Outcomes from IQER: 2010-11

Assessment

July 2012

Contents

Preface

Integrated quality and enhancement review (IQER) is defined in the current *Handbook for Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review* as 'an evidence-based peer review of a college's management of the student learning experience and performance of its responsibilities for the academic standards and quality of its higher education provision'.[1]

Each IQER Summative review report identifies good practice which has been noted by the review team during the process. In this context, good practice is defined as 'practice that the IQER team regards as making a particularly positive contribution to the college's management of the student learning experience of higher education in the context of that college; and which is worthy of wider dissemination within and/or beyond the college'. QAA is committed to disseminating the good practice identified in review reports, and the present series of *Outcomes from IQER* papers is one method by which this dissemination is achieved.

The papers take a thematic, evidence-based approach. The four papers in the series are:[2]

- *College management of higher education*
- *Staff development*
- *Assessment*
- *The student voice*.

Each paper identifies broad themes, drawing particularly on the related good practice and recommendations in the individual IQER reports. Both good practice and recommendations quoted in these papers are cross-referenced to the individual reports so that interested readers may obtain more details if they wish. Good practice points are identified in the context of the college in question, and should be viewed in that light. Likewise, the recommendations often represent opportunities for enhancement rather than reflecting any major deficiencies in existing practice. The papers place the identified themes within the broader context of developments in the sector as a whole, and summarise the overall position across the sector in relation to the topic in question.

Outcomes from IQER papers are written primarily for policy makers and managers within the college community with immediate responsibility for and interests in quality assurance, although specific topics may be of interest to other groups of readers, in particular to staff in awarding bodies with responsibility for collaborative activity. While QAA retains copyright in the content of the *Outcomes* papers, they may be freely downloaded from QAA's website and cited with acknowledgement.

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[1] For more information about IQER see: www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/IQER-England/Pages/default.aspx.
[2] The *Outcomes from IQER* papers can be found at www.qaa.ac.uk/ImprovingHigherEducation/Pages/Outcomes-IQER.aspx.

Summary

This paper is based on a review of 75 IQER Summative review reports published in 2010 and 2011 and considers the points of good practice and recommendations for action recorded in those reports. The outcomes of the Developmental engagements in assessment, which all but a small minority of colleges with very little higher education provision undergo before Summative review, and which are summarised in the Summative review reports, are also considered in this paper.

The effectiveness of the management of assessment by colleges offering higher education programmes can be judged by the quality of strategies, regulations, policies and procedures which support staff and students in their experience of the assessment process. Colleges are either acknowledged as having points of good practice or recommended to take remedial action in areas such as the ways in which assessment policies and guidelines take account of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*[3] (*Code of practice*), the operation of examination boards, or the management of responses to the reports of external examiners. Recommendations for action on particular aspects of the management of assessment have the common theme of ensuring the equitable treatment of students by means of monitoring and evaluation.

While the reports contain many features of good practice in the methods of assessment and the design and variety of assignments, the use of virtual learning environments in assessment attracts both points of good practice and recommendations for improvement. The advent of Foundation Degrees has led to an increase in outcomes from Summative reviews and Developmental engagements concerned with employer engagement with the assessment process and with the operation of work-based learning.

The themes of rigour, consistency and standardisation are continued in those parts of the reports that deal with internal verification, marking and moderation. A substantial number of points of good practice and recommendations for action concern feedback to students on their work, whether formative or summative. In general, the quality of feedback and variety in the methods of delivering it appear from the reports to be stronger areas than timeliness in the return of marked work to students. Several points of good practice can be found in the reports concerning the ways in which colleges support staff with assessment by organising staff development opportunities, sometimes in collaboration with awarding bodies or other colleges, around the theory and practice of assessment.

There is an expectation that students should be provided with information and guidance on assessment that is accurate, comprehensive and consistent and that it should be clear and easily available. Colleges are either acknowledged in general, having points of good practice for their approach to the management of information about assessment, or for particular aspects such as the quality of handbooks and recommendations for improvements follow the same pattern, with a particular emphasis on dealing with inaccuracy and inconsistency. The reports reveal an increasing use of virtual learning environments and websites to provide students with information about assessment.

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[3] At the time the reviews were undertaken, the *Code of practice* was in operation as part of the Academic Infrastructure. From 2012-13, the Academic Infrastructure will be replaced by the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

Assessment: context

1   This paper is based on a review of the outcomes of the 75 IQER Summative review reports published in 2010 and 2011 (a full list of the reports can be found at Appendix D on page 28). The methodology used in analysing the reports in this *Outcomes* series is described in Appendix C, page 27. As the topic covered in this paper is assessment, the outcomes of Developmental engagements (as summarised in the Summative review reports) are also reported.

2   Assessment in higher education has attracted attention from the earliest QAA reviews and is frequently discussed across all types of providers. In 2008, QAA published a report looking at findings from reviews of higher education in further education colleges carried out between 2002 and 2007. The report noted that many areas for development are concerned with the assessment cycle: initial design of assessment tasks to measuring outcomes and assessing sufficient rigour and integrity in the implementation and monitoring of assessment processes.[4] This has led to a focus on enhancing the assessment process in IQER.

3   When the IQER method was designed, assessment became the core topic for all Developmental engagements. Given the policies, procedures and framework needed for strong management of assessment, the Developmental engagements contributed a foundation for the Summative reviews that followed about a year later. During the Summative review process, review teams took account of progress made on Developmental engagement action plans. Because assessment had already been covered, many Summative reviews paid comparatively little attention to assessment. This paper, therefore, draws more heavily on the good practice features and the recommendations initially identified in the Developmental engagements than other *Outcomes* papers which focus on Summative review.

4   The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) is replacing the *Code of practice*.[5] *Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning* of the Quality Code makes few substantive changes from the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*, although Indicators of sound practice replace the former precepts.[6] It sets out the following Expectation that institutions are required to meet:

- Higher education providers ensure that students have appropriate opportunities to show they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the award of a qualification or credit.

The following Expectation is also relevant:

- Higher education providers ensure the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable and that the award of qualifications and credit are based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

Many colleges have made productive use of the *Code of practice* by mapping its precepts

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[4] QAA (2008) *Learning from Academic review of higher education in further education colleges 2002-07* www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Learning-from-Academic-review-of-higher-education-in-further-education-colleges-in-England-2002-07.aspx.
[5] For more information about the Quality Code see: www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/quality-code/Pages/default.aspx.
[6] QAA (2011) *Quality Code - Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning* www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/quality-code-B6.aspx.

against current practice. This is a useful way of identifying gaps and sharing good practice and it enhances higher education staff development in colleges.

5   There is clearly still work to do. Although assessment is clearly a critical part of higher education for students, the National Student Survey results for 2011 are disappointing.[7] Only 72 per cent of students in further education colleges and 66 per cent of those in higher education institutions are satisfied with assessment and feedback, the lowest set of results for all categories. In spite of a small recent increase in satisfaction, this remains a taxing area. Following these outcomes, many higher education institutions have been in discussion about the benefits of a framework that demonstrates how assessment works in practice.

6   There is a wealth of published outputs on assessment, so this section focuses on source material or bibliographies that can provide information. The Higher Education Academy (HEA) has a section on its website that covers assessment and feedback.[8] The reports, papers and presentations are listed under such topics as assessment resources and methods of assessment, which includes the complex area of group and peer assessment, and assessment processes. These examples offer guidance on approaches to assessment in general. Examples of assessment policies and practice specific to higher education in further education colleges are included in a good practice guide published by HEFCE.[9]

7   In 2011, QAA published a report intended for members of staff new to teaching and assessment in higher education.[10] It is an accessible and comprehensive report also likely to be of interest to staff in colleges. Based on three staff development events on assessment, and with the critical input of experts, there is little else available of this kind. Its bibliography is wide-ranging and current.

8   An IQER Information Bulletin published by QAA in 2010[11] reported that from 150 reviews, there were 1,100 points of good practice in Developmental engagements and 900 recommendations, of which four were essential. Of 80 reports on colleges undertaking Summative review, 32 points of good practice were identified in 28 colleges and 28 recommendations in 26 colleges. This reinforces the point (in paragraph 3) that far less attention is paid to assessment in Summative review because of the Developmental engagement experience.

Themes

9   A consideration of the points of good practice, the recommendations and other references to assessment in the review reports suggests that the following broad themes merit further discussion.

