



Module 9

Quality and Standards

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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Introduction

Welcome to Module 9, which explores your responsibility, as clerk, to ensure governors are supported in determining the quality of all aspects of provision in your college and for raising standards of student attainment. This module explains the policies, structures and processes for improving quality and standards across the whole of post-16 education and training, and considers how they will affect the work of colleges. It identifies some of the critical issues that governors will need to consider in reviewing their own responsibilities for overseeing and monitoring (but not managing) the quality and standards of provision. And how you can ensure board agendas adequately cover this topic. It will also consider how you will need to work with the senior leadership team on providing the processes and data through which governors can be assured.

Colleges have the main responsibility for quality improvement. For this purpose they should carry out an annual self-assessment and produce a quality improvement plan that addresses issues identified in the self-assessment report.

[Ofsted](#) is responsible for the inspection of learning and skills provision against terms set out in the [common inspection framework](#) (CIF). This framework sets out the judgements inspectors will make during an inspection. Colleges must ensure that their self-assessment report reflects the CIF and that their improvement plan meets the needs of external agencies.

Funding agencies are responsible for monitoring provider performance on a continuous basis and require certain minimum quality standards. Contracts and funding with colleges will ultimately be contingent on the outcomes of such monitoring and the college's capacity to address any concerns outlined by the funding agency.

The module also looks briefly at the role of the FE Commissioner.

Aims

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

- describe structures and processes for improving quality and raising standards in FE;
- explain the responsibilities governors have for monitoring standards in FE;
- explain the major policy drivers underpinning these structures and processes;
- describe the scope and purpose of the inspection framework;
- monitor how well your organisation is meeting requirements for annual self- assessment;
- identify the critical success factors for quality improvement planning;
- explain the role of government agencies in quality improvement in the FE sector; and
- determine how best governing body agendas might be structured to cover quality assurance, and what training and support governors need.

Contents

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

To do	Done		
		Section 1	Improving quality and raising standards: an overview of structures and processes
		Section 2	Policy drivers for improving quality and raising standards
		Section 3	Inspection

To do	Done		
		Section 4	Self-assessment
		Section 5	Quality improvement planning
		Section 6	The role of government agencies

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:

- the latest self-assessment report;
- the latest quality improvement plan;
- the last inspection report;
- any Ofsted monitoring visit reports;
- the strategic plan; and
- the current business or development plan.

Section 1. Improving quality and raising standards: an overview of structures and processes

The governing body is accountable to its students, to the wider community it serves and to other stakeholders for the quality and standards of the provision offered. The governing body should receive appropriate information in order to monitor and challenge performance. It should undertake a regular assessment of how effective it is in meeting its targets for improving quality and raising standards. As clerk, you will need to work with the senior leadership team and the designated performance/quality manager to ensure that board meetings and papers are structured to support this agenda.

Ofsted inspections

The Government and Ofsted increasingly expect colleges to be self-critical in the assessment of the quality of their provision. Where colleges have strong performance, external review of their performance will be 'lighter touch' and will be undertaken through remote data checks with longer time periods between inspection visits. The type of inspection activity by Ofsted will be proportionate to risk and selected according to the provider's level of performance. Colleges judged 'outstanding' will be exempt from further inspection, unless their performance drops.

Inspections of learning and skills colleges have undergone a number of changes since September 2012. Section 3 summarises the judgements inspectors will make during inspection. The latest framework has an enhanced focus on teaching, learning and assessment and makes judgements in the following areas:

- overall effectiveness;
- outcomes for learners;
- the quality of teaching, learning and assessment;
- the effectiveness of leadership and management

Ofsted will continue to inspect sector subject areas and include a grade and text in the report. It will continue to inspect, but no longer grade separately, equality and diversity, capacity to improve and safeguarding.

The primary purpose for inspection is to ensure that students achieve their learning aims and have a positive learning experience. Success rates are the key measure. Success rates are derived from the number of students who were enrolled, were subsequently retained and then achieved their full learning aim. Pass rates, sometimes called achievement rates, are based on those students who achieved their learning aim and who were retained, but do not count those students who withdrew during their course.

Provider performance is monitored annually and poor performance may trigger inspection, for example: if there is failure to improve; if there are too many years of performance requiring improvement; following a steep decline in performance; or if subject areas fall below minimum standards. The current and future approach of inspection emphasises the importance of self-assessment and action planning for quality improvement.

Self assessment and quality improvement

The responsibility for improving quality and standards lies with the college, and governors are expected to set the institutional tone and character to achieve this. Colleges are advised to carry out an annual self-assessment to evaluate all aspects of their provision. They are also advised to produce a quality improvement plan, with clear targets and actions for improvement identified in the self-assessment

report. Self-assessment and quality improvement planning must be integrated into the wider quality assurance and planning processes of the college. It is important that colleges make the strong link between quality improvement and business planning. For example, a college may wish to discontinue provision that has poor quality, but this decision may impact on the supply of provision in the local area and future recruitment.

Although the college may produce a whole-organisation self-assessment and quality improvement plan, this is normally informed by a subset of self-assessment and quality improvement plans produced by the curriculum areas, often by course teams through course reviews and then by the overarching departments, faculties or sections. Business or service areas also produce individual reports and plans. It is common practice for curriculum area self-assessment to go before an internal panel for validation and approval. Governors are sometimes present on this panel and on occasions a validator from outside the organisation may be invited to attend.

