



Outcomes from IQER: 2010-11

The student voice

July 2012

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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'.

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:

- *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 Summative review 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 of the content of the *Outcomes* papers, they may be freely downloaded from QAA's website and cited with acknowledgement.

Summary

This paper analyses comments made in the 75 IQER Summative review reports published between 2010 and 2011 on the topic of student engagement in higher education programmes in further education colleges. Sixteen of the reports contained good practice and 18 contained recommendations relating to student engagement.

The IQER method did not specifically require review teams to address student engagement as a major theme in reports, but there was emphasis on the involvement of students in the review process. This included: attending preparatory meetings, presenting the student submission, and attending a meeting with the team during the visit. Awarding bodies and colleges were supportive of students in preparing their submission. Only two colleges did not submit a student submission.

IQER Summative review reports indicate that most colleges encouraged student engagement at various levels, but that this was not often supported by an explicit strategy. The reports include comments on the student submission, on how colleges gather and use student evaluations, and how students are represented at programme and college levels. In many of the colleges where higher education provision is small, student engagement tends to be arranged on a more informal basis.

Colleges have fully embraced the National Student Survey (NSS), made use of the outcomes in their self-evaluations, and analysed and compared information to enhance the provision. Colleges are focusing increasingly on higher education provision in gathering student opinion.

Summative review reports demonstrate that colleges are building on their work with the student submission and the NSS to develop processes for enhancing student engagement. This *Outcomes* paper suggests that improvements can be made, however, in how colleges engage students in quality processes, for example by providing more training for students, ensuring students are aware of the actions taken based on their engagement, and taking steps to avoid 'survey fatigue'. There was no mention in the reports on how colleges might evaluate the effectiveness of their processes for student engagement. Colleges are aware that some students may miss out on student engagement activities. These include part-time students and those on work placements and on distance learning programmes.

Student engagement: context

1 This paper is based on a review of the outcomes of the 75 IQER Summative review reports published between 2010 and 2011 (a full list of the reports can be found at Appendix D). The methodology used in analysing the reports for this and other *Outcomes* series is described in Appendix C.

2 The following paragraphs place student engagement in the wider context of recent government policies as well as the work of the Higher Education Academy (HEA), the National Union of Students (NUS), and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). There is a broad approach to student engagement running through these various initiatives, activities and directives, ranging from encouraging the student voice and student representation at local and national levels, to engaging students more in the learning process.

3 This paper is concerned with findings from IQER reviews and takes as its principal themes 'the student voice' and student representation in relation to the management of quality and standards. IQER invites students to produce a written submission based around their academic experiences. Further detail on how student engagement is addressed during the IQER process is in paragraph 14.

4 In January 2003, the White Paper, *The Future of Higher Education*, made explicit reference to providing better information for students on teaching and learning when they apply to higher education institutions.¹ One way of achieving this was to establish a comprehensive survey of existing students' views, which it was hoped would help to inform potential students' choices. The National Student Survey (NSS) began in 2005 and colleges offering higher education were invited to take part in the survey in 2008.

5 The 2011 White Paper, *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System*, stated that student charters and student feedback would take on new importance.² On the use made of student feedback, the White Paper recommended that higher education providers publish summary reports of student surveys by the academic year 2013-14. The White Paper also talked about the introduction of the Key Information Set (KIS) from 2012-13, which would present information at a course and institutional level in a comparable format intended to meet the information needs of prospective students. The KIS would include data on student satisfaction taken from the NSS.³

6 Returning to the ways in which student engagement is defined and approached, the HEA has identified six different dimensions. They range from engagement in individual learning, engagement in curriculum design and delivery, engagement at discipline, school, department and institutional level, and in policy formation at a national level.⁴ Summative review reports include reference to engagement at curriculum, discipline, school/department and college level.

¹ Department for Education and Skills (2003) *The Future of Higher Education* (Cmnd 5735), Norwich: The Stationery Office: www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/corporate/migrateddd/publications/f/future_of_he.pdf (last accessed 22 June 2012).

