

Learning to improve: quality approaches for lifelong learning

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Foreword from the Deputy First Minister

This report creates a strategy for improving quality across post-compulsory education. It provides guidance for developing good learning within the different parts of the system.

It is written for individual staff and managers, quality assurance agencies, qualification awarding, funding and purchasing bodies.

The framework takes account of international best practice in quality improvement (such as the European Foundation for Quality Management Excellence Model), and is groundbreaking in applying it in new ways to our education sector. The report is also innovative in linking research and new thinking on learning and teaching, organisational behaviour and quality systems.

The report builds on the leadership in quality systems which Scotland has established. Our approach has had a major influence on the development of systems in the rest of the UK and increasingly abroad. Its implementation can give Scotland a significant lead ahead of the rest of the world in educational quality systems.

The report's key arguments are:

- that learner's needs should be at the centre of educational systems, but that all of the current quality systems need significant development to make this happen;
- that even more work needs to be done to make sure that the learner's voice is heard by educators;
- that to achieve improvement, 'tick box' or 'compliance' approaches will be counterproductive, and we need a productive relationship between education providers and external quality assurance agencies; and
- that if we are really to make improvements, individual staff and teams of staff have to continue to make the shift from a focus on 'teaching' to a focus on 'supporting learning', and have to be engaged effectively in reflecting on and improving their performance.

The report makes recommendations for action in five areas and proposes that the Scottish Executive convenes a working group of the partners to support and co-ordinate the development and implementation of action plans to implement the report by the different stakeholder groups working in partnership. I have asked my officials to take this work forward.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nicol Stephen". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Nicol Stephen, Deputy First Minister

Executive Summary

How can we be sure that learners are getting the best possible support from the education and training system to meet their needs and wants? This report examines ideas which help us to understand:

- the nature of learning;
- what quality and excellence in learning should be;
- what we should mean by 'good teaching';
- what stakeholders want from qualifications; and
- how we should promote quality learning.

The report puts the learner at the centre of the system. And it analyses the many and complex roles that educators must fill if they are to facilitate, support, and guide learners and evaluate and assess their achievements effectively. It recommends that we consciously shift our thinking, moving our definition of good teaching from what might be caricatured as 'well prepared, appropriate learning materials, well-organised, presented and assessed' to 'nurturing, inspiring and developing motivated learners and supporting their learning'.

We need our learners to be confident, motivated and self-directing if we are to meet our economic and social goals. We want learners who are more demanding of us – and therefore helping to push improved quality – and of themselves – thereby making better choices and driving themselves to greater achievement; and we want learning providers who are positive, creative, reflective, and responsive. We want to create powerful learning cycles between providers and learners – to improve service quality – and between providers and the economy and society – to create and maintain up-to-date, worthwhile qualifications. The report argues that the keys to this are: building the capacity of providers to reflect on their performance and listen to learners; and continuing development for educators in the full range of subject/technical and educational skills and knowledge.

The elements are already in place, and we need to support their further development. We should do this by building on existing systems, and by avoiding (or limiting the effect of) forces which would inhibit, distract or divert us from these goals. This will require sustained effort by national agencies to promote this thinking about learners and quality, by providers to continually seek improvement, and by learners to become more engaged.

The report suggests the following lines for development:

- **Creating more demanding learners** by: building aspirations and expectations; helping learners develop their personal vision and to become more self-directed lifelong learners; encouraging more positive interaction between learners and educators; strengthening student associations' support for and advocacy for learners; and amplifying the voice of learners through systematic research.
- **Building management and organisational capacity for improvement** by: supporting and strengthening quality cultures in providers; continuing to give priority to staff and team development; and more consciously building understanding of how people learn into programmes.

- **Developing funding and purchasing approaches to support quality** by: supporting and developing local management capacity; using ‘relationship contracting’ approaches to build capacity; and by taking care with the use of inevitably partial performance indicators.
- **Maintaining the value of qualifications** by: speeding up and strengthening a ‘learning cycle’ between educators, learners, the economy and employers to ensure courses and qualifications are up to date and ‘worth something’; being clear that the processes and mechanisms to promote excellence in quality of service and standards of qualifications are very different; and considering the balance between subject/technical content and skills, and learners’ growth in programme design and qualifications.
- **Developing quality review approaches** by: explicitly basing them on learner-centred and quality improvement models; reforming and re-expressing them from the learner perspective; re-emphasising external quality agencies’ purpose as evaluative support to help providers improve; and creating new relationships between the different quality agencies, founded on mutual recognition, to continue the work of reducing overlap and to stimulate common development work.

Different parts of the system are at different stages of development, operate on different scales, and have different types of learners and provision. This, combined with the pre-existing cycles of quality assurance and development activity, means that embedding these ideas will take place at different rates across the different parts of the system. A process of action planning and reporting will therefore be needed to give impetus and keep the approach alive, especially given the fact that this report proposes a gradual, but deep, process of evolutionary change over time.

Given that one of the central messages of this report is the need for ownership – capturing hearts and minds of all the players is vital if these ideas are to be embedded in what we do – centralised action planning is unlikely to be successful. Building on the approaches successfully taken by the further and higher education sector in developing their new approaches to quality may be a way forward. Under this kind of model, a working group of the partners convened by the Scottish Executive could support and co-ordinate the development of action plans by key stakeholder groups working in partnership, periodically reviewing and evaluating progress.

Above all we should keep in mind the idea of improvement itself as learning – the education business should be better placed than any other industry to keep learning about itself, find out how it can better support learners, and evaluate its achievements.

Preface

This report is a result of and builds on the philosophy underpinning the Scottish Executive's Lifelong Learning Strategy *Life Through Learning; Learning Through Life* which was published in February 2003. The strategy sets out the vision of:

"The best possible match between the learning opportunities open to people and the skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours which will strengthen Scotland's economy and society."

and sets five people-centred goals:

- a Scotland where people have the confidence, enterprise, knowledge, creativity and skills they need to participate in economic, social and civic life;
- a Scotland where people demand and providers deliver a high quality learning experience;
- a Scotland where people's knowledge and skills are recognised, used and developed to best effect in their workplace;
- a Scotland where people are given the information, guidance and support they need to make effective learning decisions and transitions; and
- a Scotland where people have the chance to learn, irrespective of their background or current personal circumstances.

As part of goal 2, the strategy set out the need:

"to develop a quality framework for post-compulsory education and training (both public and private provision) which is 'fit for purpose', owned at the point of delivery, does not overburden learning providers with audit requirements, considers results (outcomes and outputs), as well as inputs and processes that impact on the quality of the learners' experience. It should encourage organisational development, openness and accountability and improve quality across the board."

The strategy then said that, to realise this, the Scottish Executive would:

"commission a study, reporting by early 2004, on the current quality assurance landscape in Scotland, drawing on other countries' approaches to enhancing the quality of the learning experience. It will look at quality assurance arrangements for other educational sectors that collaborate on lifelong learning provision, including schools and the higher education sector, and the options for involving all providers in developing a new Scottish approach. The study will also provide options for the future development of the approach and widening its coverage. In doing so, it will take account of the respective needs of both the learner and the learning provider, as well as of current and future resource requirements. New arrangements consequent on the findings of the study would be phased in as resources permit and on timescales to harmonise with pre-existing cycles of quality assurance activity."

I was asked to undertake the study on part-time secondment to the Scottish Executive, specifically to develop a quality framework for post-compulsory education and training in Scotland which should give us the best chance of optimising the service to learners, and to identify the development priorities for the system. In discussion, it was agreed that by a 'framework' we meant a set of guiding ideas, principles, or philosophy on which we could build approaches which promote excellence and improvement and which would help us avoid actions which would inhibit this.

Such a framework if agreed and owned by the partners would help all the different players – providers, funders, quality agencies, and learners – by providing a common, consistent backdrop for development. The framework would also provide the basis for identifying the priorities for change and evaluating possible approaches and, because any changes would be phased in, possibly over a long period, and by different sectors at different rates, the framework would be something that would provide useful guidance to the post-compulsory education sector for the next decade.

This report therefore examines the forces that are at work in post-compulsory education, viewed as a complex system. It suggests a framework of ideas for and approaches to how these forces can better be harnessed to serve learners and society generally. What the report does not do is provide another checklist of indicators of quality as there are plenty of these lists already in existence, although it does suggest lines for their development. There is development and change taking place in every part of the system, and this report provides a basis to make this development more coherent.

This study was undertaken over the period 2003 – 2004 and used a combination of desk research and dialogue with key stakeholders and experts, including colleagues from other parts of the UK. A key element was a series of workshops at which these ideas were explored, tested, and developed with a wide range of stakeholders.

This report builds on the work of many people. There has been a great deal of work by educators on standards, quality and quality improvement. The system is not broken – evidence from quality inspections, reviews and audits, from post-qualification employment rates, from employer surveys, and from learner satisfaction surveys shows this. However, if we are seeking continuous quality improvement, we should continually re-examine what we do. Hopefully this report will make a useful contribution to the further development of the education and training system in Scotland, and will support the efforts of educators, managers and all those working with learners.

I would like to thank all those that participated and contributed their ideas so freely to the study.



Laurence Howells

Director of Learning Policy and Strategy for the
Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council



Learning to improve Introduction

Learning is a complex process. Different learners want different things from their learning. Different learners learn in different ways. We expect different things of learners at different stages. Learning takes place throughout people's lives, mostly without the involvement of education or training organisations. Learners learn from their peers and each other, often as much as from their educators. Learning can be practical, acquiring a skill; or intellectual, finding out how to think differently; or emotional, exploring and learning how to deal with your own feelings, attitudes and beliefs; and often can be a mixture of all these things. There are many different stakeholders: learners themselves, parents, employers, trade unions, teachers and lecturers, tax-payers, Government all with a range of different interests in learning.

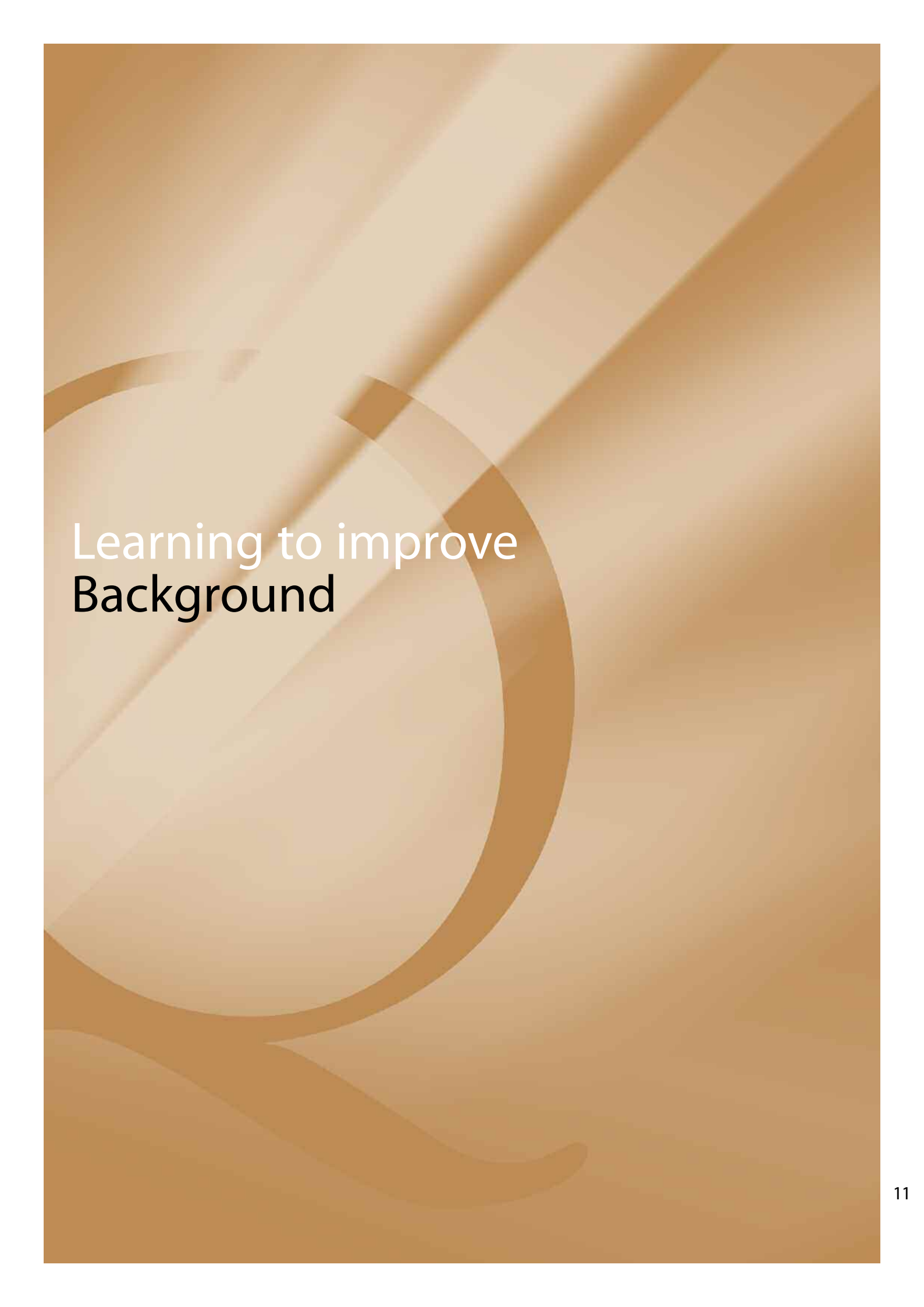
Learning is not quite the same as other service industries and this means we have to be careful about consumer/producer metaphors. Learning is not a product created by educators and delivered to learners. Knowledge is not poured into learners' heads. Skill is not imparted to people's hands as you might install a new computer program. It is the learner who creates the learning, in their heads or their hands, and it is the job of the educator to facilitate, guide and support the learner to make this transformation of themselves, their knowledge, attitudes and abilities. Active participation by the learner is required if learning is to take place.

And if the educator is not a producer, then neither is the learner a consumer. The education service must be learner-centred, but we must not be misled into forgetting the real nature of learning by the producer/consumer metaphor.¹

Things are even more complex, because learners will not learn unless they respect their educators for their knowledge, experience and skill, and educators are not only facilitators of learning, they also have to judge whether learners have met the standard for particular qualifications. They also have to design qualifications appropriate for particular trades, or professions, and which meet expectations for awards at different levels. This means that there will inevitably be an authority-relationship between educators and learners. Knowledge and experience and their role as gatekeepers to qualifications, mean that educators are authority figures. There is therefore a danger that this inherent professional authority comes to dominate over the interests and voices of learners. Educators have to work hard to avoid this, particularly given the legacy that we know many learners have from their experience in the school system. (See Learners' Voices p22).

Valuable though the consumer/producer metaphor is in emphasising the fact that the education and training system is there to benefit learners, it is insufficient to explain what is going on in the learning process. Therefore in putting service to the learner at the centre, we need to recognise the reality of the complex interactions between learners and educators, and examine how the forces at work can be better harnessed to serve learners and society generally.

¹ Indeed, often the actual customer or purchaser is the learner's employer (or sometimes the Government), who may have required the learner to take some training, or may have commissioned and paid for the course, or may have given the learner time off work for study.



Learning to improve Background

Overview of post-compulsory education system

This section provides a very brief overview of the main components of, and the quality assurance arrangements for the publicly-funded post-compulsory education system in Scotland. The publicly-funded sector is the focus of this report which is, of course, only a partial picture of post-compulsory learning in Scotland. For example, employers in Scotland spend an estimated £2.2 billion on their own education and training activities.

The Scottish Executive estimates² that there are roughly 800,000 learners (most part time) in the formal post-16 education system, both academic and vocational, and there are more learners involved in the community learning and development sector and in the voluntary sector. Job Centre Plus also supports some learning along with its other programmes for job seekers.

The main sectors are:

- Higher Education Institutions, with 20 universities and colleges. Institutions are responsible for their qualifications (in a few cases awards are validated by other Scottish Universities or by organisations such as the Open University Validation Service). External quality assurance is commissioned by the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC) from the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Scotland. A new enhancement-led approach to quality assurance has recently been developed, by a partnership involving the Funding Council, institutions, the National Union of Students (NUS) and the QAA.
- Scotland's colleges, with 43 colleges. The vast bulk of qualifications are validated by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and other awarding bodies. External quality assurance is commissioned by the Scottish Further Education Funding Council (SFEFC) from Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HMIE) for most of the provision in Scotland's colleges.³ The Funding Council and HMIE, with the sector and students, are currently implementing new approaches based on experience from the last cycle of reviews of colleges.
- Vocational Education and Training schemes (such as Skillseekers, Modern Apprenticeships, etc) operated by Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Island Enterprise and the Local Enterprise Companies. Qualifications are awarded by bodies such as SQA, City and Guilds, etc. Providers include Scotland's colleges, private training providers, voluntary organisations and local authorities. There is a wide range of providers, from large organisations operating nationally across the UK to very small niche providers, for example in rural areas, offering provision to small numbers of trainees. External quality assurance is provided through the Scottish Quality Management System (SQMS) with audits carried out under contract let by Scottish Enterprise on behalf of itself and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.
- Community Learning and Development (CLD) refers to community-based learning opportunities that include adult groups and classes, family learning and literacy and numeracy support. CLD is delivered through community learning and development partnerships in each of the 32 local authority areas in Scotland. Providers include local authorities, Scotland's colleges and voluntary sector organisations. Some programmes lead to SQA or other accreditation. HMIE has published a self-evaluation framework for CLD which it uses in inspecting and reporting on provision in local areas.

