons for this discrepancy.
- These two groups also have a high proportion of learners who are exempt. The key skills coordinator might use this information to check whether learners with exemptions have progressed to appropriate Level 3 qualifications.

Lesson observations

Lesson observation is integral to effective quality assurance. The lesson observation system should include graded observations of both full-time and part-time teachers who are involved in any activities that contribute to learning. These activities include, for example, the teaching of groups and individuals, tutorials for groups and individuals and the observation of trainees in the workplace.

Ofsted (2005). *Handbook for inspecting colleges* (draft), page 83, para 255.

Lesson observations of discrete key skills sessions, workshops and teaching on main programmes of study can provide valuable information about how key skills are supported. They also provide evidence for the five key questions in the Common Inspection Framework.

Figure 10. Using lesson observation to provide evidence for the five key questions

Key question	Lesson observers could provide evidence for the extent to which:
2	• key skills are effectively integrated into main programmes • opportunities for key skills are explicitly identified in schemes of work, lesson plans and assignment briefs • teachers have the confidence and expertise to teach key skills • key skills teaching methods and materials are up to date and relevant • key skills activities and assessment methods promote active learning and encourage learners to use their initiative • learners understand the significance and relevance of the support they are receiving • there is effective assessment and monitoring of learners' progress in key skills • teachers provide detailed feedback to learners on key skills • information and communications technology is used by learners as an integral part of courses • learners work collaboratively with their peers and others
4	• key skills are presented positively at induction • tutors discuss key skills during individual reviews of progress with learners
5	• resources, staffing and accommodation have an impact on key skills learning and achievement.

Examples of comments from reports by lesson observers in colleges

AS level Spanish

The teacher set an internet search for homework. After the session, several learners said that they did not know how to search in Spanish and were unsure how to tackle their homework.

AVCE Business

A number of learners were clearly struggling with the formulae needed for the task. There was no support offered to these learners, who became disengaged and disruptive.

BTEC First Diploma in Sport

The teacher provided careful and constructive feedback on learners' written English. A high proportion of learners have difficulties with spelling and punctuation and cannot express ideas clearly, but all learners have individual learning plans in which targets for key skills improvement are set. The tutor monitored these [the targets] *in the session and referred learners to a range of sources of support.*

Using lesson observations to make improvements in teaching

Good lesson observation schemes put as much emphasis on the feedback and action planning which result from an observation as on the observation itself. These processes are vital to making improvements in teaching.

At Evesham and Malvern Hills College, a cross-college teaching observation team is trained to include the development of key skills and *Skills for Life* as a key element in planning, delivering and reviewing good practice in teaching and learning. A college-wide system for auditing teaching documents has been introduced to achieve and maintain consistency in lesson planning, preparation and review.

DfES (2004). *A good practice guide case study*, (code CSEVMAL).

Internal verification

What information do your verifiers gather?

Verification is an important part of a key skills quality system. In the course of their work verifiers will gather information on the quality of assignments, assessments and resources that can be used as evidence for self-assessment.

Verifiers could provide information for the following questions of the Common Inspection Framework:

Key question 1. How well do learners achieve?

- Do learners have opportunities to achieve key skills qualifications in line with government guidelines?
- Do learners complete key skills programmes and achieve qualifications at an appropriate level for their prior achievement?
- Does the standard of learners' work meet or exceed the standard required by the key skills standards?

Key question 2. How effective are teaching, training and learning?

- Are opportunities for key skills explicitly identified in schemes of work, lesson plans and assignment briefs?
- Is key skills teaching closely linked to the learners' main programmes?

Key question 3. How well do programmes and activities meet the needs and interests of learners?

- Are opportunities for developing and applying key skills appropriate to the vocational area?

Key question 5. How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?

- Does the college's key skills programme promote equality of opportunity and tackle discrimination so that all learners achieve their potential?

Reports from verifiers

The questions in Figure 11 could be included in internal verifiers' checklists, allowing information to be gathered for self-assessment through internal verification.

Figure 11. Possible questions for internal verifiers' checklists

	Key question(s) of the Common Inspection Framework
Do assignments offer opportunities for learners to achieve the key skills standards at the appropriate level?	1
Have learners been entered for the appropriate level of key skills for their prior achievement?	3
Does work in learners' portfolios meet the key skills standard?	1
Has the assessor marked work consistently and applied the key skills standard to all portfolios sampled?	2
Are assignments based around meaningful activities? If not, is this for a legitimate reason, eg a lack of naturally occurring opportunities?	2, 3
Is the assignment likely to interest learners? Will the presentation of the assignment appeal to them?	1, 3
Is the level of language and the complexity of assignments appropriate to the needs of learners? Are assignments written in plain English?	2
Are portfolios clearly annotated by the assessor?	2
Have learners received sufficient constructive feedback for them to make improvements?	2
Do assignments give learners sufficient support and guidance?	2
Do assignments afford equal opportunity for all learners?	5
Are tracking and recording systems effective?	5
Is the college's key skills policy being implemented?	5
Have action plans following internal and external moderation/verification been implemented?	5

Adapted from: KSSP/LfW (2001). *Using and developing key skills assignments: guide to good practice*, Key Skills Support Programme/Learning for Work.

Learner feedback

What can you learn from your learners?

> *Inspectors will look for [a quality assurance system that has] effective methods for gathering, analysing and acting on the views of learners and college staff.*
>
> Ofsted (2005). *Handbook for inspecting colleges* (draft), page 84, para 256.

