

ANALYSIS OF HMIE REVIEWS OF QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SCOTLAND'S COLLEGES ACADEMIC YEARS 2004/05 TO 2006/07

A REPORT BY HM INSPECTORATE OF EDUCATION FOR
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1. Introduction

The service level agreement between the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council (SFC) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) details the number of college reviews to be delivered each year. Over academic years 2004-05, 2005-06 and 2006-07 (referred to in this report as 2004-07) HMIE carried out reviews of 31 of Scotland's colleges.

The revised review model which was introduced in academic year 2004-05 has two phases. Phase one is similar in all colleges. During it, college reviewers focus on elements related to *leadership and quality improvement*. Subject reviewers focus on the *learning and teaching process* and *learner progress and outcomes*. Evaluative activity only focuses on the other quality elements during the subject review insofar as they highlight *other significant factors* that have an impact on the quality of learning and teaching or learner progress and outcomes.

The follow-through phase of the review is a differentiated one where activity is proportionate to the strengths and points for development identified during the first phase. It may be at any point on a continuum from 'light touch' to 'comprehensive' and its focus may range from exploring the extent and causes of weaknesses and proposed solutions, to areas of sector-leading and innovative practice.

Summaries of the sector-leading and innovative practice examples identified during reviews, are available in *Colleges 2004-08: Short summaries of all sector-leading and innovative practice* on the HMIE website at <http://www.hmie.gov.uk/GoodPractice/Default.aspx>.

An important aspect of the review model is the inclusion in reports of *confidence statements*. These statements are additional to the grades for each cross-college quality element and the grades in each subject area. The confidence statements apply at the whole-college level to *learning and teaching process*; *learner progress and outcomes*; and *leadership and quality management*.

Percentages in this report have been rounded up or down to the nearest whole number. This has resulted in totals not necessarily adding up to 100% in some calculations and charts.

The four-point scale (*very good, good, fair* and *unsatisfactory*) is used in college reviews. The definition of the grades used in HMIE college reports is:

Very good major strengths

Good strengths outweigh weaknesses

Fair some important weaknesses

Unsatisfactory major weaknesses.

2. Confidence statements

HMIE issued confidence statements for each college reviewed, covering the three main focal points of review: *learning and teaching process*; *learner progress and outcomes* and *leadership and quality management*.

Statements can be of the following forms:

- HMIE is confident, unqualified;
- HMIE is confident, qualified by the term “overall” drawing the college’s attention to some inconsistency in practice or outcomes;
- HMIE is confident, qualified by reference to specific points; or
- HMIE is not confident.

HMIE expressed confidence in all 31 colleges reviewed 2004-07 in relation to *learning and teaching process*. In two colleges, the statement of confidence was qualified by identification of the college’s need to address weaknesses in specific subject areas.

HMIE expressed confidence in 29 colleges reviewed 2004-07 in respect of *learner progress and outcomes*. In two colleges HMIE was not confident that learners were progressing well and achieving appropriate outcomes. In ten colleges, statements of confidence were qualified. For five of the colleges the qualifications identified the need to address weaknesses in retention and attainment. In one college, qualifications related to low retention, and in three colleges, to low attainment.

HMIE also expressed confidence in 28 colleges reviewed in 2004-07 in respect of *leadership and quality management*. In 19 colleges, HMIE concluded without qualification that the college being reviewed was managing well and improving the quality of experience for learners. In the other colleges, qualifications related variously to the need to:

- improve the effectiveness of self-evaluation processes;
- develop further some aspects of monitoring, evaluation and improvement; and
- address some important weaknesses in relation to:
 - guidance;
 - access and inclusion;
 - health and safety;
 - staff; and
 - resources and services to support the learner.

In three colleges, HMIE reported that it was not confident that the college was managing well and improving the quality of its services for learners.

Following the publication of review reports, SFC informs colleges if they require to submit a formal action plan to the Council. Where there are no ‘not confident’ statements, colleges incorporate actions into their own planning process. The Council and HMIE monitor the college’s progress following the review through existing mechanisms, in particular the information contained in the college’s strategic

and operational plans and HMIE's ongoing engagement and dialogue with the college.

Where HMIE has indicated a statement of "not confident" in one of the focal points for college review, the Council requires a formal follow-up review, usually between one and two years following publication of the report. Over 2004-07, the Council therefore specified a follow-up review in four colleges. Three of these follow-up reviews were scheduled to take place during academic year 2007-08. The fourth was due to take place in 2008-09.

3. Analysis of subject reviews

3.1 Learning and teaching process

Subject reviews under the current SFC/HMIE quality framework concentrate on the learning and teaching process, and learner progress and outcomes. This section of the report focuses on the grades awarded for quality element *A5: Learning and teaching process*.

3.1.1 Distribution and analysis of grades awarded by subject area

The 18 subject areas reviewed over 2004-2007 were:

- Art and design
- Business, management and administration
- Care
- Computing and ICT (Information and communications technology)
- Construction
- Education and training
- Engineering
- Hairdressing, beauty and complementary therapies
- Hospitality and tourism
- Land-based industries
- Languages and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
- Media
- Nautical studies
- Performing arts
- Science
- Social studies
- Special programmes
- Sport and leisure.

Figure 1 shows the range of subject areas covered by the reviews, and the grades awarded for *A5: Learning and teaching process*.

Subject Area	Number of reviews	Very good	Good	Fair	Unsatisfactory
Art and design	14	9	5	0	0
Business, management and administration	26	8	18	0	0
Care	22	15	7	0	0
Computing and ICT	20	4	15	1	0
Construction	20	5	15	0	0
Education and training	1	1	0	0	0
Engineering	19	7	12	0	0
Hairdressing, beauty and complementary therapies	16	5	10	1	0
Hospitality and tourism	13	8	5	0	0
Land-based industries	12	6	6	0	0
Languages and ESOL	5	3	2	0	0
Media	1	0	1	0	0
Nautical studies	1	1	0	0	0
Performing arts	8	5	3	0	0
Science	4	1	3	0	0
Social Studies	3	2	1	0	0
Special programmes	19	15	4	0	0
Sport and leisure	8	4	4	0	0
Total	212	99	111	2	0
Percentages		47%	52%	1%	0%

Figure 1: The grades awarded for *A5: Learning and teaching process* by subject area in 2004-07

In 2004-07 a total of 212 subject reviews were conducted in these 18 subject areas. Figure 1 shows that 47% of grades awarded for *A5: Learning and teaching process* were *very good*, 52% *good* and 1% *fair*. There were no *unsatisfactory* grades awarded for this quality element in 2004-07.