² Department for Business Innovation and Skills (2011) *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System* (Cmnd 8122), London: BIS: www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/higher-education/docs/h/11-944-higher-education-students-at-heart-of-system.pdf (last accessed 22 June 2012).

³ Higher Education Funding Council for England (2012) *Key Information Sets*: www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/it/publicinfo/kis (last accessed 22 June 2012).

⁴ Hardy, C and Bryson, C (ND) Student engagement: paradigm change or political expediency? www.adm.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/features/student-engagement-paradigm-change-or-political-expediency (last accessed 22 June 2012).

7 In 2009, QAA published a paper summarising findings from 58 Institutional audits carried out between December 2004 and August 2006, focusing on the theme of student representation and feedback. The paper showed that universities were aware of the significance of student representation and of obtaining feedback from students on their learning experiences. At the institutional level, there was a commitment to involving students in governance and quality assurance arrangements by ensuring student representation on appropriate committees. At the operational level, students were represented on programme committees, with many institutions operating staff-student liaison committees. The findings summarised in the paper suggested that the involvement of students' union officers was key to the success of student representation.

8 A report based on 51 reviews of higher education in further education colleges, carried out by QAA between September 2005 and July 2007, made reference to student feedback as a factor that impinges on the quality of learning and teaching.⁵ The responsiveness of colleges to students' views was seen as a strength. Colleges used formal and informal mechanisms to capture student opinion, although in some colleges student questionnaires lacked a higher education focus and the resultant data did not distinguish between higher and further education students. The report also expressed concern that students sometimes lacked information about the representation system in the college. It also referred to the lack of feedback to students on actions taken as a result of their evaluations. The current *Outcomes* paper suggests that colleges have done much to focus more on higher education in gathering students' views, but that more needs to be done to support students on how to be representatives and to ensure that students are aware of actions taken as a result of their feedback.

9 In relation to support for higher education providers nationally, the NUS and the HEA have developed a toolkit for students' unions and higher education providers to work together on student engagement (*Student Engagement Toolkit*). The toolkit includes information on the benefits of student engagement and guidance on enhancing practices.⁶ It provides case studies and practical tools for student engagement.

10 QAA is currently working in partnership with the NUS on a project supporting student engagement with quality assurance through students' unions.⁷ The project will generate case studies and guidance at a national level and is expected to report by the start of the academic year 2012-13.

11 QAA maintains a Student Sounding Board which provides input into QAA's work at a strategic level, and has a student member on the QAA Board. The Agency has, since 2010-11, recruited and supported students as members of Institutional audit teams which will continue with the new Institutional Review process. The new Review of College Higher Education (RCHE) process, which will replace IQER from spring 2013, will place a greater emphasis on the involvement of students. In addition to presenting a submission alongside the college's self-evaluation, students will be invited to participate in meetings, as part of the preparatory meeting and both the first team visit and the review week. Students will also be invited to nominate and/or perform the role of a lead student representative (as an equivalent to the facilitator role played by a member of staff). There will also be a student reviewer as part of the review team.

⁵ Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2008) *Learning from academic review of higher education in further education colleges in England 2005-07*:

www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Learning-from-Academic-review-of-higher-education-in-further-education-colleges-in-England-2005-07.aspx.

⁶ www.nusconnect.org.uk/campaigns/highereducation/student-engagement/toolkit

⁷ www.qaa.ac.uk/partners/students/projects/Pages/default.aspx

12 Research on student engagement is increasing and researchers, staff, students and commentators have been discussing the different definitions of the student role as 'consumers' and as 'partners' or 'co-creators' in the educational setting.^{8 9} One author cautions that where students are co-opted into quality assurance and monitoring frameworks this can discourage institutions from working with students to effect real change. Participation can become a 'tick box' exercise, focusing on gathering data rather than encouraging dialogue. Student evaluations become market research exercises, with students as a data source, and less as critical partners.¹⁰

13 A report by the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI) to HEFCE in 2009 concluded that while institutions regard student engagement as significant in enhancing the student experience, more emphasis is placed on students as consumers and less on students as partners in a learning community.¹¹ The report went on to note that the idea of students as partners is stronger in some subject areas than others, for example in Art and Design and Performing Arts. There are variations in practices between institutions and their effectiveness could be improved. Institutions and students' unions face challenges to ensure that each stage of the student engagement process is effective, for example awareness of the process, nominations and elections, training for undertaking the role, and monitoring the effectiveness of the process. Institutions are becoming 'smarter' at analysing data and acknowledge that the NSS has sharpened institutional practices for action planning. Institutions are taking steps to 'close the feedback loop' and inform students if action is taken, but there is uncertainty how students can seek out information about outcomes. In some institutions, there seems to be a lack of clear identification of where responsibility lies for student engagement.

