12 March 1997

THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL

CIRCULAR

VALIDATING SELF-ASSESSMENT

To

Principals of colleges
Others with an interest in the sector

Circular type

Information and guidance

Summary

The framework for assessing the quality of provision in the further education sector from September 1997. Summary of responses to consultation. Guidelines for self-assessment and inspection.

Reference number: 97/12

97/12

VALIDATING SELF-ASSESSMENT

INTRODUCTION

1   This circular sets out the framework for assessing the quality of provision in the further education sector from September 1997. Its title, *Validating Self-assessment*, signifies a major development in the Council's approach to the assessment of quality in the sector. This has been the result of a review of the inspection framework used for the first four-year cycle guided by views on inspection expressed by the sector. The new framework acknowledges the progress that many colleges have made in developing self-critical quality assurance procedures to improve the standards of their provision. Evaluating the rigour and accuracy of the judgements made by colleges in their self-assessments will be a central purpose of inspection during the next cycle of college inspections.

BACKGROUND

2   The Council has a duty to ensure that provision is made for assessing the quality of education in institutions in the further education sector. Its aim is to promote improvements in quality. The Council achieves this aim in part through: regular inspection of college provision; the publication of inspection reports; the requirement for colleges to develop action plans as a result of inspection; links between inspection outcomes and funding; and the reinspection of curriculum areas previously identified as having weaknesses which outweighed the strengths. The Council has established a quality assessment committee to advise it on quality assessment arrangements in the sector.

3   The Council's inspection framework, *Assessing Achievement*, has been in use since September 1993. By July 1997 the present cycle of college inspections will be complete and all sector colleges will have been inspected. The quality assessment committee advised the Council that September 1997 would be an appropriate time to introduce a revised framework. To carry forward its thinking, the quality assessment committee asked the chief inspector to chair a consultative group, comprising college representatives and others with an interest in the sector, to consider how the assessment of quality in colleges might be carried out in the future.

4   The terms of reference of the consultative group were to review the framework for the inspection of colleges in the further education sector with the aim of:

- retaining many of the features of the present inspection framework, which has shown itself to be both robust and effective

- encouraging colleges and training providers to take more responsibility for their own quality assurance

- placing more emphasis during college inspections on curriculum areas, teaching and learning, quality assurance and students' achievements

- developing an inspection framework which is compatible, but not necessarily identical, with the quality assurance operations of the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), training and enterprise councils (TECs), the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) and the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), and which takes account of the Council's audit and financial procedures.

5   The proposals of the consultative group were presented in Circular 96/12, *Review of the Further Education Funding Council's Inspection Framework*. This was circulated to colleges and others with an interest in the sector in June 1996.

6   There were 251 responses to the circular from colleges, individuals, higher education institutions and other bodies. A summary of these responses is contained in annex A to this circular. The responses have been considered in detail by the consultative group, the quality assessment committee and the Council and have strongly influenced the future arrangements for inspection.

FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS FOR INSPECTION

7   In deciding upon future arrangements for inspection, the Council recognises that the primary responsibility for quality rests with colleges. The findings of the Council's inspectorate indicate that most of the provision inspected so far is sound and that over 90 per cent of curriculum areas have been awarded a grade 3 or better. The speed with which colleges address weaknesses in their provision, as revealed by the action plans put in place after

inspection and the reinspection of curriculum areas graded 4 or 5 is also recognised. The Council is aware that colleges have devoted considerable resources to the development of quality assurance mechanisms and that future inspections can therefore adopt a more selective approach based upon each college's self-assessment.

8   In determining the future arrangements for inspection, the Council has been keen to build upon those features of the existing inspection framework which have been seen by colleges to be successful. In doing so, the new arrangements set out in this circular:

- place a greater emphasis upon college self-assessment in inspection

- give greater attention to the curriculum, teaching and learning and students' achievements

- enable a more selective approach to inspecting programme areas and other aspects of college provision

- include revised guidelines for inspection and self-assessment to reflect changes in the sector

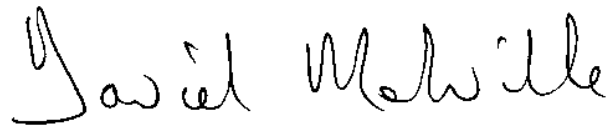- provide revised grade descriptors to achieve greater consistency.

9   The future arrangements for inspection are described in annex B of this circular. This takes account of the responses to Circular 96/12 and will form the inspectorate's main working document during the next cycle of inspections. In response to the requests for further advice, the Council has also published guidance on self-assessment in Circular 97/13, *Self-assessment and Inspection*.

INVOLVEMENT OF AUDITORS

10   The framework includes a commitment to involve the Council's auditors in inspection. This reflects the Council's intention to rationalise and lighten the burden of external assessment on colleges. Advice on the role of auditors with regard to inspection is being sought in the first instance from the Council's audit committee. Guidance on this matter will be published before the commencement of inspections in September 1997.