² Background paper for the review of Funding of Learners, Analytical Services Division of the Scottish Executive, November 2003

³ For example, HMIE does not review higher education provision in colleges covered by the UHI Millennium Institute. This provision is reviewed by QAA Scotland.

Evidence of the quality of provision currently

The evidence from quality reviews and other information across all the sectors is that 'the system is not broken'. Taken as a whole HMIE reviews, QAA reviews, SQMS audits, and SQA reviews show a positive picture and where there are issues requiring attention, action is being taken. Learner feedback⁴, where it is available, is positive. Feedback from employers, again where it is available, is generally good.⁵ There are continuing concerns from employers about key skills, particularly the softer skills, although these concerns seem to apply more to workers in jobs requiring generally lower skills.

Quality improvement concepts

A review of the literature on quality improvement shows that there has been a progressive move since the 1950's from concepts of quality control to quality assurance, and to quality improvement. There are many writers on quality, and there is a consensus that the creation of a quality culture throughout a business, and systematic examination of the business designed to identify areas for improvement are the keys.⁶ The special nature of quality in service industries is stressed in the literature. In service industries, because products are intangible, have no shelf life, and are created at the point of interaction with customers, ensuring quality requires different approaches. A significant factor influencing the quality of services is often the overall environment in which the service is delivered, including frequently the behaviour of other service users. A key conclusion from the literature is that, in service businesses, quality is a human resource management issue.⁷

Models such as the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model^{®8} have been recently promoted (for example by the Cabinet Office) as frameworks for people to think about quality. The EFQM builds on ideas on quality from around the world and invites organisations to reflect on how good they are at the full range of aspects of excellence, from leadership, people and process management, to results for customers and society. This model has been successfully used within the education sector.⁹ Some concerns however have been expressed about some of its features, particularly the applicability of the concept of 'customer' to the learning sector. The existing frameworks for quality within the post-compulsory education system in Scotland cover the same ground as this type of model with only minor differences. All the main educational quality systems regularly review their frameworks against models such as the EFQM and adapt and develop their approaches – this study does not therefore repeat this work.¹⁰

⁴ About 90% of the learners surveyed in FE and HE institutions were satisfied with the quality of their learning experience (Survey of student experience, Scottish Funding Councils for further and higher education, FE/15/03, HE 18/03, 2003). And Scottish Enterprise's follow up surveys of trainees leaving national training programmes show learners reporting that their training was of use in building confidence, learning new skills, preparation for work and as a stepping stone to new learning (Skillseekers Follow Up Survey 2003, July 2003).

⁵ For example, Skills in Scotland surveys in both 2002 and 2003, conducted by Futureskills Scotland reported that about 80% of employers considered that recruits from FE and HE were well prepared for employment. More employers (82%) felt HE students were well prepared than FE students (74%).

⁶ For example, W Edwards Deming, Quality Productivity and Competitive Position, MIT, 1982.

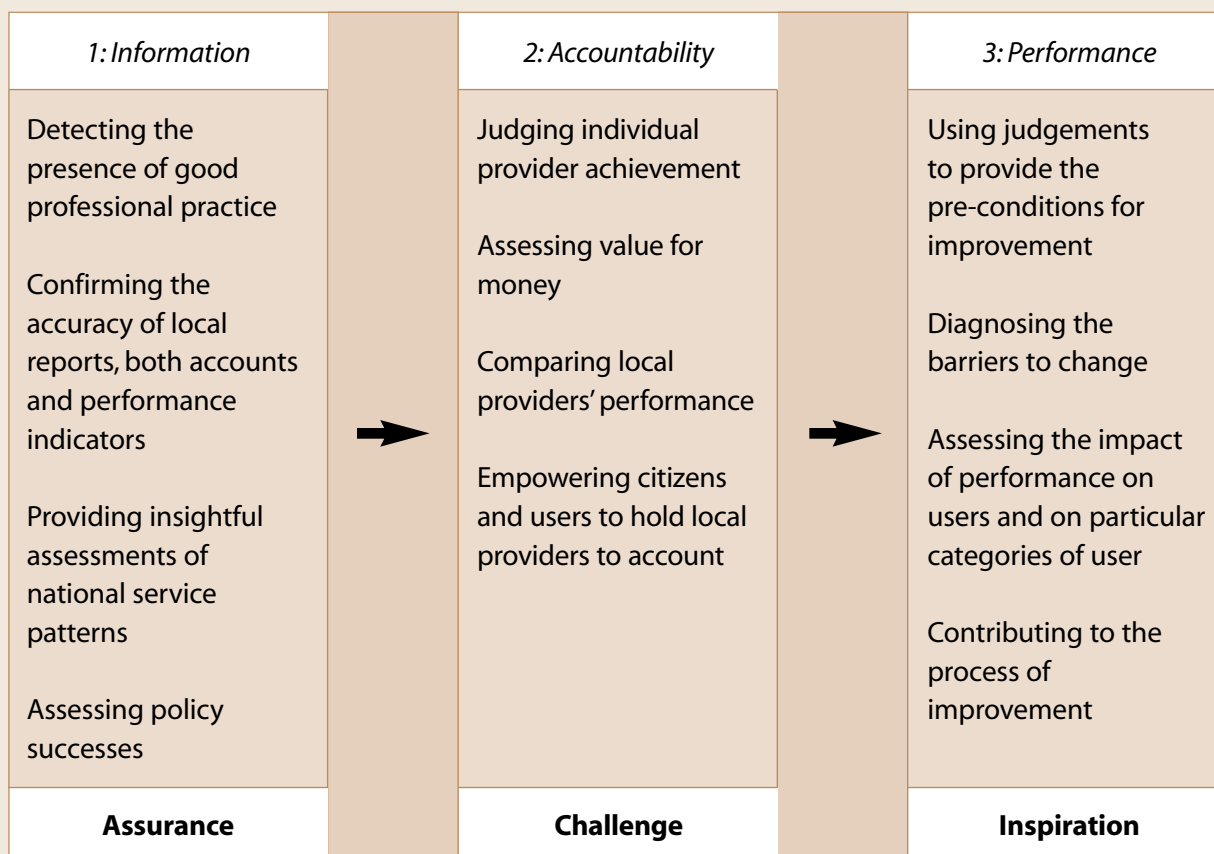
⁷ For example, The Quest for Quality in Services, Rosander, A.C. 1989, American Society for Quality Control.

⁸ The European Foundation for Quality Management: www.efqm.org

⁹ For example, Applying self-assessment against the EFQM Excellence Model[®] in Further and Higher Education, Consortium for Excellence in Higher Education, 2003

¹⁰ For example, Steed, C, Arnold, G, Mapping the QAA Framework and the EFQM Excellence Model, GMP 143/QAA, July 2001.

The Prime Minister’s Office of Public Services Reform recently reviewed approaches to inspection of public services.¹¹ This review found that “*the meaning and purpose of inspection have changed over time. It continues to provide vital assurances to the public, to departments and to the service providers, and to scrutinise accountabilities, but it is also increasingly making a contribution to service improvement. Some inspectorates are achieving this shift more quickly than others.*” The report illustrates this shift as follows:



This review emphasises that providing information, ensuring compliance and supporting accountability (both by individual providers and by purchasers/funding bodies) remain important, but that a shift of focus towards enhancing performance is required. The idea of a shift from ‘assurance’ towards ‘inspiration’ is an important one, and sets a very different tone to the relationship between providers, external agencies, and service users.

Other UK countries’ and sectors’ experience

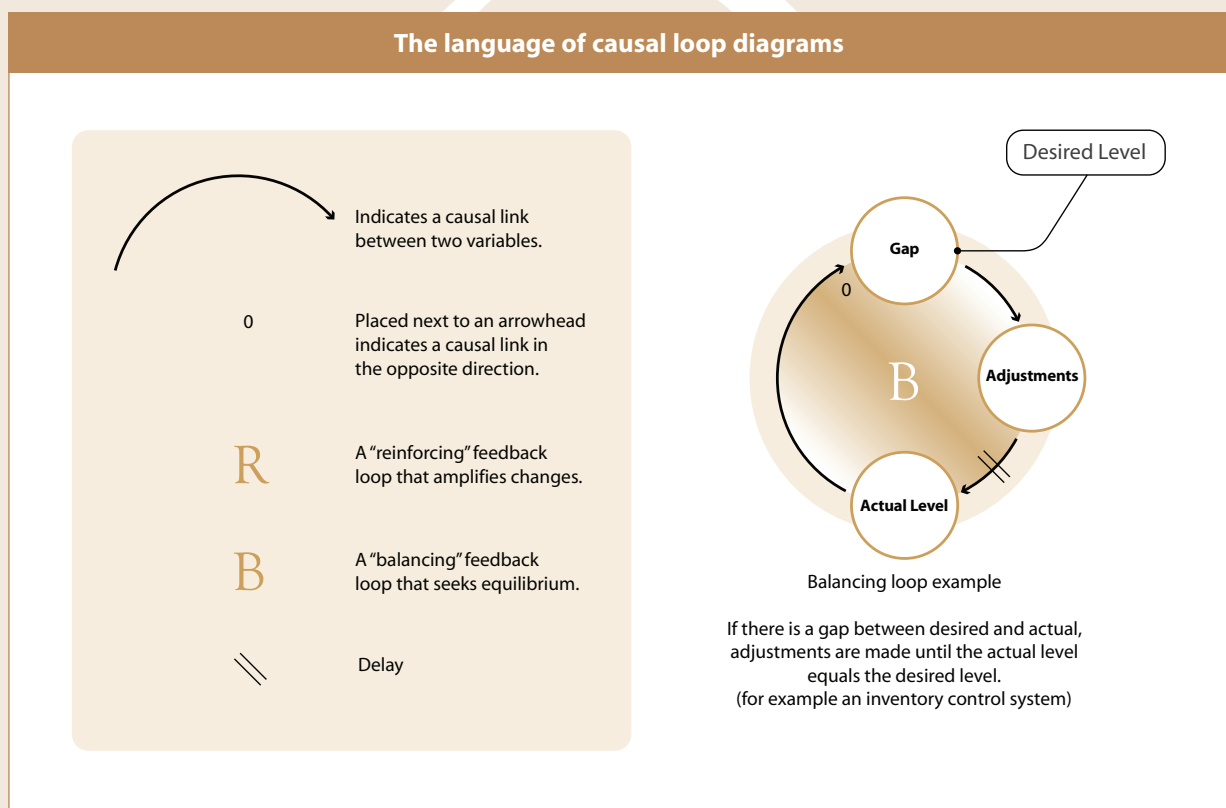
Annex A summarises information from other UK countries and sectors involved in lifelong learning. The overall message is that all the systems are moving towards models based on improvement, with self-evaluation becoming a common key tool. There are different emphases given to the place of external review in the different countries and to the place of the learner voice in the system. There are approaches being tried where funding is being used in ways aimed at promoting excellence. And there seem to be common concerns expressed about the nature of educational products, specifically the content of the curriculum and the skills which programmes develop.

¹¹ Inspecting for improvement: developing a customer focussed approach, The Prime Minister’s Office of Public Services Reform, July 2003.

Tools used in this report

This report uses systems thinking tools to illustrate and provide a way of describing how complex systems work. These tools provide a graphic way of examining such systems. A particular advantage of this approach is its clarification of situations where behaviour is influenced by interconnected, non-linear relationships. By providing a visual representation, this helps to clarify complex issues, bringing out the key elements involved and making explicit the mental models that underlie systems. This approach also emphasises that it is the interrelationships among parts, and how these interrelationships affect the common purpose of the system that are important; that the whole is the most important; and that parts have no meaning in isolation.¹²

The key tool used is 'causal loop' diagrams, which show links between elements of a system by arrows.

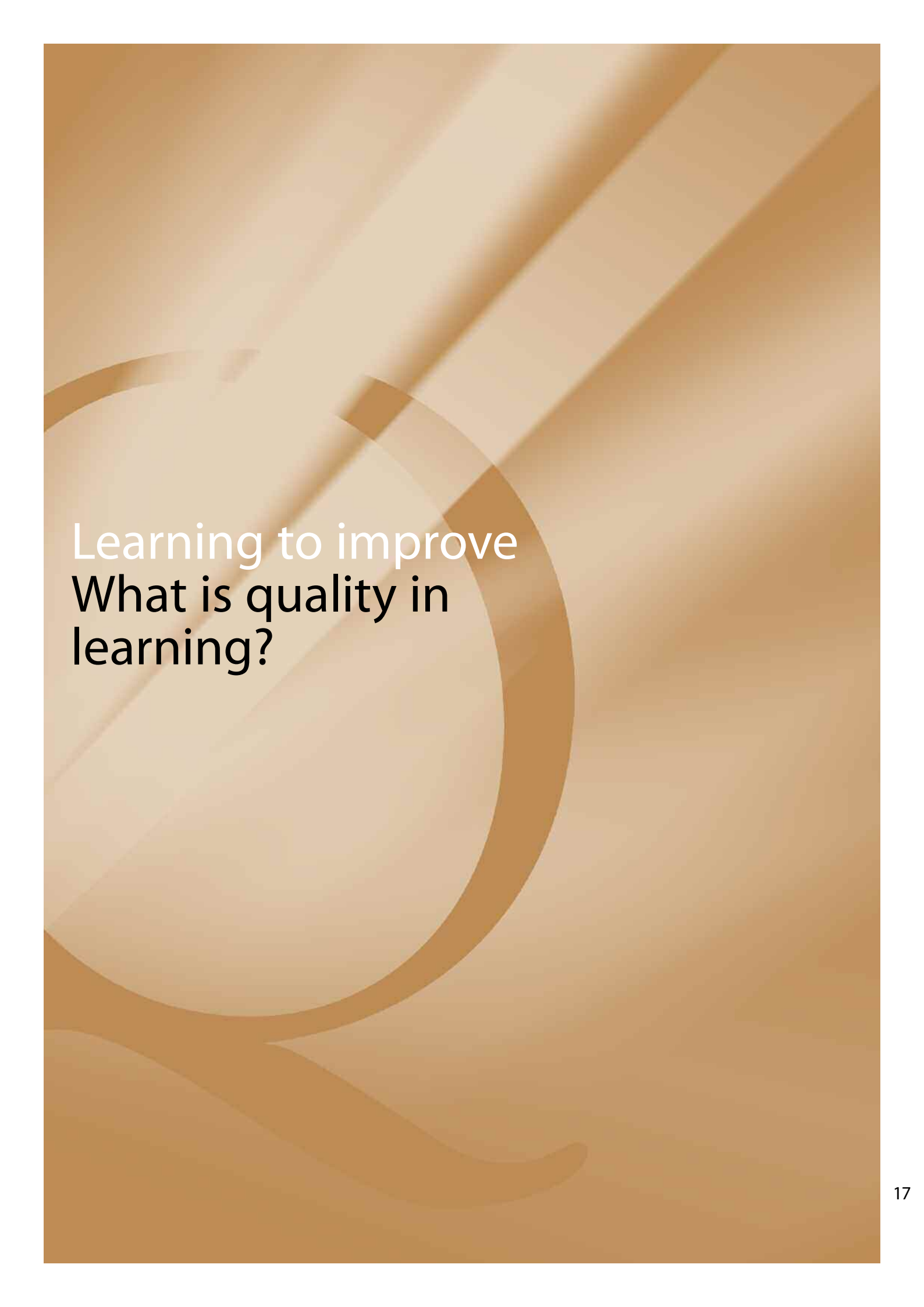


¹² Daniel H. Kim, *Systems Thinking Tools, A User's Reference Guide, Toolbox Reprint Series, Pegasus Communications 1994*

Terminology

Through this report I use:

