Further Education College Governors
Development and Training Programme
Resource Pack

Module 8 Curriculum

For suggestions on how to get the most out of these self-study materials, see the booklet on ‘Using the Materials’.

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Contents

**Introduction** .................................................................................................................................................. 1

**Section 1. National and local influences on the curriculum** ................................................................. 3

**Section 2. The students and their courses** ............................................................................................... 7

**Section 3. The curriculum offer** ............................................................................................................... 12

**Section 4. Assessing the effectiveness of teaching and learning** ......................................................... 18

**Module review** ........................................................................................................................................... 21

**Further reading** ......................................................................................................................................... 22
Introduction

Welcome to Module 8, which looks at your responsibilities in terms of the core business of the college: the curriculum and looks briefly at ways to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

The term ‘curriculum’ is often used to refer to the portfolio of course programmes and qualifications offered by a college. In practice, the concept can encompass the complete learning experience including other learning activities, cultural and sporting opportunities, and facilities such as libraries.

As a result of the responsibilities set out in the Instrument and Articles, governors are expected to take a strategic overview of the curriculum offer and make sure that it is in line with its mission and strategy.

Aims

By the end of this module you should be able to:

- explain the meaning of ‘curriculum’ and terms used for categories and levels of qualification;
- describe the range of pre- and post-19 learning opportunities at your college;
- show how this provision relates to students’ and employers’ skill requirements in your local community, and to national strategy;
- demonstrate how the offer is part of a coherent provision in your local area and - on its own and in collaboration with other colleges - contributes to social inclusion and equality of opportunity;
- understand the funding available for learners;
- outline the current range of Government policies.

Contents

Mark the sections you want to study and tick them off as you complete them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To do</th>
<th>Done</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section 1</td>
<td>National and local influences on the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 2</td>
<td>The students and their courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 3</td>
<td>The curriculum offer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 4</td>
<td>Assessing the effectiveness of teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Working on the self-study materials

These materials have been designed to be used flexibly (e.g. dip in and out for reference; complete in one sitting; work through alone or with others).

Where you need to make notes in response to activity questions, we suggest you do this in a notebook or on separate sheets of loose-leaf paper, and store the information you
compile along with the module for future reference. References listed in the Further Reading section may also be helpful.

**What you will need**
- your college's vision and mission statement, a copy of the strategic plan, the college prospectus and, if available, the annual report;
- principal's reports to governors;
- standards and performance reports to governors;
- the most recent Ofsted report;
- attendance, retention, achievement, success rate, progress and destination data on the student cohort from the current and the previous two academic years.
Section 1. National and local influences on the curriculum

No two colleges are identical in their curriculum offer. Each college's offer is influenced by both national and local factors. In this section you will be looking at some of the key influences, including the national drivers and the needs of your local economy and community.

Government departments that influence education policy

There are currently two departments that influence education and training: the Department for Education (DfE) and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). The current policy drivers for funding post-16 education and training focus on employability, apprenticeships, world class skills, and reviewing vocational qualifications.

Department for Education (DfE)

The DfE is responsible for education and children's services and oversees the 14-19 classroom-based element of FE. The Education Funding Agency (EFA) provides funding to colleges for 14-19 education.

The Government is committed to increasing the number of places in education and training for 16-18 year-olds in preparation for raising the age of participation in education or training to 18 by 2015. Local authorities have a duty to ensure that sufficient suitable places are available to meet the reasonable needs of all young people, and to encourage them to participate. Local authorities must also track young people's progress as they move between different education and training opportunities.

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)

BIS is responsible for the economy: skills, higher education, innovation, business and trade. The Skills Funding Agency (SFA) provides funding for adult learner-responsive provision and employer-responsive provision.

In the department's Plan for Growth strategy of March 2011, Ambition 4 is: “to create a more educated workforce that is the most flexible in Europe”. This has a significant focus on employer-responsive work, particularly apprenticeships, including higher level apprenticeships.