ACCREDITATION

11   Responses from the sector to consultation indicated widespread support for the introduction of arrangements to accredit colleges following inspection. However, many colleges sought greater clarification about the timescale, procedures and criteria which would apply. In response to these views, the Council's quality assessment committee has agreed to set up a working party, with members drawn from the sector, to provide advice on these matters. When these issues have been resolved, the Council will publish a circular with details of the arrangements for accreditation.

David Melville

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO CIRCULAR 96/12

INTRODUCTION

1   There were 251 responses to consultative Circular 96/12, *Review of the Further Education Funding Council's Inspection Framework*. An analysis of responses by source is shown in table 1.

2   The responses from other bodies and individuals included those received from the Department for Education and Employment, the Association of Colleges, the Association of Sixth Form Principals, county and local education authorities, the TEC National Council, the National Council for Educational Technology, the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Commission for Racial Equality and professional associations.

3   Circular 96/12 invited comments on the proposed framework for inspection. The number of responses received to the 10 issues identified in Circular 96/12 are shown in table 2.

Table 1. Responses to Circular 96/12 analysed by source

Source	*Responses. No.*	*Colleges which responded, by type %*	*Responses received %*
General further education colleges	116	52	46
Sixth form colleges	31	28	12
Tertiary colleges	32	51	13
Specialist agriculture, art and design or designated colleges	15	27	6
Independent FE institutions	5	—	2
Higher education institutions	3	—	1
Other bodies and individuals	49	—	20

Table 2. Number of responses to each issue identified in Circular 96/12

Issue	*Responses No.*
Structure of the revised inspection framework	106
Concentration of most inspection activity into a 1–2 week period	160
Structure of college inspection reports	141
Revised grade descriptors	171
Enhanced role of self-assessment in college inspections	186
Possibility of introducing college accreditation	197
Reporting and follow-up arrangements	97
Arrangements for evaluating the inspection process	82
Responses to other sections	85
Inspection guidelines	166

STRUCTURE OF THE REVISED FRAMEWORK

4   Over 98 per cent of respondents expressed general agreement with the overall structure of the revised framework. The development by all agencies of compatible approaches to the assessment of quality in further education was supported. However, some respondents expressed concern that convergence of the methods used for assessing quality might compromise the Council's open approach to inspection and result in practice which is too dependent on documentary evidence. There was general support for the use of a single inspection framework which could be applied to all institutions, regardless of size and type. The intention in the revised framework to encourage a more self-critical culture within the sector was widely supported. Most colleges recognise the need for external inspection and welcomed the proposal of an increased emphasis on the curriculum.

Inspection Principles

5   The following principles which it was proposed should guide inspection activity were supported by the vast majority of respondents:

a.   inspection should aim to raise standards and the quality of students' experience in sector colleges;

b.   all inspection should be planned in consultation with the college and reflect the college's pattern of provision;

c.   inspection should embrace: the direct observation of teaching; monitoring of the college's performance against the commitments in the national *Charter for Further Education* and the college's own charter; evaluation of the college's strategy for monitoring and enhancing the quality of its own provision; and an assessment of the college's own self-assessment arrangements.

Retaining Features of Previous Practice

6   Respondents supported the proposal that many of the features of the first four-year cycle of inspections should remain, in particular:

• regular visits to each college by a designated college inspector were regarded as useful and supportive of college development

• continuation of the four-year college inspection cycle leading to published reports was considered appropriate, although a small number of colleges advocated a shorter cycle in order that accredited status might be introduced earlier

• the planning of inspections in conjunction with colleges was widely supported although some colleges urged greater consultation over the decisions regarding the structure of specialist inspections and the aggregation of grades into the Council's programme areas.

Types of Inspection

7   Three types of inspection were proposed: inspection by college inspectors; team inspections which would draw on a college's self-assessment report; and inspections associated with national surveys. A substantial number of colleges suggested that inspections from September 1997 should be carried out on a significantly different basis from those undertaken during the first cycle of inspections. Respondents strongly favoured the validation of a college's self-assessment as the main focus of inspection activity.

8   There was general support for inspection teams to continue to include both full-time and part-time inspectors. The role of the college nominee was unanimously supported. A small number of respondents made suggestions about the composition of inspection teams. For example, one suggested that teams should no longer include a 'lay inspector'. Another stressed the need for inspection teams to have expertise in librarianship.

Assessment of Governance and Management

9   Although the majority of respondents supported the separate assessment of governance and management during college inspections, about 20 per cent expressed concerns over this proposal. Within this group of respondents, some thought that the separate grading of governance would discourage voluntary membership of corporations; some expressed the view that the separation of governance and management might impede assessments of the relationship between governance, college management and staff; and a few were of the opinion that an assessment of governance should be combined with an assessment of the college and its mission.

Assessment of Responsiveness

10   Respondents supported the proposal to distinguish the assessment of a college's mission from the assessment of its responsiveness. However, in the event that a college's mission was graded, colleges sought a clearer specification about whether it was the mission itself which was graded or the fulfilment of the college's mission. Some respondents suggested that the range of a college's provision should be given more emphasis in the revised guidelines for inspection.