Methods of obtaining feedback from learners

The following methods could be used to collect information about key skills from learners:

- feedback from discussions with groups, eg tutor groups
- feedback from individual tutorials
- focus groups
- learners' log books or journals
- learners' comments on assignments and feedback
- paper-based questionnaires
- online questionnaires
- telephone surveys
- talking to learners during lesson observations
- councils and committees for learners
- instant feedback at the end of a session (eg 'I'd like you all to take two minutes to note down three key skills tips you've gained from this session.')
- suggestion boxes or books and comment boards.

It should usually be possible to incorporate questions seeking learners' views and experiences of key skills into existing methods of feedback, rather than setting up separate systems.

Learners' feedback could provide information for the following key questions in the Common Inspection Framework:

2. How effective are teaching, training and learning?

- Is key skills teaching closely linked to the learners' main programmes?
- Do individual learning plans and reviews of progress include key skills development needs?
- Is learners' progress in key skills regularly assessed, monitored and reviewed?
- Do learners use information and communications technology as an integral part of their courses, where appropriate?

3. How well do programmes and activities meet the needs and interests of learners?

- Is the choice of Level 3 key skills appropriate to the learners' individual needs?
- Are key skills delivery styles designed to maintain interest and motivate learners?
- Are opportunities for developing and applying key skills appropriate to the vocational area?

4. How well are learners guided and supported?

- Is the quality and accuracy of guidance given to learners sufficiently sound and accurate to steer them towards the most appropriate level of key skills to meet their needs?

Case study 2. Focus groups of learners

A 30-minute focus group of eight second-year business studies learners produced the following findings.

Initial guidance (key question 4)

How and when did you find out that key skills were part of your programme? Were you given information about key skills at induction and/or in the course handbook?

We found out at the beginning of the course, when we saw key skills on the timetable. They weren't mentioned in the publicity materials for the course or in the course handbook. However, key skills were explained to us at induction.

Did you do an initial assessment? If so, what happened as a result?

We did a computer-based initial assessment at the beginning of the course. This was a very useful starting point and allowed the key skills teacher to focus on our needs.

How did you choose which key skills to concentrate on and the level of your key skills?

We all did Application of Number at Level 2 last year. This year, in the second year, we are doing Communication at Level 2. Communication would have been helpful in the first year because we would have appreciated support with report-writing skills.

Quality of teaching and learning (key question 2)

Are key skills relevant and helpful to your main programme of study?

We found that Application of Number really helped with accounts and working out formulae. Key skills are a real confidence booster. This year we are doing presentations in both business studies and Communication and we can see the transferability of the skill. However, we will use the Communication assignment as evidence for the key skill rather than the business studies presentation.

Are key skills sessions interesting?

The Application of Number teacher made key skills interesting, even though some of us had a fear of numbers.

Do your main qualification teachers feed back to you on key skills?

Some, but not all, teachers feed back on key skills in mainstream assignments. We find this feedback very useful.

If you had a problem with an assignment (eg difficulties structuring it, searching for information or using formulae) what would you do?

Our college has a system of peer support. Ex-learners are employed by the college to support current learners. We find this extremely helpful because the support staff explain things in terms we can understand.

Achievement (key question 1)

What could the college do to raise the key skills achievement rate?

We can see the value of key skills to our studies. However, key skills would be more useful if they were subject-specific. We already have a considerable amount of work for our main qualification, which takes priority, and do not always have time to complete key skills assignments.

The focus group discussion identified a number of strengths and areas for development in the college's key skills provision.

Learners' feedback is a very valuable source of information about their experience, but it may not be typical. Learners' feedback should be supported with other sources of evidence, as Figure 12 demonstrates.

Figure 12. Supporting learners' feedback with other sources of evidence

Possible strengths	Other evidence which might confirm this strength	Possible areas for development	Other evidence which might confirm this area for development
Valued system of peer support	• Observations of teaching and learning • Evidence from learner satisfaction questionnaires • Records of attendance	• Insufficient guidance • Learners are not aware of key skills before the start of their course	• Evidence from other groups of learners • Audit of publicity materials and course handbooks • Observations of induction
Learners have a positive attitude to key skills	• Observations of teaching and learning • Evidence from learner satisfaction questionnaires • Records of attendance	• Unclear links between key skills and learners' needs • Key skills are not always directly related to the learners' main qualification • Key skills accreditation level is not always related to the learners' individual needs	• Schemes of work and lesson plans • Comparison of qualifications on entry and key skills registrations
Effective feedback on key skills	• Verification reports on marked work • Observations of teaching and learning • Evidence from other groups of learners		
Good teaching	• Observations of teaching and learning • Evidence from other groups of learners	• Learners perceive key skills assignments to be too time consuming	• Internal verification comments on completed portfolios • Schemes of work and assignment briefs

You should now have a sound evidence base.

Figure 13. Collecting an evidence base

Based on the Adult Learning Inspectorate's document *Self-assessment and the inspection process*,
http://docs.ali.gov.uk/publications/Selfassessment.pdf – accessed 4 January 2006.

Once you have collected all your evidence, you can make judgements about your college's key skills provision.

Making judgements

This chapter shows how it is possible to make judgements about your college's key skills provision by comparing it with standards set. It also suggests ways of identifying strengths and areas for improvement in your college's key skills provision.

Setting standards

To determine whether your college is performing well or if there are areas for improvement, you need to know the standard that it is expected to reach.

A quality standard is an expectation of what good practice should be in the context of your college and the FE sector.

- Identify the areas that you want to evaluate. These will be based on the Common Inspection Framework.
- Identify quality standards, which should derive from your college's key skills policy.