Colleges at the heart of their community

“Colleges change lives; they feed skills into the economy and support employers to develop their workforce to underpin a competitive economy. They also cement the fabric of the community, bringing the unemployed back into the workforce, tackling issues of equality and diversity and working with health, social services and the voluntary sector to create access and opportunity to ensure inclusion.”

‘Our manifesto for further education and skills' (2013) 157 Group
Currently, the Government agenda is for increased localism and providing tailored public services for the needs of the local community.

Colleges need to be working actively to develop partnerships with local employers to upgrade skills and create jobs. Many colleges already work closely with large employers in their area, but more needs to be done to reach out to small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) using the new funding flexibilities.

Partnership with public sector organisations is also essential to making joined-up government work at a local level. Colleges need to be proactive in seeking partnerships with local authorities, health services, the police and youth offending teams, often in collaboration with charities and local community groups. Such partnerships yield substantial benefits, transforming the lives of individuals and the well-being of whole communities.

Colleges need to ensure that their voices are heard on local economic and social planning partnerships. Colleges are the main source of skills training in many localities and they therefore need to be represented on Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs – see below), playing a prominent role in developing local skills strategies.

A new push into outreach activities requires new thinking about the curriculum. Providing routes and pathways to further learning is central but it needs also to be a highly flexible curriculum built to respond to local needs on an ‘any time, any place’ formula. Building confidence and self-esteem is important and so too is recognition of the motivational stimulus that people gain from group-based activities, whether in the college, the workplace or the community.

Many colleges are already an integral part of the economic and social development of the community in which they operate. The Government aims to strengthen this and to make colleges more accountable to their local communities. Colleges undertake a dialogue with the funding agencies to determine what provision best meets local needs. The following was submitted by Ofsted as evidence to the Independent Commission on Colleges in their Communities (July 2011):

“Key strengths included extensive partnerships with local businesses, the local authority, schools and charities which create real projects that have high impact on both learners and the immediate community. These colleges are key players in the development of an effective community ethos. They develop strategies to engage hard-to-reach groups, and support them back into learning.

“Links with employers help them to become more competitive, enable them to secure their future workforce, and provide opportunities to local people. Students value work placements highly and have a very good choice of experiences through extensive links with employers, schools, nurseries, community organisations and universities.”

Evidence to the Commission from Ofsted – college inspection reports
Offender learning

Offenders - in prison or supervised in the community - should have access to learning that enables them to gain the skills and qualifications they need to hold down a job and have a positive role in society.

Raising the participation age

The Government aims to increase the participation of young people in education and training and support more young people to do this. The key elements of this strategy are to:

- raise the participation age in 2013 and 2015, eventually requiring young people to remain in some form of education or training until their 18th birthday;
- make sure that young people have the information they need to make good choices by extending the duty on schools and colleges to secure independent, impartial careers guidance.

Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)

LEPs were set up in response to the Government’s Local Growth White Paper (October 2010). LEPs are managed by voluntary boards that consist of business leaders, educational institutions and local authorities. They have a direct link to Government. There are currently 39 LEPs across the country. Their role is to influence and support the local development of enterprise, business, education and training. LEPs were given the chance to apply to have an enterprise zone and 24 were awarded. These zones can take advantage of incentives and simplified local planning regulations.

Activity

National and local influences on your college’s curriculum

Look through some principal’s reports to governors.

- What curriculum matters are raised?
- Do they illustrate any of the national or local influences listed above?

Look at your college’s vision, mission statement and strategic objectives.

- How do these relate to the current government policy drivers?
- How do they relate to your LEP priorities?

Look through your college prospectus.

- How does the curriculum offer support the economic needs of your community?