DURATION OF TEAM INSPECTIONS

11   There was strong support for a reduction in the number of days and the period over which inspection takes place. Only 5 per cent of respondents expressed the view that a lengthy period of inspection was preferable. However, some respondents expressed their concern that the concentration of inspection into a one- to two-week period would result in a greater level of disruption to college activities, albeit over a shorter period. Other respondents recognised that concentration of the inspection period would lead to a more limited sample of the range and extent of college activities being inspected and cautioned against over-emphasis on weaknesses due to increased pressure on inspectors.

STRUCTURE OF REPORTS

12   The continued publication of reports in a revised format, with an increased emphasis on the curriculum and teaching and learning, was supported. Some respondents expressed concern about the separation of governance and management, and there was some support for including governance as a part of the college and its mission. About 4 per cent of respondents wished to retain a separate section in inspection reports covering responsiveness and the range of provision. The response from the Council's advisory committee on students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities requested that provision for these students should be graded whenever it accounted for more than 5 per cent of total college provision. External institutions requested that inspections of their provision should lead to published reports.

13   A few respondents made other suggestions about inspection reports: that the Council should provide a detailed, confidential report for colleges

and only publish an executive summary; that sections covering physical and human resources should be separated; and that statistical indicators should be standard for all reports and should include the Council's performance indicators.

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

14   There was widespread support for revising the grade descriptors but also some concern that changes in the grade descriptors would lead to a different grade profile for the sector in the second cycle of inspections. There were differing views about the most appropriate descriptor for grade 3: there were general reservations about the use of the word 'sound'; some respondents felt that grade 3 should denote unsatisfactory provision; others felt that grade 3 should denote provision which is 'satisfactory' or 'adequate'. There was no clear consensus about the wording of grade 3 in the responses received to consultation, although respondents generally agreed that consistent language should be used for grade descriptors, that the comparison of strengths and weaknesses within descriptors would be helpful and that descriptors should be consistent with those used by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Office for Standards in Education.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

15   Respondents welcomed the increased emphasis on self-assessment. Respondents also recognised the need for external inspection and for further support in developing rigorous self-assessment. Colleges sought clearer guidance on the nature of self-assessment reports and their production. There was concern that self-assessment reports should be equally valid for all external agencies assessing the quality of provision. Colleges expressed the view that additional guidance issued by the Council on self-assessment should encourage consistency and support the work of colleges but should not be prescriptive, and that the establishment and composition of a college's self-assessment review group proposed in the consultation circular should not be prescribed. Colleges also sought clarification of the role of the college inspector as assessor to the self-assessment process. It was recognised that college inspectors would need additional time to carry out the proposed role effectively. Some respondents also expressed concern over possible conflicts of interest arising from the range of duties

carried out by college inspectors. The Council was urged to pay due regard to the role of awarding bodies in self-assessment and accreditation by some respondents.

ACCREDITATION

16   Accreditation was seen as a logical development for the sector by 97 per cent of those who responded. A small number of colleges did not agree with the need for accreditation, stating that the existence of published grades was sufficient. There were differing views about the introduction of accreditation during the cycle and its impact on colleges. More detail on the process and implications of accreditation was called for by some colleges before any commitment was made.

17   About 19 per cent of respondents, mainly colleges, encouraged the earlier introduction of accreditation arrangements. A few of this group did not accept the need for a further cycle of inspections. Others felt that inspection should have a more limited focus, for example, only comprising an assessment of quality assurance arrangements.

18   Some respondents held the view that early introduction of accreditation would create a two-tier system with some colleges being accredited and others subject to external inspection, thus giving a competitive advantage to accredited colleges. This group favoured a slower development, with accreditation seen as developing towards the end of the next cycle. The argument about competitive advantage was countered by many colleges which believe that accreditation would provide no greater advantage than the present publication of grades. Other views expressed by respondents were that:

- accreditation should only be introduced after convergence of funding levels has been achieved
- accreditation should be conferred on all colleges simultaneously, that is, after the next cycle at a common point
- accreditation should be conferred on all colleges but would be withdrawn where there are significant weaknesses.

19   Some respondents considered that the proposed criteria for accreditation were insufficiently focused on the effectiveness of quality assurance and evaluating college self-assessments. Respondents made the following points about the criteria:

- the existence in the college of formal and effective quality assurance arrangements, including regular and rigorous self-assessment, should be central to accreditation
- the grade profile achieved by a college should be of less importance than the existence of an effective self-assessment process; a single grade 4 should not automatically mean that a college cannot be accredited; clear guidance should be issued about the way in which value-added performance measures would be calculated and used in the process of achieving accredited status
- the specification of targets for students' achievements is not directly related to a college's ability to assess itself
- there needs to be clear guidance about what would be acceptable evidence of customers satisfaction if this is to be a factor in achieving accredited status
- evidence of effective actions to address weaknesses in provision should be one of the most significant characteristics of a college suitable to be awarded accredited status.

20   Respondents urged the Council to ensure an approach to accreditation which was consistent with that used by awarding bodies. They also expressed concerns over the costs which colleges would have to meet in establishing rigorous and effective self-assessment and achieving accredited status.