College management of assessment
- Assessment strategies, policies and regulations

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[7] Higher Education Funding Council for England (2011) *National Student Survey: Findings and trends 2006 to 2010:* www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2011/201111.
[8] Higher Education Academy *Assessment and feedback resources*: www.heacademy.ac.uk/assessment.
[9] Higher Education Funding Council for England (2009) *Supporting higher education in further education colleges: Policy, practice and prospects:* www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2009/200905.
[10] QAA (2011) *Understanding assessment: its role in safeguarding academic standards and quality in higher education: a guide for early career staff:* www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/understanding-assessment.aspx.
[11] QAA (2010): *IQER Information Bulletin 2010: Assessment and Feedback:* www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Integrated-quality-and-enhancement-review-information-bulletin-Assessment-and-feedback.aspx.

- External examiners' reports
- Monitoring and evaluation

Assessment design
- Use of virtual learning environments in assessment

Assessment in the workplace
- Employer engagement
- Assessment of work-based learning

Verification, marking and moderation
- Internal verification
- Marking assessments

Feedback to students
- Formative assessment
- Summative assessment
- Feedback methods

Supporting staff with assessment
- Staff development and training
- Collaborative activities with higher education institutions

Information and guidance on assessment

College management of assessment

10   The effectiveness of the management of assessment may be judged by the quality of strategies, regulations, policies and procedures which support staff and students in their experience of the assessment process. In the 75 summative review reports under consideration in this paper, there are relatively few points of good practice and recommendations for action with regard to the management of assessment in colleges' higher education provision. This may be explained by the fact that the management of assessment is subsumed within more general judgements on college management of higher education. Additionally it is the result of the enhancement resulting from the prior Developmental engagements in assessment in all but a handful of colleges with very small provision. The summaries of identified good practice and recommendations for action in the unpublished Developmental engagement reports, which are later published in the Summative reviews reports, provide the main source material for this paper.

Assessment strategies, policies, regulations

11   It is rare for a college's entire system for managing higher education assessment, 'including internal verification procedures, reporting structures, and interaction with external examiners and other external agencies', to be singled out as an area of good practice.[12] Colleges are, however, acknowledged as having points of good practice for particular aspects of their management of assessment. In several reports, the way in which assessment policies and guidelines take account of the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice* is identified as good practice.[13] [14] [15] [16] [17] [18] Other colleges are commended for the way

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[12] Milton Keynes College, paragraph 11
[13] Grantham College, paragraph 14
[14] City College Plymouth, paragraph 56
[15] Solihull College, paragraph 45
[16] Stafford College, paragraph 46

in which they use their relationship with their awarding bodies and links with associated and neighbouring colleges to develop and enhance their assessment practices.[19] [20] [21] [22] [23] Halesowen College, for example, was found to have 'adopted a committed and proactive stance in enhancing standards of assessment by participating in collaborative activities with partner universities and making use of partnership networks to draw on good practice at neighbouring colleges'.[24]

12   Particular aspects of college management of assessment identified as good practice include: 'precise and comprehensive guidance to staff on assessing students';[25] a Higher Education Feedback Policy giving clear guidance on providing timely and effective feedback;[26] the way in which the College and the awarding bodies' assessment regulations and requirements are accommodated successfully by a Higher Education Communication Strategy;[27] a 'thorough, ambitious and well-documented' assessment policy;[28] a comprehensive tracking system of assessments;[29] formal procedures for the submission of student assignments;[30] and a new higher education course leader's handbook providing clear and comprehensive guidance for managing assessment.[31]

13   Recommendations for action to improve the management of assessment follow a similar pattern. Several colleges are advised either to develop a strategy or code of practice for assessment across their higher education provision, to review existing strategies or to formalise or clarify assessment procedures and implement them more consistently.[32] [33] [34] [35] [36] [37] [38] [39] [40] [41] Other colleges are recommended to make explicit references to the *Code of practice* in their assessment policies and procedures.[42] [43] [44] [45]

14   The reports contain recommendations for action on particular aspects of college management of assessment with the common theme of ensuring the equitable treatment of students. These include: developing policies and procedures for the submission, authentication and return of student work to ensure consistency of treatment;[46] [47] [48] [49] [50] using

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[17] Walford and North Shropshire College, paragraph 45
[18] West Cheshire College, paragraph 46.
[19] Cirencester College, paragraph 46.
[20] Grantham College, paragraph 51.
[21] Itchen College, paragraph 36.
[22] Lincoln College, paragraph 51.
[23] Stafford College, paragraph 46.
[24] Halesowen College, paragraph 48.
[25] Gateshead College, paragraph 49.
[26] Newcastle-under-Lyme College, paragraph 46.
[27] Exeter College, paragraph 54.
[28] Oxford and Cherwell Valley College, paragraph 49.
[29] New College Telford, paragraph 49.
[30] Barking and Dagenham College, paragraph 56.
[31] Stafford College, paragraph 46.
[32] Barking and Dagenham College, paragraph 57.
[33] Barnet College, paragraph 57.
[34] Bracknell and Wokingham College, paragraph 56.
[35] City of Bath College, paragraph 64.
[36] Epping Forest College, paragraph 45.
[37] Fareham College, paragraph 45.
[38] Norton Radstock College, paragraph 42.
[39] South Cheshire College, paragraph 50.
[40] Stoke on Trent College, paragraph 44.
[41] Walford and North Shropshire College, paragraph 41.
[42] Bicton College, paragraph 60.
[43] Derby College, paragraph 41.
[44] Kensington and Chelsea College, paragraph 50.
[45] Stoke on Trent College, paragraph 44.
[46] Birmingham Metropolitan College, paragraph 55.
[47] Easton College, paragraph 50.

standard terminology in the management of assessment;[51] [52] publishing a policy on extenuating circumstances to ensure consistency of student experience;[53] and reviewing annual schedule of assessments in the light of concerns about the clustering of deadlines.[54]

15   The management of examination boards attracted only one point of good practice in the 75 reports and five recommendations for action. The point of good practice was the way in which internal examination boards ensure that all matters relating to each student's achievement and progression are thoroughly reviewed and evaluated by Lincoln College before their formal consideration at the awarding body's examination boards.[55] On the other hand, one college was advised to formalise internal assessment and examination board procedures;[56] and another to review the operation of higher national assessment boards with a view to enhancing their rigour.[57] Two colleges are required to ensure that examination boards for Higher National programmes have clear terms of reference, constitution and membership.[58] [59] One college is recommended to encourage staff to attend all examination boards, and not only to ensure that their students were being treated consistently but also to support the development of their understanding of the assessment process.[60]

External examiners' reports

16   A significant factor in the effective management of assessment is the way in which the reports of external examiners are responded to and used to assure standards and enhance provision. A number of points of good practice are identified in the reports under consideration, including: the 'manner in which the College manages or contributes to the formal responses to external examiners' reports';[61] a tracking process which contributes to the effective oversight of external examiners' reports and ensures that appropriate action is taken;[62] monitoring systems to ensure reports are responded to and acted upon;[63] [64] [65] and preparation of a clear and effective analysis of actions taken in response to reports.[66]

17   External examiners usually report directly to the awarding bodies, and several colleges are recommended to liaise with their awarding bodies to ensure
that action points and areas of good practice identified by external examiners are, where appropriate, specifically attributed to the college concerned.[67] [68] [69] [70] [71] [72] [73]

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[48] Exeter College, paragraph 55.
[49] Fareham College, paragraph 38.
[50] Milton Keynes College, paragraph 42.
[51] Bishop Auckland College, paragraph 49.
[52] Moulton College, paragraph 36.
[53] Wiltshire College, paragraph 48.
[54] Norton Radstock College, paragraph 41.
[55] Lincoln College, paragraph 58.
[56] Joseph Priestley College, paragraph 51.
[57] Derby College, paragraph 41.
[58] Birmingham Metropolitan College, paragraph 61.
[59] City of Bath College, paragraph 70.
[60] Newham College of Further Education, paragraph 50.
[61] Mid Cheshire College, paragraph 55.
[62] Barking and Dagenham College, paragraph 61.
[63] City College Birmingham, paragraph 42.
[64] City of Sunderland College, paragraph 52.
[65] Halesowen College, paragraph 41.
[66] Amersham and Wycombe College, paragraph 42.
[67] Bournville College, paragraph 46.
[68] East Berkshire College, paragraph 42.
[69] Greenwich Community College, paragraph 58.
[70] Oxford and Cherwell Valley College, paragraph 50.
[71] Stafford College, paragraph 47.
[72] West Cheshire College, paragraph 57.
[73] West Thames College, paragraph 55.