Book an appointment to go through your findings with the senior manager responsible for curriculum.
Viewpoint

We hope this activity has given you an insight into how curriculum issues are considered by your college. You should have managed to identify some curriculum areas that seem to reflect national and local influences. You may feel that one or two aspects need to be considered more carefully.
Section 2. The students and their courses

As a governor, you need to know what kind of students your college has, how they are funded, the levels and types of courses they follow, and what the links are between the courses on offer, the progression opportunities and links with employment. There may also be international students who will have specific needs.

Colleges and courses

Every college is unique in its offer, depending on its mission and specialisms. However, it is possible to group colleges according to the age range of their students and the range of courses they offer - Figure 1.

Figure 1: Categories of college – students and courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College type</th>
<th>Students and courses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sixth form colleges</td>
<td>Students aged 16-19, many following academic programmes; some colleges also have adult students; mainly full-time courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General further education and tertiary colleges; community colleges</td>
<td>Students aged 14+; they attend on a full- or part-time basis; wide range of vocational, academic and professional courses offered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land-based colleges</td>
<td>Students aged 14+; courses reflect the specialist vocational requirements implicit in the college's name; students may be full- or part-time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art, design and performing arts colleges</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist designated colleges</td>
<td>Students are mostly adults; these colleges may be highly specialised in the courses they offer or they may offer a wide range; attendance is full- or part-time; it may be on a residential basis.</td>
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Categories and levels of qualification

The Office of Qualification & Examination Regulation (Ofqual) regulates at all levels, from the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) of the national curriculum up to higher level vocational qualifications equivalent to a PhD. These assessments and qualifications are collected into separate systems (or frameworks). Find out more about the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) describes all the main HE qualifications: degrees, diplomas, certificates and other academic awards granted by a university or HE college (apart from honorary degrees and higher doctorates). It corresponds with levels 4 to 8 of the NQF.

Study programmes for 16-19 year-olds

Study programmes were introduced in the academic year 2013/14. The aim is to ensure that all 16-19 year-olds have the opportunity to study coherent, well thought-out
programmes. The programmes are constructed to meet the needs of particular groups of learners to help them to progress into work, further or higher education or training.

The concept of study programmes came out of the recommendations by Professor Wolf in her 2011 review of vocational education. Professor Wolf recommended that 1-19 study programmes should:

- not be wholly occupational;
- include at least one qualification of substantial size that offers progression either into higher levels of education or into skilled employment; these ‘substantial qualifications’ should be at least half of a learner’s study programme, mostly at a level above the learner’s prior attainment;
- include the study of English and maths and work towards the achievement of GCSE A*-C for all students who do not already have these;
- include both qualification and non-qualification activity; the latter is intended to improve learners’ employability skills and enable them to take part in other activity of value which does not necessarily lead to qualifications but which helps them to progress.

Equality and diversity

The Equality Act came into force on 1 October 2010, and applies to any business with employees and those providing goods and services to the public. It distils nine acts into one, harmonises definitions and exceptions, and places a new equality duty on public bodies.

It is important that all public bodies, including FE colleges, recognise the protected characteristics under the Act: race, religion or belief, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity.

The Act requires the college to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups;
- foster good relations between people from different groups.

It is the responsibility of the board to monitor the implementation of the Equality Act in the college.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding in FE places learners at the centre of learning decisions, and promotes their need to be safe and to succeed. Personal safety is a fundamental precondition for effective and successful learning, and can only be experienced in a safe learning environment that promotes wellbeing and security for all learners, of all ages, especially those who are vulnerable. Find out more about the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act of 2006.

‘Every Child Matters’ (2003) is an initiative which focuses on five outcomes, for all those working with children and young people up to the age of 18. Many colleges have extended this to all learners including adults. Colleges must strive to help them:
• be healthy;
• stay safe;
• enjoy and achieve;
• make a positive contribution;
• achieve economic wellbeing.

The ‘staying safe’ outcome principally concerns the capacity of colleges to ensure that children and young people stay safe from harm. Safety is arguably a precondition for the achievement of each of the other four outcomes. Evidence for their success includes compliance with relevant legislation, undertaking appropriate checks, combating bullying, harassment and discrimination, and ensuring all staff members are appropriately trained.