Examples of possible policy statements or quality standards

We will:

- identify all learners' skills support needs
- offer learners support for key skills which enables them to achieve their main learning goals and to succeed in their chosen progression route
- offer opportunities for key skills accreditation in line with government guidelines
- ensure that key skills programmes are relevant to learners' individual needs and closely linked to their main programmes of study
- provide high-quality support for key skills in a variety of settings (in main qualification lessons and through discrete key skills lessons, key skills workshops and drop-in resource centres) at a time and in a context that is acceptable to learners
- provide sufficient resources to support key skills development
- ensure that staff are competent and qualified to support and assess key skills
- review learners' individual progress in key skills regularly
- ensure that key skills portfolios are assessed to national standards
- make effective arrangements for internal verification and moderation of key skills
- monitor and review the implementation of the key skills policy
- offer opportunities for staff development and the sharing of good practice in key skills
- ensure that all staff give key skills equal value to other academic and vocational subjects.

Judging your college's performance in meeting quality standards

Example quality standard

> **We will provide sufficient, up-to-date IT resources to support key skills development.**

How will you measure how your college is doing?

Set a performance indicator. A performance indicator is a way of measuring how well an organisation is doing. For example:

- the ratio of computers to key skills learners
- the frequency of replacing IT equipment
- learners' satisfaction regarding access to computers.

How will you judge how well your college is doing?

Set a benchmark against which to compare your college's performance. A benchmark is the level of performance in other organisations nationally or locally (external benchmark) or in other parts of the organisation (internal benchmark). For example:

- the average ratio of computers to key skills learners in other colleges in the county is 1:5 (external benchmark)
- the average age of computers in the college is 3.8 years (internal benchmark)
- the overall college score for learners' satisfaction regarding access to IT equipment is 2.4 on a 1–5 scale, where 1 is excellent and 5 is poor (internal benchmark).

Benchmarks are particularly important for making judgements about outstanding provision. Unless you have something to compare your college's provision against, how do you know that it is outstanding?

Using your benchmarks as a basis, set a target against which you will judge your team's performance. The target could be included in your plan of how you will implement your college's key skills policy. For example:

- the ratio of computers to key skills learners will be 1:4
- computers in the key skills workshop will be replaced every 3.5 years
- the average score for learners' satisfaction regarding access to key skills IT equipment will be 2 (good).

Identifying your strengths and areas for improvement

Once you have gathered evidence about your college's key skills provision, you can begin to draw out what it tells you about the strengths and areas for improvement.

Does your evidence tell you that some of your team's provision is particularly good or outstanding?

Have you found areas for improvement in your team's provision?

Strengths are aspects of your team's provision that are clearly better than normal good practice.

Areas for improvement are aspects of your team's provision that are below normal good practice.

Distinguish between normal good practice and strengths.

Normal good practice might be:

- accurate record keeping of key skills registrations
- all portfolios meeting the key skills standards.

Strengths might be:

- good achievement rates in ICT; 10% above the benchmark for the sector and 5% above the college average benchmark for achievement
- high-quality work in learners' portfolios commented on by the external verifier.

Writing evaluative statements

When describing your college's strengths and areas for improvement, rather than just stating facts, use a word or phrase that is evaluative.

Statement of fact	Evaluative statement
Some lesson plans do not indicate how key skills will be addressed.	Integration of key skills into lesson plans is inadequate. 40% of lesson plans for observed sessions did not address the skills the learners needed for the session.
There is a key skills intranet.	There is a well-used key skills intranet which provides high-quality, accessible resources.

Some evaluative words and phrases

Strengths	Satisfactory provision	Areas for improvement
Outstanding	Satisfactory	Ineffective
Good	Adequate	Insufficient
Highly effective	Sufficient	Poor

It can be helpful to ask 'so what?' after writing statements to check that you have included evaluative words or judgements.

So what?	Evaluative statement
There is a file of minuted key skills meetings.	Well-minuted monthly meetings of the key skills team address emerging issues promptly with outcomes that are reviewed at future meetings and shared across the college.
All learners receive a handout on key skills at induction.	All learners receive timely, relevant and informative handouts on key skills at induction. Feedback indicates that these clearly explain the importance of key skills to main qualifications.
Staff are well qualified.	High levels of key skills achievement by staff (80% of full-time staff have achieved Level 3 in one or more key skills) enable them to support learners' portfolio building effectively.

If you are in doubt about whether something is a strength or an area for improvement, consider the impact on the learner.

You are now ready to write your self-assessment report.

Writing the self-assessment report

This chapter looks at how to bring your judgements together into a self-assessment report.

Minimum requirements

The self-assessment of your key skills provision should make judgements against:

- the evaluative requirements of the Common Inspection Framework
  (see pages 4–9)
- your previous quality improvement plan.

You should:

- evaluate the quality of key skills teaching and learning
- evaluate learners' requirements.

In addition, you should show how your key skills provision:

- promotes equality of opportunity
- responds to the needs of learners, employers and the local community
- ensures that learners are acquiring necessary workplace skills
- promotes the concept of the safe learner.

You should differentiate judgements into:

- key strengths
- key areas for improvement
- improvements since the last self-assessment.

Indicate how you have obtained and taken into account the views of learners, parents, employers and other stakeholders.

When you have completed your self-assessment you should:

- draw up a quality improvement plan which sustains strengths and addresses areas for improvement
- monitor and review how far planned actions are leading to improvement.

Adapted from: LSC (2005). *Quality improvement and self-assessment*,
Learning and Skills Council.

There is no recommended format for your self-assessment report. Although it must meet these minimum requirements, it is a working document and should suit your college's needs.

Figure 14 is an adaptation of a college's key skills self-assessment report.

