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# Self-assessment: Updated Guidance for the Further Education System

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## Foreword

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the new Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) have produced this guidance as a 'refresh' to previous self-assessment publications. This is in response to the significant changes in policy and practice that have occurred in the further education (FE) system. Ofsted has worked in partnership with the LSC and LSIS to develop this guidance. This is indicative of a shared commitment to drive forward standards in self-assessment. Ofsted views self-assessment as pivotal for quality improvement and sees this guidance as both timely and necessary.

It is expected that, later in the year, to complement this guidance, the Single Voice for Self Regulation (for Further Education) will issue its own publication on the development of performance-management systems. This will include its view of how self-assessment can support the needs and capabilities of a self-regulating FE system.

In the document *Framework for Excellence: Putting the Framework into Practice* (June 2008), the LSC, in partnership with Ofsted, the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and the LSIS, reconfirmed that self-assessment is integral to the wider processes of organisational review and development. The importance of self-assessment will continue to increase as colleges and providers review their missions and seek to improve their provision. From 2008/09, the range of evidence available to support self-assessment processes will be enhanced by the availability of framework scores. Ofsted plans to update the current Common Inspection Framework (CIF), with full implementation in September 2009. Taking account of all these changes (and more), this update on self-assessment is intended to assist the sector's focus on improvement.

In particular, this guidance seeks to draw attention to a number of key provider performance issues, including:

- ensuring excellence in provision;
- actively tackling poor performance;

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- raising standards and skills;
- increasing efficiency;
- being closer to learners and employers.

The belief is that, if colleges and providers devote sufficient attention to all the above, this will help drive improvement, raise standards across the sector, help enhance the FE system's reputation and act as one of the stepping stones towards self-regulation.

We recognise that this is a challenging agenda for the whole FE system and that it will require a concerted effort on the part of all stakeholders. However, there is much good practice on which to build.

## **Executive Summary**

This guidance is produced by the LSC and the LSIS to build on earlier publications, in particular *Quality improvement and self-assessment* (LSC, May 2005). It aims to locate self-assessment within the context of changing policy and practice, including planned changes to government arrangements affecting FE, the introduction of the Framework for Excellence (FfE), and developments in inspection.

The guidance recognises progress in the journey to self-regulation for the FE system, including the creation of the Single Voice, which will be producing its own publication on performance management in due course.

The focus here is on policy and the requirements for effective self-assessment. This is not intended as a practitioners' guide: the LSIS and the Single Voice will discuss the production of such a guide with the LSC and Ofsted in 2008/09.

A number of providers have contributed case studies to support the guidance. It is intended to supplement these as more models are developed within the sector.

## Introduction

- 1 This document is intended for all providers of publicly funded further education and training in England. It is not designed to provide definitive guidance, but rather to indicate a direction of travel that will support all providers in taking forward their work on self-assessment. This needs to be set in the context of the changing strategic arrangements for the future planning and funding of FE. These arrangements were proposed in the White Paper *Raising Expectations: enabling the system to deliver*, (March 2008) (available at: [www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/Raising%20Expectations%20pdf.pdf](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/Raising%20Expectations%20pdf.pdf)).
- 2 At the time of writing, no detailed implementation plan for these new arrangements is yet available. However, providers will be considering how the proposed changes will affect them, and determining the actions required.

## Changes in policy and regulatory frameworks

- 3 The intention here is to build on previous guidance, and to support further consideration of how provider self-assessment will be reshaped by changes in policy and regulatory frameworks. The most significant of these changes are:
  - the introduction of the FfE and other external performance measures, coupled with the LSC's increased powers of intervention;
  - the changing focus of inspection and anticipated future revisions to the CIF;
  - changes in the planning and funding of FE, as proposed in the White Paper of March 2008;
  - the Government's national indicator set for local authorities and local authority partnerships, which will provide information on performance against national priorities;



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- principles that will shape the role of self-assessment within a more self-regulating FE system; and
  - the creation of the LSIS – a new, sector-owned quality-improvement body – following the merger of the Quality Improvement Agency and the Centre for Excellence in Leadership.
- 4 Some changes will take place over the next few years. Consequently, it is not possible to provide definitive guidance on self-assessment at this stage. The role and purpose of self-assessment in the FE system of the future will necessarily evolve over time. This document seeks to identify what expectations remain the same, as well as to consider more recent or known developments.
- 5 This guidance identifies the key principles and processes that should inform self-assessment. It also links to case studies as examples of how some providers are seeking to develop their approach to self-assessment in response to policy and regulatory changes.

### **Target audience**

- 6 The guidance is targeted at governors and boards, senior managers and those with strategic performance-management roles in organisations across the FE system.

### **Constants in a changing FE system**

- 7 Insightful and challenging self-evaluation lies at the heart of quality improvement for any effective organisation. Across the FE system, most providers follow well-established and well-understood internal evaluation procedures for self-assessment. These are led by boards and senior staff, but are most effective when undertaken as a shared responsibility by all those engaged in supporting learning, achievement and progression.
- 8 Self-assessment has been an integral element of the FE system's quality-assurance and improvement processes since the publication, in 1997, of Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) Circular 97/13, *Self-assessment and inspection*. This circular required colleges to

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produce a self-assessment report (SAR) as the starting point for inspection. The circular was prescriptive in terms of both the format and the content of SARs. Similar guidance for work-based learning providers was issued by the Training Standards Council.

- 9 Subsequent guidance on self-assessment, produced by the LSC in 2002 and 2005, has reflected a gradual shift in emphasis from a report with a primarily inspection-driven focus to one that gives greater recognition to the provider's own performance goals and development needs. As a key principle for self-assessment (and one that holds true today), the 2005 guidance stated:

The chief purpose of self-assessment is to support the provider's own work on quality improvement and to measure progress against its own mission and goals. The use by other organisations, though important, is secondary.