Learning is expected to support children and young people and keep them safe from accidental injury, bullying, harassment, discrimination, crime, antisocial behaviour, neglect, sexual exploitation, exposure to violence and other dangers. Your college should also have a Prevent strategy and have considered DfE’s advice on advice to schools on ‘promoting British Values’.

**Activity**

**Who are your college’s students and what courses are they studying?**

In this activity you will be finding out more about the students at your college and the levels and types of courses that they follow. You may already have some of this information from your college induction and working through the activities in Module 1: Overview of the Further Education System and Module 6: Strategy and Educational Character. If not, or if there are gaps in your information, you should look at your principal’s report to governors and/or your college’s annual report.

• Determine with the clerk how best for you to meet some students and staff.

• Look at the trends over the last couple of years in terms of student numbers, balance of full- and part-time, and the levels and types of courses on offer by comparing the most recent data with that for the previous two years. What patterns, if any, emerge?

• Now consider the curriculum plan. How does it reflect those trends? Are you happy that the current curriculum strategy is congruent with the trends? Are there any implications for the strategic plan?

• What opportunities are there for students to progress in the college? Are all students able to move flexibly across all the curriculum areas offered? Are there patterns of unequal take-up according to gender, age, ethnicity, disability, etc.?

• Get copies of your college’s policies in relation to equality and diversity. If you identified any patterns of unequal take-up in relation to the previous question, does the college address these?
How have apprenticeships developed in your college and how do they provide coherent progression pathways for students?

**Viewpoint**

This activity should help bring to life the profile of your college and its students. You should have built up a picture of your institution in terms of two important characteristics: the student body and the range and type of courses. This picture should be consistent with the institution's vision, mission, strategic objectives and the needs of the community it serves. It should provide comprehensive progression routes across subject areas for all students.

If you are in doubt about the overall picture or have questions about the fit between this picture and the mission, strategic objectives and community needs, raise them in the forum and context you consider most appropriate.

**Support for students**

**Financial support**

Financial support for students is a complex and ever-changing area, but it is important for you to have a basic understanding of the system of funding and how it is implemented by your own college. You will look at this in more detail in Module 10: Finance.

Funding priorities are set annually and shift in order to meet national skills needs. In addition, colleges are allocated discretionary funds to support students from low income families and disadvantaged backgrounds into employment. Student loans have recently been introduced as a way of enabling older students to access qualification courses.

**Activity**

**How does your college's approach to student financial support ensure equality of opportunity?**

- Ask your college's financial director for the strategies relating to student finance and funding streams and the college's strategy for bursaries for 16-18 year-olds. This should include learning support funds, financial support, bursaries, fee levels, grants, local transport initiatives, and full cost work (where the student pays for the full cost of the programme of learning).

- Ask the students what it means to them and are they are aware of what's on offer?
Guidance and support

Guidance and support for students is an important part of the total curriculum offer and must be available to all students, irrespective of age. Institutions should provide pre-enrolment advice, ensure that induction programmes are part of the course package, and offer support throughout a course. For example, support could involve learning support, financial support or support for welfare concerns. In addition, institutions should offer guidance for progression and employment. Where students have additional learning needs the college should have a clear approach to defining those needs, together with the resources to support them.

Activity

- Review the guidance and support your college offers. Again, talk to the students and ask about what advice they got before coming to college.

Viewpoint

- The management of the student support provision is of critical importance in ensuring that the college is able to retain students. The governors should ensure that the college has in place a swift and effective support service that addresses student problems quickly and sensitively whilst keeping teaching staff informed and involved.
Section 3. The curriculum offer

Although each college is unique, they all organise their curriculum around the National Qualifications Framework, which is based on national policies aimed at:

- raising the levels of skill in the workforce;
- ensuring that young people’s learning enables them to develop the functional skills and broad range of capabilities needed for future employment;
- inclusion in education and training and addressing equal opportunities issues so that no group is excluded from the range of benefits that come from work and from playing a full part in society;
- developing a lifelong learning culture enabling people to continue to learn for a variety of purposes;
- encouraging people of all ages to take part in learning and so enjoy the benefits of qualifications and improved knowledge and skills.