The learning and teaching process is the core of colleges' work so it is a positive finding that 99% of grades awarded for *A5: Learning and teaching process* were *good* or better. However, the definition of *good* in the SFC/HMIE quality framework is "*strengths outweigh weaknesses*". Such an evaluation represents a standard of provision in which the strengths have a significantly positive impact. However, the quality of learners' experiences is diminished in some way by aspects in which improvement is required. It implies that the college should seek to improve further the areas of important strength, but take action to address the areas for improvement. In 2004-07, 52% of grades for this quality element were recorded as *good*. With under half of the grades for *A5: Learning and teaching process* recorded as *very good*, colleges should take action to eliminate the weaknesses which were identified in the learning and teaching process.

Three subject areas recorded particularly high proportions of *very good* grades for this quality element during the review period. Special programmes recorded 79% *very good* grades, Care recorded 68% *very good* grades and Art and Design recorded 64% *very good* grades.

3.1.2 Strengths and weaknesses

During each review the subject reviewer records strengths and weaknesses identified for each quality element. The main themes for strengths in *learning and teaching process* were as follows.

- Learners were enthusiastic about their learning experiences, showing high levels of engagement and motivation.
- Teaching staff applied their specialist knowledge effectively to the teaching and learning process and generally kept their subject knowledge up to date. In doing this they were able to enhance the learning experience for learners.
- Effective relationships between staff and learners contributed to enhancing the learner experience.
- Learners displayed confidence in using a range of learning resources, including online and other ICT resources.
- Staff identified appropriate learning goals for learners and planned activities to ensure learners were able to achieve their learning objectives.
- Staff encouraged learners to reflect on their learning and set targets to improve their learning. This promoted independence and learners taking ownership of their learning goals.

The most prominent theme from the weaknesses identified related to the use by staff of resources, including ICT. This theme accounted for 20% of weaknesses reported from the colleges reviewed during 2004-07. Others included:

- staff not systematically checking learners' understanding or providing them with effective feedback;
- too narrow a range of teaching methods being deployed by staff;
- learners not sufficiently engaged; and
- poor or late attendance of learners causing disruption to the teaching and learning process.

3.2 Learner progress and outcomes

This section of the report focuses on the grades awarded for quality element *A7: Learner progress and outcomes*.

3.2.1 Distribution and analysis of grades awarded by subject area

Figure 2 shows the range of subject areas covered by the reviews, and the grades awarded for *A7: Learner progress and outcomes*.

Subject area	Number of reviews	Very good	Good	Fair	Unsatisfactory
Art and design	14	3	11	0	0
Business, management and administration	26	4	16	6	0
Care	22	5	15	2	0
Computing and ICT	20	1	9	9	1
Construction	20	7	12	1	0
Education and training	1	1	0	0	0
Engineering	19	5	12	2	0
Hairdressing, beauty and complementary therapies	16	4	10	2	0
Hospitality and tourism	13	3	9	1	0
Land-based industries	12	4	8	0	0
Languages and ESOL	5	3	2	0	0
Media	1	0	0	1	0
Nautical studies	1	0	1	0	0
Performing arts	8	2	5	1	0
Science	4	0	1	3	0
Social Studies	3	0	3	0	0
Special programmes	19	12	7	0	0
Sport and leisure	8	1	6	1	0
Totals	212	55	127	29	1
Percentages		26%	60%	14%	0%

Figure 2: The grades awarded for *A7: Learner progress and outcomes* by subject area in 2004-07

The grades awarded for the quality element *A7: Learner progress and outcomes* were 26% *very good*, 60% *good* and 14% *fair*.

The grades indicate that out of 212 subject reviews 86% of grades recorded were *good* or better. However with only 26% of grades recorded as *very good*, it is clear that the majority of subject areas reviewed for *A7: Learner progress and outcomes* had weaknesses or important weaknesses that colleges need to address.

3.2.2 Strengths and weaknesses

The main themes from the strengths recorded in *A7: Learner progress and outcomes* were as follows.

- There were high levels of retention and attainment on specific programmes.
- Learners were taking advantage of effective progression and transition arrangements into further study or employment.
- Learners were generally making good progress in achieving their learning goals and developing appropriate vocational skills.

The main themes in the weaknesses recorded related to specific attainment and retention issues for individual programmes within each of the subject areas reviewed. Of the total number of weaknesses recorded in *A7: Learning progress and outcomes*, 85% were related to low retention and low attainment specific programmes and in key units. The next most frequent weakness identified was insufficient development of learners' core skills, which accounted for 5% of recorded weaknesses.

3.3 Other significant factors

Reviewers in subject reviews concentrate on the two quality elements *A5: Learning and teaching process* and *A7: Learner progress and outcomes*. However, they also comment on factors related to the other elements in the quality framework which had a significant impact on the quality of the learner experience and outcomes. In 2004-07, review teams reported 720 other significant factors. Of these 407 (57%) were considered to have had a positive impact (recorded as strengths) and 313 (43%) a negative impact (recorded as weaknesses).

The main positive feature across *other significant factors* reported during 2004-07 was the impact that high standards of accommodation had on the learning experience. In much of the provision reviewed, a learning environment that was in line with the vocational context met the needs of learners well and prepared them for future employment opportunities.

Other prominent positive features reported in *other significant factors* were that:

- the use of personal learning plans (PLPs) contributed to effective monitoring of learner progress and to setting appropriate learning targets;
- strong links with partner organisations led to better provision for learners; and
- staff identified appropriate support for learners and provided a range of fitting support measures.

The main negative themes in the *other significant factors* were, in order of frequency, as follows.

- Accommodation was poorly designed with insufficient space for learning activities.
- Insufficient access to resources, including ICT resources, impeded learners' progress.
- Specific programmes were poorly designed and did not match the needs of the learner group.
- There was insufficient analysis by staff of performance indicator data and poor action planning to improve the learning experience and learning outcomes.

4. Analysis of cross-college reviews

4.1 Distribution and analysis of grades by quality element

The cross-college quality elements in the SFC/HMIE quality framework address the commitment and capacity of the college to support the quality of the learner experience and improve outcomes.

The cross-college elements in the quality framework are as follows.

B1: Educational leadership, direction and management

B2: Access and inclusion

B3: Guidance and support

B4: Resources and services to support the learner

B5: Staff

B6: Quality assurance

B7: Quality improvement.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of grades awarded for B1-B7.