REPORTING AND FOLLOW-UP ARRANGEMENTS

21   There was wide-ranging support for the proposals about reporting and the continued publication of reports. However, respondents expressed the view that procedures for following up inspection reports needed to be more clearly defined and strengthened. Some respondents also suggested that inspection reports should comment on (or grade) the stage of development reached by a college in connection with the criteria governing accredited status. Respondents also expressed the view that the Council should reinspect and regrade aspects of cross-college provision graded 4 or 5 when weaknesses in provision have been remedied by a college.

EVALUATION OF INSPECTIONS

22   Respondents supported the proposals for evaluating inspections, including external evaluation of the work of the inspectorate, but sought clarification of the contributions to evaluations made by colleges and by inspectors.

INSPECTION GUIDELINES

23   The inspection guidelines were generally welcomed as being well-defined, clear and helpful to colleges. Respondents were keen that the guidelines should not be used as a checklist or seen as exhaustive. A number of useful suggestions about the guidelines and sources of evidence were received in relation to, for example:

- the limited range of evidence to support the inspection of governance and the college's mission

- inclusive learning, in the context of the Tomlinson committee's recent report on behalf of the Council on provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

- equal opportunities, in considering the treatment and outcomes for particular groups of learners

- widening participation, as a factor in the assessment of a college's mission

- responsiveness, especially meeting the needs of employers

- assessment of the support given to the personal, moral and social development of students (including the legal requirements affecting sixth form college and religious education)

- the emphasis given to careers education and guidance.

FRAMEWORK FOR VALIDATING SELF-ASSESSMENT THROUGH INSPECTION

1   This framework sets out arrangements for validating self-assessment through inspection. It emphasises regular self-assessment as a key indicator of effective quality assurance, with inspection being the means of assessing whether colleges' self-assessments are rigorous and accurate. The sector, through its responses to consultation, has affirmed its support for this approach to assessing and improving the quality of provision. Self-assessment is considered an appropriate means by which all colleges, regardless of size and type, can critically review their provision in order to improve the quality of students' learning experiences. The main purposes of inspection will be to:

- validate college self-assessments
- encourage continuous improvement of the quality of provision and the raising of standards
- enable colleges to compare their performance with that of others offering similar provision in the further education sector
- assist the dissemination of good practice throughout the sector and the identification of issues of national significance.

2   The challenge inherent in using a single framework to deal with a diverse and rapidly changing sector delivering many types of provision to a range of students is acknowledged. Nevertheless, consultation confirmed that the advantages of continuing to work with a single framework, incorporating clear guidelines on self-assessment and validation, far outweighed any disadvantages. The inspectorate will review the framework from time to time in the light of its experience and developments in the sector.

INSPECTION PRINCIPLES

3   The broad principles which guide inspection activity are that:

a.   all inspections will be planned in consultation with the college and reflect the college's pattern of provision;

b.   inspection will involve evaluation of the college's strategy for monitoring and enhancing the quality of its own provision, and an assessment of the college's own self-assessment arrangements;

c.   inspection will embrace the direct observation of teaching, monitoring of the college's performance against the commitments in the national *Charter for Further Education* and the college's own charter.

MAIN FEATURES OF INSPECTION

4   The main features of inspection will be:

a.   regular visits to each college by a designated college inspector;

b.   a four-year inspection cycle, leading to published reports;

c.   the requirement for each college to produce a self-assessment report which will help to determine the scope of its quadrennial inspection;

d.   the inclusion of a college nominee in the inspection team;

e.   the involvement of both full-time and part-time registered inspectors on inspection teams;

f.   the assignment of inspection grades.

INSPECTORATE

5   The inspection programme will be delivered by full-time inspectors together with a larger number of registered part-time inspectors. Each inspector will have satisfactorily completed an induction and training programme covering the use of the inspection framework and the conduct of inspections. All part-time inspectors will have satisfactorily completed training inspections before being placed on the register.

6   A named full-time inspector will be assigned to each college. The main duties of the college inspector will be to:

- build up an in-depth knowledge of the college and its local context
- act as a first point of reference for the college with the inspectorate
- establish, with the college, an inspection programme
- monitor the college's response to the issues raised in assessment reports.

TYPES OF INSPECTION

7   Within a four-year cycle there will be three basic types of inspection:

a.   by the college inspector, who will carry out the duties outlined in paragraph 6;

b.   team inspections which will validate colleges' self-assessments according to the guidelines in this framework and pay particular attention to the curriculum, teaching and learning, and students' achievements;

c.   national surveys on aspects of further education provision, during which inspectors will gather evidence on a sector-wide basis.

8   Team inspections and those associated with national surveys will normally lead to a published report. National survey reports will not identify individual colleges but may include exemplars to illustrate good practice and issues of national significance. Evidence for a national survey may be drawn from inspections carried out by college inspectors, from team inspections or from specific inspections intended to inform the survey. Visits to a college by the college inspector will normally result in a written note of the main conclusions which will be sent to the college.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

9   Colleges will be required to produce a self-assessment report prior to a team inspection. A college's self-assessment report will:

a.   help to determine the scope of the college's inspection by informing a joint planning meeting normally involving the reporting inspector, the college inspector and the college during which the inspection programme will be finalised. This meeting will be assisted by information received from other divisions of the Council;

b.   provide the starting point for assessments by inspectors and be referred to in the inspection report.