Monitoring by external funding agencies

External funding agencies may notify colleges where performance is below certain minimum performance standards and issue a 'notice of concern'. Colleges have the opportunity to give reasons for this under-performance and propose actions to improve. However, it is possible that funding for an under-performing area of provision can be withdrawn if the mitigating circumstances and reasons are insufficient. If the funding is withdrawn, the college may be prohibited from further recruitment into this area of provision.

Where performance of a college is considered 'inadequate' by Ofsted or has failed to meet minimum standards, then the FE Commissioner will be asked to review the position (see Section 6).

Activity

Understanding the key aspects of quality improvement and assessment

Work through the following questions to assess how much you know about the following. Tick one of the boxes to answer 'yes', 'no', or 'not sure'.

Do you know:	Yes	No	Not sure
What is the process for carrying out an annual self-assessment?			
What is the process for developing a quality improvement plan?			
How are the self-assessment and quality improvement plan integrated into the wider planning processes of the college?			
What informs the performance targets and key performance indicators of the college?			
Are targets appropriately ambitious and realistic?			
How are different groups of students performing?			
Is there an issue with English and maths?			
What are the views of students and other users about the college?			
How and where are governors able to challenge performance to raise standards?			
How is the college responding to any external quality requirements?			
How is the college responding to inspection requirements?			
How is the quality of sub-contracting monitored?			

Viewpoint

We hope this activity has given you an initial insight into how your college is responding to the structures and processes for improving quality and standards in the FE sector.

These are all questions your governors should know the answers to, so if you answered 'no' or 'not sure' to any of these questions you may wish to consult the senior manager responsible for quality and standards. You may find it useful to look at your college's latest self-assessment report and quality improvement plan and also the strategic plan, from a quality perspective.

If you have any questions or action points that you want to follow up, make a note of them in the 'Action Planner'.

In the next section we shall be looking in more detail at the key policy drivers for quality and standards and how they might affect the college's provision

Section 2. Policy drivers for improving quality and raising standards

There are a number of key policy drivers relating to the FE sector that must be addressed by all colleges. There have been a number of changes to policy in recent years but the Government has remained committed to the needs of students and employers as the central policy drivers.

The needs of students

The Government is committed to putting the needs, entitlements and achievements of students at the heart of provision in the FE sector. Strategies for raising quality and standards are intended to ensure that all students receive high quality education and training and are able to succeed in their learning.

Attention is focused on how teaching, learning, assessment and other processes enhance the learning experience, contribute to student success and provide value for money. All colleges should address the following question underpinning the common inspection framework.

- How effective and efficient is the college in meeting the needs of students and other users, and why?

There is an expectation that governors will take an active role in monitoring, improving and maintaining the effectiveness and efficiency of provision and, as clerk, you will need to support that agenda.

Colleges will also be expected to ensure that learning opportunities are appropriately matched to the needs of prospective students. Appropriate mechanisms should be in place for identifying the needs, expectations and capabilities of new students. Student entitlements and responsibilities should also be clearly defined, including opportunities for students to make judgements (and complaints) about the quality and standards of provision.

Colleges are expected to have mechanisms in place which enable students to provide feedback on their learning experience. This is most commonly referred to as the 'learner voice'. It is important that governing bodies monitor and review student satisfaction and also receive reports on the actions taken to address and respond to students' views. Having student governors enables a direct link to be established between the board and the student body.

Responsiveness

['Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills'](#) (BIS, 2013) emphasises a new approach to intervention where colleges underperform. Measures can include the termination of funding contracts and referral to the FE Commissioner who has powers to recommend to ministers: new 'administered college' status; restructuring and competition for new colleges following a 'Structure and Prospects Appraisal'; replacement of governors; or college dissolution. This document also outlines the Government's expansion of the apprenticeship programme, and reforms to qualifications.

Equality and diversity

Governors are required to make certain that no particular student groups or individuals are disadvantaged. To this end they should satisfy themselves that the relative performance of different groups of students is monitored and analysed. The college should set appropriate targets for improvement if such 'performance gaps' exist in order to maximise students' potential. The most comprehensive recent summary of policy in this area is contained in ['New Challenges, New Chances: Further Educations and Skills System Reform Plan: 2011'](#)

Other key areas of policy

- Introduction of Programmes of Study for 16-19 year olds.
- Emphasis on GCSE English and maths.
- Changes to apprenticeships and development of 'trail-blazers'.
- Reform of qualifications.

Also:

Students at the heart of the FE and skills system: students will be empowered, from basic skills through to higher level skills, to shape the system using information to inform their choices; Government funding will be focused on supporting students where it can have most impact, including the introduction of FE loans.

First-class advice delivered by the National Careers Service: information, advice and guidance will be provided both to inform and to stimulate demand for further education, work-based training and higher education.

A ladder of opportunity of comprehensive vocational education and training programmes: a system from community learning and basic skills through to high-quality apprenticeships of clear and flexible progression routes to higher vocational education. The system will fuel individual achievement, power the common good and drive upward economic performance.

Excellence in teaching and learning: a number of actions have been introduced to develop and promote excellent teaching, including establishing an independent commission on adult education and vocational pedagogy to develop a sector-owned strategy and delivery programme.