Progress with meeting this recommendation tends to be variable as the distribution of information from external examiner reports to individual colleges is an action that can only be performed by the awarding body. Some colleges are advised to introduce formal procedures to undertake generic reviews of reports to ensure that assessment issues are identified and acted on at executive as well as programme level.[74] [75] [76] [77] [78] Several colleges are reminded of the HEFCE requirement that students should see external examiners' reports - 'to further enhance involvement in the management of their experience'[79] - and advised to set up the mechanisms to achieve this.[80] [81] [82] [83]

Monitoring and evaluation

18   The reports under consideration contain a series of points of good practice and recommendations for action concerned with the monitoring and evaluation of assessment policies and procedures. The relationship developed by Barnet College with the link tutors of its awarding body, which enables college staff to monitor and evaluate assessment practice effectively, is identified as an area of good practice.[84] At City of Sunderland College, the Higher Education Staff Forum was found to be effective in developing ideas, coordinating initiatives and sharing good practice in assessment.[85] In a third example of good practice, a programme team was found to be actively involved in the development of teaching and assessment practices and the dissemination of good practice to maintain and enhance the quality of provision through its awarding body's discipline network group.[86]

19   Recommendations for action in the area of monitoring and evaluation include: monitoring and taking appropriate action on student success rates;[87] continuing the close monitoring of the return of marked work to ensure it meets the required timeframe;[88] using a new quality management system to monitor the assessment process;[89] reviewing the consistency of assessment procedures in order to spread more effective practices;[90] and introducing cross-college procedures for gathering and responding to feedback from students to assist in the improvement of assessment practices.[91] One college was encouraged to use a Higher Education Forum to monitor and share good practice recommended to support the management of assessment.[92] Another college was encouraged to extend the remit of a Higher Education Forum to enable it to promote the review of programmes and sharing of good practice and develop strategies for monitoring the quality of written feedback to students.[93]

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[74] Bexley College, paragraph 58.
[75] Bicton College, paragraph 67.
[76] City of Bath College, paragraph 71.
[77] Macclesfield College, paragraph 60.
[78] Stoke on Trent College, paragraph 51.
[79] Tor Bridge High, paragraph 57.
[80] Epping Forest College, paragraph 45.
[81] Leeds City College, paragraph 40.
[82] Leicester College, paragraph 67.
[83] Moulton College, paragraph 42.
[84] Barnet College, paragraph 56.
[85] City of Sunderland College, paragraph 46.
[86] Epping Forest College, paragraph 11.
[87] West Nottinghamshire College, paragraph 51.
[88] Easton College, paragraph 50.
[89] Gateshead College, paragraph 50.
[90] Macclesfield College, paragraph 52.
[91] City of Bath College, paragraph 64.
[92] Amersham and Wycombe College, paragraph 40.
[93] Bexley College, paragraph 51.

Assessment design

20   It is unsurprising that general references to the design of assessments only appear in Summative review reports in the summaries of the outcomes of Developmental engagements. An exception is the point of good practice for New College Telford in the Summative review report for its 'well designed assessment briefs which give information about their position in the assessment schedule, clear intended outcomes and the requirements for merit and distinction grades'.[94] Other colleges were commended in Developmental engagements for: the variety, clarity and detail of assessment briefs;[95] assessment structured to ensure constructive support of student learning;[96] an effective overall approach to the standardisation of assessment design;[97] the use of standard templates for assignments;[98] and an annual learning audit to review the design of assessments.[99] In some cases it is well designed assignment briefs in one particular programme[100] or carefully scheduled and highly relevant assignments in another that are identified as points
of good practice.[101]

21   A key factor in assessment design is that assignments should be related to the stated learning outcomes of the module or programme. While some colleges were commended for 'effective assessment briefs which make learning outcomes transparent'[102] or for an 'appropriately wide and balanced range of assessment types that are clearly related to learning outcomes',[103] others were recommended to ensure that intended learning outcomes are consistently identified in all assignments.[104] [105] [106] In more general terms, Moulton College was acknowledged as having a 'robust system for checking that assignments meet the requirements of each award'.[107]

22   Several colleges were acknowledged in Developmental engagements for their 'wide', 'varied', 'innovative' or 'appropriate' range of assessment methods, enabling students to demonstrate achievement.[108] [109] [110] [111] [112] [113] Particular types of assessment identified in the reports as points of good practice include: group assignments and presentations;[114] peer assessment;[115] [116] [117] [118] use of commercial or live briefs;[119] [120] [121] and pre-entry diagnostic

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[94] New College Telford, paragraph 23
[95] Leeds City College, paragraph 39.
[96] Leeds College of Art, paragraph 39.
[97] Harrow College, paragraph 58.
[98] Moulton College, paragraph 35.
[99] Newham College of Further Education, paragraph 43.
[100] Fareham College, paragraph 37.
[101] West Nottinghamshire College, paragraph 44.
[102] Leeds City College, paragraph 39.
[103] Tor Bridge High, paragraph 50.
[104] Gateshead College, paragraph 45.
[105] Newham College of Further Education, paragraph 44.
[106] Weymouth College, paragraph 49.
[107] Moulton College, paragraph 35.
[108] Barnet College, paragraph 56.
[109] City College Birmingham, paragraph 42.
[110] New College Swindon, paragraph 70.
[111] North Warwickshire and Hinckley College, paragraph 45.
[112] Truro and Penwith College, paragraph 50.
[113] Tor Bridge High, paragraph 50.
[114] Leeds College of Art, paragraph 39.
[115] Epping Forest College, paragraph 44.
[116] Greenwich Community College, paragraph 57.
[117] Kensington and Chelsea College, paragraph 41.
[118] New College Stamford, paragraph 44.
[119] Amersham and Wycombe College, paragraph 39.
[120] Hugh Baird College, paragraph 61.
[121] Kensington and Chelsea College, paragraph 41.

assessment.[122] [123] The only recommendations for action relating to types of assessment concern reviewing the settings in which group assignments for part-time students take place,[124] and reviewing the process of open-ended assessment to avoid inconsistency.[125]

Use of virtual learning environments in assessment

23   It is clear from the points of good practice and recommendations identified in Developmental engagements and reported in the Summative review reports that there is an increasing use of virtual learning environments by colleges in assessment. Exceptionally, Tor Bridge High's 'online environment that includes online assignment briefs, milestone assessment, marking schemes, grading criteria, online submission and timely online feedback' was identified as a point of good practice in the Summative review report.[126] Other points of good practice from Developmental engagements include: the good use made of the virtual learning environment to support students working remotely and in work settings;[127] the use of diagnostic tools and the creation of assessment resources on the virtual learning environment;[128] and 'the innovative use of a web-based blog which supports effectively student assessment'.[129]

24   There are a similar number of recommendations for action with regard to the use of virtual learning environments in assessment. These recommendations include: promoting the use of the virtual learning environment to support assessment practice across all higher education programmes;[130] developing the virtual learning environment to support student assessment;[131] supporting formative and summative assessment by the use of the virtual learning environment;[132] developing the virtual learning environment to facilitate student submission of course work assignments;[133] and considering a more consistent approach to the use of the virtual learning environment in assessment across different curriculum areas.[134]

Assessment in the workplace

Employer engagement

25   A QAA Information Bulletin on Foundation Degrees states that 'productive employer engagement is based on close working between providers and employers in the development and implementation of the Foundation Degree programme'.[135] Further education colleges have a long-standing reputation for working with employers and the advent of Foundation Degrees increased their involvement in the design and delivery of those awards. Employer contributions to assessment tend to be formative. At South Cheshire College, 'employers are aware of their responsibilities in providing feedback to tutors on the

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[122] Greenwich Community College, paragraph 51.
[123] Moulton College, paragraph 35.
[124] Barnet College, paragraph 57.
[125] Fareham College, paragraph 38.
[126] Tor Bridge High, paragraph 55.
[127] Barnfield College, paragraph 50.
[128] Cirencester College, paragraph 46.
[129] New College Stamford, paragraph 44.
[130] Kendal College, paragraph 46.
[131] Harrow College, paragraph 59.
[132] Joseph Priestley College, paragraph 51.
[133] Itchen College, paragraph 37.
[134] Norton Radstock College, paragraph 42.
[135] QAA 2010: *IQER Information Bulletin Foundation Degrees:* www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Integrated-quality-and-enhancement-review-information-bulletin-Foundation-Degrees-.aspx.

performance of the student in a work-based role'.[136] At Burnley College, the engagement of programme teams with employers was acknowledged as a point of good practice and there had been some innovative developments in assessment.[137] The best examples of assessment were varied and linked with clear developmental feedback, and there were many employer-related assessment activities.