10   College self-assessment reports should be assessments by the college of the quality of students' experience, the standards achieved and the effectiveness of its own governance, management and quality assurance arrangements, taking due account of the college's mission, aims and objectives, within the context of national aims and objectives for further education.

11   Such reports should:

a.   be comprehensive and evaluative;

b.   incorporate an action plan to address weaknesses in provision;

c.   be concise and written under the headings in the appendix to this annex.

12   Additionally, they should:

a.   be integral to strategic/operational planning and other quality assurance arrangements;

b.   address students' learning experiences;

c.   identify strengths and weaknesses of provision;

d.   evaluate and take full account of students' and other customers' views;

e.   be based on evidence, which is explicitly referenced and includes internal and appropriate national performance indicators.

13   The production of the self-assessment report should involve consultation with external groups, governors, staff and students, and might be overseen by a college self-assessment review group which might include external members.

14   The Council, in collaboration with the Further Education Development Agency, will provide separate guidance on self-assessment and the production of self-assessment reports.

COMPOSITION OF INSPECTION TEAMS

15   Inspection teams will include both full-time and part-time inspectors, at least one of whom will normally have recent experience outside the world of education.   Inspection teams will also be assisted in their work by the Council's auditors. Each college will be invited to nominate a senior member of staff to join the inspection team. The college nominee will be able to participate in all aspects of the inspection but will not contribute to decisions on inspection grades. A reporting inspector, who is not the college inspector, will be responsible for drafting the report on the inspected college.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

16   The scope of an inspection and the agenda to be followed will be determined after considering a college's self-assessment processes and report; the documentary evidence which supports the report's findings and judgements; and the Council's own priorities. Activities undertaken during inspections to validate a college's self-assessment will include:

- direct observation of the delivery of the curriculum: that is, the observation of training, teaching and other activities designed to promote learning
- inspection of students' work
- inspection of arrangements to support students while they are enrolled at the college
- assessment of quality assurance and its outcomes
- discussions with individuals or groups with an interest in, or view on, the quality of the college's provision, for example, students or former students, college staff, governors, parents, employers, representatives of local training and enterprise councils, and community representatives.

17   The appendix to this annex includes an indicative list of sources of evidence to support self-assessment and inspection.

DURATION OF TEAM INSPECTIONS

18   If colleges carry out self-assessment effectively, fewer days than were common in the first quadrennial cycle of college inspections will be allocated to inspections. Inspections will normally occur over a one-week period.

QUALITY ASSESSMENT

19   Inspectors will assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. The appendix to this annex provides guidelines on the kind of strengths which inspectors might expect to find in an effective college.

20   Inspectors' assessments will be set out clearly in the text of their reports. They will also summarise their judgements on the balance between strengths and weaknesses using a five-point scale, on which grade 1 represents provision of the highest quality:

- grade 1 – outstanding provision which has many strengths and few weaknesses
- grade 2 – good provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses
- grade 3 – satisfactory provision with strengths but also some weaknesses
- grade 4 – less than satisfactory provision, in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths

- grade 5 – poor provision which has few strengths and many weaknesses.

21   An assessment grade will be assigned to each programme or substantial curriculum area which is inspected. This will be based primarily on the quality of teaching and learning and students' achievements, and will also take account of curriculum content, organisation and management of the programme area and staffing and specialist resources. The inspection of curriculum areas will also contribute evidence towards the grading of support for students; cross-college/general resources; and quality assurance.

22   In addition, grades will be assigned to governance and management.

23   Inspectors will also make a judgement about the effectiveness of each college's self-assessment, based on an evaluation of:

a.   the comprehensiveness of the self-assessment;

b.   the consistency with which self-assessment has been carried out;

c.   the rigour of the arrangements to assure the college's procedures for self-assessment;

d.   the accuracy of the findings expressed in the self-assessment report;

e.   the effectiveness of the action plan in building on strengths and remedying weaknesses in provision.

REPORTING AND FOLLOW-UP

24   Inspection visits to a college will normally lead either to a written note to the college or the publication of a college inspection report. Additionally, inspectors will discuss their findings with the college staff and report to governors following a team inspection. Challenges to inspection findings will be dealt with in accordance with arrangements put in place by the quality assessment committee, which are incorporated in the Council's code of conduct.

25   College inspection reports will normally be published using standard headings covering the areas as set out in the guidelines in the appendix to this annex. A college's own assessments of its provision will be referred to in its inspection report, as will the agenda followed by inspectors to validate the college's self-assessment. An initial summary section will provide an overview of the main inspection findings and grades. The final section of

the report, 'conclusions and issues', will summarise the inspectorate's judgements about the effectiveness of the college's self-assessment; the college's achievements and any weaknesses; and suggested priorities for action to maintain and enhance the quality of provision. An annex will contain statistical indicators and any college data considered essential for an understanding of the report.