Relevant and focused learning programmes and qualifications: action to ensure that qualifications are high quality and easy to understand, by improving awareness of the [Qualifications and Credit Framework](#), consulting employers on their engagement in qualification development, and consulting on the role of [National Occupational Standards](#).

Strategic governance for a dynamic FE sector: removal of restrictions and controls on college corporations paves the way for new roles for governors working closely with other educational colleges in post-14 learning, and local stakeholders such as local authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships ([LEPs](#)) to take the lead in developing delivery models to meet the needs of their communities. Module 7 Collaboration and Partnership has more on this topic.

Freedoms and flexibilities: continuing the programme to free the FE system from central control and building on the successes already achieved, including further work by the Skills Funding Agency with colleges to remove bureaucratic burdens.

Funding priorities through a simplified funding system: to create a simple transparent funding system that is robust in ensuring funding goes only to high quality provision that delivers good value for money, while being innovative to respond to local circumstances.

Empowered students making informed choices: in the place of Government-based quality assurance systems, students will be empowered by providing better access to quality information. At the same time, swift action will be taken in relation to failing provision, providing intensive support and, if necessary, intervening to ensure that alternative and innovative delivery approaches are secured for the future. See also Section 6 of this module.

Global FE: building on the growing international demand for technician and higher level vocational skills and the legacy of [World Skills 2013](#), there will be continued support for the sector to take advantage of opportunities in the global market.

Activity

Responding to government policy drivers

Governors need to ensure that the college understands and is responding actively to these policy drivers. In this activity you will find out more about how your college is responding. You may already have some of this information from your work as clerk. If not, or if there are gaps in your information, refer to your college's quality procedure to assess its response to the following questions:

- Does the college put the needs of students and a focus on student success at the heart of its quality processes?
- What is the college doing on apprenticeships?
- How does the college identify the needs and views of students including apprentices?
- How does the college respond to the views and judgements of students, employers and other stakeholders?
- Does the college monitor and report on the relative performance of different student groups and set targets for improvement?
- What measures are in place to develop excellence in teaching and learning?
- In what areas of activity is the college unable to demonstrate at least good and improving performance?

Viewpoint

This activity will help you build up a picture of how well your college is responding to the policy drivers that we have outlined in this section. This picture should be consistent with the college's vision, mission and strategic or development plan.

In the next section we shall be looking at the common inspection framework and examining the implications of the framework for your work as a clerk.

Section 3. Inspection

The Common Inspection Framework

Ofsted is responsible for the inspection of learning and skills provision against terms set out in the [common inspection framework \(CIF\)](#). This section summarises the key features of the framework and examines its implications for your work as a clerk. It should be noted that Ofsted is developing a new framework that will cover all ages and it will review all 16-19 education and training in the same way.

Purposes of inspection

The overall aim of inspection is to evaluate how efficiently and effectively the education and training provision meets students' needs. Inspection arrangements, together with other Government initiatives, are intended to speed up improvement in the quality of the further education sector.

The main purposes of inspection are:

- to provide users with information about the quality of provision in England; thus informing them about the colleges they use or about the colleges they may use in the future;
- to help bring about improvement by identifying strengths and areas for improvement, highlighting good practice and judging what steps need to be taken to improve provision further; and
- to provide the relevant Secretaries of State and other stakeholders with an independent public account of the quality of education and training, the standards achieved and how efficiently resources are managed.

How does inspection promote improvement?

The inspection of a college promotes improvement by:

- setting expectations: the criteria and characteristics set out in the inspection framework and evaluation schedule illustrate the expected quality and effectiveness of the provision;
- increasing the college's confidence by evaluating its own view of its effectiveness and its accuracy, and offering a professional challenge (and the impetus to act) where improvement is needed;
- recommending priorities for the college's future action and, when appropriate, checking subsequent progress;
- fostering constructive dialogue between inspectors and the college's senior leaders and staff;
- evaluating the college's self-assessment, its impact and rigour, to enhance its capacity to improve its provision; and
- identifying best practice, through both inspection and survey reports, which can be shared with the sector.

The Common Inspection Framework 2012

The CIF comprises the principal criteria that inspectors must consider when inspecting every education and training college.

Overall effectiveness: the judgement on overall effectiveness is based on how effective and efficient the college is in meeting the needs of students and other users, and why. Inspectors will use all the available evidence and take into account judgements on:

- outcomes for learners;
- the quality of teaching, learning and assessment; and
- the effectiveness of leadership and management.

Outcomes for learners: inspectors will make a judgement on outcomes for learners by evaluating the extent to which:

- all learners achieve and make progress relative to their starting points and learning goals;
- achievement gaps are narrowing between different groups of learners;
- learners develop personal, social and employability skills; and
- learners progress to courses leading to higher-level qualifications and into jobs that meet local and national needs.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment: inspectors will make a judgement on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by evaluating the extent to which:

- 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.