26   Many colleges work in partnership with employers to produce commercial briefs and professional practice to inform assessment, rather than requiring employers to take part explicitly in assessment.[138] [139] [140] [141] [142] [143] Good practice in employer involvement in curriculum design is identified in many colleges, particularly in the design of realistic and real-world assessment, and some support such developments with assistance from industrial mentors.[144] [145] [146] [147] [148] [149] [150] A clear specification for mentors can make a difference.[151] The Summative review report of one college states, 'The use of employer engagement in assessment and feedback continues to ensure and enhance employability skills and knowledge of the sector market'.[152]

27   In the 75 reports considered in this paper, nine recommendations urge greater employer engagement, especially to enhance assessment.[153] [154] [155] [156] [157] [158] [159] [160] One college is 'encouraged to engage more with employers to develop further and support the assessment process'[161] and another to 'consider the potential benefits of introducing a more formal and consistent approach to obtaining employer feedback'.[162] A number of reports recommend more specific guidance to employers and mentors.[163] [164] Clear information about what is involved and expected identifies three-way responsibilities for employers, staff in colleges and students on placements.[165] [166]

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[136] South Cheshire College, paragraph 17.
[137] Burnley College, paragraph 49.
[138] Amersham and Wycombe College, paragraph 39.
[139] Bexley College, paragraph 50.
[140] Bicton College, paragraph 59.
[141] Blackburn College, paragraph 52.
[142] Exeter College, paragraph 54.
[143] Gateshead College, paragraph 44.
[144] Barnfield College, paragraph 47.
[145] East Berkshire College, paragraph 41.
[146] Gateshead College, paragraph 44.
[147] Macclesfield College, paragraph 51.
[148] South Cheshire College, paragraph 49.
[149] Southport College, paragraph 39.
[150] West Nottinghamshire College, paragraph 44.
[151] East Berkshire College, paragraph 41.
[152] Kensington and Chelsea College, paragraph 29.
[153] Bicton College, paragraphs 47 and 60.
[154] Gateshead College, paragraph 45.
[155] Grantham College, paragraph 52.
[156] Leek College, paragraph 43.
[157] Lincoln College, paragraph 52.
[158] New College Swindon, paragraph 71.
[159] New College Telford, paragraph 46.
[160] Tor Bridge High, paragraph 51.
[161] City of Sunderland College, paragraph 47.
[162] Leeds City College, paragraph 27.
[163] City College Birmingham, paragraph 43.
[164] Tor Bridge High, paragraph 51.
[165] Kendal College, paragraph 45.
[166] South Cheshire College, paragraph 50.

Assessment of work-based learning

28   The introduction of Foundation Degrees in 2000 and the original *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* (FDQB) in 2004 has meant that more colleges have been developing a coherent approach to the design and delivery of Foundation Degrees and how they engage with employers. A summary of QAA reviews of Foundation Degrees urges colleges 'to explore ways of involving employers in programme design, delivery and in contributing to assessment, especially formative assessment'.[167] The FDQB states, 'It is beneficial if employers are involved, where possible, in the delivery and assessment of the programme and the monitoring of students, particularly within the workplace.'[168] In its Summative review report, South Cheshire College is acknowledged for 'the overall organisation of work-based learning [which] is highly effective'.[169] Bicton College's good practice is also identified: 'the work-based learning aspects of Foundation Degree curricula with staff, students and employers...is making a developing contribution to the preparation of students for a wide range of employment opportunities'.[170] Some employers provide mentors and work closely with the college to support and enhance assessment activities.[171] [172] [173] [174] Other awards, particularly higher nationals, also involve employers. One report draws attention to the enrichment of the 'systematic inclusion of industrial advisors from the outset in the design and development of work-based learning and assessment'.[175] Another example of good practice cites 'the assessment of work-based learning through professional practice in the Foundation Degree Environmental Education and in the FdA Environmental Community Arts as it enables students to develop realistic ideas and aspirations with regard to their future employment'.[176]

29   The *Code of practice, Section 9*: *Work-based and placement learning* notes that 'well designed assessment can help to reinforce the relevance of the work-based or placement learning to other parts of the programme and vice versa, and give students a range of opportunities to demonstrate achievement of their learning' (page 11).[177] [178] Points of good practice include the variety and challenging nature of work placements.[179] [180] [181] [182] [183] Good practice at East Berkshire College covers 'clear guidance regarding the roles of work-based mentors and their involvement in assessment…mentors are given clear specifications of their role and information on programme content on the virtual learning environment and

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[167] QAA 2005: *Learning from reviews of Foundation Degrees in England carried out in 2004-05:* www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Learning-from-reviews-of-Foundation-Degrees-in-England-carried-out-in-2004-05.aspx.

[168] QAA 2010: *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark, May 2010:* www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Foundation-Degree-qualification-benchmark-May-2010.aspx.

[169] South Cheshire College, paragraph 17.

[170] Bicton College, paragraph 16.

[171] Birmingham Metropolitan College, paragraph 54.

[172] East Berkshire College, paragraph 41.

[173] Macclesfield College, paragraph 51.

[174] Plymouth College of Art, paragraph 53.

[175] Warwickshire College, paragraphs 15 and 31.

[176] Bicton College, paragraph 59.

[177] QAA 2007 *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education - Section 9: Work-based and placement learning:* www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Code-of-practice-Section-9.aspx.

[178] At the time the reviews were undertaken, the *Code of practice* was in operation as part of the Academic Infrastructure. From 2012-13, the Academic Infrastructure will be replaced by the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

[179] Bexley College, paragraph 50.

[180] Burnley College, paragraph 49.

[181] Hugh Baird College, paragraph 61.

[182] City College Leeds, paragraph 39.

[183] Kendal College, paragraph 49.

given a handbook for managers and mentors'.[184] South Cheshire College has 'developed a Work-Based Learning Mentor Guide which sets out the main responsibilities of the employer, student and tutor, expectations and assessment of competence during the placement, and the principal stages of work-based learning'.[185]

30   On the other hand, one college is urged 'to increase opportunities for employers to be involved in work-based assessment opportunities'.[186] While some employers make a strong contribution to the assessment of work-based learning,[187] [188] [189] [190] a number of colleges work with employers who do not directly participate in summative assessment, although some give extensive formative feedback to students.[191] [192] [193] [194] A few recommendations suggest a more standardised cross-college approach to assessment.[195] [196]

Verification, marking and moderation

31   Fundamentally, assessment (of a summative nature) is the process by which students are awarded marks towards their degrees and awards but the recommendations and points of good practice found in the reports of Summative reviews and Developmental engagements reveal the complexity of the assessment processes.

Internal verification

32   Internal verification, defined as a system of quality checks to ensure that assignments have been written to the appropriate level, and that assessment decisions are accurate, is frequently mentioned among the points of good practice and recommendations for action in the reports of both Summative reviews and Developmental engagements. Warwickshire College was acknowledged for the operation of 'a particularly robust system of internal verification that not only makes a valuable contribution to the management of academic standards but drives improvement in the practice of setting assignments, marking and the quality of feedback to students'.[197] Other points of good practice identified in this area include: a monitoring system for the verification of assignment briefs[198] and a thorough process for internal verification of assignment briefs before issue.[199]

33   Internal verification covers both checking the design of assignments and the marking of those assignments, and it is not always clear whether recommendations for action reported from Developmental engagements refer to the whole assessment process or just to assessment decisions. General recommendations on the assessment process include: introducing a standardised approach to the internal verification processes and systems;[200] establishing robust verification arrangements that assure and enhance the quality of

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[184] East Berkshire College, paragraph 16.
[185] South Cheshire College, paragraph 33.
[186] Leek College, paragraph 47.
[187] Bexley College, paragraph 50.
[188] Kendal College, paragraph 45.
[189] South Cheshire College, paragraph 50.
[190] Stoke-on-Trent College, paragraph 43.
[191] Barking College, paragraph 56.
[192] Newcastle-under-Lyme College, paragraph 40.
[193] North Warwickshire and Hinckley College, paragraph 45.
[194] Solihull College, paragraph 45.
[195] Barnet College, paragraph 57.
[196] Birmingham Metropolitan College, paragraph 55.
[197] Warwickshire College, paragraph 63.
[198] Birmingham Metropolitan College, paragraph 54.
[199] Leicester College, paragraph 55.
[200] Barking College, paragraph 57.