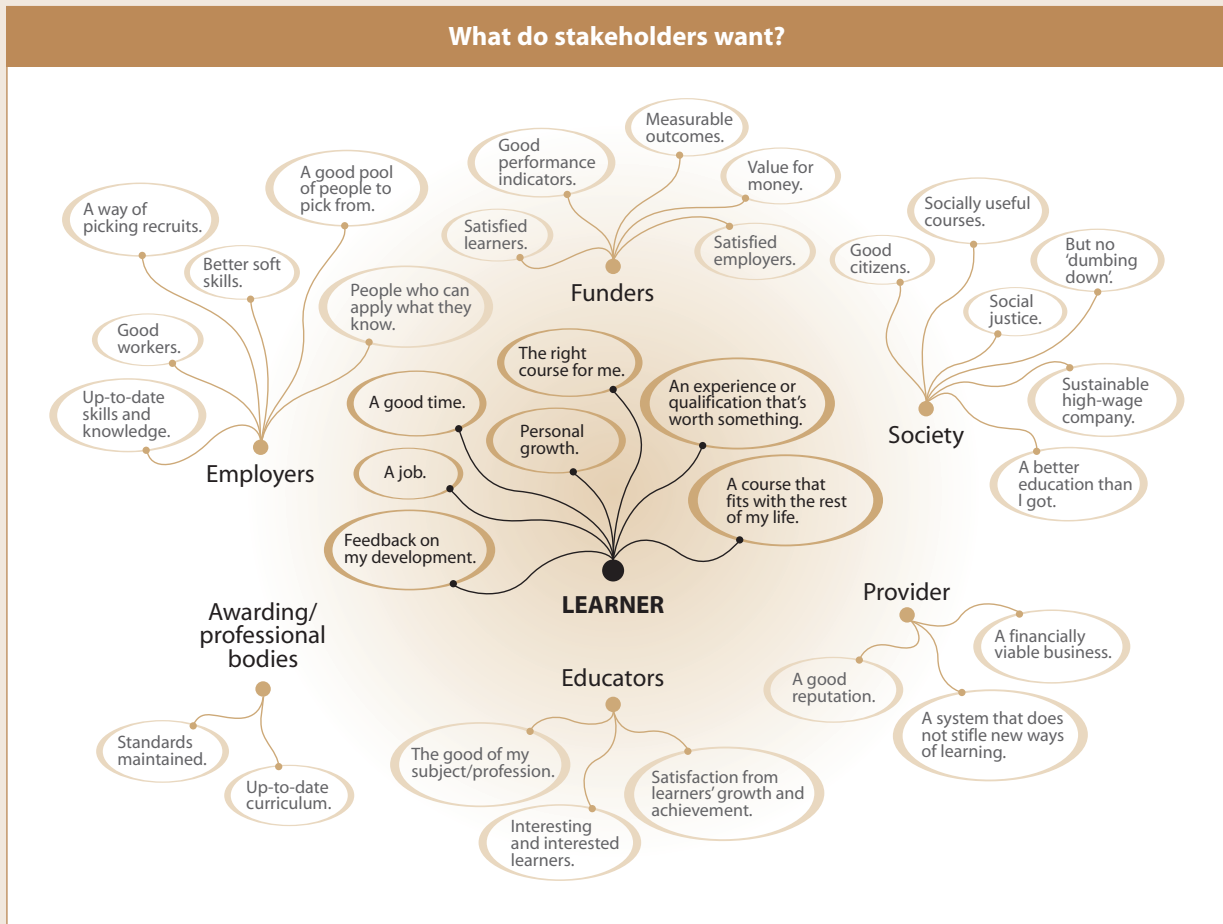
- the word 'learner' to cover the terms student, participant, trainee, etc;
- the word 'educator' to cover the roles of all those who support learners: lecturers, teachers, instructors, community learning and development practitioners, technicians, guidance staff, support staff, managers, etc;
- the word 'provider' to cover any organisation: companies, educational establishments, voluntary organisations, local authorities, etc delivering education or training; and
- for simplicity, the word 'teaching' is sometimes used in this report to refer to the full range of activities of educators. I am conscious that, particularly in community learning and development contexts, this term is not ideal. Indeed part of the thrust of the argument is that we should think more broadly about our support for learners than the word 'teaching' implies. However, all the alternatives I could come up with had other defects or would have over-complicated the text.



Learning to improve
**What is quality in
learning?**

Stakeholders

There are many different stakeholders with an interest in the post-compulsory education system, with different, and sometimes divergent, needs and wants. The main stakeholders and some of what they want are illustrated in the diagram.



Another way of illustrating different stakeholders' perspectives is summarised in the table below:¹³

The meritocratic view	Conformity to professional and scholarly norms
The social view	Satisfying the needs of important groups in society
The individualist view	Contributing to the personal growth of learners

¹³ Adapted from Robert Birnbaum, The quality cube: how college presidents assess excellence, *Journal of Tertiary Education Administration*, Vol 16 No1, May 1994.

On the face of it, these different stakeholders' perspectives could conflict. However, thinking of the system from the perspective of the learner simplifies matters – if education or training does not meet learners' needs first, it cannot meet others' needs because learners are the ones who:

- make the choices (although often heavily influenced for example by parents and, in the case of people in work, their employer);
- actually experience learning;
- improve themselves (or not);
- benefit most directly (or not);
- study hard (or not);
- stay in learning (or not);
- get jobs (or not); and
- become better citizens (or not).

But learners:

- are the least powerful (and sometimes the most vulnerable) in the system;
- often lack a personal sense of direction;
- often do not know what the options are for them and their implications; and
- are not in a position to judge the standards or qualifications required for particular careers and professions.

Therefore it is part of the education and training system's job to help learners not only with their studies, but also to develop their personal vision and make informed choices.¹⁴ This putting of the learner at the centre is central to the five goals set out in the Lifelong Learning Strategy (see paragraph 1). Talking to learners suggests that how they are treated, how educators interact with them, how they are made to feel about themselves, how groups of learners are developed, and how they are actively engaged in learning are critical aspects of quality tuition.

Putting the learner at the centre means that society has to accept that learners will not always make the choices which seem, on the face of it, to suit other stakeholder groups. Learners will continue to wish to study particular courses – beauty therapy or media studies (to quote two frequently used examples¹⁵) – or will decline to study engineering or languages (to quote two similarly popular examples), because these seem to be the right choices for them. If other stakeholders think that these choices are wrong it is for them to show to learners why they would be better making other choices.

Because one of the things that most learners want is a chance of a better job, in providing 'something worthwhile for learners', educators must understand and respond to employers' needs as far as possible. And educators should reach out to all potential learners and do so fairly, thereby contributing to social justice. The system must provide qualifications which meet the standards for professions or scholarly standards. Learners will not be served by qualifications which are not respected by society (although individual learners might be tempted by an easy route to a qualification).

¹⁴ See Learning to Work, Scottish Funding Councils for Further and Higher Education, 2004

¹⁵ Whilst it has been suggested that the popularity of such courses is a 'bad thing' and evidence of 'dumbing down', employment rates for people who have taken such courses are high.

This leads us to defining quality in education in terms of effectively meeting learners' needs: providing positive experiences and outcomes for them and helping them to grow and learn. But, for the system to provide sustainable excellence it must also meet the needs of the other external stakeholders, albeit this will be done indirectly through the quality of its support for individuals.

Taking this further leads to the idea that quality should ideally be measured by the contribution to individual learner's journeys. For one learner the outcome may be a qualification; for another improvement in confidence and self-belief; for another the chance of a better job or promotion. Capturing some of these outcomes for learners in statistical form can be very difficult. Personal testimony is not easily given a numerical value and there are serious limitations to techniques such as learner satisfaction surveys.

However, if the metaphor of the learner's journey is adopted, then we cannot judge the performance of parts of the system by output performance indicators which take no account of the context, community and types of learner with whom providers are working. And we certainly ought to be careful of defining excellence in the system by input indicators – for example, entry qualifications, which are a sign of the popularity of providers, not their value-added contribution. Whilst we cannot buck the trend of learners taking popularity as an indicator of quality, Government should not fall into this trap – we should expect all parts of the system to show excellence through evidence of the value they add for learners. Similarly process indicators such as staff student ratios, numbers of library books or computers per learner, etc, fail to get to the core of what is being delivered for learners.

Unfortunately, many studies¹⁶ have concluded that quantitative value-added performance indicators of sufficient reliability are unlikely to be possible to construct as learners' journeys are so complicated in this system. However, we should not forget the idea that excellence, in principle, ought to be defined in terms of the value-added to learners, and reflect this in how we use performance indicators¹⁷ and in our quality assurance and improvement approaches.

If quantitative performance indicators can only give a limited picture of the quality of the learners' experience, use of targets based on such indicators will have similar limitations. This mirrors experience in the Health Service where the Westminster Government has recently shifted its emphasis, announcing *"fewer performance targets and a stronger emphasis on the quality of patient care"*.¹⁸

This single-mindedly putting learners at the centre when thinking about the quality of the learning experience does not however diminish the importance of the system responding to and being influenced by the needs of employers and local communities in their strategic development on such matters as the pattern of provision available, and the technical and professional material and the skills developed by the programmes.

¹⁶ For example, Raffae, D. Howieson, C. Croxford, L. The viability of a value-added performance indicator in Scottish Further Education, Centre for Educational Sociology, The University of Edinburgh, April 2001.

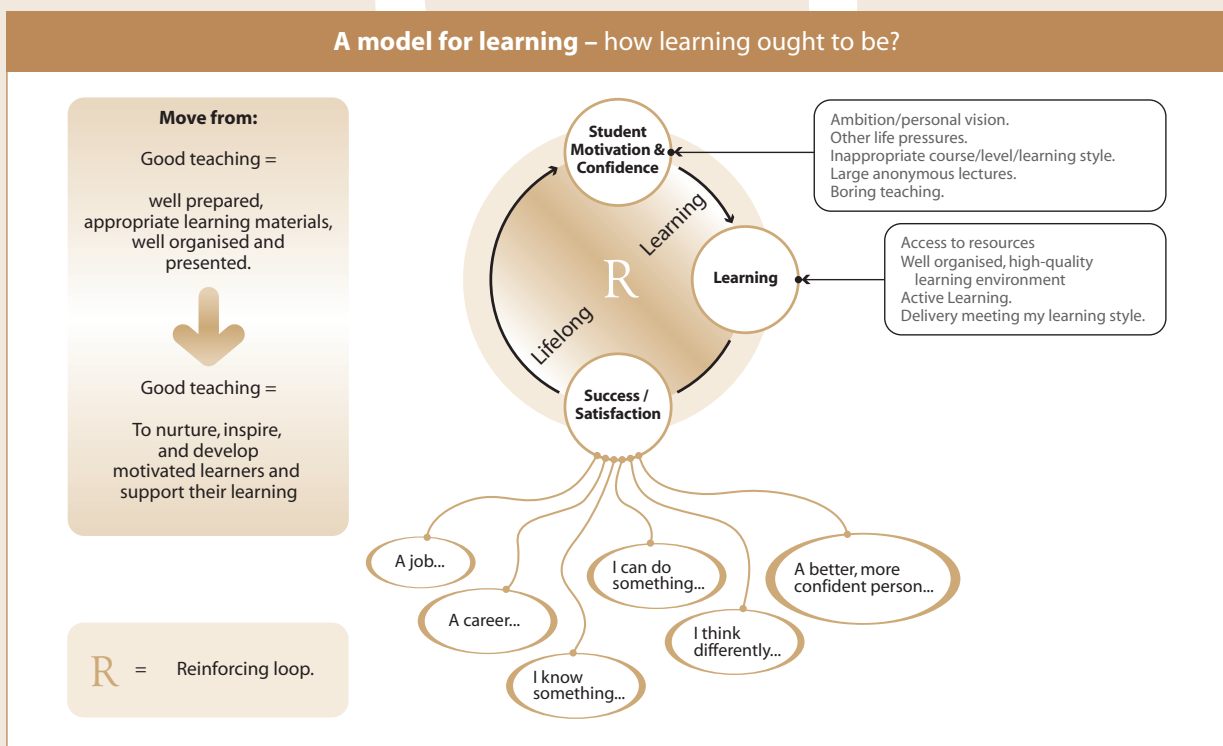
¹⁷ This is not to underplay the importance of statistical and quantitative performance indicators – such indicators provide crucial factual evidence of what is actually being achieved, but should be interpreted with care, in context, and with the value-added paradigm in mind.

¹⁸ More delivery, fewer targets from 2005-2006, Department of Health press release reference number 2004/0049, February 2004.

A model of learning

A model or models of learning is useful in creating a clearer common understanding of what we are aiming for, what we should be expecting of educators, what kinds of behaviour we should be valuing, and therefore how we should promote quality. There are various models of learning in the literature, and (either explicitly or implicitly) in use in educators' practice.

A model for learning based on adult-learning ideas is illustrated in the diagram below. The model suggests that learner motivation, confidence and previous experience leads to further learning.¹⁹ Good learning leads to feelings of success and satisfaction which breeds further confidence and motivation in the learner. This creates a virtuous circle whereby lifelong learning is supported. Key limiting factors include personal factors such as life circumstances, ambition, etc or educational factors such as the quality of teaching, access to resources, etc. This model suggests that we should be focussing on strengthening the central learning cycle. This kind of model supports a shift in our thinking about good teaching,²⁰ as shown in the diagram, and a shift in how learners think about themselves. This model, of course, is not a complete picture of how adults learn,²¹ and educators need to think carefully about how they design their support for learners in the light of research into the brain and learning, for example ideas about learning styles.²²



This kind of learning is also central to the Government's goal of a lifelong learning society. We need our learners to be confident, motivated and self-directing if we are to meet the goals expressed in the Scottish Executive's Lifelong Learning Strategy²³ such as its first goal: "A Scotland where people have the confidence, enterprise, knowledge, creativity and skills they need to participate in economic, social and civic life."

¹⁹ Of course, as with all these models, the cycle can go in reverse, with negative experiences damaging the prospects of further learning.

²⁰ Indeed, particularly in some contexts (for example community learning and development), the word 'teaching' itself is an inadequate word to describe what practitioners do.

²¹ For example, Knowles, M. The Modern Practice of Adult Education. From pedagogy to andragogy. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall/Cambridge, 1980.

²² For example, Student Learning in Scottish Further Education Colleges, HMIE, February 2004.

²³ Life Through Learning; Learning Through Life, The Lifelong Learning Strategy for Scotland, The Scottish Executive, February 2003.

Learners' voices

A key element of this study was talking to people – people studying, people recently qualified, people with substantial work experience since studying – in workshops about what they meant by good and bad learning experiences. Here is a sample of people's comments – not a scientifically collected sample – but indicative of the range of comments.

Good experiences included:

- Masters course – “an experience of independent learning”
- Counselling course – “not just rational learning, but emotional learning. And learning about yourself.”
- “Being told to stop reading critics and develop my own opinions. Built my confidence.”
- Tractor maintenance course – “lecturer showed us how to do something apparently impossible with an 'O' ring”.
- Primary school – “feeling of achievement which is still with me”.
- Essay on the Euro – “this assignment changed my beliefs”.
- Inclusive learning materials – “which gave me a chance”.
- ECDL course – “it was relevant to my job, it was up to me when and where I studied – it was all about me”.
- OU Diploma course – “materials outstanding, arrangements convenient, great to get back to learning later in life”.
- “Good feedback from lecturers which helped me develop.”
- “MEd course allowed me to take back educational theories into my teaching and compare them with my practice.”
- “Learning on the job has taught me most in my life because it is practical – theory unconnected to the real world doesn't teach you much.”

Bad experiences included:

- “Day one at uni. 500 people in a lecture theatre. What on earth was 'moral philosophy'? And the recommended text was the lecturer's book.”
- Primary school: public audition and identification of the three worst children in the class prior to a performance – “I was told never to sing, and I never have since.”
- MBA course – “Lecturer tried to treat us as if we were undergraduates, not experienced people.”
- Secondary school – “The first day. No idea where to go. Just being shouted at by teachers.”
- “They treated me as if I **was** my disability.”
- “Sitting in lectures at university, age 18-19 wasting time.”
- “Boring lectures.”
- First job in my profession, challenged by my first boss – “An honours graduate, doesn't even know this! Look at the state of education today.”
- “I was curious (insufferable?) at school, always asking questions. This was not appreciated, and I left aged 16.”
- “We were guinea pigs for a new SQA course – it was awful, no one knew what was going on, nothing was ready.”
- “Lecturers who lack patience with learners who are trying hard.”
- Mature person recently returned to learning – “Teenagers in the class who don't want to learn and spoil it for the rest of us.”
- “School was awful. Bullying teachers – not constructive. I left as soon as I could.”

A model as above becomes particularly relevant to this study, because examination of many of the existing quality frameworks²⁴ gives the impression that they value:

- the first definition of good teaching in the diagram above which puts the emphasis on the teaching process; rather than the second which puts the emphasis on learners' development and learning;
- good management; and
- compliance with documented processes.

Some of the frameworks seem to go out of their way to avoid the focus on learning – indeed some are specifically designed as tools to aid providers as businesses and therefore put the emphasis on business management, organisation and leadership issues.

It is possible, given the status of these documents, that these impressions condition how educators think about quality; or at the very least, we have missed an opportunity to reinforce the kind of learning and the kind of society we wish to create.

If we adopted a model like this, we might ask different questions of ourselves, such as what are we doing to:

- grow the confidence of learners;
- help them develop a personal vision and ambition;
- guide them towards the appropriate learning for them;
- help them build on previous learning or experience;
- help them develop the skills to be lifelong learners; and
- help them move from being relatively passive learners to active, self-directing learners?

Also this model would pose some significant questions for educators. We want educators who are excited by and interested in their subject, otherwise they are unlikely to inspire their students. However, we also need educators to value learners' personal growth and development. Educators need to consciously ask themselves if they have got the balance right between 'caring about their subject or profession' and 'caring for learners'? This is particularly important since we know that many learners' careers lead them far away from the subject focus of their education. The educator's job, above all else, should be to make learners want to learn.

We should therefore build explicitly into our thinking a model of effective learning such as the above. Unless we do this, it is difficult to see how we can evaluate our performance and build fully effective quality systems. Apart from anything else, our quality systems should express what we value, and we surely should be stating clearly and explicitly what types of learning – our core activity – we value? Of course further work would be needed by sectors to develop and articulate models that are appropriate for the learners they serve, and which the different principal stakeholders, funders, providers, educators, learners and quality agencies, hold in common.