Effectiveness of leadership and management: inspectors will make a judgement on the effectiveness of leadership and management by evaluating the extent to which leaders, managers and, where applicable, governors:

- demonstrate an ambitious vision, have high expectations for what all learners can achieve, and attain high standards of quality and performance;
- improve teaching and learning through rigorous performance management and appropriate professional development;
- evaluate the quality of the provision through robust self-assessment, taking account of users' views, and use the findings to promote and develop capacity for sustainable improvement;
- successfully plan, establish and manage the curriculum and learning programmes to meet the needs and interests of learners, employers and the local and national community;
- actively promote equality and diversity, tackle bullying and discrimination, and narrow the achievement gap; and
- safeguard all learners.

Inspectors will make judgements on three key aspects:

- outcomes for learners;
- quality of teaching, learning and assessment; and
- effectiveness of leadership and management.

In making these judgements, inspectors must evaluate the evidence for each against the grade characteristics. For each one, inspectors will use the following grading scale:

- grade 1 outstanding
- grade 2 good
- grade 3 requires improvement

- grade 4 inadequate

In making their judgements, inspectors must consider which descriptor best fits the evidence available. When evidence indicates that any of the bullet points in the grade characteristics for 'inadequate' apply, then that aspect of the college's work should be judged inadequate.

Overall effectiveness: inspectors will finally judge the quality of education and/or training provided – the college's overall effectiveness – taking account of:

- judgements on the three key aspects; and
- the extent to which the education and/or training meets the needs of the range of learners enrolled with the college and, in particular, the needs of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

In judging overall effectiveness, inspectors will take account of the full range of evidence, including the three key aspects, and will then decide whether overall effectiveness is outstanding, good, requires improvement or is inadequate.

Sector subject area grades: in addition, grades will be awarded for those [sector subject areas](#) chosen for inspection. There are 15 sector subject areas such as 'Health, public services and care' or 'Engineering and manufacturing technologies'. In some cases a secondary subject area or tier may be chosen. For example 'Hospitality and catering' is a tier within the 'Retail and commercial enterprise' sector subject area.

The inspection process

Before the inspection

How are colleges selected for inspection?

Ofsted takes a risk-proportionate approach to inspection so that they can focus their efforts where they can have the greatest impact. The risk-assessment process has two stages.

- Stage one is a college assessment based on an automated analysis of publicly available data.
- Stage two is where further analysis is necessary and the college receives a desk-based review from an HMI (inspector).

A broad range of indicators is used to select colleges for inspection in the following year. Where available, these will include a college or college's previous inspection record; self-assessment reports; performance data (including trends over the last three years); change of leader; concerns raised by a funding body, employers, parents and carers or learners; and the views of learners, parents and carers, and employers, gathered for example through online questionnaires. Indicators may also include any information on significant changes to the type of provision and learner numbers.

Other aspects taken into consideration are:

- colleges awarded a grade of 'requires improvement' for overall effectiveness will normally be inspected again within 12-18 months;
- colleges awarded a grade of 'inadequate' for overall effectiveness will normally be inspected within 12-15 months;
- colleges awarded a grade of 'good' for overall effectiveness at the previous inspection will normally have up to six years between inspections, unless their performance drops;
- colleges awarded a grade of 'outstanding' for overall effectiveness at their previous inspection are exempt from a full inspection unless their performance drops;

- the following types of provision are not exempt from inspection when judged outstanding for overall effectiveness: higher education institutions offering further education; local authorities; independent specialist colleges; dance and drama programmes; and learning and skills provision in prisons; and
- any college where the above aspects do not apply will be included in the inspection selection process at Ofsted's discretion. In addition, Ofsted may conduct unannounced inspections and monitoring visits at any time.

When are colleges notified of their inspection?

Colleges will normally be notified up to two working days before a planned inspection. This applies to all types of inspection activity and inspection can take place at any time of the year when learning is taking place. The inspection services will contact the college to inform them of the inspection and will email the notification letter to them.

The lead inspector prepares a pre-inspection briefing letter for the college and the other members of the inspection team, outlining the inspection and a list of themes. Part of the preparation for this letter will include:

- the self-assessment report and quality improvement plan;
- data analysis usually over a three-year period;
- feedback from students, parents/carers, employers from on-line questionnaires; and previous inspection reports and visits.

During the inspection

The inspection process can vary depending on the status of the college; the type and scale of the inspection is based on an assessment of risk. Typically, however, a team of inspectors will come in to the college headed up by the lead inspector. Some of the inspectors will focus on the CIF aspects which deal with over-arching themes such as leadership and management, or support for students. There will also be some subject specialist inspectors who will inspect agreed subject sector areas. Each inspector should be given a link person from the college with whom to communicate throughout the inspection.

Teaching and learning observations will form part of the inspection. Inspectors are not tasked with a specific quota of observations but they need to undertake a sufficient number to provide a robust evidence base for judgements. Joint observation between inspectors and the college's teaching and learning observers are part of the inspection with the purpose of validating the reliability and accuracy of the college's observation scheme. On occasions, inspectors may sample a large number of sessions for short periods of time. These visits to sessions are ungraded and are used to explore, for example, themes such as attendance or punctuality.

Each college is invited to nominate a senior member of staff to act as the main link with the inspection team. The nominee's role is to represent the college at the inspection team's meetings, be part of the inspectors' discussions in order to clarify issues, or to gather additional evidence for the inspectors. The nominee role is not about blindly defending the college 'against' the inspectors; it requires a balanced and constructive approach. However the nominee should be prepared to argue the case for the college where he or she believes there is a case to be made. The nominee will feed back to the college's staff on an ongoing basis throughout the inspection. The nominee does not contribute to the decisions on grades for the inspection.

