



## Module 8 Curriculum

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

# Contents

Introduction .....	1
Section 1. National and local influences on the curriculum .....	3
Section 2 The students and their courses.....	6
Section 3. The curriculum offer .....	11
Section 4. Assessing the effectiveness of teaching and learning.....	16
Module review .....	19
Further reading .....	20

# Introduction

Welcome to Module 8, which looks at your responsibilities as a clerk in terms of the core business of the institution: the curriculum. We also look briefly at ways in which you can help the governors evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in your college, although quality issues as a whole are addressed in Module 9: Quality and Standards.

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

Under the Articles of Government, the governing body is responsible for the determination and periodic review of the educational character and mission of the institution and the oversight of its activities, and for the effective and efficient use of resources, the solvency of the institution and the safeguarding of its assets. The 2008 Instrument and Articles, which many colleges continue to use, included an additional responsibility: “approving the quality strategy of the institution”. As a result, governors are expected to take a strategic overview of their college’s curriculum offer and make sure that it is in keeping with the mission and strategic plan.

Where the curriculum changes, for example in response to government initiatives or changing local employment needs, governors should ensure that the mission, strategic plan and curriculum continue to relate to each other. Look back at Module 6: Strategy and Educational Character if you need to revisit this aspect of governors’ responsibilities.

## Aims

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

- explain what is meant by ‘curriculum’ and the meaning of terms used to describe categories and levels of qualification;
- describe the variety of learning opportunities at your college both for 14 to 19 year olds and adult learners;
- show how this provision relates to the needs of students and employers’ skill requirements in your local community, and to national strategy;
- demonstrate how your college’s curriculum offer forms a coherent part of provision within your local area and show how some specialist niche provision contributes towards the ‘bank’ of national skills;
- understand the funding available for learners;
- outline the current range of government policies;
- explain how your college’s provision, on its own and in collaboration with other providers, contributes towards social inclusion and equality of opportunity; and
- help the governors to participate actively in discussions and in decision-making about curriculum issues in your college, in accordance with their responsibilities as a governor.

## Contents

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

To do	Done		
		Section 1	National and local influences on the curriculum
		Section 2	The students and their courses

To do	Done		
		Section 3	The curriculum offer
		Section 4	Assessing the effectiveness of teaching and learning

## Working on the self-study activities

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

To complete activities in this module you will need to obtain the following documents:

- 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 relevant to governors;
- standards and performance reports relevant to governors;
- the most recent Ofsted report; and
- attendance, retention, achievement, success rates, progress and destination data on the student cohort from the current academic year and from the previous two years.

## Section 1. National and local influences on the curriculum

No two providers are identical in their curriculum offer. Each provider's curriculum 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

Currently there are two ministerial departments that influence education and training: the [Department for Education](#) and the [Department for Business, Innovation and Skills](#). The current policy drivers for funding education and training focus on employability, apprenticeships, world class skills, and reviewing of vocational qualifications.

#### Department for Education (DfE)

This department is responsible for education and children's services. It oversees the 14 to 19 element of further education (classroom-based learning). The Education Funding Agency provides grants to providers for 16 to 19 education.

The Government is committed to increasing the number of places in education and training for 16 to 18 year olds in preparation for raising the age of participation in full-time 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)

This department is responsible for the economy: skills, higher education, innovation, business and trade. The Skills Funding Agency provides the 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 providers, 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 provider 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.'

### **'A Dynamic Nucleus - Colleges at the Heart of their Communities', Baroness Sharp (2011)**

Many colleges are already an integral part of the economic and social development of the community in which they operate. Current Government agendas aim 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 prisons and supervised in the community, according to need - should have access to learning and skills, which 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. The role of the LEPs is to influence and support the localised development of enterprise, business and education and training. Local enterprise partnerships were given the chance to apply to have an enterprise zone and 24 were awarded. These zones can take advantage of take incentives and simplified local planning regulations.

## Activity

### National and local influences on your college's curriculum

Work through the questions below to find out more about the national and local influences on your college's curriculum. Make a note of your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

Look through some principal's reports relevant to governors.

- What curriculum matters are raised in the principal's reports?
- 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. If you have any questions or action points that you want to follow up, make a note of them in the 'Action Planner' in 'Using the materials'.

In the next section we shall be looking in more detail at how the curriculum relates to student age, different types of courses, levels and qualifications.

## Section 2. The students and their courses

As a clerk, 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. You will then focus specifically on the range of students and courses at your own college.

### Colleges and courses

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

**Figure 1: Categories of colleges – students and courses**

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

### Categories and levels of qualification

The Office of Qualification and 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) on the [Ofqual](#) website.

The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) has been designed by the higher education sector, and describes all the main higher education qualifications. It applies to degrees, diplomas, certificates and other academic awards granted by a university or higher education college (apart from honorary degrees and higher doctorates). The FHEQ broadly corresponds with levels 4 to 8 of the National Qualifications Framework, in terms of the demands the qualifications place on learners.