assessment against clearly understood standards;[201] embedding rigorous internal verification procedures and ensuring they are applied consistently;[202] reviewing the operation of the higher education internal verification procedure;[203] facilitating greater clarity in internal verification practice;[204] and the establishment of a cross-college forum for higher education practitioners to facilitate the sharing of experience and good practice in approach to internal verification.[205]

Marking assessments

34   Some of the instances of good practice and recommendations for action in relation to internal verification found in the reports are concerned with assessment decisions. Derby College is acknowledged for the effectiveness of its internal verification system in ensuring the maintenance of standards, and Milton Keynes College is noted for its newly introduced external verifier process.[206] [207] On the other hand, Solihull College was recommended to review its internal verification policy to provide greater clarity regarding the process and the impact on the moderation of student work, and Newham College of Further Education was recommended to clarify how an internal verification panel fitted into its quality systems.[208] [209]

35   Points of good practice identified in the area of marking assessments focus on robust procedures, marking and collaborative arrangements. Several points of good practice comment on the rigour of procedures, for instance: robust procedures for the assessment and internal moderation of work;[210] assessment standardisation meetings;[211] and a rigorous approach to checking the fairness and reliability of assessment outcomes.[212] The operation of particular grading schemes and criteria was also identified in points of good practice.[213] [214] For instance, the marking scheme applied in Tor Bridge High during the assessment of creative practice, 'enabling staff to take full account of the understanding and mastery of technical skills learned by students', was identified as a point of good practice.[215] Additionally, rigorous procedures for anonymous and second marking[216] and embedded procedures for second marking[217] were identified at other colleges. There are also several examples of good practice in inter-college moderation and standardisation activities to ensure consistent assessment decisions and the sharing of good practice.[218] [219] [220] [221]

36   Recommendations for action in the Summative review, initially identified in the Developmental engagement reports, tend to be aimed at clarification or consistency, or to be concerned with technicalities in marking procedures. One college is encouraged to clarify the processes of moderation and second marking and ensure they are applied consistently;[222]

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[201] Bicton College, paragraph 60.
[202] City College Plymouth 57.
[203] Easton College, paragraph 50.
[204] Warwickshire College, paragraph 56.
[205] Newcastle-under-Lyme College, paragraph 41.
[206] Derby College, paragraph 40.
[207] Milton Keynes College, paragraph 41.
[208] Solihull College, paragraph 46.
[209] Newham College of Further Education, paragraph 43.
[210] City of Sunderland College, paragraph 46.
[211] Birmingham Metropolitan College, paragraph 54.
[212] Leeds College of Art, paragraph 39.
[213] East Durham College, paragraph 49.
[214] Newham College of Further Education, paragraph 43.
[215] Tor Bridge High, paragraph 50.
[216] West Cheshire College, paragraph 47.
[217] Norton Radstock, paragraph 40.
[218] Hugh Baird College, paragraph 61.
[219] Newcastle-under-Lyme, paragraph 39.
[220] South Cheshire College, paragraph 49.
[221] Southport College, paragraph 39.
[222] City College Plymouth, paragraph 57.

another to make the process of recording internal moderation decisions more transparent;[223] a third to clarify the situation with respect to the classification of Foundation Degrees.[224] These recommendations deal with broad issues whereas others deal with more specific actions. For instance, one college is encouraged to adopt double-marking to ensure consistency and accuracy of assessment;[225] another to ensure that moderation processes and outcomes are completely and consistently recorded in a standard form;[226] another to improve consistency in the use of grading boundaries in assessment briefs;[227] a fifth to review the use of cover sheets on assessments to ensure consistency in the identification of intended learning outcomes.[228] Recommendations concerned with technicalities in marking procedures include: addressing the use of software to detect plagiarism;[229] providing guidance on converting assignment grades to module grades and calculating final award classifications;[230] formally recording evidence of moderation on all sets of student work;[231] and establishing clear criteria for the allocation of marks to individuals undertaking group work assessments.[232]

Feedback to students

37   The importance of delivering effective feedback on assessed work to students is reflected in the proportion of recommendations and good practice points on this topic. The 75 Summative review reports considered in this paper give 56 points of good practice on feedback from Developmental engagements and Summative reviews and 26 recommendations for action.

Formative assessment

38   Colleges make use of formative assessment in a variety of ways. These include: written feedback; verbal contact; one-to-one tutorial discussions; and electronic methods. At Exeter College 'the variety of formative and summative methods of assessment feedback [is] highly valued by students, including those from employers'.[233] Students are also encouraged to engage in self-reflection as a way of enhancing their learning. Formative assessment supports the development of skills and knowledge.[234] [235] [236] [237] [238] [239]

39   The Summative review report from New College Telford captures the key aspects of effective formative feedback. It describes how 'feedback to students on their assessments is very comprehensive and identifies clearly any remedial action and allows students to develop their skills and knowledge and improve grades. There is a clear timetable for returning work, marks and feedback. Much of the interim feedback is through the internet-based document system which students consider to be very useful.'[240] In another college, 'formative feedback is encouraging, insightful and motivational and is highly valued by students across all

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[223] Hugh Baird College, paragraph 62.
[224] New College Swindon, paragraph 71.
[225] Stoke-on-Trent College, paragraph 52.
[226] East Durham College, paragraph 51.
[227] Amersham and Wycombe College, paragraph 40.
[228] Walford and North Shropshire College, paragraph 41.
[229] Grantham College, paragraph 52.
[230] Moulton College, paragraph 36.
[231] New College Stamford, paragraph 36.
[232] Norton Radstock College, paragraph 41.
[233] Exeter College, paragraph 45.
[234] Amersham and Wycombe College, paragraph 39.
[235] Barking College, paragraph 56.
[236] Cirencester College, paragraph 46.
[237] City of Bath College, paragraph 63.
[238] Greenwich Community College, paragraph 51.
[239] Harrow College, paragraph 58.
[240] New College Telford, paragraphs 16 and 25.

courses'.[241] At Epping Forest College, 'peer assessment enables students to exchange ideas and improve their assessment performance'.[242] A comprehensive range of good practice is identified at Harrow College: 'All higher education students receive detailed and helpful formative feedback on their assessments, particularly in placement and role play situations. This is given in a timely and constructive manner and, through a variety of one-to-one and group discussions with staff, students also have good opportunities to discuss their feedback and how best to use it. The effective way in which students on all higher education programmes receive timely and comprehensive formative feedback on all assignments involving practice and placement observations considerably enhances the student learning experience.'[243]

40   One college is commended for the innovative linking of formative feedback to intended learning outcomes.[244] Where colleges do not have well developed formative feedback practices, recommendations suggest reviewing tutorial practice to promote more formal methods of capturing formative feedback[245] or devising minimum standards and processes for support of formative feedback.[246] [247]

Summative assessment

41   High quality feedback accounts for good practice in the reports of 26 colleges. The best written feedback, whether formative or summative, is developmental, detailed and constructive, and helps students to improve.[248] [249] [250] [251] [252] [253] [254] Bracknell and Wokingham College is commended for: 'The high quality of tutor feedback on student-assessed work and the provision of in-college training days for mentors and the developing use of the virtual learning environment to enhance accessibility of assessment information to students.'[255] Further good practice identified in the reports includes provision of constructive feedback to students, which in some instances employed innovative approaches, reinforced by related staff development activities.[256] Recommendations for improvement in summative assessment include the development of 'a more systematic approach to student assessment feedback through the tutorial processes';[257] 'to continue the work of achieving consistency across programmes in how assessment feedback is provided to students and its timeliness';[258] and to 'ensure that all feedback on student work is fully developmental in order to demonstrate to students how they may improve their performance'.[259]

42   At City College Birmingham, 'tutors give clear, positive feedback on students' written assignments on a standard feedback sheet, supported by the annotation of scripts. Students stated that feedback to them was timely, constructive and helpful for improving their

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[241] Kensington and Chelsea College, paragraphs 31 and 32.
[242] Epping Forest College, paragraph 44.
[243] Harrow College, paragraph 36.
[244] Hugh Baird College, paragraph 61.
[245] Kendal College, paragraph 46.
[246] South Staffordshire, paragraph 46.
[247] Stoke-on-Trent, paragraph 44.
[248] Amersham and Wycombe College, paragraph 39.
[249] Barnet College, paragraph 56.
[250] City College Leeds, paragraph 39.
[251] City College Plymouth, paragraph 39.
[252] City of Bath College, paragraph 33.
[253] New College Stamford, paragraph 30.
[254] Southport College, paragraph 39.
[255] Bracknell and Wokingham College, paragraph 49.
[256] Warwickshire College, paragraph 55.
[257] Epping Forest College, paragraph 45.
[258] Exeter College, paragraph 55.
[259] Halesowen College, paragraph 42.