The lead inspector usually agrees to feed back to the college on a daily basis. Various meetings are arranged throughout the inspection for the relevant inspectors to talk with governors, managers, students and other stakeholders such as employers and parents/carers.

During the inspection, governors may attend meetings with inspectors to explore the leadership and management aspect of the CIF. Normally, inspectors would expect to meet with governors to explore their role in leading the college and understanding its strengths and areas for improvement. Inspectors will look at the impact of governance on standards and quality and there is often a focus on how governors monitor and influence performance, particularly in relation to setting challenging targets and performance indicators.

At the end of the inspection

Verbal feedback and judgements are given at the end of the inspection. The lead inspector normally presents the headline findings and judgements on the last day of the inspection. This feedback meeting is normally attended by the college's leadership team, including governors, typically the chair and vice chair.

Colleges have the opportunity shortly after the inspection to comment on a draft report for factual accuracy before publication. The final report is normally published on the [Ofsted website](#) within 25 working days of the end of the inspection.

Colleges are also given the opportunity to evaluate and give feedback on the process. Colleges are advised to produce a post-inspection quality improvement action plan to take account of inspection findings as part of its self-assessment and quality improvement cycle. If the inspection occurs just after a college has produced its annual self-assessment and quality improvement plan, it is highly advisable to produce an updated version based on the inspection findings rather than wait a year until the next self-assessment.

Further inspection visits

Following a full inspection, colleges are subject to further inspection visits as follows:

- for colleges graded as 'requires improvement' in overall effectiveness – full inspection 12-18 months after last full inspection;
- for colleges graded 'inadequate' in overall effectiveness – re-inspection monitoring visit 6-8 months after last inspection, followed by a full inspection within 12-15 months;
- an overall grade of inadequate will immediately trigger the [BIS intervention procedure](#) and involve a visit from the FE Commissioner or member of his/her team.

Activity

Assessing your board's strategic and monitoring responsibilities

The CIF requires governors to play a critical role in the college's strategic direction, to regularly receive reports on performance, and, where appropriate, to be enquiring, challenging and ambitious. In this activity you will be looking at how well your board meets that challenge.

Tick a box to answer 'yes', 'no' or 'not sure'.

Does your governing body:	Yes	No	Not sure
Receive quality and performance information which references the CIF?			
Have a self-assessment report and a quality improvement plan which use the CIF as a structural template?			
Have a self-assessment report and quality improvement plan which clearly identify the performance headlines but also provide sufficient detail to indicate where improvement is needed and how it will be achieved?			
Have a self-assessment report and quality improvement plan which contain an even balance across all aspects of the CIF?			

Viewpoint

Doing this activity may help to clarify your understanding of the key features of the CIF and examine the implications of the framework for your work as a clerk, both in taking a strategic overview of your college's direction and in monitoring the quality of the provision offered. If you felt unsure about any of the questions, make a note of areas of doubt in your 'Action Planner', and follow them up with whoever is responsible for quality in your college.

In the next section we shall be looking at self-assessment in general and at your specific role in supporting governors in the process of self-assessment.

Section 4. Self-assessment

In Module 8: Curriculum we looked at a number of ways in which you, as a clerk, can support your governors, so that they can judge whether teaching and learning in your college is effective. In this section we shall be looking at self-assessment in general and at your specific role.

Section 1 of this module has enabled you to become familiar with the role of self-assessment within the overall process for assessing the quality of provision. Under the arrangements for inspection, colleges are advised to produce an annual self-assessment report and quality improvement plan and be clear about how both have been formulated and how the improvement plan will be monitored.

The self-assessment framework

Self-assessment is primarily about improving college performance and should therefore be driven by the goals of the college and the needs of its students, employers and stakeholders. There is no prescribed framework for self-assessment, but it is highly advisable that the common inspection framework be used as the template as it provides both structure and focus. There are five headline conditions that all self-assessment frameworks must satisfy.

- Self-assessment should deal with all aspects of the college's activities, and should focus on the quality of students' experiences and the standards they achieve.
- Colleges should address the quality statements in the CIF.
- Self-assessment should be self-critical and evidence-based, using national performance data as reference points.
- Quality improvement targets should be realistic but also stretching.
- Self-assessment should consider the performance of all student groups.

Your governing body will also need to consider the key policy drivers for raising quality and standards when considering the approach to self-assessment (see section 2).

The self-assessment report and quality improvement plan will be used by Ofsted and external funding bodies to inform inspection and to monitor the college's performance on an ongoing basis.

Making self-assessment judgements

Colleges should use the Ofsted grading criteria when self-assessing:

Grade 1	outstanding
Grade 2	good
Grade 3	requires improvement
Grade 4	inadequate

There is more information on grading in section 3, which looks at the CIF in more detail.

Colleges are advised to monitor and evaluate their provision and performance against the quality criteria outlined in the common inspection framework. It is advisable that colleges use the grades and judgement descriptors in the CIF to make self-assessment judgements, as these provide specific criteria and questions around quality of outcomes; teaching, learning and assessment; and leadership and management.