The frameworks for both further and higher education qualifications can be found on the Ofqual website on the [comparing qualifications](#) page.

### Study programmes for 16 to 19 year olds

Study programmes were introduced in the academic year 2013/14. The aim of study programmes is to ensure that all 16 to 19 year olds, whether on academic or vocational education programmes, 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 study programmes should:

- not be wholly occupational;
- include at least one qualification of substantial size which 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; and
- 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 2010

The [Equality Act](#) came into force on 1 October 2010 to bring the UK in line with other European countries. It applies to any business with employees and those providing goods and services to the public and brings together previous equality legislation. 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 providers, recognise the protected characteristics under the Act: race, religion or belief, sex, 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; and
- foster good relations between people from different groups (i.e. persons who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it).

It is the responsibility of the governing body to monitor the Equality Act and how it is implemented within the college.

## Safeguarding

Safeguarding in the FE sector places the learners at the centre of learning decisions, and builds around the 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.](#)

A number of legal and policy drivers now reinforce the educational argument for safer learning, which in turn is reflected in legal duties which themselves place a focus back on the needs of the learner. Further education colleges and providers of adult, community and work-based learning in England are required to secure the safety of the children, young people and vulnerable adults who are their learners.

[‘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 providers have extended this to all learners including adults. Providers must strive to help them achieve:

- being healthy;
- staying safe;
- enjoying and achieving;
- making a positive contribution; and
- achieving economic wellbeing.

The ‘staying safe’ outcome principally concerns the capacity of learning providers 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 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.

## **Activity**

### **Get to know who your college’s students are and what courses they study**

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 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.

- 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 there omissions? Are you happy that the curriculum strategy currently being adopted is congruent with the patterns that emerge from these 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 by the college? Are there patterns of unequal take-up across the National Qualifications Framework 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, make a note of your questions in the 'Action Planner' and raise it in the forum and context you consider most appropriate.

The issue of financial support for students is considered in more detail below.

## **Support for students**

### **Financial support for learners**

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 to 18 year old students. 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).

## **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.

**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

In this section you will look at the curriculum offered by your college. As described in Section 1, each provider is unique, however they organise their curriculum based on 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 full 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 throughout their lives for a variety of purposes; and
- encouraging people of all ages to take part in learning and so enjoy the benefits of qualifications and improved knowledge and skills.

Every provider has to offer a breadth of curriculum that enables individual learning/training plans to be agreed with each learner according to their needs. Levels of learning are defined by Ofqual.

### 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 onto the next levels of learning or employment. 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 participation, attainment and progression. Often, programmes and projects aimed at re-engaging young people into education and training will 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, as a basis for progression to further learning or employment. Foundation learning can be delivered in schools and colleges, or by private or voluntary sector training providers.

#### 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 subject, 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)
- VRQs (Vocationally Related Qualifications)
- NVQs (National Vocational Qualifications).
- 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 depending on their learning goals. Some providers offer the opportunity for A level students to undertake a vocational award as part of their programme and also the opportunity for vocational students to undertake A levels.

#### 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 only include non-exam assessment in subjects where it is necessary to assess the required skills. Otherwise, assessment will be by exam only. 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. [Functional skills](#) are a key element to the curriculum and qualifications reforms in England. They 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.

### 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 of apprenticeship available:

#### Intermediate-level Apprenticeships

Intermediate-level 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**

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**

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 where apprentices attend the college for one day every week. Increasingly, however, other delivery approaches are used such as block release where apprentices attend the college daily for an extended period of time, or delivery in the workplace. Often, combinations of these delivery approaches are 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](#) (NAS) website.

## **14-16 year olds enrolled in colleges**

From September 2013 FE colleges have been able to enrol 14 to 16 year olds who wish to study high quality vocational qualifications. Some colleges have set up new 14 to 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 to 16 year olds. Criteria include:

- a college must have been rated good or above at their last Ofsted inspection. If a college was rated as 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; and
- their finances must be in good order.

## **Foundation Degree courses and other higher education programmes**

Foundation Degree courses are designed to develop higher level 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 Foundation Degree courses 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 higher education.

Around 175,000 students study undergraduate and postgraduate courses at more than 280 colleges across England. In towns that do not have a university, the local college provides a university-type service. Where towns and cities do have a university, the college often provides higher education for local people. Colleges also provide HE for those who are unable to access university due to transport costs or family commitments. Some 70% of college HE students live within 25 miles of their campus, and more than 50% study part-time, mostly on specially designed courses.

The Government has relaxed its restriction on the number of students that universities and colleges can recruit. Recent policy changes have enabled unrestricted recruitment of high achieving students, but from 2015 there will be no restriction on the number of students a university or college can recruit. Up to date information on college Higher Education can be found on the [AoC website](#).