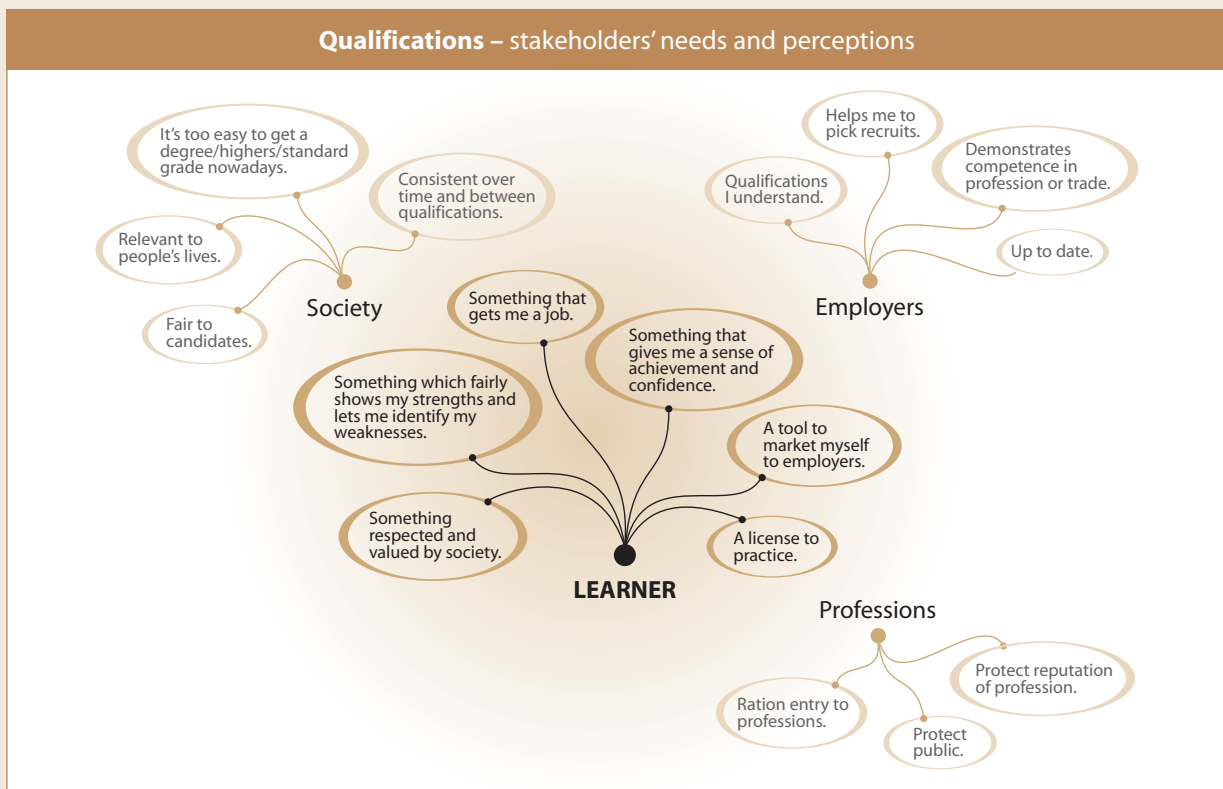
All this is not to say that leadership; good management; business development; process-orientated aspects of quality, including good teaching processes are not important. They are crucial, since these are the tools that organisations must use to deliver good learning. But, since learning is the essential core outcome sought from the education system, our quality systems should be focused on, and give the greatest emphasis to learning and the models of learning we wish to promote.

²⁴ See Annex A for examples of quality frameworks used across the UK.

Qualifications: design and standards

The previous section discussed the quality of service provided to learners, but the nature of the qualifications offered by the education and training system is another important aspect of quality. How do we make sure qualifications are fit for purpose and worth something to learners and society?²⁵

Awarding bodies have a difficult job to balance the different elements: maintaining consistent standards, both over time and between different candidates; and ensuring qualifications are current, up-to-date and relevant to the needs of learners and employers. Once again different stakeholders have different expectations and perceptions, as illustrated in the diagram.



There is regular debate about whether qualifications are easier to achieve nowadays than they used to be. It is a serious matter for education if people believe the system has been 'dumbed down', since it devalues the entire activity. We therefore have to guarantee and demonstrate its rigour to society. Similarly, there are persistent complaints that people coming out with qualifications cannot do what employers would expect of them.

If a learning model like the one described in the previous section is accepted, it has significant implications for the design of programmes and therefore for qualifications and how they are assessed. If helping learners become confident, motivated and self-directing is a key goal of the education and training system, we need to think about the implications of this for the design of qualifications and assessment as well as for courses. Progress has been made in this area through the attention given, for example, to core and transferable skills in many qualifications, and through initiatives such as Higher Education for Capability.²⁶ However, we need to move further from an

²⁵ We should remember that some learners are not seeking qualifications and achieve their goals without them – however their courses should still be well designed to contribute to their goals.

²⁶ Stephenson, J. and Weil, S. *Quality in Learning: A capability approach in Higher Education*, Kogan Page, 1992

approach which tends to focus on subject or technical knowledge, to one more consciously based around developing learners' personal capacities, their skills, competencies and capability, through their subject or professional studies. We need learners who can make use of and apply what they have learned. Depending on the nature of the programme, in designing courses and qualifications, we should therefore be thinking about what the typical learner will be doing in 10 years' time.²⁷ This perspective is particularly important in the modern world in which within that timescale most learners will already have had several jobs.

Education and training has to be there primarily to meet learners' needs. However in the design of qualifications and the maintenance of standards, learners' perspectives cannot be the dominant feature driving the system – learners are inherently not able to judge whether standards are being maintained or consistently applied, or whether a qualification is appropriate for the needs of a particular profession. Therefore learners and society have to rely on educators (through awarding bodies) for this. This puts particular responsibilities, in the hands of the educators and regulatory bodies.

In order to meet the needs of stakeholders, we need to:

- understand the aspirations of learners whom the particular course or qualification is attracting. This would, of course, be much easier if learners were clearer about their goals and aspirations;
- understand, interpret and incorporate into qualifications what employers are saying. An important contributor here will be bodies such as the Sector Skills Councils;
- understand, interpret and incorporate into qualifications the implications of trends in the economy, society and work: thinking from the perspective of what the typical learner will be doing in their work/life long after they have finished their course;
- communicate effectively to potential learners the nature, aims and value of particular qualifications as part of the process of helping learners to make the right choices for them;
- combine subject and technical expertise with personal growth;
- listen to the voices of learners who have recently qualified;
- handle learners' complaints and appeals fairly and quickly;
- ensure standards are maintained over time, and between different awards and candidates;
- examine and explain to society patterns in results, and how the system works to contribute to public confidence in the system;

and use these insights to build better educational products.

The focus on the standards issue where there have been many headlines, may have distracted attention from the issue of relevance. This is a particular problem, because the standards issue tends to turn attention inwards towards the education and training system itself, rather than outwards to the uncertain and confusing world of needs, wants and conflicting requirements. Working on creating faster-operating, more effective 'learning cycles' between awarding bodies, learners and the economy/employers to maintain qualifications which meet more clearly stakeholders' needs is something that requires continual effort.

²⁷ David VandelLinde, in a paper presented to the conference 'The Nature of Learning in Scottish Higher Education in 2025', 9 March 2004, St Andrews said "A simple but important test for your curriculum is: 'Are we preparing the young people who have come to us for the life that they will lead when they graduate (or 10 years after they graduate)?" and "If we don't make it our aspiration to affect the first ten or fifteen years of a student's career, not just the first two or three years, we won't have done the job right. This notion of being student-focused, and career-for-the-student-focused, satisfies, I think, the legitimate pressures that we get from Government and from business and industry, with respect to having graduates who can help carry the economic growth of the country forward."



Learning to improve
Possible models to promote
quality learning

This section of the report presents five models for how we might promote quality learning. These are not models for quality assurance systems. They are models or illustrations of how we might think about all of the forces at work. These models are caricatures designed to dramatise and show the tendencies that each approach is likely to create. Of course we should not forget that these models are not reality, and whilst they are presented as distinct, reality is always going to present a blend of approaches. Nor should we forget that all of the models have merits, which may be more or less appropriate for different circumstances.

However, these caricatures have a value in helping us to decide the approaches we wish to emphasise and the basis of our systems. And by providing a language to illustrate their tendencies, they help us to decide which actions are more likely to promote the outcomes we want and minimise side-effects. This is important because a key message from systems thinking is that, very often, in complex systems, obvious and, on the face of it, sensible actions just make things worse. Such systems tend to push back, with side effects which can be unproductive. Often we need to look for deeper solutions by supporting positive cycles, or by trying to remove or reduce limiting effects which inhibit progress.

The five models have been given deliberately graphic titles to bring out their essential characteristics. The models are called:

- Model 1: People are basically not to be trusted
- Model 2: Success to the successful
- Model 3: Market model
- Model 4: Trust us, we know best
- Model 5: Building organisational capacity

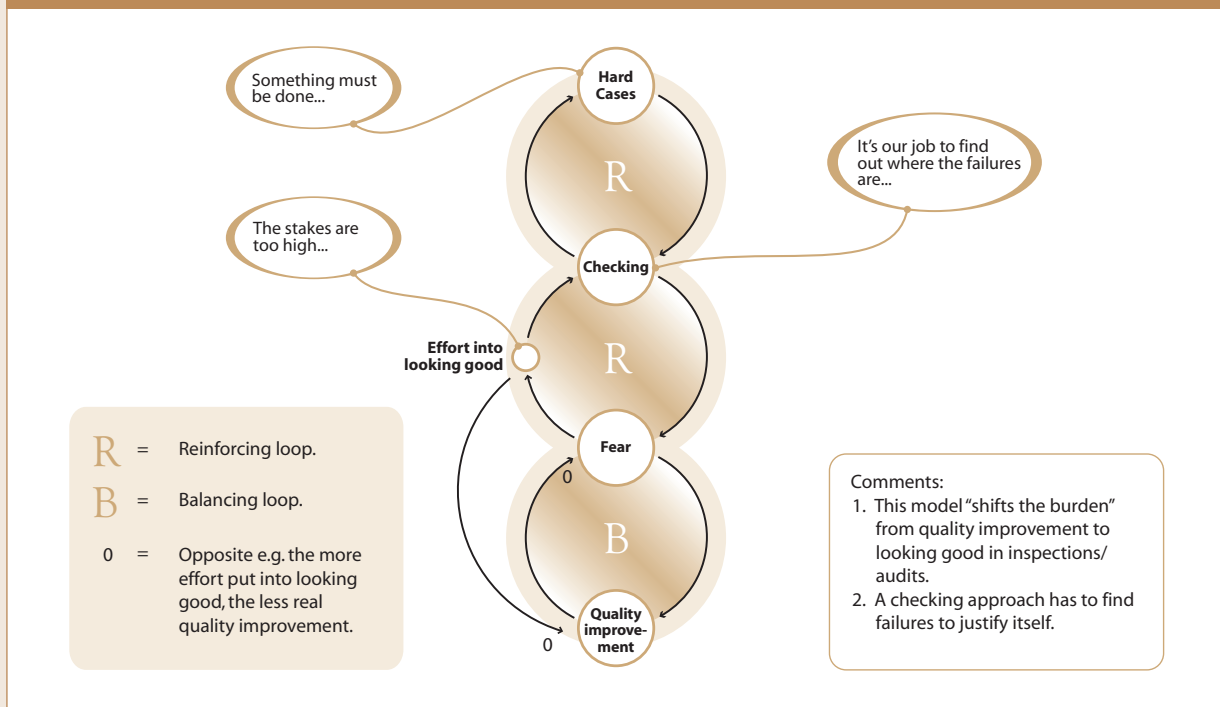
All these models have been used to some degree in different parts of the education and training system in the UK at different times.

Model 1: People are basically not to be trusted

In this model, checking is the fundamental process used to drive improvement – independent people scrutinise providers and identify where things are not up to standard. This in itself would only find a few errors, since the inspectors could only sample a small set of interactions with learners, but the fact that such checking occurs encourages organisations to put good systems in place, for fear of being exposed to adverse criticism. This should lead to quality improvement. However, one of the unintended consequences of such a system is that the fear of being exposed encourages people to put effort into ‘looking good’ in inspections. This damages effort for quality improvement, partly because over-preparation for inspection takes resources away from true improvement, but more insidiously, because it starts to diminish the organisation’s ability to look self-critically at itself. The risk is that a culture of covering up problems is created and people reach a point where they can no longer look at themselves as they really are. Of course, if inspectors know or suspect that providers are over-preparing or covering up problems then this justifies a need for more checking. Finally this kind of system is driven by the genuine cases where things are not up to scratch – where people really can’t be trusted – which do undoubtedly occur from time to time.

Of course, it is good to put people on their mettle from time to time and good to give them a focus for showing what they can do. Although something has to be done about the ‘hard cases’, the danger is that, depending on how we respond to such individual cases, we can damage the capacity of the system as a whole to deliver real quality improvement.

Model 1: People are basically not to be trusted



Examples of the negative effects of such systems can be seen, for example, in the early experiences of teaching quality assessment in higher education, where institutions felt they had to produce vast numbers of documents as evidence of their quality. Pictures exist of whole rooms filled with such material. Neither reviewers, nor institutions, nor learners benefited from such over-preparation, but institutions felt they had no alternative. Similarly, the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) in England has recently expressed concern over the resources committed by some schools in preparation for inspection, referring to 'teachers feeling that they must undertake extensive preparation over the weeks and months leading up to inspection',²⁸ and is implementing changes to its approaches including ways of eliminating unnecessary preparation for inspection.²⁹

Model 2: Success to the successful

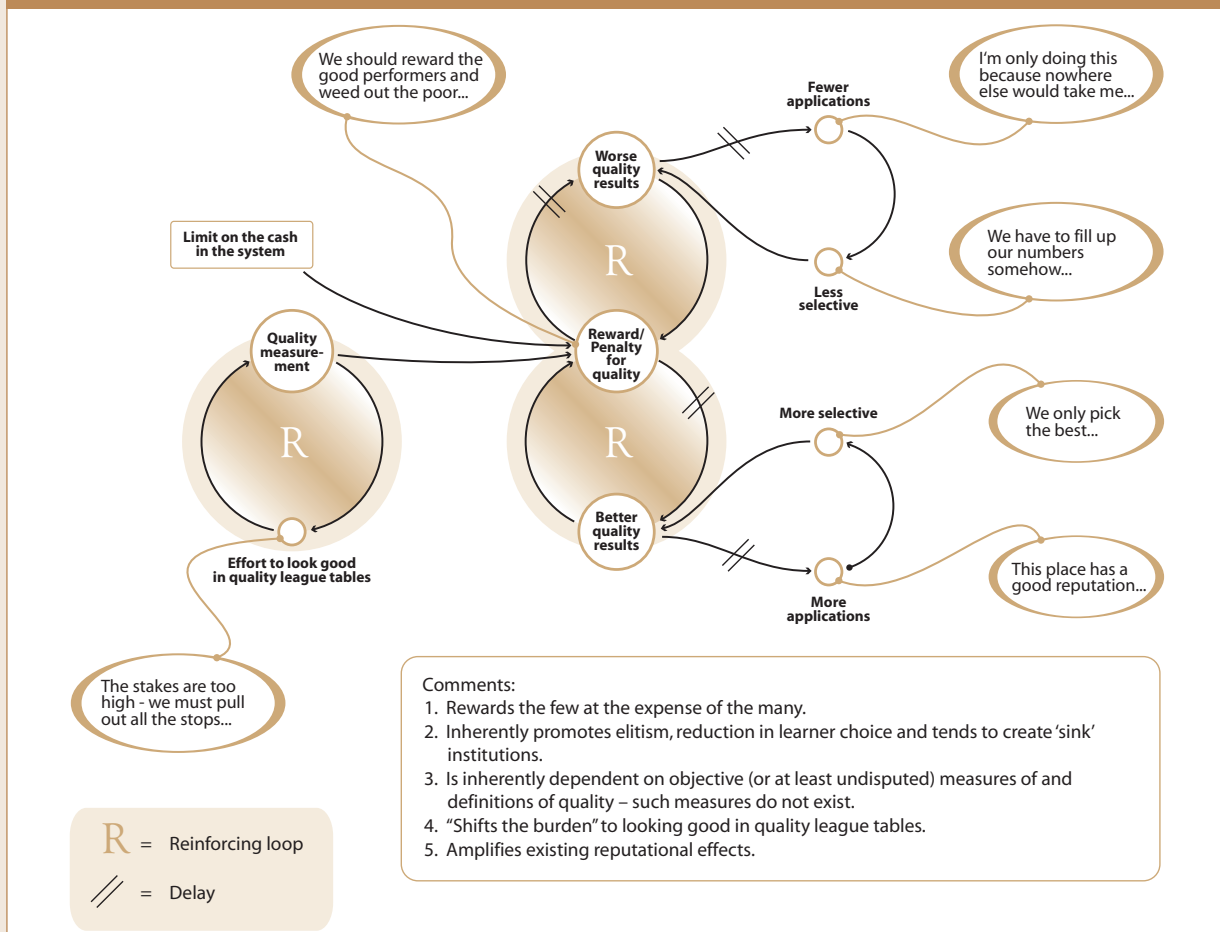
In this model, rewards of additional resources/funding are given for good quality. This seems to make sense because we should be encouraging the good performers. Over time such additional funding leads to improved quality and results for them because additional staff or resources can be spent on learners. This improvement is demonstrated and leads to further rewards or maintenance of existing differentials. Of course, where choice of provider operates, better quality results makes the successful provider more attractive to learners or purchasers. This means the provider can afford to be more selective, and this in itself tends to lead to better results as more able learners are more likely to be successful.