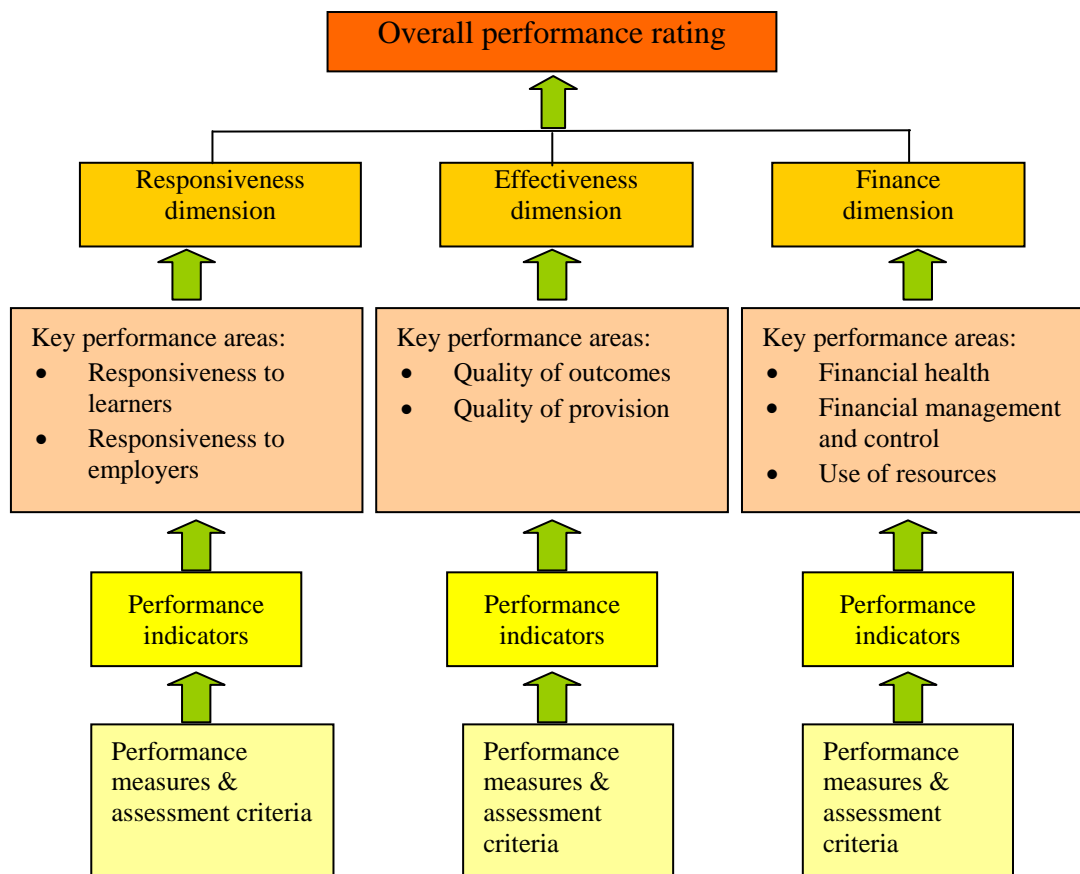
*Quality improvement and self-assessment*, LSC, May 2005

## **Self-assessment: The Framework for Excellence and the Common Inspection Framework**

### **The Framework for Excellence**

- 10 The FfE is the new performance-assessment framework for further education. Piloted during 2007/08, it will be applied to all colleges and work-based learning providers from August 2008. All other providers in the FE system will come into scope by 2010, following further piloting. The fundamental purpose of the Framework is to increase the quality and responsiveness of provision in the FE system for all learners and employers.
- 11 A new policy document and a provider guide for the Framework were published in June 2008. These are available on the FfE website (<http://ffe.lsc.gov.uk/>). The provider guide describes how scores are created for each of the performance indicators and key performance areas (KPAs) supporting the dimensions of the Framework. A further update to the provider guide was published in September 2008.
- 12 The Framework has three dimensions: effectiveness, responsiveness and finance.
- 13 The FfE comprises a set of quantitative performance indicators.
- 14 In the near future, providers will be able to produce their own Framework scores (prior to LSC validation) using LSC-designed software. Framework evidence generated in this way should (where appropriate) be used to inform aspects of a provider's self-assessment.

**Figure 1: Structure of the Framework**



- 15 The Framework should be used by colleges and providers as a source of evidence to assess and improve their own performance. From the academic year 2008/09, the LSC will expect all providers in scope – initially colleges and work-based learning providers – to use the Framework measures as part of their evidence for self-assessment, and to refer explicitly to the Framework performance indicators in SARs submitted to the LSC in December 2009. This will mean that each provider will consider the Framework grades published in June 2009 and utilise them in its SAR.

## **The Common Inspection Framework and the Framework for Excellence**

- 16 The CIF is a long-established **performance-improvement framework**. Many providers successfully use the CIF as the basis for their self-assessment processes and improvement planning, and there is no reason why this should not continue. Ofsted uses the CIF to make judgements during inspection, drawing on a wide range of evidence sources. In future, this will include the FfE measures.
- 17 The FfE is a **performance-assessment framework**, based on a set of performance measures that are judged against a set of national standards. In general, a performance-assessment framework contains the important output measures that demonstrate an organisation's performance, while the performance-improvement framework helps to identify those aspects of an organisation's operations that can be improved, so that the key output measures improve. These are the respective roles of the Framework for Excellence and the Common Inspection Framework.
- 18 All LSC-funded providers perform an annual self-assessment. The CIF enables providers to assess their performance against a number of evaluative statements and to make evidence-based judgements as to how well they are performing against the statements. These findings are reported in a SAR. The judgements from this report then form the basis for the organisation's quality-improvement plan, which addresses the issues raised in the report and proposes ways of building on the strengths. For example, a good learner-induction process identified in one sector subject area (SSA) might be exported to other SSAs.
- 19 Elements of the FfE are directly relevant to a number of evaluative statements (see Table 1 below). Where a Framework output measure is relevant to an evaluative statement, that measure should be used as evidence, alongside other relevant information, to evaluate how well the organisation is performing in that aspect of its work. Given that an organisation's published annual performance rating will be based on the