In addition, a revised quality improvement and assurance system for higher education in further education has been introduced called Higher Education Review (HER). The introduction of HER now means that there is consistency across how universities and higher education in further education are reviewed.

### **Activity**

#### **How does your college's curriculum plan support students/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. Look at the [NIACE](#) site for background.

The learning needs of adults are different from those of most students in the 16 to 19 age group. 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 learning difficulties. 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 provide them with professional qualifications such as accountancy, business improvement techniques, IT skills, CORGI gas registration, first aid, safe handling, security.

### **Adult and community learning (ACL)**

Traditionally, adult and community learning was delivered via funding from the local authority in each area, sometimes through provision managed by the authority, or through partners such as colleges and training providers or voluntary organisations. [Adult and community learning](#) is now directly funded via the Skills Funding Agency, and is outside the local authority budget, however your college may deliver adult and community learning 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, the college prospectus, principal's report relevant to governors, or curriculum reports to governors or the academic board.

## **Viewpoint**

We hope you were able to identify some key ways in which your college is providing adults with learning opportunities. You may have noticed some different approaches to learning from those you've noted for 16 to 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

The governors you work with 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, covering quality assurance, course review, self-assessment and development, and improvement planning frameworks that seek to maintain and improve college performance. You will also learn about the ways in which your college performance is monitored and reviewed both during the year and annually. The [Ofsted common inspection framework](#) (CIF) asks providers 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; and
- equality and diversity are promoted through teaching and learning.

### Teaching and learning observations

All providers 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 providers observations are undertaken without notice given to the observed teacher, whereas with others, notice is provided and teachers are able to prepare for the observation. In schemes where notice is given, an observation window of time may be provided so that a teacher knows that he or she will be observed at some point, for example during a particular week.

Ofsted inspections will normally be notified to the college on the previous 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**

In Module 9: Quality and Standards, self-assessment and quality improvement planning are looked at in detail. 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 common inspection framework 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; colleges should seek to establish a culture of continuous improvement in which self-assessment is embedded in business processes and is not a one-off event. Governors should also approve the college self-assessment report and evaluate the effectiveness and accuracy of the self-assessment process.

It is also important that governors are 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 own 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 (useful for finding out whether or not teachers are given notice of an observation or whether observations occur without prior notice as these are factors which can affect the grade profile); and
- 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 and accuracy of the observation scheme. It is likely in this scenario that observers may in this instance be grading too generously.

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.

## Viewpoint

Encouraging governors to do this kind of research will give them confidence in the quality of teaching and learning in the college. If your own research has raised any doubts in your mind or questions that you want to ask, note them in the 'Action Planner' and come back to them after you have worked through Module 9: Quality and Standards.

## Module review

This module has looked at the responsibilities of governors in terms of the core business of the college: the curriculum provided for the students. It also briefly looked at ways in which they can assess the quality of teaching and learning at the college. If you have worked through the whole module you should be confident that you can:

- explain what is meant by 'curriculum' and the meaning of terms used to describe categories and levels of qualifications;
- describe the variety of learning opportunities at your college both for 14 to 19-year olds and adult learners;
- show how this provision relates to the needs of students' and employers' skill requirements in your local community and to national strategy;
- demonstrate how your college's curriculum offer forms a coherent part of provision within your local area and show how some specialist niche provision contributes towards the bank of national skills;
- outline the range of government curriculum initiatives;
- explain how your college's provision, on its own and in collaboration with other colleges, contributes towards widening participation and equality of opportunity; and
- help the governors to participate actively in discussions and in decision-making about curriculum issues in your college, in accordance with their responsibilities as a governor.

If you are not sure that you have achieved a particular goal, look back at the contents list in the introduction to the module. You may find it useful to reread the relevant section.

### Summary of key learning points

- In this module you have looked at the range and depth of curriculum offered by your college and the responsibility governors have for ensuring the quality of that curriculum and monitoring the college's response to national curriculum initiatives.
- 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 to 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 what the progression options might be. 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 to 18 year olds.

## Where next?

You have now completed work on Module 8: Curriculum. Take a look at the further reading. 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

[Learning to Learn in Further Education](#) (2010). A literature review of effective practice in England and abroad published by the Campaign for Learning.

[Skills for Life Curriculum](#)

[Education and Learning - gov.uk](#) guidance for all forms of education and training.

## Acknowledgements

The first edition of these training materials was published in 2000. They have been periodically updated and this fourth edition of the training materials has been published by the Association of Colleges (AoC) as part of its [Governance Library](#), commissioned and funded by the [Education and Training Foundation](#) and is updated to September 2014.

We would like to thank all the authors and critical readers who have contributed to the 13 modules which constitute the complete set of governance training materials.

© Education and Training Foundation 2014

Extracts from this publication may be reproduced for non-commercial education or training purposes on condition that the source is acknowledged and the findings not misrepresented. Otherwise, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.