However, because there is a finite limit on how much money is available for the system, there is a mirror effect where more resources for some means less for others. Over time this will have the opposite effect on those losing out, leading to poorer quality results for them, with a similar downward spiral affecting learner demand.

²⁸ The Office for Standards in Education, The future of inspection: a consultation paper, HMI 2057 February 2004

²⁹ See NR 2004-55 Broad welcome for Ofsted's future of inspection plans, OFSTED June 2004

Model 2: Success to the successful



In addition, because such a system operates so sharply there is very powerful pressure to get good results in the quality measurement system or league table or whatever system is used to measure quality. This is in addition to the natural pressure that wanting to avoid criticism or have a good reputation would create anyway. This creates a strong incentive to 'look good' in such measurements and risks creating additional pressures to distract attention from real quality improvement (as in model 1).

There is a further danger because this model depends on objective, or at least undisputed, measures and definitions of quality. Unfortunately, such measures are not available.³⁰ None of the available performance indicators capture quality in a sufficiently robust way, and given the complexities and subtleties of learning it would be hard to construct acceptable measures without significant costs, and without creating even greater pressure on over-preparation, etc.

The model tends towards creating 'elite' and 'sink' providers or courses and reducing learner choice by enhancing the offering available to, and demand for the already popular providers. Because the reward elements have to be substantial if such a system is to have any effect at all, there is a real danger of benefiting the few lucky enough to attend the 'elite' providers at the expense of the many.

³⁰ See discussion of 'value-added' performance indicators on page 19.

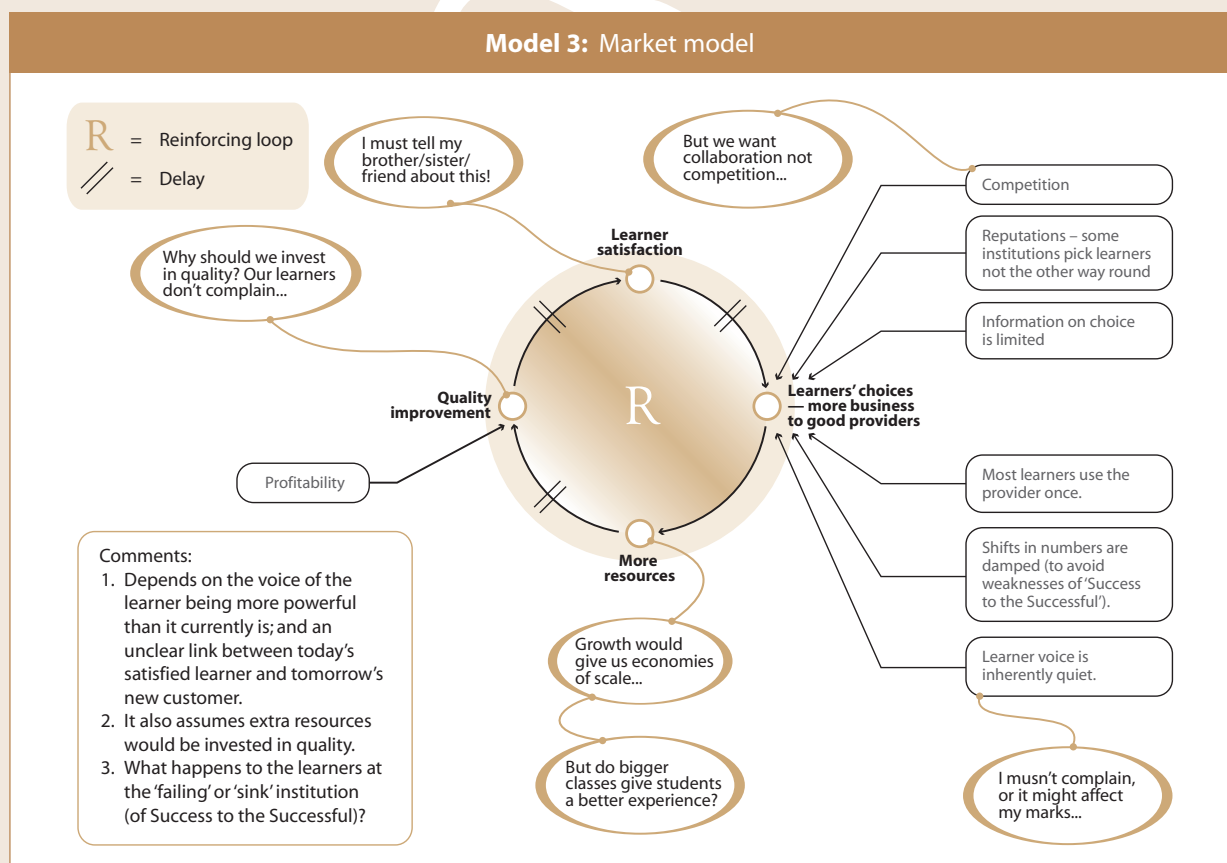
Of course, we should be supporting those who are doing well, either by recognition, additional funding or expansion of capacity or other means. But we have to be careful how we do so, otherwise we risk undermining fairness and equity for the generality of learners.

An example of how this type of model plays out in practice exists, for example, in the Research Assessment Exercise used in the higher education sector, where it has successfully increased the quality of research by focussing it in fewer institutions. This has led to substantial parts of the sector not funded for research. It is difficult to see such a concentration being an acceptable outcome for learning, given our goals for equity and access.

There is a variant of this model – the remedial model – where additional resources are provided to providers doing poorly, on the grounds that they need to be supported. The danger in this is it risks undermining good management across the system by rewarding failure. It is difficult to see how such a model could be anything other than an occasional tool used in unusual circumstances, to help a key provider respond to a major problem. And its use would have to be combined with other changes to the management and operation of that provider.

Model 3: Market model

In this model, learner choices drive the system. Satisfied learners influence the choices of the next group of learners through word of mouth and evidence of success in the job market. Learner choice leads to more business for the successful provider, which leads to more resources and economies of scale. These extra resources can be spent on quality improvement thus leading to even more satisfied learners in the future.



However, this model is heavily damped. The influence of satisfied learners on future learners' choice between providers is limited. Indeed for some parts of the system, for example, in rural communities, it is difficult to see how this kind of choice could operate anyway. But also for other parts of the system, reputations are so strong that it is difficult to see learner choice alone really operating to influence the quality of providers' provision. Furthermore, learner choice only really means something if there is spare capacity in the system, otherwise it tends to lead to providers picking learners rather than the other way around.

For the parts of the system where student choice could operate, such a model would tend to drive providers towards more competitive behaviour. We need to be careful of introducing more competitive elements at a time in which Government is seeking to promote more collaboration between providers. And in such a model there is a danger that rapid expansion by a provider could lead to a drop in quality, since there tends to be a lag between expansion and the building of capacity to support the additional activity.

And we know that the information available to learners to make their choices is limited and the business of guiding and supporting learners to choose the right course for them is complicated. Certainly peer experiences are powerful influences on choices, but a friend's successful outcome does not necessarily mean that the same course or provider is the best choice for me.

Funding systems are also used to damp shifts in learner choices by limiting the impact of such shifts in the interests of stability of the system as a whole, and to avoid some of the dangers of the 'success for the successful' model.

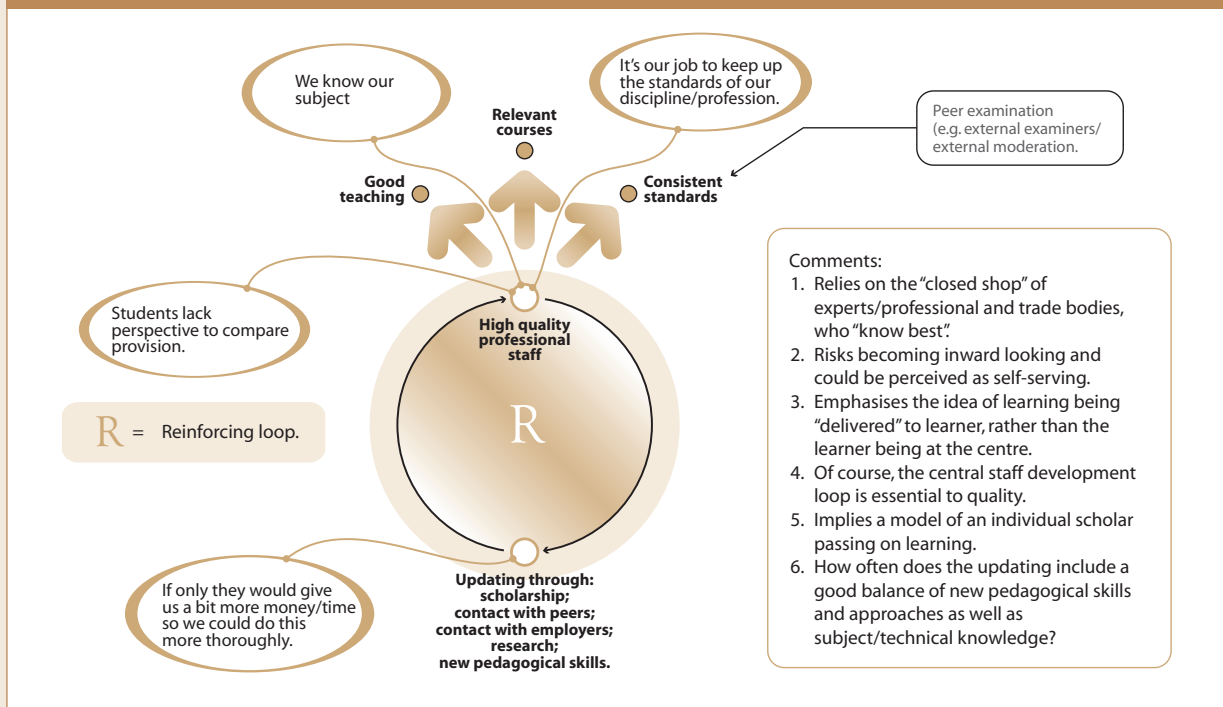
Of course we should be using learner satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) to tell us something about how well providers are meeting learners' needs. However as was noted above, the consumer/producer metaphor has limitations for learning. And where choice is inherently limited (again for example in rural areas) it is difficult to see how such a system could ever promote quality improvement. And where there is choice, such a system is likely to lead to similar outcomes to the 'success to the successful' model – strengthening existing reputations, and rewarding those best at marketing themselves.

Examples of this model have been tried although only very briefly and apparently not very successfully, for example in the provision of nursery education in the 1990s. The idea of learner empowerment is a key part of the Individual Learning Account scheme, but here the motivation is more about growing the market for learning than improving provider quality by strengthening learner purchasing power.

Model 4: Trust us, we know best

This model is based on high quality professional staff who continually update their skills and knowledge as the key to quality. By skills and knowledge is meant not just their subject or profession, but also the kinds of employment route their learners typically aspire to, how to support learners, how different people learn, etc. Such staff lead to good teaching and learning, relevant courses and consistent standards. In the case of consistency of standards, peer review and external moderation are used to provide independent scrutiny.

Model 4: Trust us, we know best



Such a model is absolutely essential for some aspects of learning, for example the standards of qualifications and the design of qualifications, which meet the requirements of particular professions or industries, as discussed before. And there is no doubt that a model which puts emphasis on staff development and a learning cycle for educators – indeed lifelong learning for educators – is essential to successful quality improvement, particularly given the special characteristics of learning, with the interaction between learners and educators being crucial.

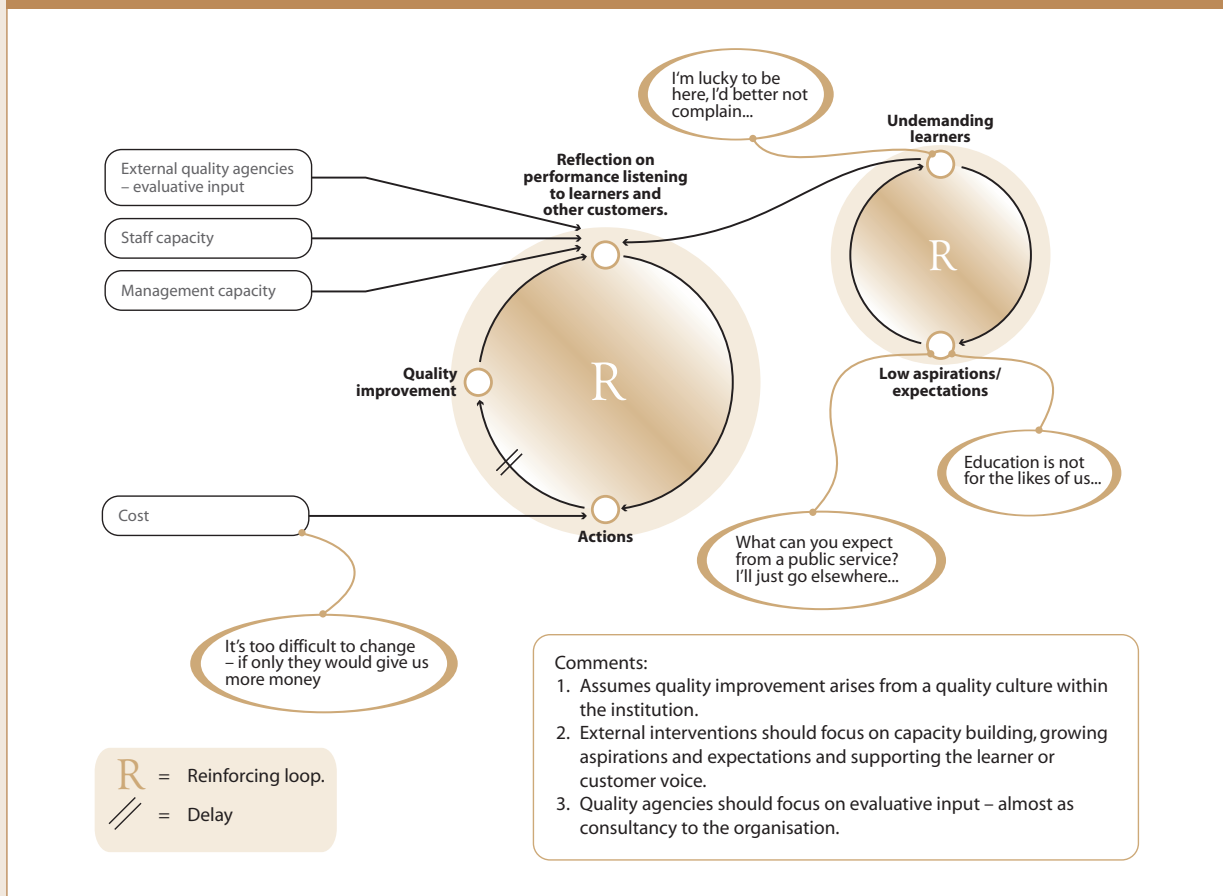
However, there are dangers to this approach. It emphasises the idea of learning being delivered to learners by educators; and the learner voice has no place. And society is becoming increasingly sceptical of systems which appear inward-looking, where experts tell us what is best for us. Also experience suggests that learning about how learners learn and creating new ways of teaching has not always been emphasised nor given sufficient priority in the staff development of educators.

So whilst aspects of such a model need to be part of our overall approach, the model is unlikely to be a complete solution.

Examples of this model exist in the qualifications system, where such systems are essential and inevitable; and in schools, where the system substantially tells young people what they should learn, and when and how, although the school system is changing nowadays, particularly in its upper stages.³¹

³¹ For example, *Managing for success in education for work – A guide*, Scottish Consultative Committee on the curriculum, 1999, which proposed shifts in the curriculum towards empowering learners. And *A Curriculum for Excellence*, 2004, The Scottish Executive, summarised in the annex, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/education/cerv-00.asp>

Model 5: Building organisational capacity



Model 5: Building organisational capacity

This model takes the capacity of providers to reflect on their performance in terms of delivery for learners, and listen to learners as the key to quality improvement. An organisation which reflects systematically and objectively in this way and then takes action as a result, is itself in a learning cycle which should optimise service for learners. However, there are key constraints – obviously the capacity and abilities of staff and managers is a key one and this is where a learning cycle as in Model 4 is required. More fundamentally however, we know that for the most part learners are relatively undemanding, with at least in parts of the system, a cycle of low aspirations and expectations reinforcing passive and undemanding learners (see also Model 3). It is hard to break out of this cycle, with action by individual providers, learners' organisations, and also work in communities being required.

One of the key elements to support the operation of this model could be the role of external quality agencies: by asking probing questions; by providing objective feedback; by making comparisons with other providers; by helping providers to listen to and amplify the voice of the learner; and by helping providers to look at evidence, performance indicators, feedback from learners, communities and other customers; and take steps to improve their services.

Another element could be development work to support the student voice, to create the kind of partnership required between learners and educators, and to create role models and advocacy for learners. Some work on this is developing in parts of the system,³² and whilst it is always likely to be patchy (for example, where there are very transient populations of learners), providers, learners' organisations and individual learners need to collaborate to create, support and grow constructive relationships.

This model is consistent with modern thinking about quality improvement in that it assumes quality improvement arises from a quality culture within a provider. There is a danger that complacent management within an organisation will settle for 'good enough' and maybe not strive for all that it could achieve. And this danger is more likely given the inherently weak voice of learners and the undemanding nature of many groups of learners. This is where external quality agencies play a part by asking challenging questions.