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- FfE, it is reasonable to expect that providers will pay serious attention to FfE output measures, particularly where they support broader evaluative judgements. Some will carry particular weight in both the SAR and the accompanying quality-improvement plan (e.g. qualification success rates).
- 20 Not every statement in the CIF is currently supported by an appropriate FfE measure; and indeed, it would be limiting for a provider only to consider the FfE measures in a self-assessment. Critical aspects of performance improvement – such as guidance and support for learners, curriculum design and planning, teaching and learning, and assessment – have a direct influence on learner outcomes. Likewise, assessment of the effectiveness of leadership and management, and of the capacity of an organisation to improve, are essential elements for self-review and action if continuous improvement is to be assured.
- 21 In the FfE, the inclusion of Ofsted’s overall effectiveness grade seeks to capture and recognise these vital elements (teaching and learning, leadership and management, capacity to improve, quality of provision, learner support). Therefore, the two frameworks are interdependent.

**Action point:** Will your current self-assessment processes enable you to accommodate, analyse and act on performance information that flows from FfE? If not, what will you need to do to take advantage of this additional information?

**Table 1: Indicative mapping of FfE key performance areas against the CIF**

Key performance areas	Linkage to evaluative statements	Indicative mapping to CIF – key questions (KQ)
KPA (1) – Learner responsiveness	'The extent to which programmes or activities match learners' aspiration and potential, building on prior attainment and experiences'	KQ 3 – How well do programmes and activities meet the needs and interests of learners?
KPA (2) – Responsiveness to employers	'How far programmes or the curriculum meet external requirements and are responsive to local circumstances'; and 'The extent that employers' needs are met'	KQ 3 – How well do programmes and activities meet the needs and interests of learners?
KPA (3) – Quality of outcomes	'Learners' success in achieving challenging targets, including qualifications and learning goals'	KQ1 – How well do learners achieve?
KPA (4) – Quality of provision	'The overall effectiveness of the provision; the capacity to make further improvements; the effectiveness of any steps taken to promote improvement since the last inspection'	Overall effectiveness grade (inspection)
KPA (5) – Financial health	'How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money'	KQ5 – How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?
KPA (6) – Financial control	'How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money'	KQ5 – How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?
KPA (7) – Use of resources	As for (5) and (6) above, plus 'the adequacy and suitability of staff, specialist equipment; and accommodation'	KQ5 – How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?

## Self-assessment and organisational improvement

- 22 Colleges and providers should continue to carry out self-assessment as part of their wider processes of organisational review and development. College corporations and the directors of provider companies will be encouraged to use the framework measures to set and monitor their own strategic goals and targets. With the growing maturity of the FE system, there will be an increased emphasis on validating self-assessment judgements – both internally and externally – utilising evidence such as benchmarking against national framework outcomes,

and processes such as peer review and development (PRD). The targeting of underperformance and the management of performance risk will also be highlighted as key elements of organisational review and development. The emphasis continues to be on driving up standards. The later section on good practice in self-assessment (paragraph 35) identifies ways in which organisations are using self-assessment intelligently to focus on their mission and priorities, to improve responsiveness to users and to manage risk.

**Action point:** Consider the status of self-assessment within the context of your wider processes of organisational review and development. Is self-assessment driven by your own organisational goals, as well as external standards? Is your approach user focused? Have you rigorous processes for using benchmark data and validating self-assessment judgements (such as PRD)? Do you target underperformance and manage performance risk? Do you have a systematic approach to spreading good internal practice? (See also the section on good practice in self-assessment (paragraph 35).)



## Self-assessment and National Policy Developments

- 23 An overview of policies guiding the FE system is provided in the LSC's publication *Learning and Skills: Policy Summaries 2008/09* (available at: <http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/nat-policysummaries0809-nov07.pdf>). This covers developments in policy for 14–19 and adult learning, as well as the changing priorities for the system, in areas such as strategy, quality, learner engagement, and funding.

### A user focus

- 24 Public policy for the FE system has become increasingly focused on meeting the requirements of its users – predominantly learners and employers. Performance assessments to meet their needs are at the heart of the proposed arrangements for self-regulation, the FfE and anticipated changes to the CIF. They will, in turn, influence all priorities for public funding, which are increasingly targeted at young people, those with disadvantages, and those adults who require Skills for Life or qualifications to Level 2 or Level 3.
- 25 In 2007/08, providers were required for the first time to develop a learner-involvement strategy. This was aimed at encouraging a more engaging, responsive and higher-quality offer to learners, leading to better outcomes. For providers, in time it should contribute to enhanced success rates and progression. An effective learner-involvement strategy is now considered essential. It should underpin self-assessment, providing feedback on the quality of service and on how this could be further improved. Within the FfE, learner-responsiveness measures provide key information that can be used in self-assessment to check the effectiveness of a learner-involvement strategy.

**Action point:** Do you have a learner-involvement strategy? Do your current self-assessment processes focus sufficiently on user engagement and subsequent actions? Are your activities reflected in your self-assessment processes?

## Community cohesion

- 26 A broader aspect of the user focus is the growing emphasis on community cohesion. In February 2008, DIUS and the Association of Colleges published a consultation on this (available for viewing at: [www.dius.gov.uk/consultations/index.html](http://www.dius.gov.uk/consultations/index.html)). It noted that the FE system plays an invaluable role in promoting community cohesion and integration, providing settings where young people and adults from a range of backgrounds can come together. In 2005, Ofsted found that almost all colleges had successfully created environments where students of different heritages felt welcome and safe, and where there were effective procedures and strategies to tackle racism and harassment. Cultural awareness was being raised in most colleges, but, at the same time, the promotion of equality and diversity through the curriculum was patchy. Many colleges actively promoted community cohesion, and the consultation included examples to reflect this. Providers of adult and community learning, and work-based learning, will contribute to community cohesion, as appropriate to their mission and role.