Figure 14. Self-assessment report

Year:	2004–05	Contributors to the report:	Overall grade:
Course leader/manager:			
Team:	Key skills		

SUCCESS RATE, RETENTION AND ACHIEVEMENT TABLE

Qualification		2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2003–04 benchmark data	Target 2005/06
All key skills	Number of starters	2400	2290	2150		
	Retention %	42	45	56	70	80
	Achieved %	48	50	75	70	80
	Success %	21	23	42	49	56

SUMMARY OF LESSON OBSERVATION GRADES (for teaching, learning and assessment)

Type of observations	Number of observations	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Attendance
Number of observations	20	3	10	5	2	87%
%		15	50	25	10	

Key strengths:	Areas for improvement:
• improved overall achievement • good attendance • good teaching • flexible, online testing meets learners' needs • good information at induction • effective key skills staff development programme	• unsatisfactory retention • poor integration of key skills in many sessions • inadequate matching of entry qualifications with key skills registrations • insufficient pre-course information • inadequate staff capacity and expertise to develop an integrated key skills programme across the college

Key question 1:
How well do learners achieve?

Key strength	Improvements since last self-assessment	Evidence	Areas for improvement	Evidence
Improved overall achievement rates	Achievement has increased from 50% to 75%.	Achievement data – overall achievement exceeds the benchmark by 5%.	Unsatisfactory retention	Retention data – overall key skills retention is 56%; 14% below the college benchmark and the team target.
Good attendance in classes and at tests	Attendance in classes has risen from 75% to 86%. Attendance at tests has risen from 76% to 92%.	Registers – attendance now exceeds the benchmark by 2%. Records of attendance at tests		

Key question 2:
How effective are teaching, training and learning?

Key strength	Improvements since last self-assessment	Evidence	Areas for improvement	Evidence
Good teaching	There has been an increase of 2% in grades 1 and 2 for observations of key skills sessions.	Moderated lesson observation forms – 65% of discrete key skills sessions observed were good or better.	Poor integration of key skills in many sessions	Internal verification reports – 73% of portfolios moderated used discrete key skills assignments. Lesson observation forms – in 35% of main programme area sessions observed there was inadequate support for the development and assessment of key skills.

Key question 3:

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

Key strength	Improvements since last self-assessment	Evidence	Areas for improvement	Evidence
Flexible, online testing meets the needs of work-based learners	Attendance of work-based learners at tests has risen from 58% to 87%.	Records of attendance at tests Feedback from employers – 98% report that flexible, online testing is more convenient than paper-based testing. Learners' end-of-course questionnaire – 86% of work-based learners prefer online testing.	Inadequate matching of entry qualifications with key skills registrations	Comparison of initial assessment and entry qualifications with key skills registrations – 44% of learners are entered for key skills at the level of their main programme of study rather than the level that meets their individual needs. Distance travelled data – 60% of achievers gain a key skills qualification at the same level as their entry qualification.

Key question 4:

How well are learners guided and supported?

Key strength	Improvements since last self-assessment	Evidence	Areas for improvement	Evidence
Good introduction to key skills during induction period	All full-time learners are shown an introductory DVD about key skills as part of their induction. All learners receive an information leaflet about key skills at induction.	Observations of induction sessions – all sessions observed included a comprehensive introduction to key skills, including a presentation on DVD. 2004 learner questionnaire on induction – 92% of learners said that they had received a good or excellent introduction to key skills (65% in 2003).	Insufficient pre-course information	A review of course brochures and pre-course publicity showed that there is no mention of key skills in these materials. Learner focus group – learners report they did not know about key skills until induction.

Key question 5:

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

Key strength	Improvements since last self-assessment	Evidence	Areas for improvement	Evidence
Effective key skills staff development programme	88% of full-time staff have now attended key skills training; an increase of 19%. 67% of part-time staff have attended key skills training; an increase of 22%. There is increased integration of key skills into main qualifications.	Evaluations of training sessions – 78% of staff thought that their awareness of key skills had improved. 2004/05 lesson observations – 62% of lesson plans included provision for integrated development of key skills (48% in 2003/04).	Inadequate staff capacity and expertise to develop an integrated key skills programme across the college	Integrated support for key skills was judged inadequate in 15% of observed sessions. 30% of staff in main curriculum areas do not have a key skills qualification or equivalent. Staff skills audit – 76% of main curriculum staff do not feel confident about supporting skills development.

Grading your college's provision

The LSC minimum requirements for self-assessment require that college self-assessment reports grade each key question and subject sector category. Your college may require you to grade contributory areas such as key skills. Grading can be a helpful way of putting a value on the standard of work at your college.

The grades used by the inspectorates are:

Grade 1   Outstanding
Grade 2   Good
Grade 3   Satisfactory
Grade 4   Inadequate.

Weigh up your key strengths and areas for improvement. Do some of your strengths and areas for improvement carry more weight than others? For example, do they affect a large number of learners?

While all aspects of the Common Inspection Framework contribute to your college's overall grade, it is your judgements on achievement and standards and teaching and learning that carry most weight. When in doubt about whether an aspect of your college's provision is a strength or a weakness, always evaluate how much impact it has on learners.

For example, 'Two of our college's key skills assessors are also external key skills moderators' is only a strength if it has an impact on the quality and accuracy of assessment and on learners' achievement rates.

Does your college have many strengths and few areas for improvement? Does it exceed most benchmarks?	Outstanding	Grade 1
Do your college's strengths clearly outweigh the areas for improvement?	Good	Grade 2
Does your college have some strengths but also some areas for improvement?	Satisfactory	Grade 3
Do the areas for improvement clearly outweigh the strengths?	Inadequate	Grade 4

In the self-assessment report in Figure 14 (see page 31) there are some strengths but also some areas for improvement. The key skills team decided that there was a balance of strengths and areas for improvement and so awarded the provision grade 3: satisfactory.