14 Summative review reports for IQER do not include a specific section for student engagement but reviewers are asked to comment on the student submission, its preparation and its usefulness, and colleges are asked about how students' views inform the management of higher education programmes. Sources of evidence for the review include details of how colleges have acted on students' views. Students are asked about their submission, their engagement with quality assurance processes, representation mechanisms, and how their views have been collected and used by the college.¹² The reports make reference to student engagement in all the three core themes of IQER, for example how the colleges encourage students to be members of management committees/working groups responsible for the governance of academic standards, the quality of learning opportunities and public information.

⁸ Carey, P (2012) Representation and student engagement in higher education: a reflection on the views and experiences of course representatives, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*: www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0309877X.2011.644775 (last accessed 22 June 2012).

⁹ Fielding, M (2001) Students as radical agents of change, *Journal of Educational Change*, Vol. 2, No. 3, pp 123-41.

¹⁰ Carey, P (2012) Representation and student engagement in higher education: a reflection on the views and experiences of course representatives, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0309877X.2011.644775 (last accessed 22 June 2012).

¹¹ Little, B, Lock, W, Scesa, A and Williams, R(2009) *Report to HEFCE on student engagement*, Centre for Higher Education Research and Information, The Open University: www.open.ac.uk/cheri/documents/student-engagement-report.pdf (last accessed 22 June 2012).

¹² QAA (2008) *Handbook for Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review*: www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/The-handbook-for-Integrated-Quality-and-Enhancement-Review.aspx.

Themes

15 A consideration of the features of good practice, the recommendations and other references to student engagement in the review reports suggests that the following broad themes merit further discussion.

- Theme 1: Student submissions for IQER reviews.
- Theme 2: Student representation in college management: the extent of student representation, specific student-focused committees and contact with senior staff.
- Theme 3: How colleges gather and use student feedback information.

Theme 1: Student submissions for the IQER reviews

16 IQER provided students with opportunities to be involved at several stages in the review process. These included attending the briefing with QAA staff and the preparatory meetings at colleges, producing a student submission, and meeting the review team during the visit.

17 QAA provided a general guide for students on the review process and another one specifically to develop their submissions.^{13 14} The guidance suggests that submissions could take a variety of different forms, such as being based on questionnaires or a written report from a focus group. Irrespective of its form, the submission should reflect the views of the majority of students, rather than just a minority, about their experiences as learners. Students were given guidance on the areas they should cover, such as learning resources, quality of support, learning and teaching, and the quality of the information the college publishes about itself.

18 This paper comments on three aspects of the student submission: the methodologies used to compile the submissions, how they were presented, and how they were used by the team during the review. Summative review reports contain a section where the review team comments on the student submission. The team commented on the methods used to gather data and how useful the submission was for the review team in conducting the review.

19 Only two colleges did not include a submission. This was put down to operational reasons. In all cases, colleges were highly supportive of students in producing the student submission through providing administrative and technical support and, in some cases, offering them access to existing student feedback information which was made available in the self-evaluation evidence. It is difficult to assess the extent to which college staff involvement could have influenced outcomes. In most cases, colleges facilitated the production of the submission but played no part in the compilation or writing of the submissions. In one case, there was a declaration that college staff were not involved.¹⁵ Some colleges used external and independent consultants to work with students.¹⁶ One report referred to how a college used a Learner Voice Coordinator to help students.¹⁷

¹³ QAA (2008) *Integrated quality and enhancement review: a guide for students*: www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Integrated-quality-and-enhancement-review-a-guide-for-students.aspx.