**Action point:** Do you have a strategy to promote community cohesion in the wider context of equality and diversity? With the increasing prominence of community cohesion, how is this reflected in your self-assessment processes?

## Safeguarding learners

- 27 In addition to promoting the health and safety of learners, there is a need to protect children and young people, as well as to safeguard the welfare of vulnerable adults (see also paragraph 60 (j)).
- 28 The core features that can impact positively on safeguarding practice should be included in aspects of both leadership and management and quality of provision. However, providers need to pay specific attention to the aims found in the *Every Child Matters* Outcomes Framework for the

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outcome to 'stay safe' – the extent to which children, young people and vulnerable adults are:

- safe from maltreatment, neglect, violence and sexual exploitation;
- safe from accidental injury and death;
- safe from bullying and intimidation;
- safe from crime and anti-social behaviour, in and out of educational establishments; and
- secure, have stability and are cared for.

- 29 As the statutory requirements are complex, it is important that each provider understands and then complies with relevant government policies, making good use of best-practice guidance. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) published a programme of work in its *Staying Safe: Action Plan* earlier this year (available at: [www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/search/IG00312](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/search/IG00312)). This plan noted that children and young people had responded to consultation by saying that, of the five *Every Child Matters* outcomes, staying safe is the most important.

**Action point:** Are you fully aware of the current government policies and safeguarding requirements? Do your self-assessment processes pay sufficient regard to safeguarding practices at all levels of the organisation and with all partners? Do you have a written policy for safeguarding vulnerable groups that is reviewed annually? Overall, how effective are you in evaluating your settings and services to ensure that young people and vulnerable adults are safe and feel safe?

### Continuing professional development

- 30 Effective staff development has always been important in improving the quality of provision. However, recent changes have given professional development a new status and importance in FE. An employer-led sector skills council, Lifelong Learning UK, is now responsible for

promoting the continuing professional development (CPD) of all those working in the FE system, and for developing a qualifications strategy for the FE system workforce. The enhancement of professional skills should include the skills of effective self-assessment, at the appropriate level of professional responsibility. The code of professional practice developed by the Institute for Learning includes a requirement for all teachers and trainers to complete a minimum of 30 hours of CPD a year. Participation in LSIS development activities may contribute to this requirement. More detailed information can be found in the FE workforce strategy (available at: [www.lluk.org/3263.htm](http://www.lluk.org/3263.htm)).

**Action point:** Does CPD have sufficient impact in your current self-assessment arrangements? Does it have a prominent role in effecting improvement? Have you any evidence that it is improving learner outcomes?

## **Demand-led funding**

- 31 The year 2008 sees the FE system undergo the biggest reform to its funding since incorporation in 1993. In response to the major policy challenges of improving skills for the economy and supporting social inclusion, funding is becoming more demand led, with a range of changes introduced progressively to 2010.
- 32 Providers will be operating in a market environment, in which competition will be encouraged. The customer will have more power to choose. For choice to be exercised, there will need to be a balance between demand and supply, supported by funding for priority learning and with fees paid wherever appropriate.
- 33 With the proposed national policy changes, in terms of funding, organisation and support, there will be a clear distinction between provision targeted at young learners and that aimed at people aged 19+. New models of delivery will be encouraged for the 14–19 learner entitlement, including partnerships. More benefits are to be delivered to employers, notably through Train to Gain. Adult skills accounts will be

implemented progressively. The effectiveness of providers in responding to these reforms will be reflected in their self-assessments.

**Action point:** Do your self-assessment processes adequately reflect the implications and risks/opportunities presented by demand-led funding? For example, do they ensure that partnership working delivers improved outcomes for learners, increasing and improving delivery for employers, and an improvement in the relationship between resources and quality? If you offer 14–19 and adult programmes, what impact do you expect the national policy changes for planning and funding provision to have on your self-assessment processes?

## Sustainability

- 34 Colleges and providers have a responsibility to develop learning environments and programmes that are inspirational, innovative, sustainable and equipped with industry-standard facilities. Most providers and their learners are rightly concerned about global issues such as climate change and the potential impact on the lifestyles of future generations. Through their actions, providers can demonstrate ways of operating that are models of good practice for learners, employers and the communities they serve. The Government's Climate Change Bill sets ambitious targets for reducing the UK's carbon emissions by at least 26 per cent by 2020, and 60 per cent by 2050. Environmental standards dictate that the standards for new college buildings are among the highest in the world, and the country's ambition is for all new college buildings to be zero carbon rated by 2016.

**Action point:** Do your self-assessment processes take sufficient account of the promotion of education for sustainable development, as well as your own contribution to sustainability – e.g. through the design of curriculum and accommodation strategies?

## **Good Practice in Self-assessment**

### **Process and rigour**

- 35 The primary purposes of self-assessment should be to support the provider's own development needs and measure progress against its own mission and goals. The use by other organisations, though important, is secondary.
- 36 Increasingly, providers will be developing their own performance goals and internal standards to secure high-quality, effective delivery of their strategic priorities. This work should complement or build on the key external performance measures set out in the FfE and the broader demands of the CIF.
- 37 Self-assessment is most effective when it is a rigorous, honest and challenging evidence-based review of performance, and when it is set within a provider's wider processes for organisational review and development, including:
- identifying and responding well to the needs of learners, employers and communities;
  - setting demanding performance goals and standards as part of organisational plans;
  - benchmarking performance and acting on outcomes;
  - validating self-assessment judgements with care and rigour, both internally and externally;
  - managing performance improvement, proportionate to risk;
  - acting immediately on underperformance; and
  - identifying and spreading good practice.
- 38 In carrying out these processes, each provider will be expected to develop its capabilities, wherever these capabilities are currently lacking. An organisation's capacity to improve will be reviewed during

inspection, but, more importantly, it will underpin provider improvement strategies and generate important information for learners, employers, other clients and communities served by the provider.