performance and grades.'[260] Fareham College gives 'good-quality and informative feedback to students, promoting their learning and understanding'.[261] At New College Stamford, external examiners praise 'the written feedback given to students [which] is of a high quality. Staff provide detailed feedback that is closely related to the learning outcomes. Students met by the team indicate that the feedback is valuable and effective in guiding their future learning'.[262]

43   The timeliness of the return of marked work is a weaker area, in spite of the fact that many colleges have agreed targets for this. Eleven colleges were encouraged to improve timeliness.[263] [264] [265] [266] [267] [268] [269] [270] [271] [272] [273] One recommendation suggests developing a cross-college standard.[274] Seven colleges are acknowledged for the constructive timeliness of their feedback, in recognition of the fact that the prompt return of work promotes learning and progression.[275] [276] [277] [278] At Weymouth College, 'the timely feedback on assessed work provides clear guidance on how to improve and effectively supports students in achieving their learning outcomes' and at Ruskin College 'staff provide exceptionally rapid and constructive formative feedback to students'.[279] [280]

Feedback methods

44   Good practice at Barnet College identifies 'a wide and effective range of assessment and feedback methods, including the use of e-learning, peer and self assessment, blogs, tutorials, formal examinations and informal oral feedback'.[281] Several colleges use innovative methods to give feedback in addition to a written pro forma, front sheet or oral feedback in tutorials. Leeds College of Art has 'arrangements for giving feedback to students on their assessed work [that] are thorough and constructive, and make widespread use of structured group critiques for studio work'.[282] Warwickshire College 'drives improvement in the practice of setting assignments, marking and the quality of feedback to students'.[283]

45   Other methods of feedback include: electronic feedback;[284] [285] peer feedback from students and partner colleges;[286] [287] e-learning portfolios and memory sticks;[288] and mentor feedback.[289]

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[260] City College Birmingham, paragraph 30.
[261] Fareham College, paragraph 27.
[262] New College Stamford, paragraph 30.
[263] City of Bath College, paragraph 64.
[264] Exeter College, paragraph 55.
[265] Harrow College, paragraph 59.
[266] Hugh Baird College, paragraph 62.
[267] Leeds College of Art, paragraph 41.
[268] Leek College, paragraph 43.
[269] Macclesfield College, paragraph 52.
[270] Newcastle-under-Lyme College, paragraph 41.
[271] Stoke-on-Trent College, paragraph 44.
[272] Tresham College, paragraph 53.
[273] Wiltshire College, paragraph 48.
[274] Birmingham Metropolitan College, paragraph 55.
[275] City College Birmingham, paragraph 42.
[276] Grantham College, paragraph 51.
[277] Knowsley College, paragraph 46.
[278] New College Stamford, paragraph 46.
[279] Weymouth College, paragraph 29.
[280] Ruskin College, paragraph 30.
[281] Barnet College, paragraph 39.
[282] Leeds College of Art, paragraph 19.
[283] Warwickshire College, paragraph 19.
[284] City College Plymouth, paragraph 39.
[285] Leicester College, paragraph 55.
[286] East Berkshire College, paragraph 41.
[287] Epping Forest College, paragraph 45.

Supporting staff with assessment

Staff development and training

46   In view of the fact that a paper on staff development has been published in this series of *Outcomes from IQER*,[290] this short section focuses only on support with assessment. Colleges organise their staff development in a number of ways but many colleges focus specifically on assessment as part of their staff development programmes. Some use the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students* to map their practice against its precepts.[291] Points of good practice include the way staff development events offer opportunities and mechanisms for sharing good practice in assessment.[292] [293] [294] [295] Truro and Penwith College is acknowledged for the 'provision of a broad and innovative range of opportunities for training, development and support. Higher education workshops have been facilitated on a range of activities aimed at enhancing teaching, learning, assessment and moderation, clearly aimed at promoting understanding of the theory and practice of learning and assessment.'[296] Some have publications to support staff with assessment: 'The College now produces the Guide to Assessment, which directly addresses the methods and processes of assessment. This guide, written by the Higher Education Manager and produced in consultation with experienced staff, builds upon experience and existing good practice.'[297] In particular, staff new to teaching higher education benefit from mentoring and learning approaches to assessment[298] and effective arrangements for assessment that promote continuous professional development.[299] [300]

47   There are a number of recommendations for supporting staff more effectively with assessment. Nine colleges are recommended to extend their sharing of good practice in this area.[301] [302] [303] [304] [305] [306] [307] [308] [309] It is suggested that one college 'should develop further a formal assessment strategy; facilitate the sharing of good practice on a college-wide basis; ensure the inclusion of formative assessment across all programmes; and ensure the accuracy and completeness of information for students'.[310] Another college 'should develop a college-wide approach to the assurance of assessment. It might benefit from fostering personal development through the reflective practice journal; ensuring that feedback on assessment is consistently focused on student improvement'. The college was also recommended to review

[288] Gateshead College, paragraph 44.
[289] North Warwickshire and Hinckley College, paragraph 44.
[290] QAA 2011: *Outcomes from IQER 2008-10: Staff development:* www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Outcomes-from-IQER-Staff-development.aspx.
[291] At the time the reviews were undertaken, the *Code of practice* was in operation as part of the Academic Infrastructure. From 2012-13, the Academic Infrastructure will be replaced by the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.
[292] City of Bath College, paragraph 63.
[293] City of Sunderland College, paragraph 46.
[294] Stafford College, paragraph 46.
[295] Runshaw College, paragraph 50.
[296] Truro and Penwith College, paragraph 34.
[297] Oxford and Cherwell Valley College, paragraph 42.
[298] Birmingham Metropolitan College, paragraph 54.
[299] New College Swindon, paragraph 70.
[300] West Cheshire College, paragraph 46.
[301] Barking College, paragraph 57.
[302] City of Bath College, paragraph 64.
[303] City College Birmingham, paragraph 43.
[304] City of Sunderland College, paragraph 47.
[305] Derby College, paragraph 41.
[306] Oxford and Cherwell Valley College, paragraph 50.
[307] Southport College, paragraph 40.
[308] Truro and Penwith College, paragraph 51.
[309] Wiltshire College, paragraph 48.
[310] Burnley College, paragraph 50.

'the language used to describe assessment; assuring itself that all relevant information concerning assessment is transmitted to each individual student; and reviewing the documentation about the support of students with disabilities'.[311]

Collaborative activities with higher education institutions

48   Partnerships offer other opportunities through close relationships with awarding bodies to develop and sustain assessment practice. In one instance, 'good practice was noted in the close relationship with awarding bodies to develop and sustain good assessment practice, including the staff development provided by the college'.[312] Another describes how 'inter-college staff development also supports assessment practice.[313] Recommendations in this area focus on the potential of colleges to develop closer relationships with awarding bodies to enhance assessment practices. For instance, one recommendation suggests that more could be done to obtain support from awarding bodies.[314]

Information and guidance on assessment

49   Although the Summative review process requires a statement on whether reliance can be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that a college is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers, there are few identified points of good practice and recommendations for action relating specifically to information about assessment in the 75 reports under consideration. A considerable number of each, however, are summarised in the reports from Developmental engagements on assessment.

50   The main considerations are that students should be provided with information and guidance on assessment that is accurate, comprehensive and consistent and that it should be clear and easily available, whether in the form of handbooks or electronically on websites or virtual learning environments. A considerable number of points of good practice in the provision of information and guidance on assessment are identified in the reports. Colleges are acknowledged in general for their systems for, or systematic approach to, the management of information about assessment,[315] [316] [317] [318] sometimes in partnership with their awarding bodies or their students.[319] [320] Some colleges are acknowledged for the provision of information on assessment that is 'reliable',[321] 'clear',[322] [323] [324] [325] 'consistent',[326] [327] or comprehensive'.[328] [329] [330] [331] [332]

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[311] Oxford and Cherwell Valley College, paragraph 50.
[312] Cirencester College, paragraph 44.
[313] South Cheshire College, paragraph 49.
[314] Kendal College, paragraph 46.
[315] Bicton College, paragraph 59.
[316] Macclesfield College, paragraph 51.
[317] Mid Cheshire College, paragraph 49.
[318] Stafford College, paragraph 46.
[319] Amersham and Wycombe College, paragraph 39.
[320] Southport College, paragraph 39.
[321] Ruskin College, paragraph 40.
[322] Birmingham Metropolitan College, paragraph 54.
[323] Burnley College, paragraph 49.
[324] Kendal College, paragraph 49.
[325] Tor Bridge High, paragraph 50.
[326] New College Telford, paragraph 45.
[327] Oxford and Cherwell Valley College, paragraph 49.
[328] Exeter College, paragraph 54.
[329] Hugh Baird College, paragraph 61.
[330] Knowsley Community College, paragraph 46.
[331] New College Stamford, paragraph 44.
[332] Norton Radstock College, paragraph 40.