Learner success rates in colleges across the country generate national performance rates against which colleges must measure their performance. These are referred to as national rates, averages and

sometimes benchmarks. National averages are available by subject, level, age, college type, ethnicity, and course length/duration. Your quality team will be familiar with these categories of learners and learning programmes.

Increasingly colleges should also place a focus on the extent to which the outcomes of the provision produce high grades and add value. High grade and value-added data are both available to colleges. Value-added is the extent to which students achieve in relation to their expected or predicted performance based on their GCSE outcomes. For example, if a student is expected to achieve a C grade at A-level based on GCSE grades achieved but actually achieves a B grade, this represents added value. Strong value-added performance indicates that students are stretched and challenged through effective teaching, assessment and target setting. Externally produced performance reports that show value-added information are available to colleges.

All qualifications fall into official groupings known as subject sector areas. Each subject sector area contains a group of qualifications that relate to a specific occupational area, so for example engineering has its own subject sector area, as does construction or health and social care and so on. The main subject sector area is known as the first tier (tier one). There are further second tier categories that break down the subject area into more specific areas. For example, arts, media and publishing is the title for the overall tier but it has second tier categories for: music and performing arts; visual arts and media. Typically inspections now focus on the second tier (tier two) categories to provide greater focus to the inspection. The lead inspector will identify a number of representative tier two subject areas to be inspected. The reasons for the selection will be related to the size and significance of the provision to the college and previous performance and inspection grades.

In reviewing and approving self-assessment reports the governing body will need to consider the following points:

- performance data should be available for all the key criteria from the CIF, and for all the activities/areas that are subject to assessment;
- data should include performance trends (to confirm year-on-year changes) and performance comparisons against other colleges (benchmark data);
- evidence should support the judgements made, i.e. data should be valid, quantifiable, current and accurate;
- reports should be evaluative (identifying strengths and areas for improvement) rather than descriptive;
- strengths should represent performance above expected or normal practice; and
- it is advisable that judgements be moderated to ensure that they are objective and self-critical.

The self-assessment process

Self-assessment should be viewed as an integral part of college planning and not as an add-on extra. Earlier we looked at the importance of self-assessment being integrated with 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 self-assessment report and evaluate the effectiveness and accuracy of the self-assessment process. As clerk, you need to ensure there is enough agenda time given to this item and that governors have the skills to review the materials being supplied by senior leaders. Ofsted has recently launched a dash board for governors to help with this task.

It is also important that governors are assured that key stakeholders are involved in the self-assessment process. For example, students, employers and partner schools should be surveyed to ascertain their satisfaction with the services provided to them by the college.

It is advisable that governors 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. It is considered good practice to have some form of external verification of this self-assessment in order to ensure that there is an objective evaluation of effectiveness. The outcomes and actions arising from this can be incorporated into the self-assessment and quality improvement plan under the leadership and management aspect, or can generate a separate governance quality improvement plan which is monitored and updated on a similar basis.

Activity

Evaluating your college's self-assessment process

Use the questions below to start to evaluate your college's self-assessment process. Tick a box to answer 'yes', 'no' or 'not sure'.

Do you know:	Yes	No	Not sure
Does your college have a validation process for its self-assessment before it is taken to the board for final approval?			
Are any governors involved in the validation process?			
Do you organise learning journeys/visits/shadowing for your governors?			
Are you sure that all key stakeholders are consulted and engaged in the self-assessment process?			
Are all judgements clearly evidence-based?			
Does the self-assessment report reference or follow the structure of the CIF?			
Is your self-assessment driven from the bottom up, i.e. starting with quality reviews at course/programme level?			
Does your self-assessment consider high grades, value-added and progression/destination data in addition to success rates?			
Has your college started using the Ofsted dash board?			

Viewpoint

If you find that your self-assessment process does not allow you to answer all these questions, you may find it useful to discuss some of them with the senior manager responsible for quality and standards.

This activity should help you focus on the quality of your college's self-assessment. If you answered mainly 'yes', you are probably self-assessing effectively. If you answered 'no' or 'not sure' to any of these questions, you may have more work to do to improve self-assessment. It is important that both the governing body and the senior leadership team approach self-assessment as a positive process.

In the next section we shall be looking at governors' responsibilities within the quality improvement process and how you, as clerk, can support them.

Section 5. Quality improvement planning

As we saw in Section 4, self-assessment should not be an end in itself, but a means for ensuring continuous improvement. As part of this continuous improvement process a quality improvement plan should also be prepared. Quality improvement plans should therefore build on issues identified in the self-assessment report and inform (and be informed by) the overall planning processes of the college. In this section we look at different aspects of your responsibilities for reviewing and informing such plans.

Remember that your role is to support governors to take a strategic overview of your college's planning; you will support how they monitor the production and implementation of the plan.

General requirements

All colleges are advised to produce an overall improvement plan with explicit links to issues arising from self-assessment and the most recent inspection. Colleges undergoing re-inspection or having received a notice of concern will have to produce a specific improvement plan to address the areas of under-performance. There should be an annual cycle for self-assessment and improvement planning that is informed by a programme of data collection and analysis.

Critical issues that need to be considered and addressed in quality improvement planning are summarised below. Quality improvement plans should not only consider clear areas for improvement but may also seek to:

- maintain areas of strength;
- further improve areas which are strong; or
- address downward trends (for example an area that is slipping from outstanding to good).