**Action point:** How often do you review the processes by which you undertake your self-assessment and improvement planning? How do you ensure that the rigour of self-assessment judgements is consistent across your whole organisation? Do you have a plan that addresses the outcomes of your self-assessment, covering both the strengths that it identifies and the areas for improvement? How do you communicate this plan to your staff? How do you monitor its implementation and the benefits you gain from the changes you make?

### Setting performance goals and standards

- 39 Colleges and providers are expected to set and manage their own performance goals, standards and targets as part of their strategic and business planning processes. They should do so in ways that are relevant to their own needs and circumstances and, in particular, to the needs of their own client groups. In setting performance goals, providers should give due recognition to key performance measures set out in the FfE, the evaluative statements in the CIF and, where relevant, the national indicator set (see **[www.audit-commission.gov.uk/performance/](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/performance/)**).
- 40 Such an approach will allow providers to develop a mission-driven approach to self-assessment and improvement planning that is responsive to external standards but directed by their own strategic goals and development needs.
- 41 Performance targets at all levels of an organisation should be challenging and should take account of trend data. Mechanisms for checking on progress against targets in the improvement plan must be effective, and the impact of actions taken should be clearly

demonstrable, particularly the impact on improving outcomes for learners.

**Action point:** How will you build FfE performance indicators and measures into your self-assessment and quality-improvement processes? How often do you review departmental/team and organisational performance targets? Is this review integral to your business planning processes?

### Identifying and managing performance risk

- 42 When developing their approaches to organisational review and development, providers should target areas of underperformance within their business planning cycle. They should set their own standards with reference to national benchmarks and using other forms of benchmarking activity. As with external inspection processes, providers should carry out review and development activities in ways that are proportionate to risk. Providers participating in PRD activities will be expected to share good practice and seek to eliminate underperformance as part of this work.
- 43 Risk assessment should evaluate the factors that will impact on performance and service delivery at any level of the organisation. In utilising risk registers, numeric risk scoring can be undertaken to identify the level of risk, based on the probability of the action/event occurring and the level of impact if it did occur. Providers should incorporate evidence arising from risk assessment into SARs. Any identified high-risk areas should attract particular attention in action plans, which should identify the control and mitigation of risk.

**Action point:** Do you know the areas in your organisation where learners are at greatest risk of not achieving? Do your self-assessment processes enable you to pinpoint and examine more closely the reasons for this?



## Benchmarking performance

- 44 Self-assessment processes must be rigorous and make good use of externally validated data to inform judgements. Where validated data are available (including national averages, minimum performance thresholds, FfE measures), these should be used to set challenging targets and drive improvement. When setting targets, providers should be mindful of year-on-year improvements in national averages. Providers are also encouraged to work together to benchmark performance within organisational processes or functions. Participation in PRD activity can facilitate this work (see <http://excellence.qia.org.uk/sfe>).

**Action point:** Do you use benchmarking to support your self-assessment judgements? To set challenging targets? To learn from comparison with others?

## Making judgements and determining grades

- 45 Colleges and providers are required to evaluate and grade their performance. In doing so, providers should:
- make effective use of performance data, including benchmark data and learner and employer data, to provide evidence to support judgements;
  - carefully analyse the outcomes of internal teaching and training observations;
  - use the views and perspectives of learners and employers to inform and test out judgements;
  - ensure that performance information and data are available to staff at all levels;
  - make evaluative rather than descriptive statements that focus on outcomes;

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- distinguish between strengths and norms in an FE system that is constantly improving; and
  - use grading based on inspection scales.
- 46 Objectivity and rigour in arriving at self-assessment judgements and grades will be critical to the success of organisational review and development. This is ultimately about developing a self-critical culture that is as confident about admitting and acting on weaknesses as it is about claiming strengths. Careful assessment of past actions and their impact to support improvement is essential to the self-assessment process.
- 47 As part of an assessment of capacity to improve, Ofsted will consider a provider's capacity to make valid and reliable self-assessment judgements. Well-managed processes for the validation of a provider's own judgements can help secure greater rigour within self-assessment processes.

**Action point:** What processes do you apply in arriving at self-assessment judgements and how do you ensure that these are based on valid and reliable evidence? How confident are you that all contributions to your self-assessment report are truly self-critical and reflect an accurate assessment of your organisation's performance?

### Validating self-assessment judgements

- 48 Most colleges and providers have established organisational processes for the internal validation of self-assessment judgements/reports. The effectiveness and efficiency of these processes should be subject to ongoing review. Where these need improvement, urgent action is required. Rigour in judgements arising from the observation of teaching and learning must continue to be an integral part of the self-assessment process. Robust systems for the management and moderation of the observation of teaching and/or training activities must be developed for this purpose.

- 49 Providers will also be expected to develop arrangements for externally validating self-assessment judgements and reports at the level of the whole organisation. Some providers make use of external consultants or agency staff for this purpose. As part of the move towards a more self-regulating system, providers are being encouraged to participate in PRD activities that allow them to test the rigour of self-assessment judgements and the fitness for purpose of their improvement plan, as well as offering opportunities for collaborative development and the effective transfer of good practice (see paragraph 54). Where PRD is effective, it can substantially improve the accuracy of SARs and improvement planning. The LSIS will continue to support PRD activity and to work closely with the Single Voice in the development of proposals for the use of PRD within a more self-regulating system.

**Action point:** Does your organisation participate in PRD activity to validate self-assessment judgements and to learn from the practice of other organisations? In what other ways do you establish validation through independent, external and informed views?

### **Acting on underperformance**

- 50 The primary responsibility for managing underperformance and barely satisfactory provision that is not improving will remain with individual providers. The LSC's strategy for enforcing 'minimum levels of performance' will continue. A performance indicator based on the principles of minimum levels of performance will be incorporated into the FfE. Providers will need to develop well-defined strategies and systems for targeting underperformance and managing risk. Regulatory and commissioning agencies will increasingly be required to act swiftly on underperformance.
- 51 Minimum levels of performance are expected to continue to be the basis for increased intervention, e.g. through the LSC issuing a Notice to Improve. The new arrangements now cover a much wider range of

underperformance, including financial health. Any new LSC-funded provision will also fall into scope as outcomes become known. The current approach to combining LSC activity and Ofsted post-inspection actions will continue. This brings together the work of the LSC and Ofsted in the area of provider performance.