There are many examples of this kind of thinking in use in the sector. Two particular examples are the Total Quality Management initiatives which Scotland's colleges took from the late 1980s, and use of the EFQM Excellence model in some English higher education institutions from the late 1990s. In addition of course, most of our quality assurance frameworks are now founded on the model of self-assessment and improvement. Explicit focus on learner feedback, partly because of its difficulty, is however less developed than it might be.

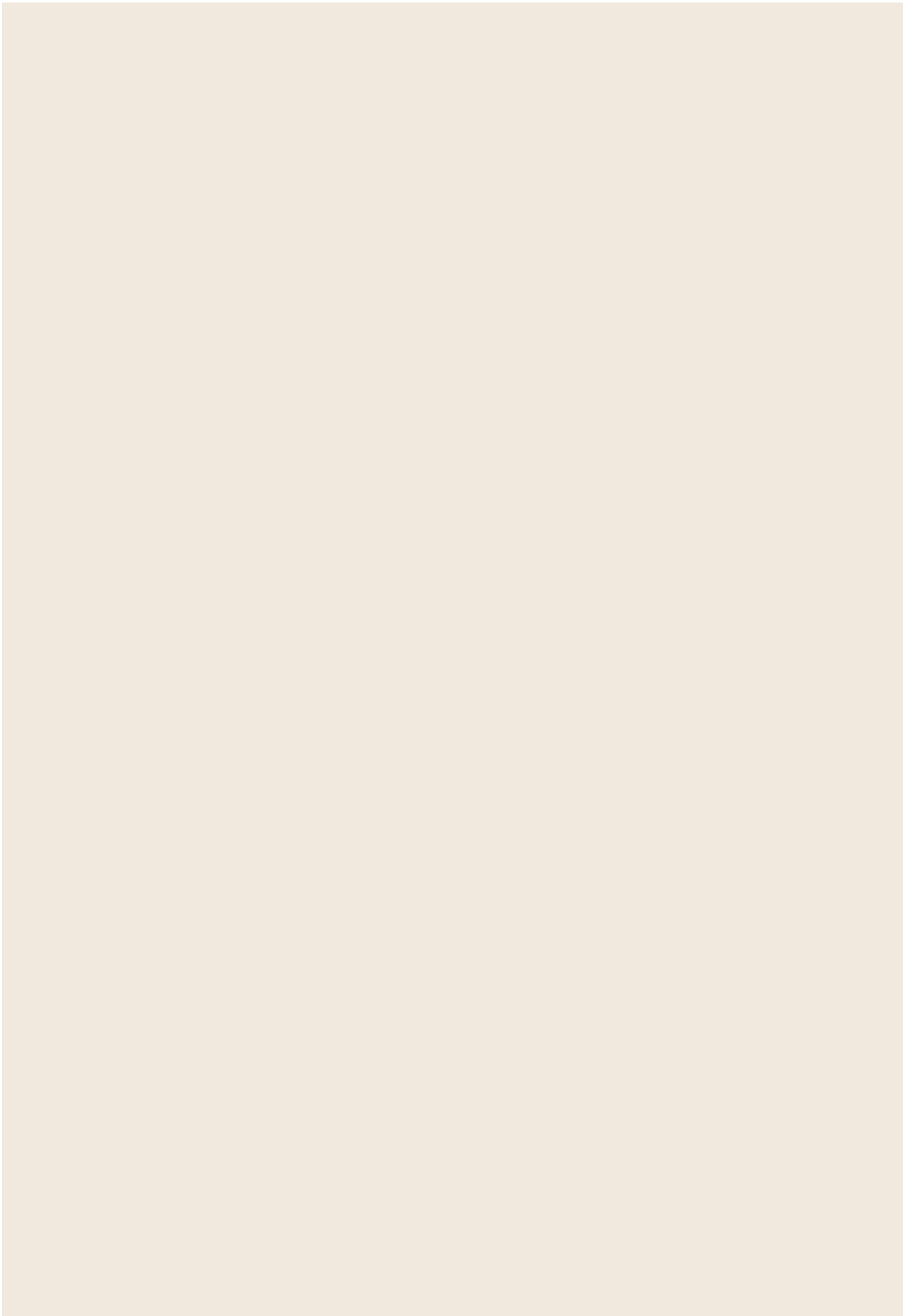
Conclusions

This systemic analysis suggests that we should found our approach to quality in the system on a blend of Model 5, stressing the need for reflection and listening to learners by providers, and Model 4 stressing the need for lifelong learning for educators in a wide range of technical and educational skills and knowledge. This is not such a startling conclusion, since our systems have been moving towards these approaches for a number of years. And there is an attraction and logic to the learning industry explicitly adopting a 'learning organisations'³³ approach to its own quality improvement. However, this analysis also suggests that, as far as possible, we should be careful to avoid creating forces which let loose some of the destructive cycles caricatured in models one to three.

Summing up, these models suggest that we should focus our actions on things which are likely to promote reflection and improvement by providers; grow aspirations and expectations in learners and communities; and support learning cycles within providers which develop the capacity of staff, managers and organisations.

³² For example, Sparqs – Student Participation in Quality Scotland, www.sparqs.org.uk. Sparqs aims to: map the quantity and quality of student representation in institutions across Scotland; provide advice and support to students, students unions and institutions on developing their student representation systems and structures; deliver training to student class representatives and student board of management members on improving their representative systems and structures.

³³ Senge, P. *The Fifth Discipline: the art and practice of the learning organisation*, Random House, 1990





Learning to improve
So what should we do?

This section takes the conclusions of the preceding material – the stakeholder analysis, the idea of a learner-centred model of learning, the need for a learning cycle to develop qualifications and the systemic analysis of possible systems to promote quality improvement, and tries to identify areas for ‘high leverage’ actions. Consistent and concerted action in these areas should support evolutionary change in all the interacting parts of the system – communities, learners and learners’ organisations, providers, funding/purchasing bodies, qualifications bodies and quality review/auditing bodies – and should give us the best chance of creating reinforcing cycles of improvement. And all the suggestions below are inter-related – for example, growing learner expectations and provider responsiveness need to be developed hand in hand.

Sustainable long term change is not brought about overnight in complex systems, particularly where we are seeking shifts in thinking about cultures, roles and relationships, for example, the shifts in the culture of learners, educators, and quality bodies to make the stronger learning cycles for which this report argues.

The following is therefore not a detailed prescriptive set of actions that specific players should take. Rather it is a set of pointers for the directions in which each part of the system needs to evolve by working on embedding and making this thinking a core part of their approach.

The different parts of the system will almost certainly find some of the suggestions below more difficult to implement than others – partly because different sectors are at different stages of development, and partly because of the different characteristics of their learners and provision. Combined with the pre-existing cycles of quality assurance and development activity, this means that embedding these ideas will take place at different rates across the different parts of the system. Also the different sectors will probably need to use different means appropriate to the nature of their provision and learners to take these ideas on board. However, the different players can all learn and develop together the tools to make progress.

Area 1: Create more demanding learners

Build aspirations/expectations in communities and in learners to create more demanding learners. This is, in any case, already a key element of the mission of parts of the education system, but this analysis shows that it also has an important part to play in promoting quality. One of the constraints on improvement is the expectations of learners – if learners expect to be passive, then it is difficult for educators to move to active learning styles, and it is all too easy to fall back on traditional teaching modes.

Educators need to think about how, through outreach, guidance, induction processes, methods of teaching and communication of expectations to learners, they can help raise learners’ and communities’ ambitions. Interaction between the school system and post-compulsory education and training to approach this may also be useful.

Schools, community learning and development, and providers have to work to turn the negative cycle around to change our expectations of learners and their expectations of us. In doing this we have to face the worry that empowering learners may unleash a set of demands and expectations we cannot cope with; and also the risk that apathy and lack of engagement are so endemic that our education processes are unable to turn that around. However, unless we attempt to do this and make progress, we are surely failing to provide real quality learning.

Help learners develop a personal vision so that they are clearer about what they want out of their education and become more self-directed as learners. Finding ways to help learners make the transition from 'passive' learners – where the system tells them what they should learn – to 'self directing' learners³⁴ – where they are more conscious of their personal goals and seek the learning they need to achieve their goals – should become embedded as a key role of the learning sector. This is part of what we should offer learners, but it would also contribute to the previous objective by creating learners who were more demanding of us and thereby helping push improved quality – and more demanding of themselves thereby making better choices and driving themselves to greater achievement.

We have to be realistic however. There are learners in the system who are very far from the ideal of adult self-directed learners, particularly those who have little commitment, for example where training is seen as the only alternative to loss of benefits. We should not be unrealistic in our expectations of how far the education and training system can take these learners. Nevertheless our aim should be to help all learners, no matter where they are in the system, to make progress with their attitudes and expectations as well as specific subject content.

Encourage more positive interaction between learners and staff to handle learners' issues. Providers need to deal constructively with learners' issues and show that they welcome them being raised – this is part of the kind of constructive relationship we want between learners and educators. Of course, not all the problems can be dealt with, but learners need to know that their concerns have been heard and properly considered and that something has been done about them, when possible. There are responsibilities on both sides as both learners and providers have duties. We need to support a culture where this interactivity and mutual working together to deal with issues is ubiquitous. Providers can also help this process by being clear about the levels of support and service that learners can expect from them, and by dealing demonstrably fairly with complaints when they occur.

Strengthen the student association-type advocacy role where applicable. Students' associations and national organisations supporting them can play a key role in supporting learners, bringing together and articulating their concerns and interacting effectively with providers. We should be seeking to create and support constructive relationships between providers and learners which promote good learning. Particularly given the authority-relationships that are inherent in the education system, structures that support, give a voice to, and provide advocacy for learners have an important part to play where they can be organised. Providers have a responsibility to help create such support, and there is existing development work on strengthening the capacity of learners' organisations in carrying out these roles being undertaken in the FE and HE sectors. Structures for learners participating in community learning and development are beginning to be developed, for example local learning forums.

However, more work needs to be done. Student associations for example, are inherently weak in some of Scotland's colleges, as a result of the part-time, transient or dispersed nature of the student population. There are, however, examples where these kinds of problems have been overcome.³⁵ Trainees on LEC training programmes have no organisations to support them except where this is

³⁴ Such approaches are being promoted in many parts of the education sector – for example in schools, see *A Route to Effective Learning and Teaching*, HMIE, 1999

³⁵ For example, the recent creation of a sabbatical student president post at Angus College, in a partnership between the college and its student association. Similarly, Dundee College with its student association has evolved an effective model of partnership, which both the college and learners find valuable. And some other colleges have similar arrangements. The UHI Millennium Institute has also developed a new model for its student association, appropriate to its dispersed and partnership model of delivery in a rural setting.

provided through trades unions or where they are delivered in colleges. Given the nature of some kinds of provision, it is difficult to see how structures could be put in place to support learners. However, some collaborative work could be considered to share good practice and create more permanent and effective structures to support groups of learners at different providers – using networks, peripatetic resources, the world wide web, etc.

Amplify the voice of the learner. This could be done for example, through research work, surveys and focus groups, longitudinal studies, and forums. There are some existing programmes of work in this area at national, regional and local level, and whilst there will always be a limit on how far such work can take us, it is important to continue and develop this work. If the service is to be learner-centred, we need to find out what learners think about it. It is important to distinguish between the kind of advocacy role for learners discussed above and finding out learners' views. Individuals, even when they are fulfilling a representative role, can only talk from their perspective. Research methods – focus groups, surveys, collecting testimony, etc – are needed to complement representation and find out systematically learners' views.

Area 2: Build management and organisational capacity for improvement

Support and strengthen a quality culture in providers. The capacity of providers to learn about themselves and how they can improve is central to the model. A learning cycle within providers should be continually emphasised as one of our fundamental expectations of them. Tools such as self-assessment; effective, contextualised, use of performance indicators; and systematic learner feedback should lead to evaluation, action and development. And quality improvement has to mean something concrete and demonstrable for learners. Funders, purchasers and quality agencies have a role to keep reiterating and reinforcing these expectations. They can also support providers by funding national and regional development on these issues, and they should consider doing so across sectors where there are common issues.

Continue to give priority to staff and team development. Staff development needs to cover subject, technical, pedagogical skills, and the skills to understand learners' needs. After learners, educators are the most important people in the system, and a quality culture will only be built if we maintain, support and value professionalism amongst staff. Providers need to plan for and build in lifelong learning for educators – including staff development and team development – as part of their quality improvement efforts. Team development is an important aspect, because no individual has all the answers, and working together and reflecting on our practice with colleagues has an essential part to play in improvement.

Funding bodies should continue to support national programmes to help providers develop, share practice and learn together. There would be merit in these programmes bringing together people from across the post-compulsory education sector, given that many of the issues are common problems. The development of a lifelong learning Sector Skills Council may also create opportunities for cross-sectoral working. Work on staff development can also build on substantial existing work in both sectors (e.g. the HE academy, the Learning and Teaching Support Network, the TQ(FE) and Professional Development Awards in Scotland's colleges).

Above all our approach to staff development should be founded on the same principles as our work with learners. Educators are learners too, and staff development programmes which are 'done to' staff, and which are not founded on the ideas of facilitating self-directed adult learners' growth and development, will not support the right culture or be fully effective.

Consciously build understanding of how people learn into programme design and delivery.

The developing body of knowledge and research on how people learn should be consciously used to invigorate the way courses and programmes are designed and delivered. National development programmes (again possibly across sectors), could be used to help educators tailor more effectively their provision to the different learners with whom they interact.

Area 3: Develop funding/purchasing approaches

Strengthening local management. Funding/purchasing bodies should continue to support and develop local management capacity as the key approach³⁶ – short term temptations to centralise control (for example, in response to specific one-off cases at individual providers) should be resisted because they are inimical to the overall approach. Where specific events have to be dealt with, funders have to find ways which decisively resolve the problem, but which do not degrade the capacity of the system as a whole.³⁷

Use ‘relationship contracting’. Where appropriate, funders/purchasers should use relationship contracting approaches – i.e. the idea that, as funders/purchasers, it is our role to help build the capacity of suppliers. Examples might include supporting national development capacity as well as more individually targeted support. Consideration should also be given to contracting approaches, for example longer term contracting arrangements where appropriate.

Be careful with funding approaches. National funding models have to be built on measures of performance and performance indicators. A balance has to be struck between the need for such systems, because of their transparency, efficiency, and fairness, and the risk that they create forces which damage the overall aim, for example, by giving too great weight to partial or uncontextualised performance indicators. Funding systems do change behaviour, but they may not change hearts and minds and our priority is to create the right kind of culture, relationships and interactions. Care is therefore needed if we are thinking of consciously using funding systems to promote quality. There is a limit to how far a funding system can be a vehicle to do this, and ill-advised funding systems could be inimical to genuine quality development in the system for all learners. Funding approaches, of course, need to continue to be based on threshold levels of acceptable quality. Provision falling below these thresholds should continue not to be eligible for funding.

Area 4: Maintain the value of qualifications

Speed up and strengthen a ‘learning cycle’ for qualifications. Educators who design courses and qualifications need to learn continually from learners, the economy and employers to ensure their courses and qualifications are ‘worth something’. Awarding bodies have to design qualifications which learners can use either to progress to further learning, in which case ‘joining-up’ of qualifications between sectors is important, or to get a better job, in which case, core skills as well as specific up-to-date technical knowledge is required, or for general living. The multiple and changing requirements of learners, employment markets and expectations mean that awarding bodies need to update qualifications more rapidly than before. They also need to develop methodologies to understand and make sense of the complexity of signals from learners and employers. Collaborative national cross-sectoral development work on these issues could help all awarding bodies do this

³⁶ For example, the new financial memorandum being developed for colleges and universities, which emphasises and clarifies where responsibilities lie for the quality of provision. HEC/01/04 Renewing the Financial Memorandum, SHEFC and SFEFC Dec 2004.

³⁷ For example, the differentiated approaches to quality being used in further and higher education – with elements of external review being tailored to different providers.

better. For example, the signals from employers about core skills provide messages for all sectors, and research and development effort on how to address and respond to these messages could usefully be pooled. The collaborative structures which have created the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework could provide a useful vehicle for this work.

Maintain the distinction between quality of service issues and the standards of qualifications.

The processes and mechanisms to promote excellence in these two different aspects of the education service are quite distinct and it is very important to avoid muddling the two in our thinking. Whilst both depend on professional educators, separation of how we develop and maintain excellence in these two functions – the function of facilitating learning, and the function of designing qualifications and making judgements about achievement – is fundamental. Having said that, from the learner’s perspective, both are equally important – the learner wants a positive experience, but they also want qualifications which are respected and worth something.

Continue to consider the balance between subject/technical content and skills and growth in programme design and qualifications.

Continued development along the path of incorporating and making explicit the personal growth and skills, as well as the knowledge and technical content of provision, is needed to meet learners’ and employers’ needs. All the stakeholders need to collaborate to speed up progress since this will require shifts of learners’ expectations, teaching and learning methods, assessment methods and expectations about the content of qualifications.

Area 5: Quality auditing bodies

Explicitly base our quality systems on the models of learning and quality improvement we wish to promote.

The frameworks for quality used by external quality agencies are very powerful tools for expressing what we value in learning and what quality means to us. Given the subtlety of learning, these quality frameworks are probably the best tool that we have to underscore the common values and expectations we have about learning and a quality culture in Scotland. We should also explicitly embed the idea that, in principle, excellence should be measured by the value added by the provider towards the learner’s journey, rather than simple input or output measures. However, developing common understanding and consensus on these issues in the different sectors will require careful work over a period, together with dialogue amongst providers, educators, learners and quality agencies.