Every college has to offer a breadth of curriculum that enables individual learning plans to be agreed according to their needs.

Entry and foundation level

Most general FE colleges offer entry and foundation level learning programmes. The courses offered at these levels include functional skills in English and maths for adults, provision for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, and programmes aimed at enabling young people who have not yet achieved Level 2 to progress. There are some specialist colleges that solely offer programmes for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, often with residential facilities.

Foundation learning generally supports low-attaining learners to help raise their attainment and progression. Programmes and projects aimed at re-engaging young people into education and training will often be part of a college’s foundation learning provision. Young people work on a personalised programme that leads to a mix of small, flexible qualifications. Foundation learning can be offered in schools and colleges, or by private or voluntary sector training colleges.

Examples

- Literacy and numeracy skills development embedded in vocational and other programmes.
- Work preparation and transition to work programmes for learners with learning difficulties.
- Life skills and independent living skills programmes for learners with learning difficulties.
- A range of motivational progression-focused awards and certificates to enable young people to progress to the next level of learning or employment, including learning based on vocational subjects, functional skills and personal and social development qualifications.
**Level 1 and 2**

Most general FE colleges offer vocational qualifications at Levels 1 and 2. They also offer GCSE opportunities to learners who wish to improve their qualifications, in order to progress to further opportunities.

**Examples**
- BTEC Introductory Awards, Certificates and Diplomas (Level 1)
- BTEC First Awards, Certificates, Extended Certificates and Diplomas (Level 2)
- OCR Nationals (Levels 1 and 2)
- Vocationally Related Qualifications (VRQs)
- National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)
- GCSEs (Level 2)
- Functional Skills in English, maths and information communication technology (Levels 1 and 2)

**Level 3**

Learners will either undertake an A level programme or a vocational programme, while in some colleges it's possible to combine the two.

**Examples**
- BTEC Extended Diploma (e.g. in sport and exercise)
- A Level (e.g. in English)
- NVQ Level 3 (e.g. in motor vehicle engineering)
- International Baccalaureate

**A level and GCSE reforms**

The Government is currently reforming A level and GCSE qualifications. Changes include subject-by-subject arrangements that put in place a better balance between exam and non-exam assessment or coursework for the 14 subjects being revised ready for first teaching in 2015. A levels will be assessed by exam except where it is necessary to use other methods to assess the required skills. The new AS qualification will be a stand-alone qualification, separate from the A level. Exam boards will be able to design the AS so that it can be taught alongside the first year of an A level course.

**Functional skills**

On most programmes, learners will undertake functional skills, which are the practical skills that allow people to use English, maths and ICT in real-life contexts. In developing functional skills, people can adapt and apply the knowledge to suit different situations they may face at home, at work, in education and in the community. Ofqual is currently reviewing Functional Skills qualifications, including branding.
**English for speakers of other language (ESOL)**

ESOL courses aim to improve speaking, reading and writing of English for learners whose first language is not English. ESOL courses are currently available from Entry level through to Level 2.

**Apprenticeships**

Apprenticeships are seen as an important contribution to economic growth. There are three levels available:

**Intermediate-level Apprenticeships (Level 2)**

Intermediate apprentices work towards work-based learning qualifications such as an NVQ Level 2, functional skills in English, maths and ICT, and, in some cases, a relevant knowledge-based qualification such as a BTEC; these provide the skills students need for their chosen career and allow entry to an advanced level apprenticeship.