Element	Very good	Good	Fair	Unsatisfactory
B1	19	9	2	1
B2	18	8	3	1
B3	15	11	4	0
B4	13	16	1	0
B5	11	15	4	0
B6	13	15	2	0
B7	10	16	4	0
Total	99	90	20	2
Percentages	47%	43%	9%	1%

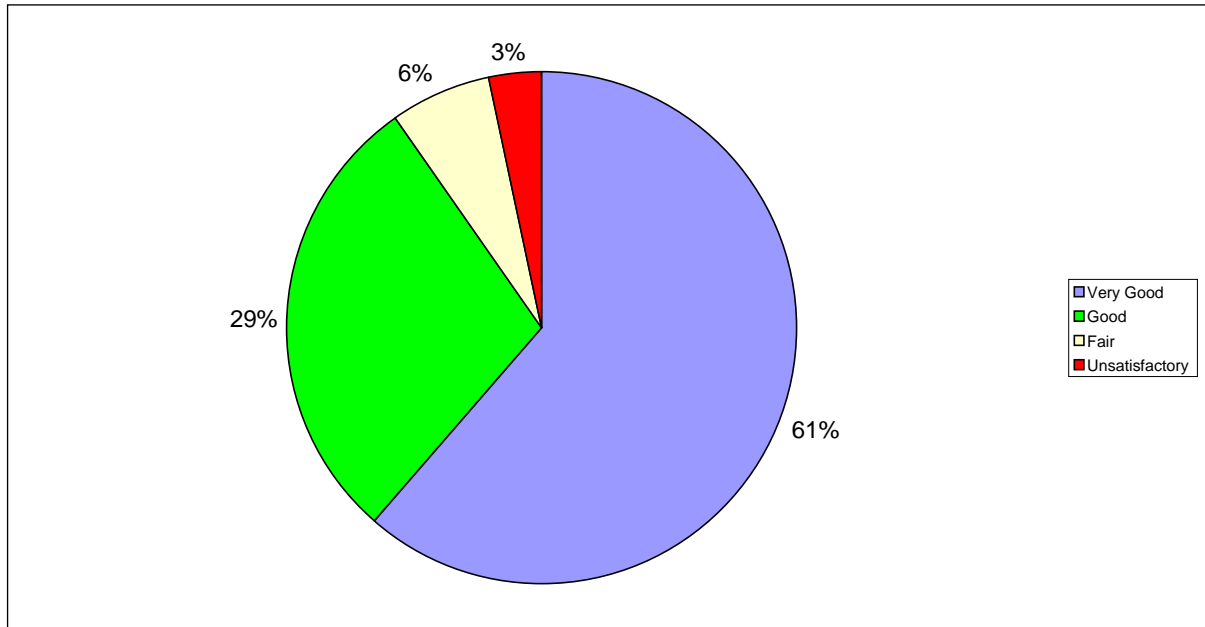
Figure 3: The cross-college grades awarded in reviews 2004-07

In 2004-07, 211 grades were awarded in the 31 colleges reviewed. The table shows that 47% of grades awarded during the cross college reviews were *very good*, 43% *good*, 9% *fair* and 1% *unsatisfactory*. In cross-college reviews in 2004-07, 90% of grades awarded were *good* or better.

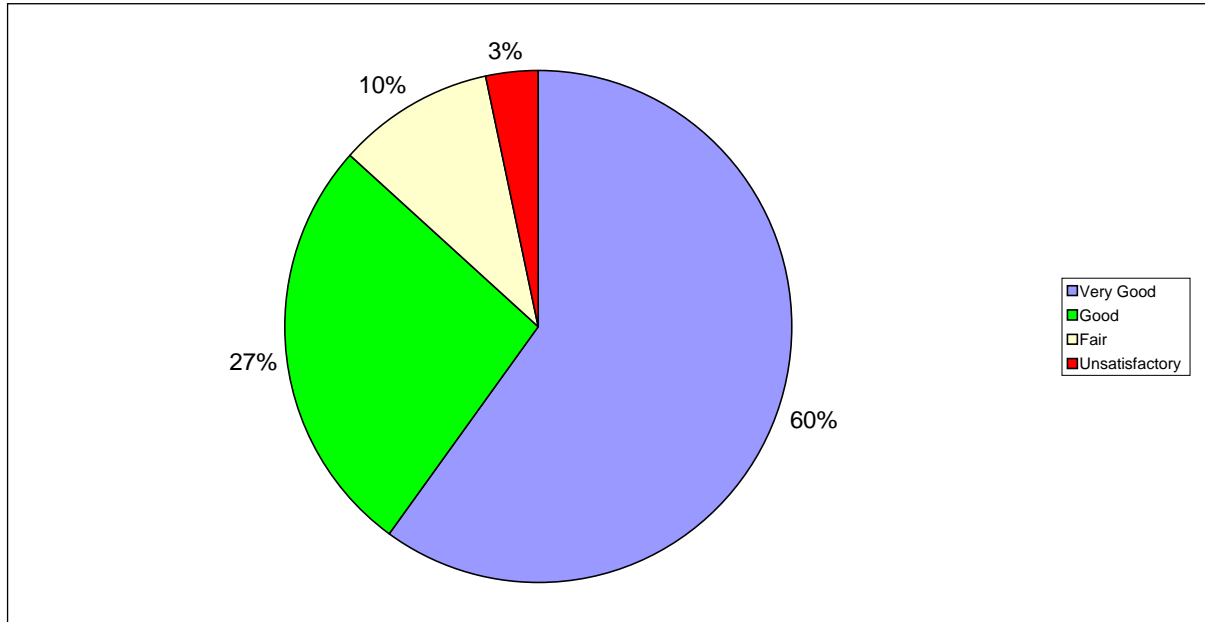
The graphs on the following pages show the proportion of grades awarded for each of the quality elements in 2004-07.

Distribution of review grades in cross-college elements in college reviews, 2004-07

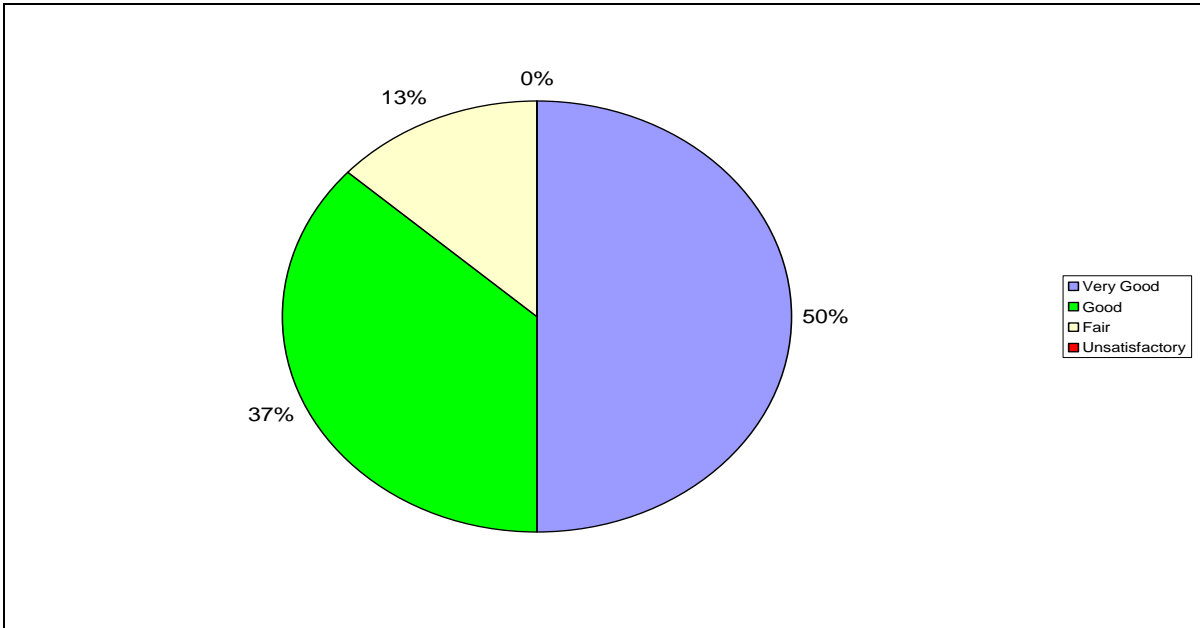
B1: Educational leadership, direction and management