51   Other colleges are recommended to take action to improve the quality of information and guidance on assessment they provide to students. One college is encouraged to ensure assessment and evaluation procedures are communicated clearly and consistently to students;[333] another to review all current programme documentation to ensure accuracy and consistency;[334] another to 'develop robust policies and procedures to ensure all forms of information provided to students on assessment are consistent and accurate';[335] a fourth to 'ensure greater parity between programmes in the information they provide'.[336]

52   Student, programme or module handbooks are the most common way of providing assessment information to students and several points of good practice are identified in the reports. One college was acknowledged for effectively coordinating and monitoring student and module handbooks to ensure accurate information;[337] another for providing easily accessible and comprehensive information in module guides;[338] and a third for publishing clear and appropriate information about assessment methods for each of its programmes in student handbooks.[339] Another report identified a higher education toolkit, which included a series of clear, concise and valued guides, such as 'researching and writing your assessment', as a point of good practice.[340]

53   Several colleges are encouraged to use templates to provide consistent information on assessment policies and procedures in student handbooks.[341] [342] [343] [344] Where colleges were found to provide inconsistent, incomplete or inaccurate information in handbooks, they are encouraged to review or revise them, to standardise the information, drawing on good practice in particular programmes and, where necessary, to improve the clarity and consistency of the assessment information contained in them.[345] [346] [347] [348] [349] [350] [351] [352]

54   The reports reveal an increasing use by staff and students of assessment information in electronic form, either on college websites or in virtual learning environments. In some reports, the comprehensive electronic provision of assessment information is identified as a point of good practice;[353] [354] in others the quality of the information available on the college website[355] or the effective use of virtual learning environments to communicate assessment information is acknowledged.[356] [357] [358] [359] [360] On the other hand, there are

[333] Exeter College, paragraph 62.
[334] Leek College, paragraph 43.
[335] Easton College, paragraph 50.
[336] Macclesfield College, paragraph 52.
[337] Truro and Penwith College, paragraph 50.
[338] City College Plymouth, paragraph 56.
[339] Exeter College, paragraph 54.
[340] City of Sunderland College, paragraph 46.
[341] Amersham and Wycombe College, paragraph 44.
[342] Barking and Dagenham College, paragraph 57.
[343] Greenwich Community College, paragraph 59.
[344] Runshaw College, paragraph 51.
[345] Grantham College, paragraph 52.
[346] Harrow College, paragraph 59.
[347] Leicester College, paragraph 56.
[348] Lincoln College, paragraph 52.
[349] Moulton College, paragraph 36.
[350] Newham College of Further Education, paragraph 44.
[351] Norton Radstock College, paragraph 49.
[352] Weymouth College, paragraph 49.
[353] New College Stamford, paragraph 44.
[354] Truro and Penwith College, paragraph 50.
[355] Norton Radstock College, paragraph 40.
[356] Amersham and Wycombe College, paragraph 39.
[357] Barnet College, paragraph 56.
[358] Bracknell and Wokingham College, paragraph 49.
[359] City College Plymouth, paragraph 56.

recommendations in the reports for colleges to improve or refresh the information on assessment on their websites[361] [362] [363] and to develop their virtual learning environments in order to provide more comprehensive, consistent or accessible information for students on assessment.[364] [365] [366]

The themes in context

55   Taken together, these reports indicate the importance of assessment in the student experience of higher education and similarities in the challenges faced by higher education institutions and further education colleges in the management of assessment processes and procedures. The success of Developmental engagements in bringing about enhancements in assessment is indicated by the comparative lack of outcomes, either features of good practice or recommendations for action, relating to assessment in the Summative review reports.

Conclusions

56   The outcomes of Developmental engagements summarised in the reports of Summative reviews indicate that the IQER process has brought about considerable improvements in the way in which student work is assessed in higher education programmes delivered in further education colleges. The large body of good practice identified in the reports reveals that systems and policies are in place in many colleges to provide assessment that is rigorous, fair, developmental and sometimes innovative, while the recommendations for action indicate ways in which institutions can make improvements to the benefit of the learning experience of their students.

Areas of strength as indicated by the evidence from the report

57   Areas of particular strength in the management of assessment include the way in which assessment policies and guidelines take account of the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*[367] and the use of relationships with awarding bodies and neighbouring colleges to develop and enhance assessment practices.

58   Several areas of good practice were identified in methods for responding to external examiners' reports and the use of the reports to assure standards and enhance assessment practices.

59   There are many examples in the reports of good practice in the design of assignments, mostly drawn from the outcomes of Developmental engagements. Several of these involve the innovative use of virtual learning environments in assessment.

60   Good practice arose from close and effective partnerships with employers, including the engagement of employers in curriculum design, although not usually explicitly in assessment. The variety and challenging nature of work placements were found to offer opportunities for different forms of assessment.

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[360] Norton Radstock College, paragraph 40.
[361] Barnet College, paragraph 64.
[362] Kendal College, paragraph 46.
[363] Stafford College, paragraph 47.
[364] Kensington and Chelsea College, paragraph 42.
[365] Leicester College, paragraph 56.
[366] North Warwickshire and Hinckley College, paragraph 46.
[367] At the time the reviews were undertaken, the *Code of practice* was in operation as part of the Academic Infrastructure. From 2012-13, the Academic Infrastructure will be replaced by the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

61 It is clear from the reports that good quality formative assessment, particularly when linked to intended learning outcomes, supports students in the development of skills and knowledge. Detailed, developmental and constructive feedback on both formative and summative assessment leads to significant improvement and is appreciated by students.

62 It appears from the reports that, for the most part, colleges provide students with accurate, comprehensive and consistent information on assessment, increasingly by electronic means.

Areas where further work is required

63 Colleges whose oversight of assessment practices was found to be lacking in rigour are advised to develop a strategy or code of practice for assessment across their higher education provision, or to review, formalise or clarify existing assessment practices in the interests of consistency and the equitable treatment of students.

64 The management of examination boards attracted only one point of good practice and several recommendations for improvement. A number of recommendations relate to the way in which the reports of external examiners are received and responded to. Several colleges were recommended to liaise with their awarding bodies to ensure that they received the reports of external examiners, disaggregated if necessary, and others were reminded of the requirement that students should see the reports.

65 Although the internal verification and marking systems of some colleges were acknowledged as points of good practice, recommendations in this area were concerned with securing consistency in marking and accuracy in recording results and recommending awards.

66 There are several recommendations in the reports about improving the timeliness of the return of marked work, in spite of the fact that many colleges were found to have in force published targets.

67 In spite of the evidence in the reports that many colleges offer support to staff with assessment, staff development in the theory and practice of assessment, possibly in collaboration with awarding bodies, is an area that would benefit from further work.

68 In view of the number of recommendations in the reports, methods of ensuring the continuing accuracy and consistency of information on assessment is an area where further work is required.

Appendix A: Good practice relating to assessment

The Developmental engagement reports featured 328 points of good practice relating to assessment. These points can be categorised into:

- college management of assessment
- assessment design
- assessment in the workplace
- verification, marking and moderation
- feedback to students
- supporting staff with assessment
- information and guidance on assessment.