26   Normally, a college inspection report will be published no more than 10 working weeks after the end of an inspection. The Council will continue to distribute a limited number of copies of inspection reports and will make it known that colleges are expected to make available copies of the report, or a summary, to local employers, schools, students and potential students, parents and others.

27   Following the issue of its college inspection report, each college will be required to provide a written response to the Council outlining its plans for addressing any weaknesses identified in the report. Since the main purpose of quality assessment is to maintain and enhance quality across the sector, inspectors will monitor colleges' responses to inspection reports and, where appropriate, offer advice on the implementation of any action colleges take in the light of inspection findings. Where necessary, provision will be reinspected in accordance with Council requirements.

EVALUATION OF INSPECTIONS

28   Every team inspection will be subject to evaluations by:
- the inspectorate
- the college being inspected.

29   The work of the inspectorate will be reviewed annually by the quality assessment committee and the inspectorate will publish an annual report evaluating its work. From time to time, the work of the inspectorate will also be subject to external evaluation.

INTRODUCTION OF THE FRAMEWORK

30   Inspections using this framework will begin in September 1997.

GUIDELINES FOR SELF-ASSESSMENT AND INSPECTION

These guidelines are intended to assist colleges undertaking self-assessment and inspectors evaluating the effectiveness of self-assessment. The guidelines are expressed as a set of positive 'quality statements' against which colleges and inspectors can assess provision. These have been expressed, and can be interpreted, in a way which will enable colleges to accommodate changes in their provision which they may wish to make in response to recommendations found in the reports of national significance, such as that of the Tomlinson committee, *Inclusive Learning* (published by the Council), and the Dearing review of qualifications for 16 to 19 year-old students.

Since each college is unique, the guidelines are not intended to be exhaustive nor prescriptive and it is not intended that colleges or inspectors should use them as a checklist.

It is recognised that teaching and learning takes many different forms. In order to simplify these guidelines the term 'lesson' is used to cover all guided learning activities.

1 THE COLLEGE, AND ITS MISSION

Quality statement	*Indicative sources of evidence*
1a the college has a clear mission, is responsive to the needs of its local community, seeks to widen participation in further education and promotes equal opportunities	• mission statement • policy statements and college's charter • strategic and operational plans • labour market research, socio-economic data • the views of all customers, including students and members of the local community • all aspects of the college's performance

2 TEACHING AND LEARNING

2a teaching and learning are planned effectively to meet the needs of all students, achieve standards set by awarding bodies and cover syllabuses	• units/modules/syllabuses • schemes and records of work • course documentation • lesson observation and the views of students • arrangements to support students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
2b the aims and objectives of lessons and other learning experiences are clear to students	• handbooks/handouts provided to students • lesson observation and the views of students
2c teaching sustains students' interest and extends their skills, knowledge and understanding	• records of students' progress • students' written, oral and practical work • lesson observation and the views of students
2d teachers use appropriate methods to meet students' individual learning needs and promote productive working relationships	• schemes of work and lesson plans • teachers records of students' work • students' work • the views of students • lesson observation • tutorial and other arrangements • support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
2e teachers give appropriate attention to equal opportunities and the exploration of cultural, moral and social issues	• schemes of work and lesson plans • the views of students • lesson observation • tutorial and other arrangements • policy statements • programmes of opportunities for enrichment
2f within their courses, students have the opportunity to experience and value different methods of learning	• schemes of work and lesson plans • students' work • arrangements for access to suitable learning resources • the views of students
2g experience of work, where appropriate, makes an effective contribution to students' learning	• records of learning at work, including reports of work experience • the views of students and employers • use of students' experience in teaching and learning

Quality statement	*Indicative sources of evidence*
2h core/key skills, where appropriate, are developed, assessed and accredited	• teaching schemes and lesson plans • records of core/key skills assessments • lesson plans and lesson observation • students' work
2i students attend regularly, are punctual, attentive and organise their own learning effectively	• attendance records • students' learning agreements and action plans • lesson observation • students' work
2j students carry out practical work competently and safely	• health and safety arrangements • instructions to students about health and safety • resources to ensure safe working practice • lesson observation
2k forms of assessment and opportunities for accreditation are appropriate	• assessment arrangements • teachers' records • lesson observation • students' assessed work • verifiers' and moderators' reports • the views of staff and students
2l students understand the purpose of assessments and what is expected of them	• handbooks/handouts and assignment briefs provided to students • the views of students • students' assessed work • lesson observation
2m assessment is fair, is carried out regularly and is used to inform students how they are doing and how they might improve	• teachers' records of assessments • students' assessed work • students' action plans and evaluations • the views of students • reports from examiners and verifiers
2n parents/employers and others are appropriately informed of students' progress	• arrangements for reporting on full-time and part-time students

3 STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

3a the college sets suitable targets for the performance of individuals and groups	• data on attendance, completion/retention, examination results/other achievements, added value, progression, destinations • national targets for education and training
3b students' work is of an appropriate standard and where appropriate demonstrates vocational competence	• course documents • awarding body requirements • moderators'/verifiers' reports • students' records of achievement • students' notes, written assignments and practical work • lesson observation • views of employers