¹⁴ QAA (2008) *Student involvement in the Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review, IQER and the student written submission*: www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Student-involvement-in-Integrated-Quality-IQER-and-the-student-written-submission.aspx.

¹⁵ Epping Forest College.

¹⁶ Grantham College, Leeds City College, Leicester College and Solihull College.

¹⁷ Stoke on Trent College

20 Student representatives played a key role in gathering information and ensuring that the submissions represented the views of the wider student body. In some cases, awarding body student representatives and students' unions assisted the process; although it has to be noted that students' unions are not as well developed in colleges as in universities. Focus groups were set up in most colleges with the information being organised by student representatives, supported by higher education administrative officers.¹⁸ In two colleges, the summaries of points made at the focus groups, which were a routine part of student engagement, were used in place of a student submission.¹⁹ One college used an 'away day' to gather students' views.²⁰ Reports refer to the use of online surveys and virtual learning environments to gather student evaluations.²¹

21 To focus students' responses, some colleges used the core themes of the review to produce the submission.²² As part of their engagement with the review, students at one college posted comments on the notice board in the university centre and emailed the Higher Education Coordinator. They then drafted these into statements and posted them to the virtual learning environment.²³

22 The majority of student submissions were presented as summaries of surveys, questionnaires and focus groups. They used simple statistical data, supported by qualitative commentaries. A few colleges' submissions were presented on DVDs.

23 Generally, the submissions showed that students were satisfied with their experiences at the colleges. Some did identify areas of concern, which were picked up by the review teams at meetings with students. The submissions acted as catalysts for colleges to focus on student engagement in higher education. They also provided review teams with evidence and a basis for setting an agenda for the review. No features of good practice were identified or recommendations made with reference to student submissions.

Theme 2: Student representation in college management: extent of student representation, specific student-focused committees and contact with senior staff

24 There were two features of good practice regarding student representation on formal committees.²⁴ However, most reports made reference to student representation at various levels of college management. In all colleges, higher education constitutes a relatively small part of their provision. The extent of student representation, specific to higher education, needs to be seen in this context. Colleges have increasingly established quality processes specific to higher education, such as membership of boards of study and higher education management groups. Student representation tends to concentrate on the higher education forum and programme level, and less on higher levels of management. Other colleges have set up student forums and higher education learner voice groups with representatives from all programmes attending. Another method used is for student representatives to attend the Principal's Question Time sessions.²⁵ Awarding bodies provide students with the university course representative handbook. This has significance in ensuring students are aware of the representative process.

¹⁸ For example, Cirencester College, Exeter College, Leeds College of Art.

¹⁹ New College Stamford and New College Telford.

²⁰ City College Plymouth.

²¹ For example, City of Bath College, Northern College and Hinckley College.

²² For example, Easton College, Harrow College and Macclesfield College.

²³ Kendal College.

²⁴ Barking and Dagenham College, paragraph 36; Truro and Penwith College, paragraph 33.

²⁵ City of Birmingham College.

25 Student representatives are sometimes elected, but they are mostly volunteers. Only one report referred to a training event for student representatives.²⁶ Colleges use their virtual learning environments to publish minutes of meetings. Awarding body involvement was referred to in one case where the university received and audited minutes of student representative meetings.²⁷

26 In four colleges, good practice was identified where students' participation was used to enhance specific areas of the provision. Students acted as 'mystery customers' to provide evaluations of public information.²⁸ Final year students were involved in giving views on the prospectus, which led to changes.²⁹ Students acted as ambassadors to assist in the promotion of the College's widening participation strategy and help students in the transition from further to higher education.³⁰ At another college, students were involved in decisions regarding capital expenditure.³¹ The other 12 features of good practice in the reports were general statements about the effectiveness of engaging students in quality assurance processes without specifically mentioning student representation.