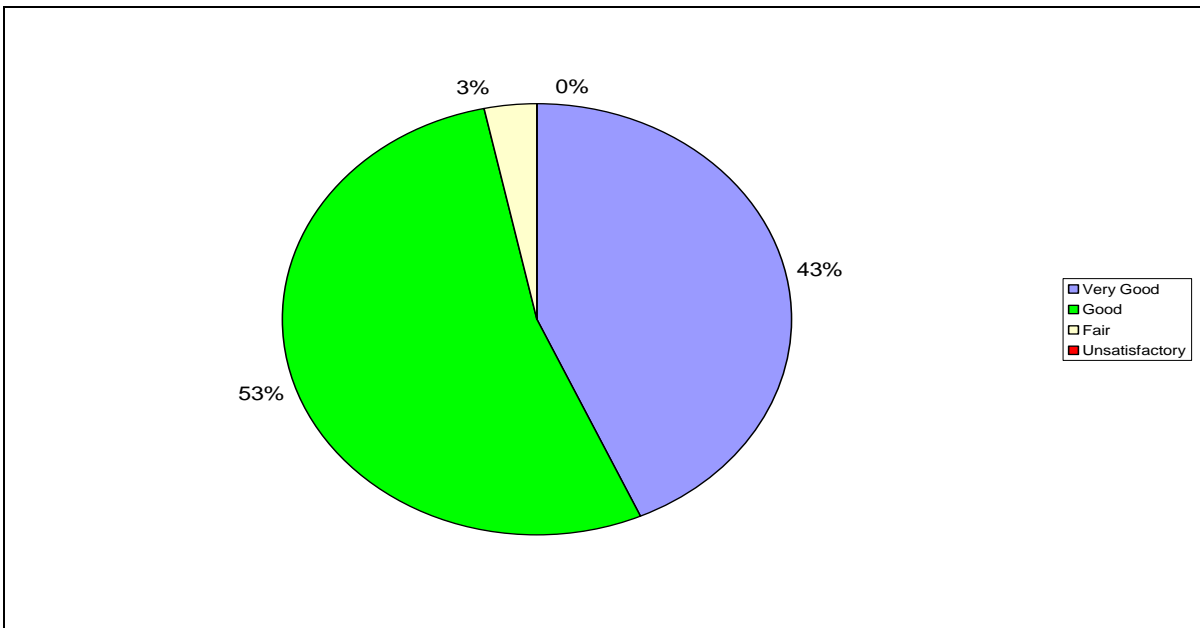
B2: Access and inclusion



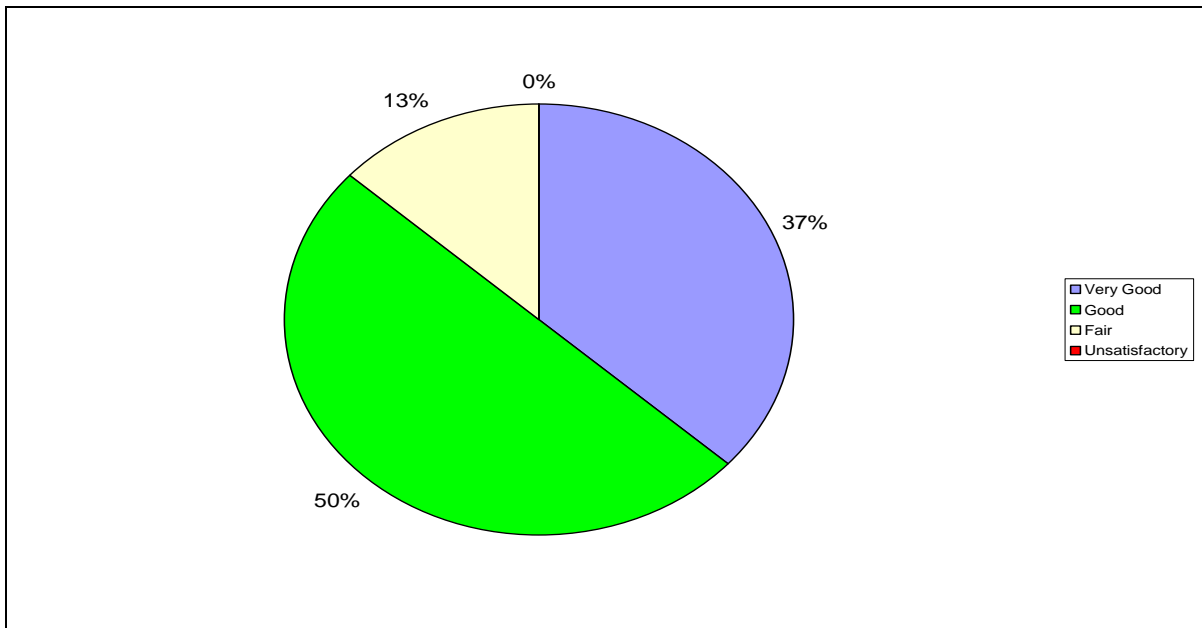
B3: Guidance and support



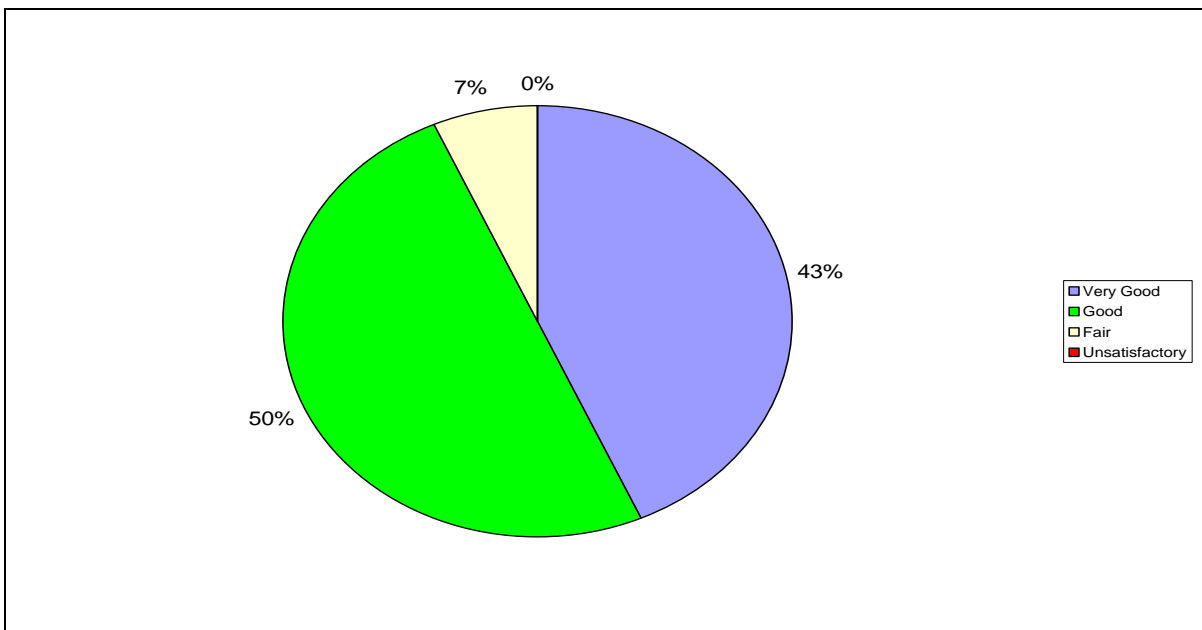
B4: Resources and services to support the learner



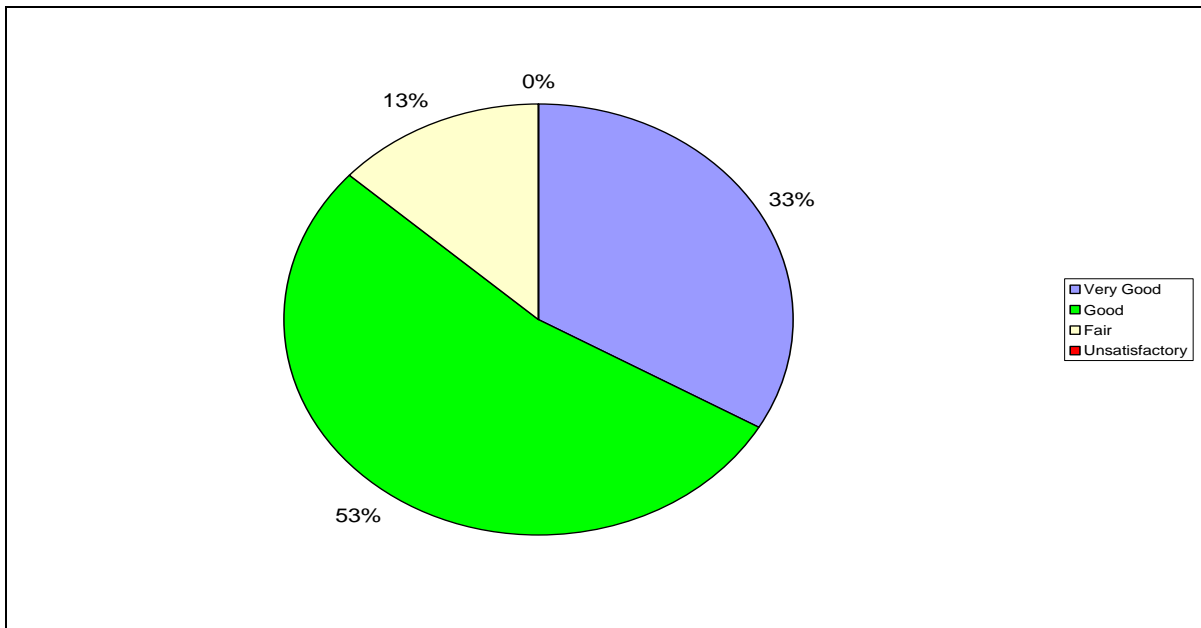
B5: Staff



B6: Quality assurance



B7: Quality improvement



4.2 Strengths

4.2.1 Analysis of strengths identified in cross-college reviews: Educational provision: design, planning and management

In this section the strengths recorded for the quality elements *B1: Educational leadership, direction and management* and *B2: Access and inclusion* are brought together. In 2004-07 the strengths that were identified most frequently in these two elements were that:

- the senior management team and the principal shared a clear vision and provided effective and enthusiastic leadership;
- college aims and objectives took account of partner needs and both local and government priorities;
- effective partnerships and links with stakeholders helped widen the range of learners taking part in college programmes; and
- college commitment to access and inclusion resulted in clear strategic plans.

4.2.2 Analysis of strengths identified in cross-college reviews: Learner services, resources and staff

This section covers the three quality elements *B3: Guidance and support*, *B4: Resources and services to support the learner* and *B5: Staff*.

The strengths most frequently identified under *B3: Guidance and support* were as follows.

- Managers were effective in communicating their commitment to supporting learners.
- Helpful and approachable staff supported learners' needs well.
- The college provided effective access to guidance and support to meet learner needs.
- Effective partnership arrangements enhanced the helpful guidance provided by college staff for learners.
- Early identification of learning needs, including core skills, helped support learners well.

For *B4: Resources and services to support the learner* the following common strengths were identified.

- Learner accommodation and resources provided well for learner needs and for developments in the curriculum.
- Facilities, including assistive technologies and accommodation, provided well for learners with impaired mobility and for those with extended learning support needs.
- Implementation of college ICT strategies met learner needs well.
- Library and quiet learning spaces catered well for learners and facilitated independent learning.

In *B5: Staff*, the following common strengths were identified.

- Continuing professional development (CPD) provision met staff training needs effectively.
- Staff review processes identified training needs well.
- Staff were well qualified and had relevant vocational experience.
- There was a strong commitment to teamwork among staff.

4.2.3 Analysis of strengths identified in cross-college reviews: Quality assurance, improvement and enhancement

This theme includes the quality elements *B6: Quality assurance* and *B7: Quality improvement*. The following common strengths were recorded.