Validating your self-assessment report

How do you know that your self-assessment report and grade is consistent with other curriculum areas in your organisation and with other organisations, and that your judgements are valid?

- Swap self-assessment reports with another curriculum area.
- Present draft reports to committees, learner groups and staff groups for comment.
- Attend networks and training events.
- Look at the inspection reports on the Key Skills Support Programme's inspection database (**www.keyskillssupport.net**) to see what inspectors judge to be key strengths and areas for improvement.
- Set up a partner or buddy exercise with another college and exchange self-assessment reports. It doesn't have to be a local college; you could use e-mail or the telephone to contact another college further afield.
- Employ an external consultant to check your report – but not to write it.

You are now ready to write your quality improvement plan.

Writing a quality improvement plan

What is a quality improvement plan for?

A quality improvement plan is a tool for managing improvements. It is a systematic way of ensuring that the necessary improvements take place.

During annual assessment visits, Ofsted inspectors are likely to focus on your college's quality improvement plan.

What issues need to be addressed?

The quality improvement plan should link to each strength, area for improvement and satisfactory aspect of your college's provision identified in the self-assessment report.

Quality improvement plans should not just address areas for improvement. There may be aspects of your college's provision which are not weak but which could be developed into strengths; there might be good practice that you wish to share with staff.

Set priorities. Identify which aspects of your college's provision need most urgent attention. Focus on the issues that have the most impact on learners.

What actions will you take?

Identify actions that will have the most significant impact in making improvements.

What outcomes do you hope to achieve?

Set clear targets for improvement that are easy to understand and enable you to see at a glance who will do what, when and for which intended outcome.

Explain the effect that you hope your completed actions will have on your learners.

Targets should be SMART. Figure 15 explains what each letter of the SMART acronym stands for.

Figure 15. SMART targets

	Example
Specific	To increase to 70% the proportion of **staff teaching on Level 3 courses** who hold at least one appropriate key skills qualification at **Level 3**
Measurable	To increase to **75%** the proportion of learners aged 16–19 leaving college with all three main key skills at Level 2 by July 2006
Achievable	To increase the proportion of grades 1 and 2 for observations of discrete key skills sessions from **55%** to **65%** by June 2006
Realistic	To map key skills requirements and opportunities for collating evidence in the briefs **of all major assignments**
Time-related	To train 80% of full-time teachers in integrating key skills into main qualifications by **June 2006**

Who needs to take action?

Identify the person responsible for making sure the action is completed on time.

What is the time frame for action?

Give dates by which actions have to be completed and outcomes achieved, with milestones (interim stages and review dates) if appropriate. Deadlines should be realistic and challenging. Avoid using words like 'ongoing', which do not suggest a clearly measurable outcome within a given time frame.

Monitoring your quality improvement plan

- How will you monitor that things are going according to plan?
- How will you measure whether or not the action is completed?
- How will you evaluate the effect of the completed action on the learners?

Example

Outcome/success criteria	Progress and evaluations
To increase to 80% the proportion of full-time staff who hold at least two key skills qualifications (or equivalent) at Level 2 or above	Report to staff development sub-committee on: - the number of teaching staff who hold key skills qualifications or equivalent at Level 2 or above - the number of staff who have achieved key skills qualifications in the current year
To increase to 75% the number of observed sessions in which learners receive effective support for key skills development	Report from quality manager to key skills forum on key skills findings from observations of teaching and learning

Figure 16 is the quality improvement plan drawn up by the key skills team to address the issues identified in their self-assessment report on pages 31–34.

Figure 16. Quality improvement plan

Area for improvement	Action	Outcomes/ success criteria	Responsibility	Timescales		Progress and evaluation
				Review	Complete	
Un-satisfactory retention	Set targets at course level for key skills retention	Rates for key skills retention on all courses to reach college retention target (80%)	Course managers	Mar 2006	Jul 2006	Course reviews Report to the academic board sub-committee on retention rates
Need to disseminate good teaching practice	Identify good key skills teaching practice and disseminate information and resources to staff	To increase the proportion of observed, discrete key skills sessions awarded grade 1 or 2 from 65% to 80%	Key skills champions	Mar 2006	Jul 2006	Report from the quality manager to the key skills forum on support for key skills, based on the findings of lesson observations
Poor integration of key skills in many sessions	Support course teams with mapping key skills into all major assignments	To decrease the proportion of portfolios using discrete key skills assignments from 73% to 40% To increase the proportion of observed sessions which offer satisfactory or better support for key skills to 90%	Key skills champions	Feb 2006	Jul 2006	Report from internal verifiers to the internal verification panel commenting on the use of integrated assignments Report from the quality manager to the key skills forum on support for key skills, based on the findings of lesson observations