27 The three recommendations regarding student representation referred to formalising processes,³² encouraging representation at senior college-wide committees,³³ and establishing a higher education-only forum.³⁴

Theme 3: How colleges gather and use student feedback information

28 Colleges use a range of methods to gather student feedback. These include module and programme level evaluations as well as institutional questionnaires. Awarding bodies sometimes gather their own student feedback. There were references in the reports to awarding body link tutors meeting students. Increasingly, colleges make use of their virtual learning environments and have dedicated higher education questionnaires. Colleges with smaller numbers of higher education programmes tend to rely more on informal methods. A feature of good practice in one college referred to the setting of a benchmark of a 75 per cent satisfaction rate.³⁵ In one case, end-of-module evaluations were required by a professional body (Civil Aviation Authority).³⁶ One report referred to a college which had an Explicit Learner Voice Strategy.³⁷ Another feature of good practice identified was the use of programme leaders from other programmes to evaluate the student feedback, which enabled the college to be more objective in the analysis of the feedback without affecting the outcomes.³⁸

29 There was some evidence to show how colleges use student feedback to enhance provision. The main use of feedback was to inform annual monitoring reports. At this point, colleges demonstrated a thorough scrutiny of information. The NSS was given special attention especially at senior management levels. Self-evaluations for IQER Summative reviews often made reference to the NSS and compared the results from year to year. There were some references to how colleges ensure that students are aware of the follow-up

²⁶ West Cheshire College.

²⁷ Harrow College.

²⁸ City of Sunderland College, paragraph 42.

²⁹ Wiltshire College, paragraph 43.

³⁰ City College Plymouth, paragraph 33.

³¹ Northern College, paragraph 46.

³² Barnfield College, paragraphs 19 and 20.

³³ Bourneville College, paragraph 33.

³⁴ Warwickshire College, paragraph 32.

³⁵ Easton College, paragraph 28.

³⁶ Exeter College.

³⁷ Milton Keynes College.

³⁸ North Nottinghamshire College, paragraph 24.

of actions taken in response to their feedback. More colleges are adopting 'You said, We did' information on notice boards. One report noted that the college published a Higher Education Bulletin which identified actions taken in response to student feedback.³⁹ Another report noted that staff follow up on surveys by meeting student groups to ensure feedback is comprehensive and valid.⁴⁰

30 One recommendation pointed to the need to develop a means of providing feedback effectively to all students in response to issues raised.⁴¹ There were features of good practice regarding the 'closing of loops'. One report referred to the broad approach to capturing students' views, discussing these and then taking action.⁴² At another college, there was a variety of methods used, a systematic approach adopted to capture the student voice, and actions taken in response to student feedback.⁴³ In another college there were effective mechanisms in place for the collection of student views, which led to necessary action, and to outcomes being reported back to students.⁴⁴

31 Specialist modes of learning, for example, work-based learning and distance learning, and the experiences of part-time students, tended to be subsumed in general questionnaires. One report noted that low returns on questionnaires from part-time students remained a problem.⁴⁵ None of the reports made reference to how colleges monitored the effectiveness of how student evaluations are gathered and used. One college was recommended to monitor closely the effectiveness of its revised arrangements for engaging with students.⁴⁶

The themes in context

32 The *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*,⁴⁷ Section 7: *Programme design, approval, monitoring and review* identified student feedback, including the NSS, as a source of evidence for informing annual and periodic reviews.⁴⁸ The new UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) includes a specific Chapter on student engagement which will ask higher education providers to take deliberate steps to engage students, individually and collectively, as partners to enhance their learning experiences.⁴⁹ The Quality Code expects institutions to improve the motivation of students to engage in deep learning and to learn independently. It also asks for the provision of feedback by students and their participation in quality assurance and quality enhancement processes in the improvement of their learning environment. It suggests seven Indicators of sound practice for institutions to work with the student body by setting up arrangements for partnerships, offering opportunities and an environment for student engagement. This would include induction of students and the sharing and monitoring the

³⁹ Truro and Penwith College.

⁴⁰ Kendal College.

⁴¹ Newcastle-under-Lyme College, paragraph 29.

⁴² Bicton College, paragraph 32.

⁴³ Bishop Auckland College, paragraph 33.

⁴⁴ East Durham College, paragraph 32.

⁴⁵ Birmingham Metropolitan College.

⁴⁶ Derby College, paragraph 29.