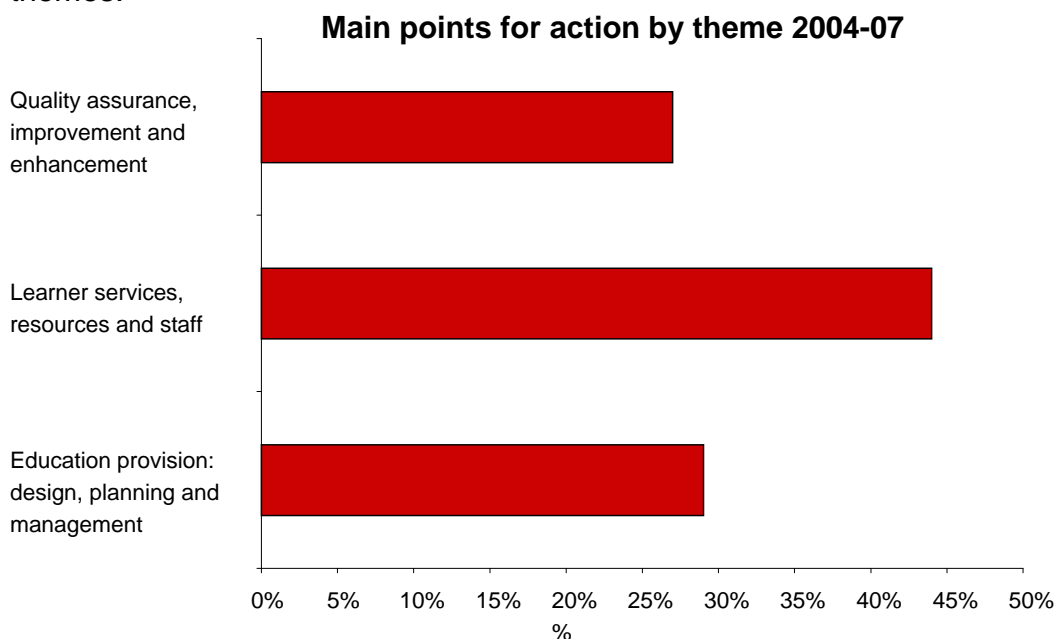
- Well-developed and comprehensive quality systems helped improve the learner experience.
- Staff demonstrated good levels of knowledge of quality procedures.
- Staff were committed to improving the quality of learner experience.
- The college had a strategic commitment to self-evaluation and staff were involved in self-evaluation procedures.

4.3 Main points for action

Main points for action are recorded by HMIE only for the cross-college B elements in reviews. In 2004-07 there were 298 *main points for action*. They have been organised under the same themes as in the previous section:

- educational provision, design, planning and management;
- learner services, resources and staff; and
- quality assurance, improvement and enhancement.

The bar chart below shows the distribution of main points for action for each of these themes.



4.3.1 Analysis of *main points for action* identified in cross-college reviews: Educational provision: design, planning and management

Twenty-nine per cent of all *main points for action* related to quality elements *B1* and *B2*. The areas in which HMIE most frequently identified *main points for action* were as follows.

- The college should improve communication links across college functions to inform strategic and operational planning.
- The college should develop approaches to target setting with outcome-based and measurable plans.

4.3.2 Analysis of *main points for action* identified in cross-college review: Learner services, resources and staff

Forty-four per cent, or almost half of all cross-college *main points for action*, related to quality elements *B3*, *B4* and *B5*. The most frequent areas for *main points for action* related to:

- systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of CPD activities undertaken by staff;
- progressing action plans on building adaptations to support access for all learners; and
- the systematic profiling of learners' core skills.

4.3.3 Analysis of *main points for action* identified in cross-college review: Quality assurance, improvement and enhancement

Twenty-seven per cent of all cross-college *main points for action* related to quality elements *B6* and *B7*. The three most frequent areas for *main points for action* were that:

- team action plans should include specific, measurable targets to help address weaknesses;
- the college should develop procedures to systematically identify and share best practice in learning and teaching; and
- self-evaluation procedures should be extended to cover all aspects of college services that impact on the learner experience and be linked to improvement planning activity.

5. Sector-leading and innovative practice

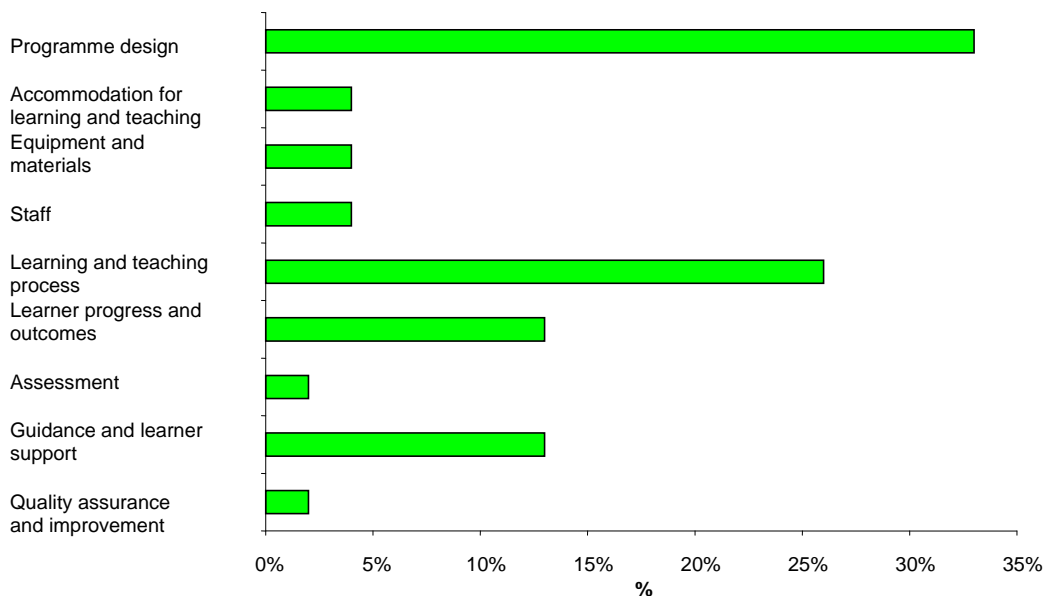
Review reports identified and described a range of practice that was:

- sector-leading and innovative;
- particularly effective in terms of impact or outcomes; and
- able to be replicated, adopted and customised by other colleges.

During the review process, such sector-leading and innovative practice (SLIP) examples were identified in both subject and cross-college quality elements. In the subject elements, reviewers identified 54 examples of SLIP from the 31 colleges reviewed. The bar chart below shows the frequency of SLIP examples for each of the quality elements in which they occurred. For this analysis, quality elements A1-A4, A6, and A8-A9 are considered separately, not under the general heading of *other significant factors*.