- 52 The capacity to identify underperformance and deal with it must, therefore, be a key feature of the self-assessment process. Improvement plans for dealing with underperformance should be realistic but demanding. They should describe specific actions, measurable outcomes and success criteria, designated responsibilities, clear timescales, and methods for assessing both the progress and success of the planned actions.
- 53 The SAR should include evidence of progress/success since the last improvement plan. Evidence of capacity to improve should be included in the SAR, along with a graded judgement. Up-to-date guidance on capacity to improve is available in Ofsted's inspection handbooks for September 2008 (available at: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

<p><b>Action point:</b> Do your current self-assessment and quality-improvement arrangements adequately identify and challenge underperformance? How do you manage risk in this context?</p>
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### **Identifying and spreading good practice**

- 54 Untapped sources of knowledge, skills and good practice exist in most organisations, but more needs to be done to capture and use this intelligence to improve overall organisational performance. Effective work may remain hidden because staff do not recognise their own good practice or lack the means for validation. Paradoxically, providers often place greater confidence in practice that has been developed in other organisations.
- 55 Providers should use self-assessment systematically, to identify and validate good practice within their own organisations. They should also develop improvement plans that actively engage staff in the process of

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knowledge/skills transfer. Such strategies are critical to achieving consistently successful performance across all aspects of provision.

**Action point:** Have you used evidence relating to the transfer of good practice from one department/team to another within your self-assessment report, to demonstrate improvements? How do you ensure the effective transfer of good practice following from 'sharing' activities across teams?

## **Self-assessment Requirements**

### **Ofsted: inspection and self-assessment**

- 56 A provider's annual SAR will continue to provide Ofsted inspectors with crucial evidence to support judgements about the current five key questions in the CIF, the contributory grades for equality of opportunity, and the provider's capacity to improve. The SAR will help Ofsted – as well as the provider – to assess risk, monitor standards and plan for inspection. Where SSAs of learning are to be inspected, the SAR will help inform the lead inspector's selection of which areas to inspect. During the inspection, inspectors' findings will be compared with those in the provider's SAR, and a conclusion reached on the accuracy of those judgements. This will contribute towards the grade for capacity to improve.
- 57 Ofsted does not require a college or provider to produce a SAR in any prescribed format. However, rigorous self-assessment and effective action planning to address identified areas for improvement (including provision that is satisfactory but not improving) should be an integral part of an organisation's performance-management arrangements. The overall effectiveness grade will continue to be expressed in terms of the grade descriptor used in the standard four-point grading scale. This grade will include an assessment of the college's capacity to make further improvements and will make reference to the accuracy of the SAR, relative to the judgements made and the grades awarded by the inspectors. References to the accuracy of self-assessment will also be made in other sections of the report. In addition, the leadership and management section will include an evaluation of the quality-assurance processes that underpin the SAR. As part of the process of monitoring visits, inspectors may comment on aspects of self-assessment, but they will not formally revise the overall judgements about self-assessment made during the main inspection.
- 58 Ofsted recognises that, in responding to a wide set of policy drivers, providers may well need to modify and change their self-assessment

processes and reports. In general, providers should feel confident in seeking to develop a more innovative, mission-driven approach to their self-assessment processes. Ofsted's expectation remains that each SAR will still meet the basic requirements of inspection and will respond adequately to the full range of evaluative statements found in the CIF.

### **LSC: submitting self-assessment reports**

- 59 Providers will continue to be asked each year to make the latest version of their SAR available to the LSC and Ofsted. The importance of producing a SAR and of submitting it in electronic format to the LSC's Provider Gateway cannot be overstated. In future, this will be monitored closely by the LSC. The LSC and Ofsted will use the Gateway as the source for each provider's SAR. Each provider will only have access to information held about its own organisation, and this information will not be available to other providers.

### **Format of self-assessment reports**

- 60 As previously stated, there is no prescribed format for SARs – providers may choose to use a variety of approaches. The following list is, however, indicative of the key information that the LSC and Ofsted would expect to be included in any SAR.
- a. A summary description of the organisation, its operating environment, its mission, and its organisational goals and targets.
  - b. An account of how the self-assessment process was carried out, including arrangements for validating self-assessment judgements.
  - c. A summary of progress since the last SAR, focusing on the outcomes of the previous year's improvement plan and giving reasons for any improvement targets that have not been met.
  - d. The main findings from the self-assessment process (in the form of expanded bullet points) classified as strengths, areas for improvement and improvements since the last self-assessment/inspection report.

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- e. Graded judgements (referenced to supporting evidence) on performance against:
  - the key questions of the CIF;
  - the FfE dimensions and KPAs;
  - the criteria set out in *Every Child Matters* (where appropriate); and
  - the provider's own key performance measures (or 'balanced scorecard').
- f. Overall graded judgements on:
  - performance of the whole organisation; and
  - the organisation's capacity for improvement.
- g. A summary of the grades identified in (e) and (f) above, in future based on the template presented in the annex (a similar overview of the externally awarded grades/ratings should be included as an appendix to the report).
- h. Graded judgements on each area of learning, aligned as closely as possible to the SSAs of learning, or effectively cross-mapped to these wherever areas of learning reflect the provider's own organisational structure.
- i. Graded judgements on the different types of learning undertaken, e.g. work-based learning, higher education, learndirect, offender learning.
- j. A judgement on provision made to ensure health, safety and welfare. All organisations need to measure their health and safety performance to find out if management systems are effective. This process should be identified in SARs, along with actions taken and improvement plans, as needed. Later in 2008, the LSC intends to work with the Single Voice to support it in the development of practitioner-level guidance on self-assessment in this essential area.
- k. Actions necessary to achieve further improvements in performance. Where provision is satisfactory, there should be clear evidence of



plans to bring about improvement. Where provision is unsatisfactory, (particularly where a Notice to Improve has been issued), detailed plans should be provided, with an indication of milestones and monitoring procedures. The improvement plan may be integral to the SAR or be contained within other organisational planning records. If the latter is the case, the SAR should clearly reference the separate records.