⁴⁷ From 2012-13, the Academic Infrastructure will be replaced by the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

Further information is available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/Pages/default.aspx.

⁴⁸ Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2006) *Code of practice for assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*, Section 7: *Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*.

www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Code-of-practice-section-7.aspx.

⁴⁹ Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2012) *UK Quality Code for Higher Education: Chapter B5 Student engagement*: www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/quality-code-B5.aspx.

effectiveness of student engagement. For such an environment to be effective, the provider is likely to:

- be aware of the importance of feedback from students
- have transparent mechanisms, agreed between the student body and provider, for the nomination and election of student representatives
- provide induction and ongoing support for students and staff appropriate to their roles
- monitor and review the effectiveness of their policies and processes for encouraging students in their quality processes.

33 Colleges' activities for student engagement are in line with the proposals in the two White Papers. They are making effective use of the NSS and are conscious of the need to treat students as 'intelligent customers'. Regarding the dimensions of student engagement identified by the Higher Education Academy, reports indicate that student engagement works well mainly at programme level but less so at senior management and national levels.

34 The 75 reports covered in this paper show that for colleges offering higher education in England, there is considerable activity to promote student engagement. This is in broad agreement with the findings in the *Outcomes from Institutional audit paper: Student representation and feedback arrangements*⁵⁰ for other higher education providers. There are similar conclusions in the aforementioned paper about the need to 'close loops' and to ensure that part-time students and those on work placements and distance learning programmes are not overlooked. The *Learning from academic review of higher education in further education colleges in England* report, published by QAA in 2008, noted how colleges needed to make their student questionnaires more higher education-focused. This report can confirm that colleges are achieving this by using more higher education-specific questionnaires and engaging students in higher education quality processes which are distinct from further education.

35 The new Quality Code identifies features of the environment conducive to student engagement. While colleges have processes to support student engagement, more needs to be done to organise this support and to provide induction and training. Student representatives need to be provided with more information on their role and on the quality processes. There is also the need to monitor the effectiveness of the process.

36 Research on student engagement raises the question of the role of students as customers or as partners in learning. Colleges have a deserved reputation for supporting students and providing strong academic guidance in support of learning. Student evaluation data tends to be used as part of annual quality assurance process and as a means of enhancing the provision. Colleges are certainly aware of students as customers. As noted in the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI) report to HEFCE in 2009, colleges have used the NSS to sharpen their processes for gathering feedback from students.

Conclusions

Areas of strength as indicated by the evidence from the reports

37 Although the Summative review reports recorded no features of good practice regarding student submissions, colleges demonstrated their full commitment to supporting

⁵⁰ *Outcomes from Institutional audit: Student representation and feedback arrangements* (2005): www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Outcomes-from-institutional-audit-Student-representation-and-feedback-arrangements.aspx.

students in the preparation of the student submission. They did this without any undue influence on the outcomes. Only two colleges did not provide a student submission. The submissions were highly useful for review teams in setting the agenda for the review visit.

38 Regarding student representation, there were two features of good practice. Colleges are developing specific higher education committees. These are mainly at programme level, with less involvement at senior management level. In some cases, awarding bodies provide guidance on student representation. There are four features of good practice where students are involved in specific aspects of the provision, such as contributing to the scrutiny of public information and acting as ambassadors to support new students. Smaller colleges (with fewer FTEs) tend to use informal methods to involve students.

39 Colleges have several methods for gathering student opinion. One notable feature is the prominence given to the National Student Survey (NSS). Colleges are vigilant in their analysis of the outcomes and in taking action where needed. Student opinion is gathered at module, programme and college levels. Increasingly, colleges are using questionnaires that are specific to higher education. More colleges are making use of online responses. Reports identified 10 features of good practice regarding gathering and using student evaluations. Three of these referred to colleges ensuring that students are made aware of the actions taken in response to evaluations.

40 There were 14 desirable and four advisable recommendations around the topic of student engagement, most of which were concerned with the need to establish more formal policies for gathering and analysing student feedback and for student representation.