**Advanced-level apprenticeships (Level 3)**

Advanced-level apprentices work towards work-based learning qualifications such as NVQ Level 3, functional skills and, in most cases, a relevant knowledge-based certificate such as a BTEC; to start this programme, learners should ideally have five GCSEs (grade C or above) or have completed a Level 2 apprenticeship.

**Higher apprenticeships (Level 4)**

Higher apprentices work towards work-based learning qualifications such as NVQ Level 4 and, in some cases, a knowledge-based qualification such as a Foundation Degree.

Apprentices have an employer and are paid a wage. A training agreement sets out what is expected of the college, the employer and the apprentice.

Colleges are increasingly using a variety of delivery approaches for apprenticeships in order to best meet the needs of the employer and the apprentice. Delivery is normally on a regular day-release basis. Increasingly, however, other approaches are used such as block release where apprentices attend the college daily for an extended period of time, or delivery in the workplace. Combinations of these approaches are also used.

Colleges provide assessors who visit the apprentices in the workplace to observe, record and validate assessment evidence. Colleges also provide training coordinators who provide pastoral support and have overall responsibility for monitoring and supporting an apprentice's progress. Some colleges combine these two roles.

**NB** At the time of writing this module, apprenticeship frameworks are being revised by employers to better match their needs. For the latest frameworks visit the [National Apprenticeship Service](https://www.nas.gov.uk) (NAS) website.
14-16 year-olds

From September 2013 FE colleges have been able to enrol 14-16 year-olds who wish to study high-quality vocational qualifications. Some colleges have set up new 14-16 centres offering a combination of vocational and academic subjects. Only FE colleges that meet certain criteria can enrol and receive Government funding for 14-16 year olds. Criteria include:

- a college must have been rated good or outstanding at their last Ofsted inspection. If a college was rated satisfactory, and their last inspection was a number of years ago, they will have to show evidence of improved performance over the past four years;
- they must conduct an assessment of their capability and readiness using the ‘readiness to open’ checklist published by the government; their finances must be in good order.

Foundation Degrees and other higher education programmes

Foundation Degree courses are designed to develop skills at Levels 4 and 5 which will equip students with the combination of technical skills, academic knowledge and transferable skills that employers need. All students enrolled on a Foundation Degree must demonstrate their skills in the workplace, and work experience is essential for students who are not in employment. They will also have the opportunity to progress to a degree course at honours level. Some colleges also run degree courses and Master’s programmes, depending on their specialism and resources.

The Government HE White Paper Students at the Heart of the System (2011) and the subsequent fee reforms have created an HE system where the costs of teaching are met through student loans, repayable on an income basis. The role of further education colleges is central to the Government’s plans for delivering HE [see Module 7].

Activity

How does your college’s curriculum plan support learners?

- Consider some representative students from the student profile at your college. How does the curriculum offer meet the needs of students and the local economy? What challenges are posed for these students, and for staff and managers?
Viewpoint

- Although the various curriculum initiatives offer very flexible choices in principle, they pose challenging problems for managers in terms of group sizes, timetabling and tracking, forecasting income, and other factors. For teaching staff, there are additional responsibilities. For students, greater flexibility and different assessment approaches can be confusing.

The learning needs of adults

There are different funding streams and Government priorities for adult learning. See the NIACE site.

- The learning needs of adults are different from those of most pre-19 students. They may want to acquire functional skills missed in their earlier years, to refresh and upgrade their skills as returners to work, or to re-train for different employment opportunities after periods of unemployment.

- Some adults will be learning solely out of personal interest as a leisure activity, and such programmes will be funded by the students themselves. For them, the social aspects of studying might be as important as the knowledge or skill gained. Their study skills and confidence as learners may need to be enhanced.

- Programmes may also be made available for students with learning difficulties, sometimes severe. Funding for such programmes is complex and often only available where the intended outcome is employment. More information on funding for such learners is available here.

Adult literacy and numeracy learning

There are national standards set by Ofqual that define levels of learning for literacy and numeracy for adults. Detail of this can be seen in the adult core curriculum site.