The following refer to 20 points of good practice that came out of Summative review reports:

- good quality and informative feedback, promoting student learning and understanding, is provided on assignments across the provision [Fareham College]
- the College's Guidelines for the Assessment of Students are clearly written and offer precise and comprehensive guidance to staff for assessing students [Gateshead College]
- the use of memory-sticks, which has been extended across the provision, enables students and staff to access information and is especially beneficial to students, who are able to submit assignments and receive prompt feedback on their work [Gateshead College]
- formative feedback is encouraging, insightful and motivational and is highly valued by students across all courses [Kensington and Chelsea College]
- the arrangements for giving feedback to students on their assessed work are thorough and constructive, and make widespread use of structured group critiques for studio work [Leeds College of Art]
- the internal examination boards ensure that all matters relating to each student's achievement and progression are thoroughly reviewed and evaluated by the College prior to their formal consideration at the awarding body's examination boards [Lincoln College]
- the high quality of feedback to students which provides clearly for remedial action and progression, together with the comprehensive tracking system of assessments that includes completion dates, grades and details of verification [New College Telford]
- the well designed assessment briefs which give information about their position in the assessment schedule, clear intended learning outcomes and the requirements for merit and distinction grades [New College Telford]
- there is a coherent approach to assessment across all modules, consistently designed and applied to support the calibration of academic standards and student learning opportunities in an online environment that includes online assignment briefs, milestone assessments, marking schemes, grading criteria, online submission and timely online feedback [Tor Bridge High]
- the College operates a particularly robust system of internal verification that not only makes a valuable contribution to the maintenance of academic standards across the higher education provision, but drives improvement in the practice of setting assignments, marking and the quality of feedback to students [Warwickshire College]
- the quality and quantity of the feedback on student work, which students describe as making a positive contribution to their learning [Hugh Baird College]

- on the FdA Lens Based Photo Media students present their work at the same time as those from the University of Lincoln undertaking the same assessment, providing a valuable opportunity for comparing levels of achievement and getting comprehensive peer and staff feedback [New College Stamford]
- staff provide students with high quality written feedback that gives effective guidance for future learning [New College Stamford]
- the College's Higher Education Assessment Feedback Policy provides clear guidance on providing timely and effective feedback [Newcastle-under-Lyme College]
- the relationships that the College has developed with link tutors enable college staff to monitor and evaluate assessment practice effectively [Barnet College]
- where a module is delivered by a number of partner colleges, a representative sample of marked scripts is taken from all providers and reviewed by representatives from all colleges involved in delivery to ensure standardisation [Barnet College]
- a wide and effective range of assessment and feedback methods enables students from diverse backgrounds to demonstrate achievement [Barnet College]
- staff provide exceptionally rapid and constructive formative feedback to students [Ruskin College, Oxford]
- the effective way in which students on all higher education programmes receive timely and comprehensive formative feedback on all assignments involving practice and placement observations considerably enhances the student learning experience [Harrow College]
- the timely feedback on assessed work provides clear guidance on how to improve and effectively supports students in achieving their learning outcomes [Weymouth College].

Appendix B: Recommendations relating to assessment

The Developmental engagement reports featured 333 recommendations relating to assessment. These recommendations can be categorised into:

- college management of assessment
- assessment design
- assessment in the workplace
- verification, marking and moderation
- feedback to students
- supporting staff with assessment
- information and guidance on assessment.

The following refer to 24 recommendations that came out of Summative review reports:

- review its higher education assessment strategy to clarify assessment and moderation procedures at both programme and college level [Barking & Dagenham College]
- take the initiative in introducing a college-based plagiarism detection system [Bracknell and Wokingham College]
- ensure assessment and evaluation procedures are communicated clearly and consistently to students [Exeter College]
- invite the College Higher Education Forum to debate the systems for the submission of student work across all higher education courses to ensure equivalence of the student experience and that academic standards are consistently maintained [Fareham College]
- review the management of the moderation process to include reference to learning outcomes and the quality of tutor feedback, in order to disseminate good practice and to ensure that new tutors are supported in the development of good feedback techniques [Greenwich Community College]
- continue to work with colleagues from the University and other colleges to improve the speed at which summative feedback is returned to students, and to ensure greater consistency in the quality of feedback across assessors [Itchen College]
- develop further the College assessment policy and procedures to more explicitly reflect the Academic Infrastructure [Kensington and Chelsea College]
- ensure that all students receive feedback in a timely manner to help them with future assessments [Runshaw College]
- ensure that all higher education students receive prompt feedback before undertaking further assessment in order to provide effective support for their learning [Warwickshire College]
- establish examination boards for Higher National programmes which have clear terms of reference, constitution and membership, and which clarify the role of the Higher National Board of Studies [City of Bath College]
- establish a set of clear and unambiguous policies and procedures for Higher National programmes to ensure that all staff and students understand the academic assessment regulations [City of Bath College]
- encourage college staff to be in attendance at all examination boards, not only to ensure that their students were being treated consistently, but also to support the development of their understanding of the assessment process [Newham College of Further Education]
- ensure that revised assessment procedures are embedded and applied consistently across all courses [Stoke on Trent College]

- adopt a process of double-marking, building on the good practice in the Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector provision, to ensure consistency and accuracy of assessment [Stoke on Trent College]
- develop its internal verification processes to facilitate the audit and assurance of the quality of feedback given to students on their formally assessed work [Stoke on Trent College]
- include submission dates on the assessment schedules for all modules [Norton Radstock College]
- continue the close monitoring of the return of marked work to ensure it consistently meets the required timeframe [Easton College]
- provide assessment regulations that students can obtain directly from the College website in a concise, user-friendly format [Barnet College]
- continue to look at ways of achieving greater parity in the timing of feedback [Macclesfield College]
- review the Assessment Policy to ensure that examination boards for higher national programmes have clear terms of reference, constitution and membership [Birmingham Metropolitan College]
- include intended learning outcomes on feedback sheets and relate some comment to the achievement of these [Mid Cheshire College]
- ensure that summative assessment is received in a timely fashion [Ruskin College, Oxford]
- ensure that students on all programmes receive comparable quality of assessment feedback [City of Sunderland College]
- introduce more effective and comprehensive practice in using 'unpacking sheets' to clarify assessment assignment criteria for students on the Foundation Degree in Counselling [Harrow College].

Appendix C: Methodology used for producing papers in *Outcomes from IQER*

For each published Summative review report, the text of bullet points of good practice and recommendations identified by the review team is taken from Section E, Conclusions and Summary of judgements. The bullet points are incorporated into a spreadsheet and coded to a series of top-level themes.

- Academic Infrastructure
- Assessment
- Employer engagement
- Public information
- Quality management
- Staff development
- Student experience
- Student engagement

Each bullet point text is then coded to a series of more detailed topics within each theme. This enables areas of good practice and recommendations to be sorted and analysed.
The paragraph references in the main text of this paper refer to Section B of the Summative review report, where the examples of good practice and recommendations are discussed in more detail and in the context of the individual college.

Individual *Outcomes* papers are written by experienced IQER reviewers and coordinators. To assist in compiling the papers, authors are able to use the spreadsheet of bullet points to establish a broad picture of the overall distribution of features of good practice and recommendations in particular areas, as seen by the review teams. They then consider this information in the context of the more detailed discussion in the main text of the Summative review reports.

Appendix D: The IQER Summative review reports

2010-11

Amersham and Wycombe College
Barking College
Barnet College
Barnfield College
Bexley College
Bicton College
Birmingham Metropolitan College
Bishop Auckland College
Blackburn College
Bournville College of Further Education
Bracknell and Wokingham College
Burnley College
Cirencester College
City College Birmingham
City College Plymouth
City of Bath College
City of Sunderland College
Derby College
East Berkshire College
East Durham College
Easton College
Epping Forest College
Exeter College
Fareham College
Gateshead College
Grantham College
Greenwich Community College
Halesowen College
Harrow College
Hugh Baird College
Itchen College
Joseph Priestley College
Kendal College
Kensington and Chelsea College
Knowsley Community College
Leeds City College
Leeds College of Art
Leek College

Leicester College
Lincoln College
Macclesfield College
Mid Cheshire College of Further Education
Milton Keynes College
Moulton College
New College Stamford
New College Swindon
New College Telford
Newbury College
Newcastle-under-Lyme College
Newham College of Further Education
North Nottinghamshire College
North Warwickshire and Hinckley College
Northern College
Norton Radstock College
Oxford and Cherwell Valley College
Plymouth College of Art
Richmond Adult and Community College
Runshaw College
Ruskin College, Oxford
South Cheshire College
South Staffordshire College
Southport College
Stafford College
Stoke on Trent College
The Solihull College
Tor Bridge High
Tresham College
Truro and Penwith College
Walford and North Shropshire College
Warwickshire College
West Cheshire College
West Nottinghamshire College
West Thames College
Weymouth College
Wiltshire College

Appendix E: Titles of papers in *Outcomes from IQER*

Papers published in 2011:

- *College management of higher education*
- *Staff development*

Papers published in 2012:

- *Assessment*
- *The student voice*

All published *Outcomes* papers can be found at
www.qaa.ac.uk/ImprovingHigherEducation/Pages/Outcomes-IQER.aspx.