Areas where further work is required

41 Colleges encourage students as representatives and have the means of gathering student evaluations, but the Summative review reports identified little evidence of any clearly articulated strategies to do this. There needs to be a locus of responsibility to champion and drive student engagement. Colleges need to adopt measures to monitor the effectiveness of the student engagement processes. Most recommendations in the reports ask for more formal, systematic and transparent methods for gathering evaluations. There is a need to ensure that mechanisms are in place to provide students with feedback on the actions taken in response to their questionnaires and focus groups. The *Outcomes from Institutional audit* paper (July 2011) noted that the involvement of students' unions is key to successful student engagement in institutional committees and other decision-making bodies. The role of college students' unions in student engagement, particularly smaller ones, is less well developed than in the university sector.

42 The *Outcomes from Institutional audit* and the IQER Summative review reports agree on areas where further work needs to be done. Colleges need to provide clear information about opportunities for student engagement. Students need to have more training to be fully effective as representatives. They also need to be given time to be involved in the process. Summative review reports and the *Outcomes from Institutional audit* identify a similar area where work is required, namely to ensure that part-time students and those on work-placements and on distance learning programmes are represented and included in feedback mechanisms. Increasing use of online methods and social media could facilitate engagement and information gathering. Colleges need to avoid 'survey fatigue' and simplify how feedback is obtained. All this points to a need for an explicit student engagement strategy which students understand and consider worth being involved in.

Appendix A: Good practice relating to student engagement

- The active encouragement of the student voice and student participation in the Student Forum [Barking and Dagenham College, paragraph 36].
- The broad approach to capturing students' views, discussing these and then taking action [Bicton College, paragraph 32].
- The variety of methods used and systematic approach adopted by the College to capture the student voice, and actions taken in response to student feedback [Bishop Auckland College, paragraph 33].
- The College has been responsive to the views of students in the provision of combined social and study space [Blackburn College, paragraph 39].
- Act as a 'mystery customer' to act as an additional mechanism for checking the accuracy of public information [City of Sunderland paragraph 42].
- Higher education ambassadors and student associates contribute positively to the College's widening participation agenda and to informing, guiding and supporting students in their transition from further to higher education [City College Plymouth, paragraph 33].
- The College has in place effective mechanisms for the collection of student views about their learning, which leads to any necessary action, and the outcomes are reported back to students [East Durham College, paragraph 22].
- The systematic way in which student views are collected, responded to and used to enhance learning opportunities [Easton College, paragraphs 28, 30 and 32].
- The overall process of collecting, detailing and reacting to student views and opinions and the way in which this affects good communication between staff and students make a considerable contribution to the student learning experience [Harrow College, paragraph 42].
- The wide range of methods employed to capture and respond to student feedback and evaluation [Hugh Baird College, paragraph 41].
- The College deploys a range of mechanisms to capture student opinion, which is clearly overseen by senior management and used to inform planning and decision making [Leeds College of Art, paragraph 20].
- The College initiative to extend the NSS to all higher education students enables it to evaluate the student view of its higher education provision in its entirety [Leicester College, paragraph 37].
- Taking account of student views in determining the priorities for capital expenditure in support of the quality of learning opportunities offered to students [Northern College, paragraph 46].
- The involvement of learner reviews of programme area managers from different subject areas brings in an element of openness, independent scrutiny and further opportunity to share good practice [North Nottinghamshire College, paragraph 24].
- There is an effective student representation system and excellent arrangements for general feedback and updating information to students [Truro and Penwith College, paragraph 33].
- The use of focus groups of existing higher education and level 3 students to provide comments on drafts of the next prospectus, resulting in appropriate and beneficial changes to its format and style [Wiltshire College, paragraph 43].