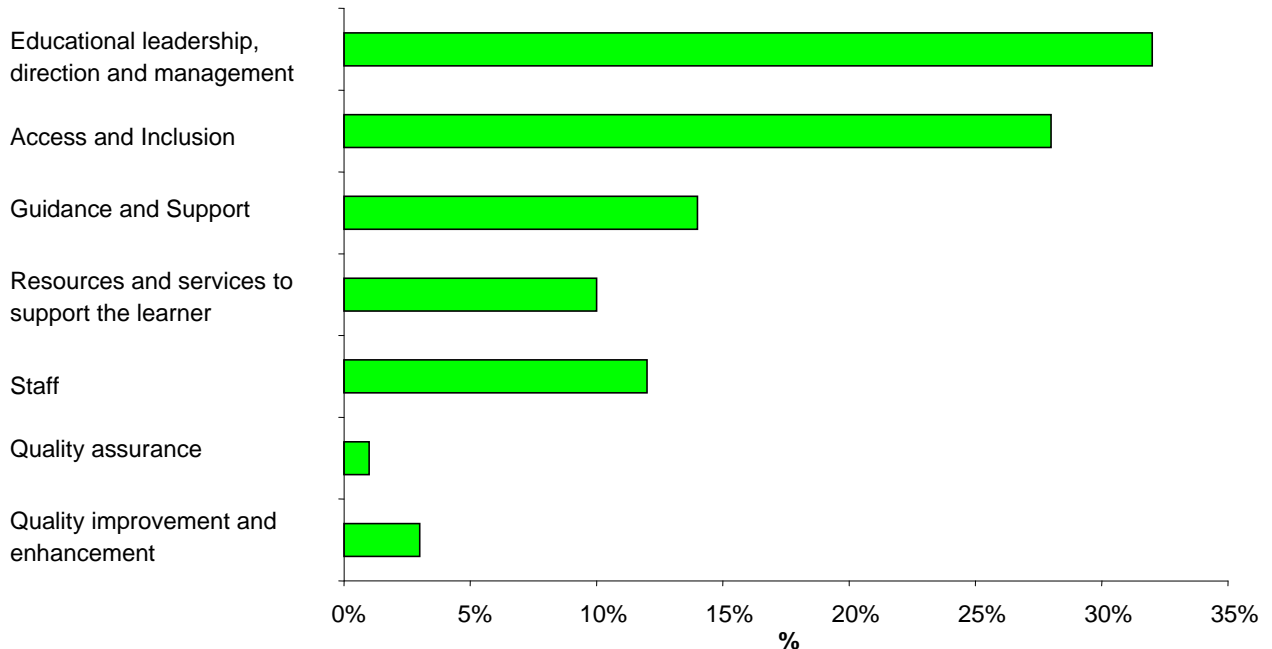
The bar chart shows that in the 31 reviews, 33% of SLIP examples were identified in the quality element *programme design*. *Learning and teaching processes* accounted for 26%, *learner progress and outcomes* 13% and *guidance and learner support* 13%. There were two SLIP examples recorded in each of the quality elements *accommodation for learning and teaching*, *equipment and materials*, and *staff*. There was one SLIP example recorded in each of the quality elements *quality assurance and improvement* and *assessment*.

Frequency of SLIP examples by quality element in subject review in 2004-07



In cross-college reviews, 78 SLIP examples were identified. The bar chart below shows their distribution across the cross-college quality elements to which they are related.

Frequency of SLIP examples by quality element in cross-college review in 2004-07



The bar chart shows that almost two-thirds of SLIP examples related to the quality elements *B1: Educational leadership, direction and management* and *B2: Access and inclusion*. The quality element with the greatest number of SLIP examples was *B1: Educational leadership, direction and management*, with 32% of SLIP examples. There was only one SLIP example recorded in *B6: Quality assurance* and two examples recorded in *B7: Quality improvement*.

The full range of SLIP examples identified in both the subject and cross-college reviews is available on the HMIE website using the following link <http://www.hmie.gov.uk/hmiegoodpractice/Default.aspx>.

6. Some key messages from the 2004-07 reviews: summary

Colleges have a critical role to play in meeting the lifelong learning needs of their communities. In recent years colleges have further developed policies, quality systems and procedures which are designed to meet the needs of their learners and improve the learning experience.

The HMIE report *Improving Scottish Education* summarised findings in college reviews over the 2002-2005 review cycle. It identified areas where colleges were doing things well and others which were priorities for improvement. The report outlined the need to:

- identify, capture and use effectively the good practice which exists in colleges;
- ensure there is sufficient staff expertise, access to equipment and facilities, and variety in teaching approaches to ensure the effective contribution of ICT to the learning process;
- focus on self-evaluation procedures to improve the quality of learning and teaching; and
- make better use of performance indicator data to evaluate the effectiveness of programme delivery.

The key strengths and weaknesses which emerged from reviews between 2004 and 2007 are presented below. Particular strengths identified in *A5: Learning and teaching process* and *A7: Learner progress and outcomes* were as follows.

- Teaching staff applied their specialist knowledge in order to enhance the learning experience for learners.
- Learners displayed a high level of motivation and engagement in their programmes.
- Learners were generally making good progress in achieving their learning goals and developing appropriate vocational skills.
- A high proportion of learners progressed successfully into employment or further study.

However, the review process also identified weaknesses in *A5: Learning and teaching process* and *A7: Learner progress and outcomes* that were relevant to attrition from specific programmes or learners' low success rates in award-bearing programmes. They most frequently related to:

- resources, including ICT, not being used effectively in support of learning;
- staff utilising too narrow a range of teaching approaches;
- staff not systematically checking learners' understanding or providing them with effective feedback; and
- learners making insufficient progress in developing core skills.

These strengths and weaknesses were underpinned by *other significant factors* that had a positive or negative impact on the learning experience.

Positive *other significant factors* included:

- recent improvements in accommodation and facilities;
- strong links with employers and partner organisations;
- the use of PLPs to monitor and set learning targets; and
- appropriate learning support for learners and provision of a range of support measures.

Other significant factors which had a negative impact upon the learning experience included:

- accommodation that was poorly designed for learning activities; and
- insufficient access to resources, including ICT resources.

It is clear from the strengths recorded during reviews that senior managers in colleges had been proactive in developing and implementing systems and procedures to improve the quality of the learner experience. In the cross-college quality elements in the reviews for 2004-07 HMIE identified major strengths where senior managers had:

- developed effective partnerships and links with stakeholders which helped extend learner participation by offering a range of programmes in a variety of modes;
- provided appropriate access to well-coordinated guidance and support which met learner needs effectively;
- provided accommodation which met learner needs and expectations well;
- implemented CPD procedures which met the training needs of college staff effectively; and
- implemented comprehensive and well-developed quality systems to improve the learner experience.

In other cases, colleges had developed processes and systems for quality improvement and enhancement but the impact on learners had been limited. Issues included:

- insufficient targeting of college and subject team action plans on specific issues to help address weaknesses in key areas;
- existing procedures to identify and share best practice in learning and teaching were not sufficiently systematic;
- the lack of robust procedures for evaluating the effectiveness of CPD activities undertaken by teaching staff hindered plans for the improvement of the learner experience; and
- self-evaluation procedures and operational planning which did not adequately cover all cross-college and support functions that impacted on the learner experience.