Rebalance quality systems towards the learner experience.

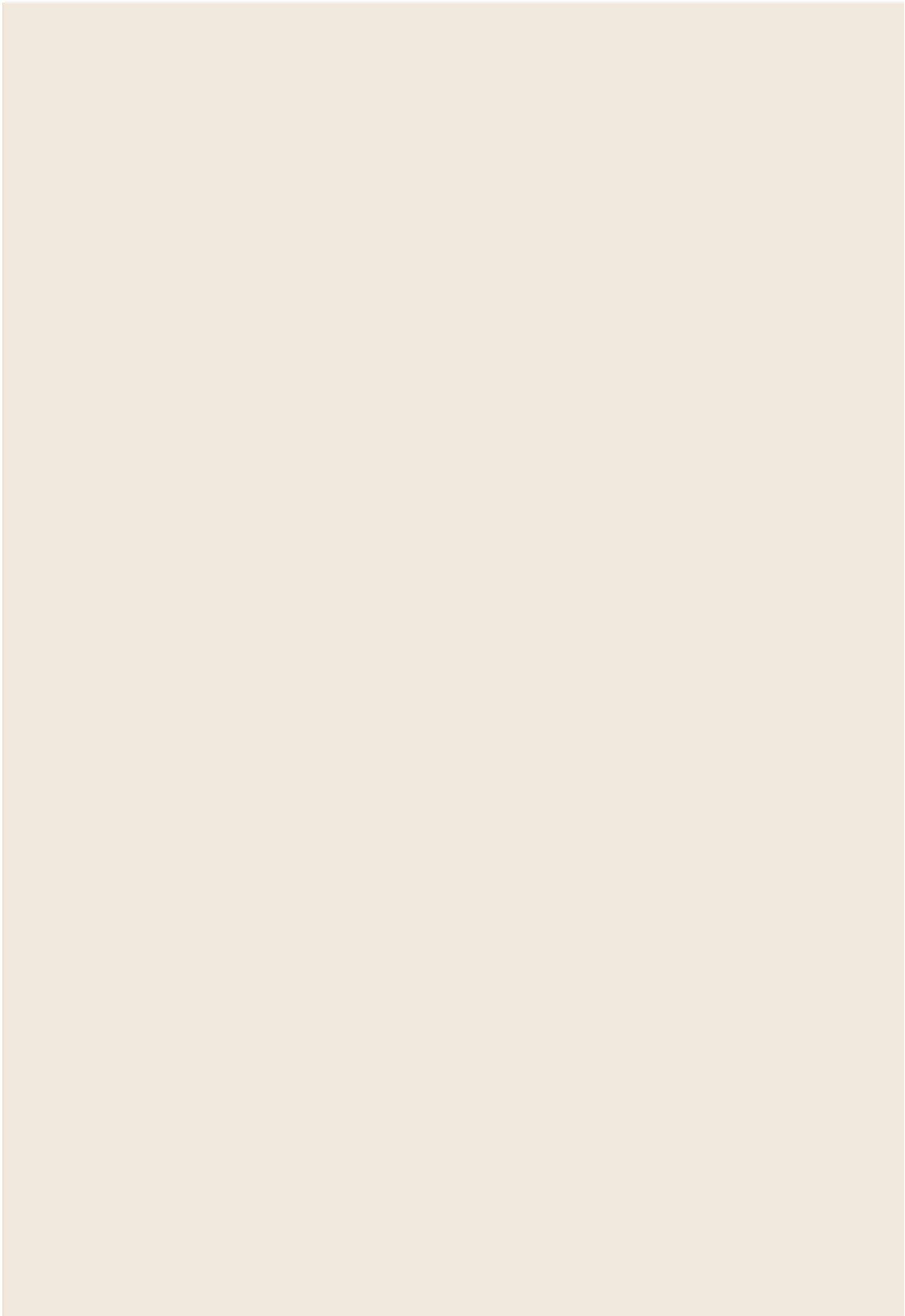
Some of the quality systems emphasise managerial aspects and seem to avoid engaging with the actual learning experience. Similarly, others appear to give more time to and therefore implicitly value more highly, the things we would describe as good processes rather than good learning. Reframing quality systems consciously from the learner perspective would reinforce the message of a learner-centred system. And quality agencies need to make sure that involving learners and interpreting learner feedback is a prominent part of their process of evaluation alongside other sources of evidence. Mechanisms such as learner involvement in reviews should be considered. Of course as noted above, learner feedback needs to be handled carefully. Particularly where learners themselves are not clear about why they are on a particular course, what their personal goals are and what they are expecting; it is difficult to ask them to evaluate whether what is provided to them is good or bad.

Re-emphasise the purpose of external quality agencies as evaluative support to providers to help them improve. The quality agencies' primary role is to provide independent evaluative feedback to providers on their performance, the perceptions of learners and other customers, and to help support reflection, improvement and the building of capacity within organisations. This should be emphasised much more strongly. We have to move to a position where providers regard this 'free consultancy' as an invaluable source of information for improvement: especially when it contains criticisms. If we do not build this developmental role for external quality agencies we are losing a huge potential for improvement and not making the shift from 'assurance and compliance' to 'enhancement and inspiration'. This reframing of roles may require development of new skills and approaches by the quality agencies, and will require them to maintain credibility with educators. Mechanisms such as involving practitioners from other providers in external evaluative work may also help build quality improvement into the community of educators. It will undoubtedly be difficult to move from a culture where providers feel that inspection/audit/review is 'imposed' on them, and the agencies will need to think carefully about how they shift to a new relationship.

Create a forum which brings together the quality agencies. Such a forum should set itself the task of building common approaches and sharing development costs. Given the diversity of the system – the range of learners, from those seeking help with literacy and numeracy to those taking PhDs; the range of providers, from small private training providers with maybe 5 or 10 trainees at any one time to large universities with over 20,000 learners; the range of provision from short courses lasting a few weeks to degree provision lasting 4 (or sometimes more) years; and the credibility (and therefore background) that quality agencies need to have with educators and learners in the particular part of the system being looked at – one single approach across the whole system would not be effective. However, the different approaches taken by the different parts of the system should share common principles, and a forum would help to promote this.

The forum should also eliminate duplicated elements such as 'assessment methods' which are covered in several frameworks (for example, the SHEFC/HMIE framework and SQMS and the SQA's framework). This forum could usefully grow, for example, from the existing work on convergence between SQMS and the HMIE framework. Minimising the audit burden will be key to growing the positive relationship between providers and external quality agencies. If providers perceive overlap and unnecessary duplication in the work of external agencies, it will damage their willingness to engage constructively with them. Equally, if providers perceive that external agencies do not recognise their 'track record' then this will reduce the credibility and effectiveness of reviews. The developing of review processes tailored to the situation of individual providers (for example on the basis of 'risk') should therefore be continued, and information shared between agencies.

An accord between the agencies and their sponsor organisations to found their approach on mutual recognition of each other's quality arrangements, should be a founding principle of this forum, whilst recognising that there will be provision where this will be more difficult, where aspects of providers' work will continue to need to be examined by more than one agency, and special cases which will require unique treatment.





Learning to improve
What next?

This report presents a strategy for the further development of our approach to quality of education in Scotland. A key message is that if we wish to promote a quality culture, we need to think about all the things that affect the system and understand how they interact, not just focus on quality assurance systems, important though they are. And we also need to recognise the inevitability of inertia in the system. It will take time and persistent and consistent effort to realign systems, change hearts and minds, grow new relationships between the many groups involved, and develop the confidence of learners and potential learners.

Looking long term, we want learners who are more demanding of us and of themselves, and learning providers who are positive, creative, reflective, and responsive. We want to create powerful learning cycles between providers and learners to improve service quality, and between providers and the economy and society to create and maintain up-to-date, worthwhile qualifications. The elements are already in place, and we need to support their further development. We should do this by building on existing systems, and by avoiding (or limiting the effect of) forces which would inhibit, or distract or divert us from these goals. This will require sustained effort by national agencies to promote this thinking about learners and quality, by providers to continually seek improvement, and by learners to become more engaged.

A process of action planning and reporting will therefore be needed to give impetus and keep this approach alive, especially given the fact that this report proposes a gradual, but deep, process of evolutionary change over time. One of the central messages of this report is the need for ownership. Capturing the hearts and minds of all the players is vital if these ideas are to be embedded in what we do and centralised action planning is therefore unlikely to be successful. Building on the approach successfully taken by the higher education sector³⁸ in developing its new approach to quality may be a way forward. Under this kind of model a working group of the partners convened by the Scottish Executive could support and co-ordinate the development of action plans by key stakeholder groups working in partnership, periodically reviewing and evaluating progress.

Above all we should keep in mind the idea of improvement itself as learning. The education business should be better placed than any other industry to keep learning about itself, find out how it can better support learners, and evaluate its achievements.

³⁸ A partnership between the institutions, the funding council, the quality agency and student representative body was used to develop the new approach.



Learning to improve
Annex A:
Approaches to quality in learning
throughout the UK

This annex summarises key aspects of approaches to quality in learning throughout the UK.

Scotland

Overarching strategies:

A Framework for Higher Education in Scotland (The Scottish Executive, 2003) which identifies the key challenges in teaching and learning as: *“speeding the rate at which flexible and innovative provision is developed which: is responsive and relevant to needs of learners, employers and Scotland more widely; fully contributes to the Executive’s aspirations for lifelong learning and closing the opportunity gap; is high quality and operates efficiently”*.

Lifelong Learning Strategy: Life Through Learning; Learning Through Life (The Scottish Executive 2003). The strategy sets five people-centred goals (see preface to this report). Specifically on quality it says:

“Quality matters. Individuals, employers and government invest time, money and effort in learning and training. Where quality is poor, they are less likely to make or continue their investment.

“It is our aim to ensure that all lifelong learning provision in Scotland competes with the best in the rest of the world in quality terms. Our assumption is that excellence in our lifelong learning provision will encourage more individuals to participate in learning throughout their lives and ensure value for money in publicly-funded provision.”

A Curriculum for Excellence,³⁹ (The Scottish Executive, November 2004), sets out the proposals of the Scottish Executive’s Curriculum Review Group for school age education. The group identifies:

- the values upon which the curriculum should be based;
- the purpose of the school curriculum 3 to 18 and the outcomes which all young people are intended to achieve; and
- the design principles which schools, teachers and other educators will use to implement the curriculum, and which will be used in a process of national reform.

In their response⁴⁰ to this report Scottish Ministers accepted the report’s proposals and set out a programme of work in response. This response notes that:

“A Curriculum for Excellence has profound implications for teaching and learning processes and for the initial and continuing professional development of teachers. It can be used immediately by teachers and educators in early years’ centres, schools and colleges to examine and improve their practice. We will support this process through professional development events and advice.”

In Ambitious, Excellent Schools,⁴¹ (November 2004), the Scottish Executive commits itself to an agenda for action “built on our belief in the potential of all young people and our commitment to help each of them realise that potential”. It sets out its agenda for action involving:

³⁹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/education/cerv-00.asp>

⁴⁰ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/education/cemr-00.asp>

⁴¹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/education/aesaa-00.asp>

- heightened expectations, stronger leadership and ambition;
- more freedom for teachers and schools;
- greater choice and opportunity for pupils;
- better support for learning; and
- tougher, intelligent accountabilities.

Particular focus under the last bullet point is given to “integrated, proportionate inspection to support improvement and target action” and “support and challenge for local authorities to deliver continuous improvement”.

A Smart, Successful Scotland: Ambitions for the Enterprise Networks (Scottish Executive, 2004), which sets out the Scottish Executive’s vision for a Scotland where “*sustained and sustainable economic growth rests on continuing improvements in productivity*”.

On skills and learning, Smart, Successful Scotland says:

“We want an economy which fully exploits high skill levels. Education, at all levels, while not narrowly focused on employability alone, must contribute to a culture of enterprise and actively enable people to improve their quality of life and to take their part in a prosperous and competitive economy. Businesses, individuals and government must invest in skills development and make best use of those skills.”

“The ability to identify and respond quickly and flexibly to changing demands from employers is a characteristic of an effective labour market. To achieve this, a culture of lifelong learning amongst those in the market and those involved in supplying the labour market is needed. Timely and high quality information on the labour market must be available, especially when requirements are changing as a result of growth, changing business practices or technical advances. Current and future requirements need to be articulated to individuals, educational establishments and those involved in career counselling, curriculum development, skills development and policy making. Enhanced skills in areas that can transfer across industry sectors, including problem solving, team work, communications, sales and marketing, are all highly important when the labour market demands flexibility. The development of high quality business leadership and management skills are also crucial to success in a changing business environment.”

Quality Improvement:

For **Scotland’s colleges**, SFEFC published a Quality Improvement Strategy in 2001 (CLFE/19/01). This has now been revised following a consultation issued in October 2003 (FEC/06/03). The Council’s approach is based on four key principles:

- quality must be owned by colleges and not imposed from outside. The Council is confident that Scotland’s colleges share its commitment to providing students with a high quality educational experience. The Council’s role is to work in partnership with the sector, HMIE and other relevant stakeholders and to ensure that its processes support and reinforce the sector’s approach to quality;
- self-evaluation is a key tool in quality assurance and improvement;
- support for Scotland’s colleges in continuing and accelerating the process of culture change from one of compliance with externally defined quality standards to one of dynamic development and continuous quality improvement; and
- further reduction in the overall burden of external quality audit.

For the **higher education sector** SHEFC set out its strategy for quality enhancement of learning and teaching in 2001 (*Strategy for the quality enhancement of learning and teaching: consultation responses and way forward HE/11/01*). The strategy set out a vision for quality enhancement, asked institutions to develop their own quality enhancement strategies, and defined how the Council would use strategic funding to invest in national infrastructure and innovation. The strategy was further developed in partnership with the institutions, the QAA and Scottish students leading to a new approach to quality assurance (*An Enhancement-led Approach to Quality Assurance: consultation responses and the way forward HE/29/02*). This approach put the emphasis on institutions' ownership of quality, a much greater prominence for the learner perspective and initiated a process of national enhancement and development activities based around themes such as 'assessment' and 'responding to student needs'. This approach has since been developed in response to the parallel external evaluation SHEFC commissioned. A summary of progress is given in *Quality Enhancement Framework: update CL HE/48/04*.

The Quality Initiative in Scottish Schools, HMIE, June 2000 provides an overview of this initiative which was launched in 1997. It put schools at the centre of the drive to raise standards and quality by taking responsibility for their own quality assurance, evaluating their performance and making the necessary changes. It set out a programme of self-evaluation, development work and external inspection for schools, expecting local authorities and HMIE to work together to build a culture of quality into the day-to-day work of all involved. It balanced internal self-evaluation with external evaluation, commenting that *"without such independent external inspection, self-evaluation can become a process of self-deception. Rigorous independent inspection is a fundamental element of the drive to raise standards and improve quality"*.

Working and learning together to build stronger communities: Scottish Executive Guidance for Community Learning and Development January 2004

This Scottish Executive guidance defines Community Learning and Development and sets national priorities.

"Community learning and development describes a way of working with and supporting communities. We see community learning and development as central to 'social capital' – a way of working with communities to increase the skills, confidence, networks and resources they need to tackle problems and grasp opportunities. We want community learning and development to bring together the best of what has been done under the banners of 'community education' and 'community development' to help individuals and communities tackle real issues in their lives through community action and community-based learning."

The guidance also describes how the the quality of CLD services can be maintained highlighting four areas: evaluation, raising the profile, staff development and management information. On evaluation, the guidance says:

"All those involved in CLD have an interest in ensuring that the service they provide is to a consistently high quality. Effective self-evaluation by partners should be an ongoing process. CLD Partnerships should consider using the quality assurance framework provided by HMIE in How Good Is Our Community Learning and Development? and the planning and evaluation framework provided by LEAP⁴² (Learning Evaluation and Planning).

"HMIE will continue to evaluate the quality of local authority CLD services through its inspection, reporting and follow through programme."

Job Centre Plus provides services to job seekers. This includes job search, work experience and placements, confidence building and mentoring as well as education and training. A wide range of providers work with the learners on these schemes. In Scotland, Job Centre Plus allows the different providers to choose the quality framework which works for them. Providers submit development plans, explain what system they use for quality assurance and improvement and, providing these are sufficiently robust, Job Centre Plus accepts these. The range of quality systems used is therefore wide, reflecting the wide range of providers involved. Frameworks commonly used by Job Centre Plus providers include SQMS and The Big Picture,⁴³ which is a version of the EFQM specially tailored for the voluntary sector.

Quality frameworks:

The key quality frameworks are:

- Specification for the Review of Standards and Quality in Scottish Further Education Colleges (SFEFC/HMIE, Aug 2004).⁴⁴
- Handbook for enhancement-led institutional review: Scotland (QAAHE 2003).⁴⁵
- Scottish Quality Management System Standards Manual (Scottish Enterprise).⁴⁶
- How good is our community learning and development? (HMIE, May 2002).⁴⁷
- Literacies in the Community (Scottish Executive, 2000) – the quality assurance guidance for literacies practitioners.
- Quality Indicators (learndirect scotland, 2000).
- Quality Assurance: Principles, Elements and Criteria, SQA, December 1998.⁴⁸

⁴² LEAP is a practical approach to effective evaluation and planning of community activities such as learning and health. It has been developed by the Scottish Community Development Centre. <http://www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk/web/site/Engagement/techniques/leap.asp>

⁴³ www.thebigpic.org.uk

⁴⁴ [http://www.hmie.gov.uk/documents/publication/supporting 20informarion 20for 20FE.doc](http://www.hmie.gov.uk/documents/publication/supporting%20information%20for%20FE.doc)

⁴⁵ http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/elir/handbook/scottish_hbook.pdf

⁴⁶ Meeting the SQMS standards is a requirement for providers of vocational education and training funded by the Enterprise Networks.