Inadequate matching of entry qualifications with key skills registrations	Ensure that all learners are registered for key skills: • in line with government guidelines • that show progression from their entry qualifications and initial assessment	To increase learners' average distance-travelled score for key skills across the college from 0.37 to 1	Personal tutors	Jan 2006	Jul 2006	Key skills coordinator to report to the key skills forum on comparison of entry qualifications and initial assessment scores with key skills registrations MIS report to key skills forum on distance-travelled data
Insufficient pre-course information	Include information on key skills in all course publicity, course handbooks and the checklist for pre-course interviews	Learner survey on initial guidance and induction to indicate that 90% of learners are aware of key skills when they enrol for their course All course brochures to include clear information on key skills	Course managers	Sep 2005	Nov 2005	Report by the quality manager to the key skills forum on the findings of the learner questionnaire on induction and the focus group
Inadequate staff capacity and expertise to develop an integrated key skills programme across the college	Identify staff who do not have appropriate qualifications Organise a staff training programme to enable staff to acquire key skills qualifications appropriate to the level at which they are teaching	To decrease the proportion of observed sessions where integrated key skills is judged to be inadequate to 5% To increase the proportion of staff with a key skills qualification or equivalent at Level 2 to 95% To increase the proportion of main curriculum staff who feel confident about supporting skills development to 60%	Staff development manager	Jan 2006 Mar 2006 Mar 2006	Jul 2006 Jul 2006 Jul 2006	Report from the staff development manager to the academic board on a staff skills audit Report by the staff development manager to the academic board and key skills forum on staff achievement of key skills qualifications Evaluations of key skills training, including whether staff have gained in confidence about supporting key skills development

You have now completed your key skills self-assessment report and quality improvement plan.

Reviewing your self-assessment process

Self-assessment will only lead to improvements in key skills provision if:

- it enables you to identify your college's strengths and weaknesses accurately
- everyone in the organisation understands the findings and supports the implementation of the quality improvement plan.

Key skills self-assessment has implications for people in the following job roles:

Governors

- Does the governing body receive and debate reports on key skills across the college?
- Are governors informed of evaluations and do they discuss subsequent action plans?
- How do governors ensure that the college's quality assurance system operates effectively for key skills?

Senior managers

- Are key skills fully covered by the college's quality assurance system, including arrangements for the observation of lessons?
- Is key skills provision clearly identified in the self-assessment reports of all curriculum areas?
- Is key skills provision rigorously evaluated to form a basis for further improvement?

Middle managers

- Are SMART targets for learner numbers and achievement being set and met with clear action plans for improvement?
- Is key skills provision rigorously evaluated?
- Is self-assessment based on clear evidence?
- Are lesson observations carried out with all teachers, whatever their contractual status?
- Is good practice in the classroom identified and shared?

Programme managers

- Are programme managers actively involved in evaluating key skills provision and in the self-assessment process?
- Are there opportunities to take part in key skills training or to gain new skills and knowledge about key skills?
- Do programme managers take part in staff development designed to spread good practice?
- Are key skills included in lesson observations and the outcomes shared in order to improve development and assessment of key skills?

Key skills coordinators and managers will benefit from using the checklist in Figure 17. This will help to ensure that the key skills self-assessment leads to improvements in this aspect of the college's provision.

Figure 17. Effective self-assessment checklist for key skills coordinators and managers

	Yes (tick)	Partly (tick)	Not yet (tick)
Are you using the Common Inspection Framework as a basis for your self-assessment?			
Does the key skills team have a sense of ownership of the self-assessment report?			
Do curriculum areas comment on key skills in their subject sectors?			
Does the calculation of key skills success rates take into account all learners with entitlement funding?			
Are you able to comment on distance travelled in key skills?			
Does your college's internal verification process contribute to your self-assessment?			
Do you take account of learners' views in your self-assessment?			
Do you seek the views of employers and other stakeholders?			
Is key skills information from lesson observations collated and used to inform your self-assessment?			
Are lesson observers sufficiently aware of key skills issues to make a sound judgement?			
Do you have clear standards for: • retention and achievement? • the quality of teaching and learning? • leadership and management?			
Have you differentiated between strengths and normal good practice?			
Have you been honest when identifying your college's areas for improvement?			
Are your judgements based on evidence?			
Do you have arrangements to moderate and validate your self-assessment?			
Do your key skills self-assessment findings inform key skills training plans?			
Do you address the areas for improvement in your quality improvement plan?			
Are your plans for improvement realistic? Do you have the budget and staffing to carry them out?			
Do you identify good practice and make arrangements for disseminating this?			
Do you monitor your progress in implementing your quality improvement plan?			

Appendix 1
Extracts on key skills from Ofsted's *Handbook for inspecting colleges*

'In evaluating the college's overall effectiveness and efficiency, inspectors will evaluate, among other things … the development of learners' key skills and basic skills.'

(page 32, para 117)

Key question 1. How well do learners achieve?

'Inspectors will focus on the key skills of communication, application of numeracy and IT. The wider key skills of working with others, improving own learning and performance, and problem-solving may also form part of learning programmes. In their judgement of key skills achievements, inspectors will consider:

- the opportunities for learners to study and gain accreditation for key skills
- levels of attendance at key skills lessons
- the standards reached against the level specifications, based on observation and scrutiny of learners' work
- the number and proportion of learners completing key skills programmes and achieving qualifications at an appropriate level.'

(page 47, para 153)

Key question 2. How effective are teaching, training and learning?

'The inspection of key skills will normally be included in the inspection of individual areas of learning. Judgements about key skills will also be summarised in the main section on the overall quality of provision.'

(page 56, para 186)

'The development of key skills is most effective when teachers take responsibility for developing them as part of their teaching and when learners see the relevance of these skills to the courses they are studying. In the best practice, key skills teaching takes place in a variety of settings, including lessons, key skills workshops and resource centres which learners can visit as they wish and study individually or in groups.'

(page 56, para 187)

'To reach a judgement on the teaching and development of key skills inspectors will assess whether:

- there is a college policy on key skills that applies to all programmes and all learners
- the strategy for implementing the policy ensures a co-ordinated approach across the college that is actively supported by senior managers
- there are systematic procedures for initial assessment, further diagnostic assessment and learning support
- key skills teaching is closely linked to learners' main programmes
- there is an appropriate range of teaching methods and modes of delivery
- there is regular monitoring and review of learners' progress
- there are effective arrangements for internal verification and moderation
- managers receive regular reports on key skills development across the college
- there are opportunities for staff development and sharing good practice.'