Identifying and prioritising areas for improvement

Colleges are expected to set clear objectives for improvement, with success criteria for judging the outcomes of agreed actions. Wherever possible a measurable target should be associated with each objective. Objectives for improvement should be SMART:

Specific (are they clearly defined to specify what the objectives aim to achieve?)

Measurable (can they be measured to see if objectives are met or not?)

Achievable (is there a high probability of attainment?)

Realistic (can the objective be achieved with the resources available?)

Time bound (have dates/timescales been set for achievement?).

Statements of broad intentions or aspirations should be avoided. The most important consideration is the impact of the action.

Improvement targets should be set for all key areas of improvement identified in the plan. For example there should be clear targets for improvements in student success rates, improvements in student and other stakeholder satisfaction ratings, and narrowing any equality and diversity achievement gaps.

Targets should be set in the context of the performance of other colleges. This process is known as benchmarking. As well as measuring against externally defined standards, the college should also have a set of internal key performance indicators and possibly 'stretch' targets for continuous improvement.

Specifying actions and responsibilities for achieving improvements

Improvement plans should provide a sound basis for bringing about improvement, specifying all the activities and tasks necessary to achieve proposed objectives and targets for improvement. A key question to ask is: how is this activity going to make a difference?

The impact of the proposed actions should always be clear and measurable. The performance target for improvement should be stated, wherever possible, in terms of performance indicators.

Responsibilities and timescales associated with carrying out the plan and monitoring progress should also be identified. The plan should be discussed with all those directly affected by the proposed changes, including partners. The costs (and potential benefits) of the plan should also be estimated.

Arrangements for monitoring and reporting on progress and outcomes

The implementation of improvement plans is the role of the college's management team. However governors, in order to monitor progress against actions, should expect to receive regular reports and updates. Whilst senior leaders are expected to have an overall view of quality improvement, other managers, such as heads of school or department, will have subsidiary improvement plans which are focused on their areas of responsibility.

In order to monitor progress and evaluate the outcomes of improvement plans, clerks should ensure that reports:

- are regular and timely;
- are consistent from meeting to meeting in order to facilitate clear monitoring of progress with reference to key performance indicators;
- identify under-performance and if targets are unlikely to be achieved (a traffic light system of red, amber and green is a good approach);
- include a commentary alongside statistical data where needed;
- clearly differentiate between targets and forecasts;
- clearly identify which national averages are being used and when they were published (for example, general and tertiary college benchmarks, specialist college benchmarks); and
- include mitigating plans if targets and benchmarks are missed.

Activity

Evaluating your college's improvement planning

As a clerk you will need to monitor carefully the implementation of your quality improvement plan. To do this effectively you will need to answer the following questions. You will also need to refer to the latest quality improvement plan.

Tick a box to answer 'yes', 'no' or 'not sure'.

Do you know:	Yes	No	Not sure
Does your college improvement plan build on the strengths and address areas for improvement identified in the most recent self-assessment and inspection reports?			
Does it focus on the needs and attainment of students?			
Are targets for improvement clearly stated and prioritised?			
Are planned activities, responsibilities and timescales for improvement clearly identified?			
Are there effective arrangements for monitoring progress and reporting back outcomes?			

Viewpoint

This activity has given you an opportunity to have a critical look at your college's quality improvement planning. A good improvement plan is essential for continuous improvement.

In the next section we shall be looking at the role of Government agencies in quality improvement.

Section 6. The role of Government agencies

There are two agencies responsible for funding colleges of post-16 learning in England. The [Skills Funding Agency](#) (SFA) is an agency of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and it exists to fund and promote adult further education (FE) and skills training in England. The [Education Funding Agency](#) (EFA) is the Department for Education's delivery agency for funding and compliance for all learners from 16 to 19 years of age.

Ofsted

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) reports directly to Parliament and is independent of government departments and impartial. It is responsible for the inspection of those providing education and skills for students of all ages.

Increasingly Ofsted is providing a regional support offer to help colleges to improve. This includes facilitating 'outstanding' and 'good' colleges working and sharing practice with 'requires improvement' and 'inadequate' colleges.

Ofsted Support and Challenge

All colleges have a responsibility for ensuring that they provide a good quality of education and/or training for their students. Senior managers together with the governing body, as appropriate, must determine the exact actions to take to improve the college and how to access any necessary support. However, inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted will support and challenge the college in this process.

The following is an indicative range of support and challenge strategies that HMI may choose to employ and/or recommend when visiting a college. The strategies are not mutually exclusive and the list is not exhaustive. HMI may identify other activities that suit the specific circumstances of the college. The range of options may include:

- HMI meeting with governors to explain, using Ofsted evidence, how the governing body can assist in ensuring that a college improves to good;
- an invitation to leaders and managers from the college to attend an Ofsted improvement seminar covering the range of common weaknesses identified through inspection evidence; this is likely to include, for instance, improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and governance;
- HMI-brokered opportunities for representatives from the college to shadow an Ofsted inspection;
- establishing stronger links with other regional or national colleges to learn from their strengths, as well as to work together on shared issues;
- HMI offering to arrange a visit for senior leaders and governors to another college;
- leaders or managers attending a specific subject or aspect seminar led by HMI, drawing on Ofsted evidence;
- a meeting between the HMI with other staff or groups of staff at the college to review progress against agreed action plans and/or to share good practice;
- HMI meeting with middle leaders and managers in the college to discuss how teaching or training can be strengthened; or
- joint observation of a particular subject or aspect by the HMI and senior/middle leaders.