Professional development and higher level skills for adults in the workplace

Most colleges, through partnerships with employers, provide higher-level qualifications for employees to increase their knowledge and skills and help them gain professional qualifications such as accountancy, business improvement techniques, IT skills, CORGI gas registration and first aid.

Adult and community learning (ACL)

Traditionally, adult and community learning was delivered via funding from the local authority, sometimes through provision managed by the authority, or through partners such as colleges and training colleges or voluntary organisations. ACL is now directly funded via the SFA, although your college may deliver ACL on behalf of the local authority.
This could include family learning classes, health awareness, and English for speakers of other languages.

**Access to HE**

These courses are designed for people who would like to study at university but who left school without the usual qualifications such as A levels. Typically these are one-year qualifications. Sometimes colleges will also offer pre-access courses to help prepare learners who are not yet ready to undertake the full access course; this will usually involve developing English and maths skills.

**Activity**

**How well does your college cater for the needs of adult students?**

- Identify some key ways in which your institution is catering for the needs of adult students. E.g. where are courses sited? What additional support or services are offered? If you are not sure, look at your institution's vision, mission statement, strategic objectives and prospectus, principal's reports to governors, or curriculum reports to governors or the academic board.

**Viewpoint**

- You may have noticed some different approaches to learning from those you've noted for 16-19 year-olds: learning taken to other locations such as community centres, employers' premises, libraries and primary schools; dedicated adult areas in the college such as adult common rooms; provision of crèche or nursery places. Perhaps special projects have been developed offering a range of beneficiary allowances and support.
Section 4. Assessing the effectiveness of teaching and learning

As governors you will want to be confident that the college is delivering high quality teaching, learning and assessment and is continuously monitoring and working to improve practice. Module 9: Quality and Standards takes a more detailed look at quality. The Ofsted common inspection framework (CIF) asks colleges the following question: how effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?

The CIF sets out the following range of statements which inspectors use to explore the effectiveness and quality of teaching and learning:

- learners benefit from high expectations, engagement, care, support and motivation from staff;
- staff use their skills and expertise to plan and deliver teaching, learning and support to meet each learner’s needs;
- staff initially assess learners’ starting points and monitor their progress, set challenging tasks, and build on and extend learning for all learners;
- learners understand how to improve as a result of frequent, detailed and accurate feedback from staff following assessment of their learning;
- teaching and learning develop English, maths and functional skills, and support the achievement of learning goals and career aims;
- appropriate and timely information, advice and guidance support learning effectively;
- equality and diversity are promoted through teaching and learning.

Teaching and learning observations

All colleges have teaching and learning observation schemes where teachers, and sometimes also assessors and tutors, are observed and have their performance and the quality of learning graded by an observer. The grading scale normally follows the Ofsted scale of: Grade 1 outstanding; Grade 2 good; Grade 3 requires improvement; Grade 4 inadequate.

Schemes and observation policies vary; with some colleges, observations are undertaken without notice, whereas with others, notice is provided and teachers are able to prepare for the observation.

Ofsted inspections will normally be notified to the college on a Thursday and begin the following Monday. In this case, the determination of which areas will be inspected and observed is made on the first day, providing very short notice of observations.

There are also differences in how observation grades link to teachers’ appraisal, pay, competency or capability, and training and development. There is no single model for the observation and monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders, managers and governors must be aware of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment occurring in the college, what is being done to improve or maintain standards and what is being done to develop and share practice.
Self-assessment and quality improvement

Colleges are advised to produce an annual self-assessment report and a quality improvement plan. Self-assessment is primarily about improving college performance and should therefore be driven by the goals of the college and the needs of its learners and stakeholders. Lesson observation profiles and a review of teaching and learning must feature prominently in self-assessment and improvement planning.