(page 56, para 188)

'In relation to specific courses, inspectors will evaluate whether:

- learners are learning the skills necessary to cope with the courses they are following
- work is being marked carefully, with correction of spelling, grammatical errors and inaccuracies in work with numbers
- ICT is used by learners as an integral part of their courses, where appropriate
- [learners'] work is presented as professionally as it is reasonable to expect at the relevant stage of their course
- learners work collaboratively with their peers and others.'

(page 57, para 189)

The identification of, and provision for, additional learning needs

'Individuals' learning needs, including their additional needs, should be accurately identified and learners should have access to effective additional support throughout their studies or training … The initial assessment of literacy and numeracy should determine whether the learners have the key skills necessary for the specific demands of the course rather than simply assessing general levels of literacy and numeracy.'

(page 62, para 207)

Key question 3. How well do programmes and activities meet the needs and interests of learners?

When judging how well programmes meet the needs and interests of learners, inspectors will evaluate how far 'learners … including those with special educational needs, have good opportunities to gain qualifications that support their personal and academic progress, including key skills and basic skills qualifications.'

(page 73, para 234)

'Enrichment opportunities will, for example, enable learners to explore personal, social and ethical issues, and take part in sports, drama or other activities. They may include citizenship, careers education and guidance or key skills development.'

(page 71, para 227)

Key question 4. How well are learners guided and supported?

When evaluating the quality of care, guidance and support offered to learners, 'inspectors will evaluate … the effectiveness of reporting systems to ensure that each learner's attendance at each subject or option, including key skills or additional learning support, is promptly reported to their personal tutor.'

(page 77, para 241)

Key question 5. How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?

When making judgements about college and departmental management, inspectors will look at 'the arrangements for … key skills and basic skills teaching…'

(page 86, para 265)

Ofsted (2005). *Handbook for inspecting colleges* (draft), Ofsted.

Appendix 2
Example of a key skills self-assessment calendar

Self-assessment should be a continuous process throughout the year, not an annual event.
This self-assessment calendar is an example of how you might plan your collection and analysis of data and information.

Activity	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Check that learners' qualifications on entry and initial assessment results are entered onto the key skills database	■											
Analyse achievement and value-added data for the previous year	■											
Use initial assessment and/or qualifications on entry to check that learners are on an appropriate level of key skills		■										
Analyse equal opportunities data							■					
Hold focus groups					■				■			
Carry out a telephone survey of early leavers and absentees from key skills				■								
Analyse the results of the telephone survey					■							
Seek and analyse feedback from employers											■	
Review learners' feedback on induction		■										
Analyse learner feedback questionnaires				■				■			■	
Hold a meeting of the employer advisory group			■			■				■		
Appraise key skills staff				■								
Audit individual learning plans							■					

Activity	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Observe induction sessions	■											
Observe discrete key skills provision			■			■			■			
The quality manager writes a report on the observation of key skills in main programmes			■	■			■			■		
Observe individual reviews of progress			■									
An external observer carries out observations							■					
Hold a meeting of the key skills team to finalise the quality improvement plan			■									
Monitor progress and the impact of actions on the quality improvement plan					■			■			■	
Review courses						■				■		
Send the self-assessment report to an external reader (the key skills manager at another college)												■
Hold a meeting of the key skills team to draw up the first draft of the self-assessment report										■		
Hold a meeting of the key skills team to finalise the self-assessment report for the previous year		■										
The key skills team collects and reviews schemes of work and assignment briefs		■										
Carry out interim internal verification of portfolios					■							
Carry out final internal verification of portfolios							■		■			
Carry out external verification								■		■		

Based on Stubbing Court Training Limited's self-assessment cycle, **http://data.ali.gov.uk/goodpracticedb/** – accessed 4 January 2006.

Appendix 3
Glossary

Benchmarking

A way of evaluating data to establish the relative level of performance compared with other organisations or other parts of your organisation.

Distance travelled

One of the New Measures of Success, distance travelled shows how much progress in non-graded qualifications individual learners have made, based on their prior attainment, compared to national results.

Evidence base

The information and data gathered to form the basis of your judgements about your college's provision.

Performance indicator

A measure of how well an organisation is doing or of progress made towards a target; for example, measuring how many staff are qualified to deliver key skills. Performance indicators can be assessed against previous performance or target figures or benchmarks.

Quality assurance

All methods of assuring the quality of final goods and services and processes. It requires planned and documented systems and processes that identify failures in the design, production or delivery of goods or services before they become problems. It also requires those systems and processes to be audited and reviewed to ensure their ongoing suitability. In colleges, these systems and processes may include:

- self-assessment reports and auditing processes
- observations of teaching and learning

- learner satisfaction surveys
- measures of learner success such as retention and achievement rates
- measures of equality and diversity.

Quality improvement plan

A plan to address the areas for improvement and the means by which the improvement will be achieved.

Quality standard

A statement of what good practice should be in the context of your college and the FE sector.

SMART targets

SMART targets are specific (say exactly what has to be done), measurable (have measurable success criteria), achievable (are possible within the time period with the resources available), realistic (within your capabilities and current constraints) and time-related (specify a completion date).

Triangulation

A method of establishing the accuracy of information by comparing three or more types of data sources, eg interviews or feedback, lesson observation and documentation.