Quality statement	*Indicative sources of evidence*
3c students perform well in examinations and/or other types of formal assessment	• examination and other results • the college's analysis of students' results • national statistics • data on added value • data on retention/completion
3d targets for student retention/completion are set and met	• analysis of data on retention, completion and progression • records of actions taken to improve performance • national statistics
3e students' other achievements are recognised and valued	• information on awards, prizes, grants, scholarships, projects, performances, exhibitions, sporting achievements • students' records of achievement • work-related achievements
3f students attain their primary goals in terms of progression, for example, to other further education courses, higher education or employment	• students' records • analysis of data on students' destinations including further training and employment

4 CURRICULUM CONTENT, ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

4a the curriculum enables students to achieve nationally-approved standards for education and training	• approval documents from national validating and awarding bodies • students' work • range of programmes and content of curriculum
4b within the context of the college's mission, the curriculum meets the needs of all students, of employers and of other customers	• course documentation • market research • links with industry, other educational colleges, and the local community • range of courses and curriculum content • the views of students, employers and others • analysis of achievement levels for different groups of students • analysis of data on students' destinations, including further training and employment
4c the curriculum is managed efficiently and effectively, and provides continuity and progression for all students	• timetables • course handbooks • data on students' destinations • documentation on efficiency measures and targets • the views of students
4d students have the opportunity to participate in extra-curricular activities	• course documentation • observations of students' activities • the views of students and staff

Quality statement	*Indicative sources of evidence*
4e colleges fulfil legal requirements in respect of religious worship and education	• legal requirements • arrangements for collective worship and religious education • the views of staff and students
4f there are clear links between strategic planning and the development and management of the curriculum	• strategic plan • departmental plans • course documentation • data on students' destinations • minutes of departmental meetings • plans for, and results of, market surveys • the views of governors and staff • the views of employers and external organisations
4g off-site learning, franchised provision and distance learning are managed effectively	• strategic and operating plans • quality assurance arrangements • the views of staff and students • inspection of off-site provision

5 SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

5a impartial guidance before and on entry to the college helps students to choose the course which is right for them	• publicity materials • admissions • open events • links with schools, careers service, external agencies and employers • procedures for the assessment of students' prior learning • the views of staff and students • observation of recruitment and guidance procedures
5b induction programmes enable students to settle into work quickly and to understand the opportunities open to them, their rights and their responsibilities	• induction arrangements • information and materials provided for students, including charters and learning agreements • transfer arrangements between courses and records of transfers • guidance for teachers • observation of induction sessions • the views of students
5c students receive effective learning support to meet their individual learning needs throughout their studies	• screening, diagnostic tests and arrangements to follow up the results of these • monitoring arrangements • support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities • the views of staff and students • arrangements for additional support • tutorial or other arrangements • guidance for tutors

Quality statement	Indicative sources of evidence
	• arrangements for the completion of records of achievement • observation of tutorials and other support sessions
5d students receive appropriate guidance on the opportunities available to them when they have completed their studies	• careers education and guidance procedures and records • procedures for applying to join other further education courses and to enter higher education • access to appropriately trained staff • opportunities for students to meet employers and undertake visits • the views of staff and students • information about employment opportunities
5e students have access to relevant support on personal issues	• arrangements for providing financial advice, counselling for personal, health, moral and social matters, childcare and other forms of support which assist students • the views of staff and students • equal opportunity and disability policies and grievance procedures

6 RESOURCES

Staffing and specialist provision

6a teachers have appropriate qualifications and up-to-date knowledge	• teachers' qualifications and experience • documents showing staff deployment across the college • lesson observation • the views of managers, teachers and students
6b technical and administrative staff are appropriately qualified and effectively deployed to support teachers and students	• staff qualifications and experience • observation of learning activities • the views of managers, teachers, support staff and students • timetables and job descriptions
6c staff evaluate their own performance and are provided with suitable opportunities for professional development	• arrangements for staff appraisal and review • Investors in People status • staff development programmes • arrangements for disseminating the information/experience gained through staff development activities • resources allocated to staff development • the views of staff
6d there is appropriate specialist equipment and other resources to support teaching and learning	• course documents • equipment/resource lists • access to and utilisation of learning resources • plans for replacement and updating resources • use of off-site facilities • lesson observation • the views of staff and students

Quality statement	Indicative sources of evidence
6e specialist classrooms, laboratories and teaching areas are suitably and safely equipped	• equipment/resource lists • lesson observation
6f students have access to appropriate learning resources and materials to assist their learning	• handouts and other learning materials • library and other learning resources to support specialist provision • textbooks • lesson observation
6g students have suitable access to appropriate information technology resources	• information technology strategy • resource lists including hardware and software • access arrangements and the support available to students • lesson observation
6h specialist accommodation provides an appropriate setting for teaching and learning	• accommodation strategy • surveys of the use of rooms • lesson observation • quality of the learning environment