There is no prescribed framework for self-assessment but it is highly advisable that the Ofsted CIF is used as the template, as it provides both structure and focus. Self-assessment should be viewed as an integral part of organisational planning and not as an add-on extra. Module 9 looks at the importance of integrating self-assessment into business planning. Governors should also approve the college self-assessment report and evaluate the effectiveness and accuracy of the self-assessment process.

As governors you need to be assured that key stakeholders are involved in the self-assessment process. For example, learners, employers and partner schools should be surveyed to ascertain their level of satisfaction with the services provided to them. Governors also need to decide what involvement if any they may have in the observation of teaching, learning and assessment.

Governors normally undertake a self-assessment of their effectiveness in various aspects of governance including the impact on quality and standards. Typically this is conducted through the use of an annual questionnaire or through a ‘health check’ approach. The outcomes and actions arising from this can be incorporated into the self-assessment and quality improvement plan under the leadership and management heading. External evaluation of the quality of governance is increasingly seen as good practice.

Activity

Reviewing the effectiveness of teaching and learning in your college

Ask the senior manager responsible for quality to provide you with the following information:

- the teaching and learning observation grade profile for the college;
- the college's policy and procedure for observing teachers;
- some completed sample lesson observation forms.

- Ask how the profile of lesson observation grades compares to that of other colleges and how it correlates with the college's success rates. For example, if the college's success rates require improvement yet the lesson observation profile shows that the majority of teaching and learning is good or outstanding there may be an issue about the reliability of the observation scheme.

- It might also be useful to know what percentage of the teaching team is newly-qualified and what support is in place for these teachers.
Further questions governors might ask are:

- how are teachers who are graded as inadequate or as requiring improvement supported to improve?
- how are teachers new to the college inducted?
- how are observers selected and trained?
- does the college's personnel or human resources department provide governors with information on teaching staff turnover, equality and diversity data relating to teachers, newly-qualified teachers and/or teachers new to the college?
- what percentage of the college's professional development budget is dedicated to teaching and learning and what are the priorities for the year?

There should also be a significant focus on teaching and learning in your college's self-assessment report and quality improvement plan, as well as previous inspection or monitoring visit reports.
Module review

Summary of key learning points

- The curriculum is the core activity of the college and therefore a major responsibility for governors. One important aspect of this is to match the curriculum with the needs of the community the college serves.

- There are a number of national and local influences on the curriculum offer of a college, some of them Government-led and others specific to the community served by the college.

- It is important that governors understand the student profile at the college so that the curriculum offer meets their needs. Special consideration must be given to widening participation and providing equality of opportunity, including opportunities for students with disabilities and learning difficulties and students whose first language is not English.

- There are a number of curriculum initiatives for 16-19 year-olds. These are designed to contribute to the overall Government policy of providing flexibility for learners, raising the levels of skills and employability in the population, and developing a lifelong learning culture.

- Where the college's curriculum offer seeks to attract adult learners, it must take into account a number of factors specific to this group. For example, prior experiences of education and training, confidence levels, family commitments and responsibilities, and progression options.

- Increasingly, funding is driving what colleges offer to adults and the focus is increasingly around functional skills and helping adults to gain qualifications up to and including Level 2.

- The challenge for colleges is to attract and retain adult learners, who can be nervous about returning to education and often have outside commitments and responsibilities that work against their ability and desire to stay in learning. It can also be a challenge for colleges to be able to afford to deliver discrete classes to adults; if this is unaffordable, adults may have to infill into classes for 16-19 year-olds.

Where next?

You have now completed work on Module 8: Curriculum. Take a look at the further reading for each section. Note down what further information, support or guidance you would like.

Putting it into action

We hope that working through this module has raised useful questions, increased your awareness of issues and given you ideas for practical action that you would like to follow
up. The ‘Action Planner’ in ‘Using the Materials’ contains a section where you can note down any questions or action points that you want to follow up within your own college.

**Further reading**

- *Skills for Life Curriculum*

**Acknowledgements**

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