Appendix 4
References and useful sources of information

References

ALI (date unknown). *Self-assessment and the inspection process*, Adult Learning Inspectorate.

http://docs.ali.gov.uk/publications/Selfassessment.pdf

ALI/Ofsted (2005). *Common Inspection Framework for education and training*, Adult Learning Inspectorate/Ofsted.

www.ali.gov.uk/Publications/Publications/Oct+2005/common+Inspection+Framework.htm

www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubs.summary&id=3884

DfES (2004). A good practice guide case study: Evesham and Malvern Hills College, Department for Education and Skills (code CSEVMAL).

DfES (2005). *Key skills policy and practice: your questions answered*, Department for Education and Skills.

www.dfes.gov.uk/keyskills

Excalibur: Adult Learning Inspectorate good practice database.

http://data.ali.gov.uk/excalibur/bbp/html_content/quality/colleges/selfassessment_HandT.htm

Key Skills Support Programme's inspection database.

www.keyskillssupport.net/supporting/resources/inspection

KSSP/LfW (2001). *Using and developing key skills assignments: guide to good practice*, Key Skills Support Programme/Learning for Work.

www.ksspforwork.org.uk/guides/using_and_developing_key_skills_assignments.pdf

LSC (2005). *Quality improvement and self-assessment*, Learning and Skills Council.

www.lsc.gov.uk (access the reading room)

Ofsted (2005). *Handbook for inspecting colleges* (draft), Ofsted.

www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubs.summary&id=3911

Stubbing Court Training Limited's self-assessment cycle.

http://data.ali.gov.uk/goodpracticedb

Useful sources of information

This area of the Key Skills Support Programme website gives general information on revised inspection arrangements.

www.keyskillssupport.net/supporting/quality/inspection

LSC (2005). *Planning for success – a framework for planning and quality*, Learning and Skills Council.

www.lsc.gov.uk (access the reading room)

Owen J (2002). *Benchmarking for the learning and skills sector*, Learning and Skills Development Agency.

www.LSDA.org.uk/pubs

Owen J (2002). *Making quality sense: a guide to quality, tools and techniques, awards and the thinking behind them*, Learning and Skills Development Agency.

www.LSDA.org.uk/pubs

Appendix 5
Useful addresses

ACCAC

(Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales)
Castle Buildings
Womanby Street
Cardiff CF10 1SX
Tel 029 2037 5400
www.ccw.org.uk

ALI

(Adult Learning Inspectorate)
Spring Place
Coventry Business Park
Herald Avenue
Coventry CV5 6UB
Tel 024 7671 6600
www.ali.gov.uk

AQA

(Assessment and Qualifications Alliance)
Devas Street
Manchester M15 6EX
Tel 0161 953 1180
Publications 0870 410 1036
www.aqa.org.uk

ASDAN

(Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network)
Wainbrook House
Hudds Vale Road
St George
Bristol BS5 7HY
Tel 0117 941 1126
www.asdan.co.uk

Becta

(British Educational Communications and Technology Agency)
Millburn Hill Road
Science Park
Coventry CV4 7JJ
Tel 024 7641 6994
www.becta.org.uk

BSA

(Basic Skills Agency)
Commonwealth House
1–19 New Oxford Street
London WC1A 1NU
Tel 020 7405 4017
Publications 0870 600 2400
www.basic-skills.co.uk

CCEA

(Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment)
29 Clarendon Road
Clarendon Dock
Belfast BT1 3BG
Tel 028 9026 1200
www.ccea.org.uk

CfBT

(Centre for British Teachers)
60 Queens Road
Reading RG1 4BS
Tel 0118 902 1000
www.cfbt.com

City & Guilds

1 Giltspur Street
London EC1A 9DD
Tel 020 7294 2468
www.city-and-guilds.co.uk
www.key-skills.org

DfES

(Department for Education and Skills)
Key Skills Policy Team
Room E3c
Moorfoot
Sheffield S1 4PQ
Tel 0114 259 3759
Publications 0845 602 2260

www.dfes.gov.uk/keyskills

Edexcel

One90 High Holborn
London WC1V 7BH
Tel 0870 240 9800
Publications 01623 467 467

www.edexcel.org.uk

Ferl

See Becta

www.ferl.becta.org.uk

Key Skills Support Programme

(LSDA)
Regent Arcade House
19–25 Argyll Street
London W1F 7LS
Helpline 0870 872 8081
kssp@LSDA.org.uk

www.keyskillssupport.net

Key Skills Support Programme

(Learning for Work)
The Cottage Office, Eightlands Road
Dewsbury, West Yorkshire WF13 6PF
Helpline 0845 602 3386

helpline@lfw.org.uk
www.keyskillssupport.net

LSC

(Learning and Skills Council)
Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Tel 0845 019 4170

www.lsc.gov.uk

LSDA

(Learning and Skills Development Agency)
Regent Arcade House
19–25 Argyll Street
London W1F 7LS
Tel 020 7297 9000
Information Services 020 7297 9144

enquiries@LSDA.org.uk
www.LSDA.org.uk

National Learning Network

See Becta

www.nln.ac.uk

OCR

(Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)
Coventry Office
Progress House
Westwood Way
Coventry CV4 8JQ
Tel 0247 647 0033
Publications 0870 770 6622

www.ocr.org.uk

Ofsted

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE
Tel 08456 40 40 45
Publications 0700 263 7833

www.ofsted.gov.uk

QCA

(Qualifications and Curriculum Authority)
83 Piccadilly
London W1J 8QA
Tel 020 7509 5555
Publications 01787 884 444

www.qca.org.uk/keyskills

UCAS

(Universities and College Admissions Service)
Rosehill
New Barn Lane
Cheltenham GL52 3LZ
Tel 01242 222 444
Publications 01242 544 610

www.ucas.ac.uk