- l. An appendix containing key performance data used to support SAR judgements. This should include data derived from the FfE, mission-driven indicators, current enrolments by area of learning and age, and information on learners' successes and progression.
  - m. An appendix summarising the views of learners, employers and communities, including perceived areas of strength and perceived weaknesses.
- 61 While there are no fixed rules about the length of a SAR, it should be 'fit for purpose'. Reports that are excessively long or very short do not always meet either internal or external needs. Providers are reminded that the quality of a SAR will be judged by external agencies on its comprehensiveness, self-critical nature and accuracy, rather than on its length.

### **Sub-contracted, consortium and partnership working**

- 62 Where provision is delivered by a consortium, a partnership or by sub-contractors (e.g. 14–19 consortia or a Train to Gain partnership) the lead provider is responsible for the overall quality of provision, quality of outcomes and overarching self-assessment processes and judgements. These aspects should be included in the SAR of the lead provider. However, individual providers involved in such arrangements should be mindful that Ofsted will expect them to assess their contribution to the overall provision, appropriately referenced in their organisational SAR.
- 63 The LSC has recently published a self-assessment toolkit for 14–19 partnerships (available at: [www.lsc.gov.uk/publications](http://www.lsc.gov.uk/publications)).

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- 64 This aims to describe what a good partnership of this type looks like, to identify resources, and to demonstrate how collaborative activity benefits learners. The toolkit utilises an approach to self-assessment based on key questions and progress-check indicators, linked, as far as possible, to providers' existing evidence.

## **Self-assessment in the Future**

- 65 While it can be difficult to try to predict the future, the following is a known outline of what is likely to happen. The list is not exhaustive, but it does identify the likely key drivers for future developments.

### **Changes in the Common Inspection Framework**

- 66 Ofsted is reviewing aspects of the CIF, and a revised approach will be put to the sector for consultation late in 2008. Although the main headings in the inspection framework will be consistent across all Ofsted's inspection remits, more detailed evaluation statements will be sector specific. In developing these evaluative statements, it will be important that the FE system can draw a clear 'line of sight' from the new range of national performance indicators (e.g. FfE and the national indicator set: see paragraph 3) to the questions posed. In this way, Ofsted's intention is to arrive at the desired single quality framework for the FE system. However, in the design of the new framework, Ofsted is mindful of the need to provide continuity with the existing CIF and grading, in order to allow direct comparisons of performance over time. There will also be a need to ensure that aspects not directly covered by FfE indicators – e.g. teaching, training and learning, equality and inclusion, and guidance and support – continue to be a focus for gathering inspection evidence and making judgements.

### **The provider mission and self-assessment**

- 67 At present, providers are expected to undertake regular reviews of their mission and their main aims. This is identified for colleges in the revised Instrument and Articles of Government 2008. Article (3)(1)(a) now requires the periodic review of the institution's educational character and mission. This reflects the expectation expressed in the FE White Paper (2006) that a corporation or training organisation will keep its mission under review. A review of mission is seen as a board-level responsibility for providers: it should identify the learners, clients and communities to be served and the type of provision to be made.

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Effective self-assessment will judge how well a provider has done in delivering its mission and note what should be improved.

- 68 In future, this imperative will be driven by system-led initiatives, as identified in the section on self-regulation (see paragraph 72). The revised Instrument and Articles of Government inform the codes of conduct and practice under which colleges (and others) determine the appropriateness of their own performance goals.

## **The Integration of External Performance Measures in Self-assessment**

- 69 Currently, providers use externally validated data and performance standards (if available) to compare their own outcomes against system norms, benchmarks and the standards expected. The FfE takes this further, by providing a wider range of evidence across, currently, seven KPAs. This will enable providers to use external evidence for learner and employer responsiveness, alongside existing evidence such as success rates. In addition, the finance dimension will assess each provider against external standards and measures of financial health, financial management and control, and use of resources. The framework will draw, wherever possible, on existing sources of information and data, but will utilise these in new ways to establish performance standards for the purpose of self-assessment.
- 70 However, it should be noted that other external performance measures may well apply to some providers in the FE system – e.g. the national indicator set linked to the Children’s Plan and *Every Child Matters* indicators, as well as wider skills and community-focused indicators. In addition, there are plans to further develop FfE indicators, which might, in future, include some measure of an organisation’s contribution to social/community cohesion.

### **Practitioners’ guide to self-assessment**

- 71 The need for a non-prescriptive practitioners’ guide will become more apparent as the system grows and diversifies, and as self-assessment becomes an increasingly significant tool for improvement. The LSIS and the Single Voice (see paragraph 72) will discuss the development of a practitioners’ guide with the LSC and Ofsted. This will be published during 2009.

### **Self-assessment within a self-regulating further education system**

- 72 Responsibility for the development of effective and efficient systems of self-assessment will in future rest collectively with the FE system itself.

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Proposals for enhancing the capacity for self-assessment and self-improvement lie at the heart of the system of self-regulation now being developed by the Single Voice for Self Regulation (for Further Education), an alliance of provider representative bodies with a responsibility for developing regulatory frameworks under which a self-regulating FE system will operate.

- 73 A performance-management system is being created. By means of this, providers will develop and demonstrate their capacity for self-regulation and self-improvement through arrangements for the professional review and development of staff and governors, through processes of organisational review and development, including provider self-assessment, and through collaborative peer-working with other providers. At a sector-wide level, the Single Voice intends to regulate the terms under which providers exercise these responsibilities, through codes that define acceptable levels of practice and performance. On this basis, the Single Voice will intervene wherever performance falls below acceptable standards. Consultation will take place with the sector on these matters.
- 74 The Single Voice will work with the LSIS in building the capacity for self-regulation and improvement through the further development of the national improvement strategy, through development services that are responsive to the needs of individuals and organisations working within the FE system, and through the publication of good-practice guidance. The Single Voice will also work with the funding bodies, Ofsted and other agencies to ensure that systems of external regulation are aligned with the needs and capabilities of a self-regulating sector. The development of a common performance-assessment system for FE forms part of this aspiration.
- 75 There will be further consultation with the sector on the development of these proposals, and a consultation paper will be published in autumn 2008. Subsequently, the Single Voice will publish further guidance on self-assessment in spring 2009. This guidance will be regularly updated

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to reflect evolving practice in self-assessment, developments in self-regulation and changes in the policy landscape of FE.