<http://www.sqms.co.uk/>

⁴⁷ <http://www.hmie.gov.uk/documents/publication/cldfull.pdf>

⁴⁸ <http://www.sqa.org.uk/files/nq/A0798.pdf>

England

Overarching strategies:

The Department for Education and Skills: Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners (Cm6272), July 2004 sets out the DfES's strategy for the next five years, covering the whole education field from pre-school to higher education. The strategy sets out five key principles for reform:

- Greater personalisation and choice, with the wishes and needs of children's services, parents and learners centre-stage.
- Opening up services to new and different providers and ways of delivering services.
- Freedom and independence for frontline headteachers, governors and managers with clear simple accountabilities and more secure streamlined funding arrangements.
- A major commitment to staff development with high quality support and training to improve assessment, care and teaching.
- Partnerships with parents, employers, volunteers and voluntary organisations to maximise the life chances of children, young people and adults.

The strategy then sets out specific plans in line with these principles for each of the areas: early years, primary, secondary, 14-19, adult and higher education.

The Future of Higher Education, Cm 5735 January 2003, set out the Government's proposals for reform. The White Paper said that:

"Effective teaching and learning is essential if we are to promote excellence and opportunity in higher education. High quality teaching must be recognised and rewarded, and best practice shared.

"Reforms include:

- *Additional funding not just for excellence in research but also in teaching with new money for pay modernisation, rewarding good teaching and promoting best practice;*
- *Centres of Excellence to reward good teaching and promote best practice;*
- *Better information for students including a new annual student survey and publication of external examiners' reports to help student choice drive up quality;*
- *New national professional standards for teaching and a new national body to develop and promote good teaching – the Teaching Quality Academy."*

Success for All: reforming further education and training (DfES, November 2002) set out a strategy for reform including four elements:

- **Meeting needs, improving choice:** to improve the pattern, responsiveness and quality of provision in each area to meet learner, employer and community needs; expecting all providers to look afresh at their education and training mission and to focus on their strengths; and further expanding the Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) network, strengthening focus on meeting regional and sub-regional skills needs and giving increased emphasis to encouraging innovative approaches to meeting these needs.

- **Putting teaching, training and learning at the heart of what we do:** by establishing a Standards Unit in the Department staffed mainly with expert practitioners to identify and disseminate good practice, learning materials and training programmes.
- **Developing the leaders, teachers, trainers and support staff of the future,** including setting a new target that by 2005/06 the vast majority of full-time and a majority of part-time college teachers and lecturers should be appropriately qualified.
- **Developing a framework for quality and success:** establishing a new planning, funding and accountability system, based on greater partnerships and trust. There will be additional rewards for top performing providers, including financial rewards, building on the current arrangements for learning and skills Beacon status.

21st Century Skills Realising our Potential Cm 5810, July 2003 sets out the Government's Skills Strategy for England. It sets out the importance of raising skills levels both to raise competitiveness and contribute to greater social justice. The strategy says that:

- We must put employers' needs for skills centre stage, managing the supply of training, skills and qualifications so that it responds directly to those needs.
- We must raise ambition in the demand for skills. We will only achieve increased productivity and competitiveness if more employers and more employees are encouraged and supported to make the necessary investment in skills. We need a new social partnership with employers and unions, and a much stronger focus on driving up skills and productivity in each sector of the economy and in each region.
- We must motivate and support many more learners to re-engage in learning. For too many people, learning is something that stops when they leave school. Learning new skills, at work and for pleasure, must become a rewarding part of everyday life.
- We must make Scotland's colleges and training providers more responsive to employers' and learners' needs, reaching out to more businesses and more people, and providing training in ways that suit them. Creating a truly demand-led approach means reforming qualifications, reforming the way we fund Scotland's colleges, and reforming the way we deliver training.
- We must achieve much better joint working across Government and the public services. This is not just a strategy for the Department for Education and Skills, but a shared strategy involving the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Treasury and the range of agencies involved in training, skills, business support and productivity. Government must lead by example, in the way that we work and in our own role as employers.

The Government's Policy on Inspection of Public Services, July 2003 flows from the report *Inspecting for Improvement*. From the analysis in this report the Office of Public Services Reform derives the following principles:

- The **purpose of improvement**. There should be an explicit concern on the part of inspectors to contribute to the improvement to the service being inspected. This should guide the focus, method, reporting and follow-up of inspection. In framing recommendations, an inspector should recognise good performance and address any failure appropriately. Inspection should aim to generate data and intelligence that enable departments more quickly to calibrate the progress of reform in their sectors and make appropriate adjustments.
- A **focus on outcomes**, which means considering service delivery to the end users of the services rather than concentrating on internal management arrangements.
- A **user perspective**. Inspection should be delivered with a clear focus on the experience of those for whom the service is provided, as well as on internal management arrangements. Inspection should encourage innovation and diversity and not be solely compliance-based.
- **Proportionate to risk**. Over time, inspectors should modify the extent of future inspection according to the quality of performance by the service provider. For example, good performers should undergo less inspection, so that resources are concentrated on areas of greatest risk.
- Inspectors should encourage rigorous **self-assessment** by managers. Inspectors should challenge the outcomes of managers' self-assessments, take them into account in the inspection process, and provide a comparative benchmark.
- Inspectors should use **impartial evidence**. Evidence, whether quantitative or qualitative, should be validated and credible.
- Inspectors should disclose the **criteria** they use to form judgements.
- Inspectors should be **open** about their processes, willing to take any complaints seriously, and able to demonstrate a robust quality assurance process.
- Inspectors should have regard to **value for money**, their own included: inspection looks to see that there are arrangements in place to deliver the service efficiently and effectively; inspection itself should be able to demonstrate it delivers benefits commensurate with its cost, including the cost to those inspected; and inspectorates should ensure that they have the capacity to work together on cross-cutting issues, in the interests of greater cost effectiveness and reducing the burden on those inspected.
- Inspectors should **continually learn** from experience, in order to become increasingly effective. This can be done by assessing their own impact on the service provider's ability to improve and by sharing best practice with other inspectors.

Quality improvement:

The Learning and Skills Council's Quality Improvement Strategy 2003-2006 (February 2004)

covers further education/vocational education and training and is based on five main principles:

- The experience and success of learners are at the heart of what the Council does.
- Colleges and other providers are responsible for the quality of their own services.
- The more successful a provider is, the less the Council will need to intervene.
- The Council will work closely with its partners to develop, put into practice and assess the strategy.
- The Council's ways of working with providers must be based on relationships of trust and a shared commitment to learners, and should reduce unnecessary administration.

The strategy describes how the Learning and Skills Council intends to meet five general aims: to develop local patterns of education and training to meet the needs of learners, employers and communities; to recognise and reward excellent providers, and encourage them to share their good practice; to improve the quality of education and training across the learning and skills sector so it becomes consistently strong; to help the weakest providers achieve at least minimum levels of performance; and to improve its ability to deliver *Success for All*⁴⁹ and the quality improvement strategy. The quality of further education and training provision is assessed by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) working in partnership.

The Learning and Skills Council recently published a circular **Recognising and Rewarding Excellence in Colleges and other Providers of Further Education – Arrangements for Premium Rate Funding (Circular 03/16)**. This circular explains the purpose of this initiative as 'to recognise and reward excellent performance, which will support raising standards in the sector'. Providers judged excellent will be funded in 2004/05 and 2005/06 at a premium rate representing a "3.5% *real terms increase, compared with the standard rate real terms funding increase of 2.5%*". The LSC expects that around 10% of FTE learners will be in providers qualifying for this additional funding. The Circular notes difficulties in identifying excellence – the fact that the same measures and evidence are not available for all types of provider, that even where similar evidence is available, variations in the curriculum profile will affect the measures, and the risks of perverse incentives (for example, use of raw success rates "could provide an incentive for institutions to distort certain types of provision in order to meet criteria for excellence"). To qualify for excellence a provider will have to have made good progress in implementing their three-year development plan; and show either excellent performance evidenced through inspection, or have high, 'curriculum adjusted', success rates.⁵⁰

The DfES and the Learning and Skills Council also recognise excellence through awarding '**Beacon status**' to providers. In addition to premium funding rates, Beacon Colleges receive funding to disseminate good practice, and for some funding for innovation. They will also receive a 'lighter touch' in monitoring and inspection.⁵¹ Another initiative is funding for Centres of Vocational Excellence, where the focus is on responsiveness to employers' skills needs.⁵²

⁴⁹ Success for All, DfES (Nov, 2002) set out the government's programme of reform of the post-16 learning and skills sector in England.

⁵⁰ This measure will take account of the provider's curriculum profile – levels of qualifications and the mix of short/long course provision. It will not take account of widening participation factors, because the impact of this factor is small compared with others and inconsistent between providers.

⁵¹ Report of the Review of Learning and Skills Beacon Status, DfES, October 2003 <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/learningandskillsbeacons/>

⁵² Centres of Vocational Excellence in Further Education: the way ahead, DfES <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/cove/framework.shtml>

The Higher Education Funding Council for England's Strategic Plan 2003-08 has enhancing excellence in learning and teaching as one of its core strategic aims. It aims to ensure that all higher education students benefit from a high-quality learning experience fully meeting their needs and the needs of society, and sets six objectives:

- To achieve the successful implementation of the new quality assurance framework⁵³ for higher education.
- To promote activities to enhance the quality of learning and teaching across the sector.
- To provide rewards to celebrate and encourage excellence in all modes, pedagogies and approaches to teaching, and to promote the professional development of teaching staff.
- To support the continuing development of the physical infrastructure for learning and teaching, so that this remains fully fit for the purpose and delivers excellent provision.
- To support the supply of HE student places matching the changing needs of learners and other stakeholders.
- To review and put in place funding methods for learning and teaching that will support the achievement of these objectives.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England also recently announced the establishment of **Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs)**.⁵⁴ The purpose of CETLs is to reward excellent teaching practice and to invest in that practice further to increase and deepen its impact across a wider teaching and learning community. Institutions were asked to define their own areas of excellence, evidenced by scholarly practice and a successful track record of excellence in teaching and learning outcomes, and demonstrate how their identified excellence is reflected in and advanced by the proposed focus of the CETL. Some £315 million will be invested to fund 74 CETLs over the five-year period from 2005-06 to 2009-10. The CETLs will each receive substantial recurrent funding, ranging from £200,000 to £500,000 per annum for five years, and a capital sum ranging from £0.8 million to £2 million. A complete list of CETLs and brief descriptions is available on the HEFCE website.⁵⁵

In relation to **schools**, the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) published a consultation paper *The Future of Inspection* (HMI 2057) in February 2004. This paper proposed developments in OFSTED's approach saying:

"A great deal of information about schools is now in the public arena. Many schools now undertake self-evaluation effectively; those which do not should be encouraged to do so. We believe that inspection can further support the improvement of schools through more regular and much lighter engagement, incorporated into the schools' own cycle of planning. Inspection should become a more natural part of the normal business of schools, rather than an infrequent event which does not necessarily see the school as it usually is. In order to eliminate the unnecessary preparation that still occurs we propose that we should give a very short period of notice before a school is inspected."

Following the consultation these principles have been put into practice in new arrangements for inspection of schools announced by OFSTED and the DfES in March 2005.

⁵³ The new framework to be implemented from 2003 builds on institutions internal quality assurance arrangements. See Handbook for Institutional Audit: England QAA 021 7/2002

⁵⁴ Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning: Invitation to bid for funds, HEFCE, January 2004/05.
<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2004/04%5F05/default.asp>

⁵⁵ <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/tinits/cetl/>

Quality frameworks:

The key quality frameworks are:

- The Common Inspection Framework (OFSTED, 2001).⁵⁶
- Handbook for Institutional Audit: England QAA 021 7/2002.⁵⁷
- Framework 2005 – Inspecting Schools (OFSTED, 2005).⁵⁸

Wales

Overarching strategies:

The National Assembly for Wales published **The Learning Country: A comprehensive Education and Lifelong Learning Programme to 2010**⁵⁹ in Wales in 2001. The report sets out a vision for Wales as a learning country. It articulates some key principles which the Government is seeking to establish. These are:

- High standards and expectations and progressively improving outcomes for all learners whatever their situation.
- The interests of learners override all others.
- Barriers to learning must be recognised and steadily overcome.
- Every encouragement must be given to ensure that academic, technical and vocational pathways have parity of esteem.
- Inequalities in achievement between advantaged and disadvantaged areas, groups and individuals must be narrowed in the interests of all.
- Innovation must be supported.
- The informed professional judgement of teachers, lecturers and trainers must be celebrated without prejudice to the disciplines of public accountability; and with proper regard to clearing the way to unleash the capacity and expertise of practitioners.
- Policy and programme development must be undertaken on the basis of partnership.
- Provision for education and lifelong learning must reflect wise use of money.
- Policy for education and training must be evidence based.
- The agenda for lifelong learning must be applied in ways that reflect the distinctive needs and circumstances of Wales.

⁵⁶ The Common Inspection Framework sets out the joint approach the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) and Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) takes for inspections of post-16 non-higher education and training. The DfES is currently consulting on revisions to the framework.

⁵⁷ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubs.summary&id=1037>

⁵⁸ http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/institutionalAudit/handbook/audit_handbook.asp

⁵⁹ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubs.summary&id=3861>

⁵⁹ <http://www.wales.gov.uk/subieducationtraining/content/PDF/learningcountry-e.pdf>

Quality improvement:

The National Council for Education and Training for Wales (ELWA) published *Aiming for Excellence: Quality Framework (NC/C/03/10LP)* in September 2003. The framework is underpinned by the following principles:

- To focus on identifying and meeting the needs of the customer (the individual learner, business or community).
- To seek maximum value for money in the activities funded by the National Council.
- To reward high quality, and promote continuous improvement, so that the aim for excellence becomes a way of life for providers.
- To ensure that quality procedures are applied consistently to all provision, recognising differing delivery contexts.
- To build on past experience and good and effective practice.
- To minimise bureaucracy and administrative burdens on providers, while assuring accountability for public funds.

The framework identifies 14 performance measures in the following areas: planning and responsiveness, learner achievement, learners' experiences and leadership and management.

ELWa undertakes twice-yearly reviews of the performance of providers against this framework. A key element is judgements on the quality of provision undertaken by Estyn, which is the Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales.

The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) Corporate Strategy to 2010 sets a goal of delivering the highest quality learning and related support to learners, with one of its strategic outcomes by 2010 being a higher education sector which stands well in comparison with the rest of the UK and overseas in terms of the provision of high quality learning and teaching. The strategy specifically requires continuous quality enhancement to be a central feature of institutions' learning and teaching strategies.

The HEFCW supports teaching excellence through funding for institutional learning and teaching strategies, encouraging institutions to reward excellent teaching through their human resource strategies, through sectoral collaboration on enhancement activities, and through support for the HE Academy. On the importance of human resource strategies supporting excellence it says 'Promotion plays such a key role in academic career development that this new requirement for evidence that excellence in teaching really does count will, the Council believes, be an important lever for change.'⁶⁰

Quality frameworks:

The key quality frameworks are:

- The common inspection framework for education and training in Wales,⁶¹ Estyn, 2002
- Handbook for Institutional Review: Wales, QAAHE,⁶²

⁶⁰ Mechanisms for supporting excellent teaching in higher education, HEFCW, 2004, W04/06HE

⁶¹ <http://www.estyn.gov.uk/publications/CommonInspectionFramework.pdf>

⁶² http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/reviewWales/handbook/Welsh_handbook_english.pdf

Northern Ireland

Overarching strategies:

The Department for Employment and Learning,⁶³ Northern Ireland funds the two universities and two university colleges, and the further education colleges in Northern Ireland. It also provides support to a small number of non-statutory further education providers. In **higher education** it aims:

- to promote high standards of teaching;
- to promote high standards of research and encourage enterprise and innovation;
- to promote and support productive interaction between higher education and industry and commerce and encourage the transfer of knowledge;
- to encourage increased access, support lifelong learning, and maximise achievement for all who can benefit from higher education; and
- to fund the universities and teacher training colleges and promote the effective financial management, accountability and value for money of public funds in the higher education sector.

In further education it aims:

- to support regional economic development and, in particular, to provide the skills necessary for the knowledge-based economy;
- to increase participation and widen access to those previously under-represented in the sector; and
- to improve the quality of provision and enhance standards of performance.

The Department of Education's Education and Training Inspectorate provides for inspections of FE colleges in relation to the quality of teaching and learning.


*Quality frameworks:*⁶⁴

- Improving Quality: Raising Standards, Department of Education, Northern Ireland, 2003.⁶⁵

⁶³ www.delni.gov.uk

⁶⁴ Note Higher education provision is covered by the same framework as the QAA uses in England

⁶⁵ http://www.deni.gov.uk/inspection_services/publications/IRQS_Training.pdf



Learning to improve
Annex B:
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