Cross-college/general provision

Quality statement	Indicative sources of evidence
6i general accommodation is suitable, is used effectively and is well maintained	• accommodation surveys • surveys of the use of rooms • observation of the suitability of accommodation
6j general facilities to support learning, including libraries and learning resource centres, are of an appropriate quality and readily accessible to students	• financial allocations and the use of these • arrangements for identifying and meeting curriculum needs • the range of resources including books, journals and other materials and equipment • the quality of the learning environment, including the amount and the use made of the space available to students • access, including opening hours • staffing levels • views of students
6k common areas, including refectories and common rooms, meet the needs of students and staff	• accommodation surveys • direct observation • the views of students and staff
6l students have access to recreational and sports facilities, where appropriate	• accommodation surveys • data on participation and use • range of facilities including use of those off-site • direct observation • the views of staff and students
6m the college caters effectively for students from particular groups, including those with physical disabilities	• policy statements and development plans • access and support arrangements • direct observation • the views of staff and students

Quality statement	Indicative sources of evidence
6n teaching and support staff have appropriate work areas and access to facilities to help them in their work	• accommodation surveys • direct observation • the views of staff

7   QUALITY ASSURANCE

Quality statement	Indicative sources of evidence
7a the college sets itself high standards and has arrangements for quality assurance which lead to measurable gains in performance	• mission statement • strategic plan • data and performance indicators covering all aspects of the college's work • the views of employers, students and other clients • views expressed by external verifiers/examiners
7b quality assurance arrangements are understood and supported by staff and governors, and meet the requirements of examining, awarding and accrediting bodies, and the *Charter for Further Education*	• policy statements and guidance documents, including the college's charter • academic board papers, where appropriate • moderators'/verifiers' reports • the views of staff and governors
7c the college is committed to continuous improvement	• guidance on quality assurance • documents produced through implementing quality assurance procedures • the achievement of nationally-recognised arrangements for assuring quality • views of staff
7d quality assurance procedures cover every aspect of the college's work, are rigorously applied and are continually reviewed	• guidance on quality assurance • operational plans, including departmental plans • arrangements linking quality assurance to strategic planning • governing body papers • documents produced through implementing quality assurance procedures
7e performance indicators are clearly identified, effectively used and help to ensure that money is well spent	• management information, its accessibility and use • course reviews • college analysis of performance against targets • views of staff
7f the college's reporting arrangements include regular and rigorous self-assessment of its performance which identifies strengths and weaknesses, informs strategic planning and leads to continuous improvement	• course reviews and other quality assurance reports • student questionnaires • liaison with employers and survey of employers' opinions • the views of staff and students • self-assessment report

Quality statement	Indicative sources of evidence
7g the college's own charter is readily available and clearly identifies the standards of service which students and other customers can expect	• arrangements for reviewing and monitoring charter commitments • examination of the charter and its use • the views of customers • analysis of complaints
7h responsibilities for quality assurance arrangements arising out of links with other colleges, including franchise agreements and other forms of contracted provision, are clearly allocated, understood and met	• policy documents and agreements • review documents • direct observation and the views of representatives of external colleges
7i staff appraisal and professional development are integral to quality assurance	• appraisal documentation • staff development policies • staff development reports • allocation of resources for staff development • progress on appraisal

8   MANAGEMENT

Quality statement	Indicative sources of evidence
8a effective management enables the college to achieve its targets, to meet its other criteria for success, and to keep teaching and learning under constant review	• mission statement • strategic and operational plans • data on the college's performance in all aspects of its work
8b the college's values and its aims, objectives, targets and criteria for success, as embodied in strategic and operating plans, are understood and supported by staff	• strategic and operational plans • Investors in People status • arrangements to communicate aims and objectives to staff • the views of staff
8c the college's management structure and its lines of communication and accountability are effective; staff understand their roles in the context of how the college is managed	• documentation on the management structure • arrangements for internal communications • the views of managers, teachers and other staff • minutes of management meetings and action plans
8d staff and other resources are effectively and efficiently deployed	• organisation and management structures • job descriptions and timetables • the views of staff
8e there is appropriate and effective liaison with external bodies involved in education and training; for example training and enterprise councils, local education authorities, careers education and guidance services, schools and other organisations within the local community	• documentation and evaluation of external links • the views of representatives of external organisations
8f the college's strategic development is informed by effective market research	• use of TEC and other labour market information • market research and marketing plans • responses to key national reports • internal sources of information • the views of representatives of external groups

Quality statement	Indicative sources of evidence
8g information needs of management are identified and management information is effectively used at all levels	• management information strategy and its implementation • course reviews and documentation • returns to the Council • reports to governors • the views of managers and staff
8h equality of opportunity is promoted and effectively managed	• policy statements • monitoring arrangements • the views of staff and students • publicity and marketing material • lesson observation

9 GOVERNANCE

Quality statement	Indicative sources of evidence
9a governors effectively oversee the college's strategic direction, regularly monitor the college's and their own performance, and secure the appointment, appraisal and development of senior staff	• arrangements for assuring the quality of the college's provision, including self-assessment • processes and actions to inform the strategic planning • instruments of governance • membership of the governing body • clerking arrangements • attendance records • the structure and work of governing body committees • governing body papers and minutes • code of conduct and register of interests • financial memoranda • observation of governing body meetings • the views of governors and staff • communication with staff • arrangements for the appointment, appraisal and development of senior staff