## Case Studies: What Can I Learn from the Case Studies?

- 76 Case studies have been devised to show the way in which some providers are seeking to develop their approaches to self-assessment in response to the changing policy and regulatory context of FE. The case studies are available on the Support for Excellence website on the Excellence Gateway at: <http://excellence.qia.org.uk/sfe>.
- 77 The case studies have been chosen to show how the FfE measures, for example, can inform self-assessment, as explored during the pilot stage in 2007/08. However, at least one of the models – the ‘balanced scorecard’ – illustrates how a provider might use a mission-driven approach to inform its self-assessment processes. Each of the case studies presents different approaches (or variations thereof), to help providers develop an appropriate model for their own organisation.
- 78 All the providers in the case studies have highly refined processes to monitor quality and plan their business. However, each of the providers has developed a different approach to integrating performance outcomes into their quality and business practices. The following types of models have been observed.
- **The ‘intrinsic’ FfE model.** Here, the FfE indicators were integral to self-assessment, but the latter was not constructed on the Framework’s KPAs. (See the ‘In Touch Care’ case study.)
  - **The FfE-based model.** In this model, self-assessment reporting was based around the Framework’s KPAs. At the moment, this is not widespread in the application of the Framework in the system. (See the ‘Castle College Nottingham’ case study.)
  - **The combined CIF/FfE-based model.** This model is one in which self-assessment is carried out against a schedule of criteria based on CIF key questions and FfE dimensions. Again, so far it has been utilised infrequently. (See the ‘Eastleigh College’ and ‘West Suffolk College’ case studies.)






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- **The 'balanced scorecard'**. A number of colleges have adopted this methodology as a precursor to their self-assessment, business planning and performance-monitoring activity. (See the 'Chesterfield College' and 'Loughborough College' case studies.)
- 79 More information on all these approaches can be found, together with the case studies, on the Excellence Gateway, where annexes to the case studies also provide an array of exemplar materials used by the case study organisations within their self-assessment processes (see: **<http://excellence.qia.org.uk/page.aspx?o=161063>**).
- 80 Additional case studies are in the process of being developed and will be placed on the Excellence Gateway in due course, including studies covering a wider variety of different organisation types.

## What Should I Do Now?

- 81 Having read this updated guidance, there are a number of things that you might wish to consider.
- Conduct a review of your current self-assessment arrangements to ensure that they are fit for the purpose of reviewing performance from 2007/08 and meeting external regulatory requirements. (Whom should you involve in this review?)
  - With reference to current developments, and also looking ahead, decide on the changes you will need to make to your self-assessment processes for 2008/09 if you are going to accommodate key policy drivers. (The case studies might be helpful here.)
  - Even as it seeks to improve (if necessary) the rigour of current self-assessment processes, any review must be mindful of future needs ('future proofing').
  - Finally, under self-regulation the FE system will gain more autonomy, will be increasingly mission driven, and will assume increased responsibility for tackling underperformance and driving up standards. Will your plans to update self-assessment processes be sufficient to accommodate these expectations?

## Annex: Illustrative Summary Grade Table

Example self-assessment (SA) summary sheet									
SA: Overall Grade Summary Sheet - 2007/08									
Common Inspection Framework									
						06/07 grade	Grade 07/08	RAG	
<b>Overall Grade:</b>						2	2	Amber	
<b>Capacity to Improve:</b>						3	2	Green	
Aspect	06/07 grade	Grade 07/08	RAG	Aspect	06/07 grade	Grade 07/08	RAG		
<b>Achievement &amp; Standards</b>	2	1	Green	<b>Leadership and Management</b>	3	2	Green		
<b>Quality of Provision</b>	2	2	Amber	<b>Contributory Grades:</b>					
Teaching and Learning	2	2	Amber	Equality of Opportunity	2	2	Amber		
Needs and Interests	2	2	Amber	Educational and Social Inclusion	1	2	Red		
Guidance and Support	2	2	Amber						
Performance Indicators									
Framework for Excellence									
Dimension	06/07 grade	Grade 07/08	RAG	Dimension	06/07 grade	Grade 07/08	RAG		
<b>Responsiveness</b>	2	2	Amber	<b>Finance</b>	3	2	Green		
Employers	3	2	Green	Financial Health	1	2	Red		
Learners	2	2	Amber	Financial Control	2	2	Amber		
<b>Effectiveness</b>	2	2	Amber	Use of Resources	3	2	Green		
Quality of Outcomes	1	1	Green	<b>Overall Performance Rating</b>	2	2	Amber		
Quality of Provision	2	2	Amber						
Every Child Matters					Primary Institutional Goals				
Outcomes	06/07 grade	Grade 07/08	RAG	Descriptor (illustrative examples)	06/07 grade	Grade 07/08	RAG		
Being healthy	1	2	Red	Learner attendance > 85%	N/a	3	Green		
Enjoying and achieving	2	1	Green	Employer fees > 10% income	3	2	Green		
Staying safe	1	1	Green	Qual FT teaching staff > 90%	4	3	Green		
Making a positive contribution	2	2	Amber	Standard of accommodation	3	2	Green		
Achieving economic well-being	3	2	Green	Range of vocational quals	3	3	Amber		
EXAMPLE: Red; Amber; Green rating									
	>	Aspect has improved or been maintained as outstanding							
	>	Aspect has stayed the same							
	>	Aspect has declined, but is not necessarily inadequate							