Appendix B: Recommendations

- Establish a more formal student participation at course level, so as to allow the expression of the student voice and to facilitate the sharing of information such as external examiner reports with student representatives [Barnfield College, paragraphs 19 and 20] Desirable.
- Establish a systematic policy for gathering anonymous student feedback at module level to provide additional information on the quality of teaching and learning [Birmingham Metropolitan College, paragraph 30] Advisable.
- Encourage the representation of students on senior college-wide committees to ensure that higher education is given greater consideration [Bourneville College, paragraph 33] Desirable.
- Establish a clear system for evaluating the effectiveness of the provision of resources to support learning, taking full account of students views [Derby College, paragraph 22 and 32] Advisable.
- Monitor closely the effectiveness of its revised arrangements for engaging with students [Derby College, paragraph 29] Desirable.
- Implement systematic forms of evaluating the student experience to capture the specific issues of higher education students and inform the quality improvement process [Epping Forest College, paragraph 27] Desirable.
- Develop a more systematic and transparent method for gathering and analysing and using student opinion and encouraging greater involvement for students in the higher education process. [Gateshead College, paragraph 27] Desirable.
- Ensure that student views on the quality of pre and in-course information they receive are formally collected [Grantham College, paragraph 46] Desirable.
- Explore ways to share salient points of external examiner reports with students [Leicester College, paragraph 20] Desirable.
- Review the range of student feedback opportunities and their efficacy, to provide a more coherent and rationalised approach across the courses for the collection and use of students' perceptions. [Lincoln College, paragraph 37] Desirable.
- Produce a standard questionnaire to collate student feedback to ensure consistency of response and action [Newham College of Further Education, paragraph 28] Desirable.
- Develop a comprehensive means of obtaining feedback from students on their experience of induction in order to gain a fuller understanding of the needs of students and how they might be met [Newham College of Further Education, paragraph 29] Desirable.
- Develop the means of providing feedback effectively to all students in response to issues raised [Newcastle-under-Lyme College, paragraph 25] Desirable.
- Ensure that the FdSc New Media Design and Technology course team reflects on the students' perceptions and expectations of their learning experiences and takes action where necessary [Southport College, paragraph 24] Advisable.
- Consolidate systems for gathering student feedback and addressing actions and responding to them [Southport College, paragraph 13] Desirable.
- Institute an effective procedure for gathering feedback regularly from higher education students and encourage the active involvement of students in this process to enhance the student experience [South Staffordshire College, paragraph 32] Advisable.
- Devise and implement improved strategies for engagement with students and employers in the review and evaluation of all aspects of its provision [Stoke on Trent College, paragraph 30] Desirable.
- Establish a higher education-only forum [Warwickshire College, paragraph 32] Desirable.

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 Infrastructure⁵¹
- 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.

⁵¹ From 2012-13, the Academic Infrastructure has been replaced by the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

Appendix D: The IQER Summative review reports

2010-11

Amersham and Wycombe College	Leicester College
Barking College	Lincoln College
Barnet College	Macclesfield College
Barnfield College	Mid Cheshire College of Further Education
Bexley College	Milton Keynes College
Bicton College	Moulton College
Birmingham Metropolitan College	New College Stamford
Bishop Auckland College	New College Swindon
Blackburn College	New College Telford
Bourneville College of Further Education	Newbury College
Bracknell and Wokingham College	Newcastle-under-Lyme College
Burnley College	Newham College of Further Education
Cirencester College	North Nottinghamshire College
City College Birmingham	North Warwickshire and Hinckley College
City College Plymouth	Northern College
City of Bath College	Norton Radstock College
City of Sunderland College	Oxford and Cherwell Valley College
Derby College	Plymouth College of Art
East Berkshire College	Richmond Adult and Community College
East Durham College	Runshaw College
Easton College	Ruskin College, Oxford
Epping Forest College	South Cheshire College
Exeter College	South Staffordshire College
Fareham College	Southport College
Gateshead College	Stafford College
Grantham College	Stoke on Trent College
Greenwich Community College	The Solihull College
Halesowen College	Tor Bridge High
Harrow College	Tresham College
Hugh Baird College	Truro and Penwith College
Itchen College	Walford and North Shropshire College
Joseph Priestley College	Warwickshire College
Kendal College	West Cheshire College
Kensington and Chelsea College	West Nottinghamshire College
Knowsley Community College	West Thames College
Leeds City College	Weymouth College
Leeds College of Art	Wiltshire College
Leek College	

The full Summative review reports can be found at:

www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/Pages/default.aspx

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.

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