7. Follow-through phase of review

The follow-through review phase aims to assist the college in preparing an agenda for action to improve the quality of the learner experience. It:

- is designed to be proportionate to the strengths and points for development identified during the phase one review;
- investigates and writes up selected practice associated with some of the key strengths identified during the phase one review, and other examples of innovative or sector-leading practice;
- investigates the causes and extent of any significant weaknesses identified in *learning and teaching process*, and *learner progress and outcomes* during the phase one review, drilling down using selected (and occasionally all) A quality elements; and
- investigates the impact and causes of any significant weaknesses identified in the *Leadership and quality management* elements.

During the three years 2004-2007, the follow-through phase of review has become well established and the commentary below for 2006-07 is included for the first time in this analysis of reviews to provide a fuller picture of the complete review process.

In all of the 12 colleges reviewed in 2006-07, reviewers in the follow-through phase investigated and wrote up selected good practice associated with some of the key strengths identified during the phase one review, and other innovative or sector-leading examples of good practice. In three of the 12 colleges reviewed in 2006-07, follow-through related entirely to SLIP. In four colleges, six to eight examples of SLIP per college were confirmed during the follow-through phase with five or fewer SLIP examples being confirmed during follow-through in each of the remaining eight colleges.

During the follow-through phase, reviewers also investigated the causes and extent of weaknesses identified in both subject and cross-college quality elements. In 2006-07, a large amount of one college's follow-through activity related to weaknesses identified during phase one of the review. In four colleges, there was a broad range of follow-through activity encompassing both weaknesses and SLIP, whereas in the remaining four colleges there was limited follow-through activity outside of exploring SLIP examples. In one college, follow-through phase activity included further observations of learning and teaching within the same subject areas as those covered in the core review.

In 2006-07 *A7: Learner progress and outcomes* accounted for most follow-through activity (18%) related to weaknesses in the subject elements. The quality elements *B6: Quality Assurance* and *B7: Quality improvement and enhancement* together accounted for a quarter (25%) of follow-through phase activities related to weaknesses in the cross-college elements. The single quality element that accounted for most activity relating to weaknesses during the follow-through phase of cross-college elements was *B3: Guidance and Support* (18%).

8. College staff evaluations of the review process

HMIE invites and encourages colleges to provide feedback about the review process and its outcomes through the use of questionnaires and a discussion with the principal after both phases of the review are complete. All comments from college staff are considered by HMIE in adjusting and in developing procedures for future reviews.

8.1 Evaluations from review phase one

Almost all respondents, in both the subject and college review process, rated the preliminary procedures, suitability of methods, deployment of reviewers, procedures employed and quality of feedback as *good* or better. Ninety-five per cent of respondents from the subject review process rated the usefulness of written feedback as *good* or better compared to 73% of respondents from the college review process.

A few aspects of the review process received less positive feedback from a few respondents involved in both the subject and college review process. These included the range of documentation required and the level of demand on staff.

Comments from respondents

The following comments have been chosen from feedback received about the first phase of reviews during 2006-07 to reflect the range of perceptions of college staff of the review process on specific aspects of the quality of provision in colleges:

- *Classroom observations, and interviews focusing on learning and teaching, were helpful and supportive.*
- *Over-emphasis on raw PI data.*
- *The review provided an excellent opportunity to focus on core functions and their impact, enhanced existing evaluation practice and was both motivating and reinforcing for staff, and constructive in terms of the way ahead.*
- *The reviewer was very focused and appeared to concentrate on the key evidence which considering the size and complexity of the department was no mean feat. The reviewer seemed to enjoy the review process which was very encouraging for everyone and increased confidence and motivation in the area. Everyone involved in the feedback sessions felt they were a positive and helpful aspect of the review process.*
- *Feedback sessions were accurate and helpful.*
- *Meaningful discussion with learners and a valuable professional dialogue on performance indicators.*
- *The process of allowing staff to present supporting folio material by way of justifying outcomes was fair and reasonable.*
- *Lots of materials were requested and then not used.*
- *We think that the increase in the amount of time spent speaking to students makes the review more effective than previously.*

- *The review was a challenge, and (the findings) exceptionally disappointing, however it was accurate and ultimately will prove developmental.*
- *It would help to see more detailed written feedback.*

8.2 Evaluations from the follow-through phase

Almost all respondents rated the suitability of methods employed by reviewers, the quality of the feedback given and the good practice explored as *good* or better. Asked to rate the follow-through phase in terms of helpfulness to the colleges, most respondents chose it *good* or better.

Comments from respondents

The following comments have been chosen from feedback about the follow-through phase of reviews during 2006-07 to reflect the range of perceptions of college staff of the review process on specific aspects of the quality of provision in colleges:

- *Accuracy of reviewers and handling of tensions is very good in most cases.*
- *Reviewers were insightful and impressive in the way they conducted the review. Good quality improvement pointers – very worthwhile.*
- *The follow-through involved a one-hour session with a reviewer in terms of learner progress and outcomes. The meeting was very supportive. A good developmental experience.*
- *Verbal feedback was very valuable in that there is a real honesty about the review findings.*
- *Provided opportunities for a number/range of staff to be involved in discussion resulted in positive feedback for staff re the benefits of review to course team and department as a whole.*

The examples above include comments from college managers and staff that occasionally conveyed reservations about aspects of the external review process. Generally such reservations are the views of individuals rather than representing commonly-held or widespread misgivings. However, HMIE have addressed any recurring themes as noted below.

- The concern expressed by a few respondents that performance indicators for learner attainment were given too much emphasis in arriving at grades for *learner progress and outcomes* was addressed during the training of Associate Assessors. Associate Assessors were reminded of the need to consider a wide range of evidence, including learner coursework, core skills and skills for citizenship and employability, distance travelled and the achievement of personal goals in individual learning plans.
- Concern was expressed, especially by college principals, on the quality of guidance from HMIE on the production of learner reports. This resulted in substantial revisions to this guidance. Many of the learner reports produced subsequently by colleges have been more appropriate for the target audience.
- Concern continues to be expressed at the volume of documentation required from colleges before reviews. HMIE has continued to encourage colleges to submit most documentation electronically.

- More than a few individuals continue to suggest that HMIE should observe more episodes of learning and teaching during external reviews. HMIE are considering possibilities for evaluating more learning and teaching by subject area as part of the evidence gathering for future aspect reports.

9. Glossary

CPD Continuing professional development

ESOL English for speakers of other languages

ICT Information and communications technology

PLP Personal learning plan

SFC Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council

SLIP Sector-leading and innovative practice