The Department for Innovation and Skills (BIS)

BIS is the department for economic growth. The department invests in skills and education to promote trade and boost innovation. In 2011 BIS published a key document '[New Challenges, New Chances: Next](#)

[Steps in Implementing the Further Education Reform Programme](#)' (NCNC). This publication sets out the programme of work required to take forward the reform of the further education and skills system and outlines how BIS will monitor the performance of colleges, and the actions taken where performance falls below minimum acceptable standards. NCNC states:

"We want to see the FE sector build on and increase its innovation, responsiveness and its high quality offer to students and employers. By empowering students to make informed choices through better access to information on quality, we create competition and the incentives for colleges to be responsive to students and employers. If we get this right, we can minimise the Government-led quality systems, which divert colleges from concentrating on the needs of students and employers. However, we will maintain minimum standards. Where student and employer needs are not being met and performance is poor, Government will intervene quickly and effectively."

Ofsted, BIS and the Skills Funding Agency now adopt a more proportionate and risk-based approach to monitoring, which allows them more quickly to identify and target underperforming colleges.

BIS will intervene where colleges fail in one of these three measures:

- an 'inadequate' Ofsted inspection;
- failure to meet minimum standards of performance (based on learner success); or
- failing financial health or control.

['Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills'](#) (BIS, 2013) emphasises a new approach to intervention where colleges underperform. Measures can include the termination of funding contracts and referral to the FE Commissioner, who has powers to recommend to ministers: new 'administered college' status; restructuring and competition for new colleges following a 'Structure and Prospects Appraisal'; replacement of governors; or college dissolution.

The Skills Funding Agency

The Skills Funding Agency is responsible for giving colleges, training colleges and employers the right funding to help adults, young people, the unemployed and people with low skill levels to get the skills they need for employment. This includes:

- supporting traineeships for young people not in education, employment and training (NEET);
- funding and coordinating apprenticeships throughout England;
- overseeing and managing 24+ Advanced Learning Loans;
- being a co-financing agency for the European Social Fund (ESF) in England, which is investing in jobs and skills;
- helping offenders get into education or training using the Offenders' Learning and Skills Service.

The SFA also:

- maintains Individualised Learner Record (ILR) data;
- publishes data and datasets to support planning and performance reporting in FE;
- supports the Learning Records Service, who maintain Unique Learner Numbers (ULNs) and Personal Learning Records (PLRs).

The SFA, along with partners, monitors the risk attached to a college and may intervene if there is sufficient cause for concern. The starting point for the Agency is the assessment of the risk of a college failing to deliver post-19 provision that makes efficient and effective use of public funds.

Factors that are considered include:

- quality of provision;
- delivery of provision;
- delivery model;
- financial stability;
- control of public funds; and
- significant change.

These risk assessment factors are shared with the Education Funding Agency (EFA) and both agencies will work closely together where colleges have pre- and post-19 learners.

The following factors that have been identified as triggers in 'New Challenges, New Chances' will lead to the Agency taking action:

- a college receiving an 'inadequate' Ofsted inspection judgement for overall effectiveness;
- provision falling below the post-19 Minimum Quality Standards being developed as a successor to the current Minimum Levels of Performance (DfE is currently reviewing the mechanism for determining any pre-19 minimum standards that might apply);
- a college being rated as 'inadequate' by the SFA for financial health or financial control.

The agency's College Risk Assessment Matrix Review Group monitors and assesses risk and need for intervention on a quarterly basis.

The Education Funding Agency

There will be two triggers that will identify if a school or college delivering education or training to 16 to 19 year olds is underperforming. These triggers are:

- receiving an overall Ofsted judgement of inadequate; or
- falling below the national minimum standard set each year.

In addition to education standards there is also a separate assessment about the financial performance of institutions made by the Education Funding Agency (EFA) that may also trigger action.

Apprenticeships are currently an all-age programme. Apprenticeship quality will therefore continue to be assessed against the minimum levels of performance applied by BIS.

The EFA has a set of minimum standards that set the absolute minimum expected performance for all colleges of 16-18 education and training. It is expected that all schools and colleges will strive to exceed the standards.

HEFCE and QAA

The Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Quality Assurance Agency are becoming increasingly important. FE colleges now provide over 14% of all HE and many colleges are offering their own Foundation Degrees and some are pursuing degree awarding powers. Therefore clerks should support governors in understanding the role of these organisations.

The Education and Training Foundation

The [Education and Training Foundation](#) is a body created in August 2013 with the following aims:

- to raise the quality and professionalism of teachers and trainers across the FE and training sector;
- to deliver consistently excellent outcomes for learners and employers;
- to support colleges and training colleges of all types in achieving their own improvement objectives; and
- to promote this vibrant sector to employers and national influencers, and raise awareness of its vital role in rebalancing the economy.

It is owned by the sector through its membership bodies the Association of Colleges, the Association of Employment and Learning Providers and the national network of local adult learning colleges. It has charitable status and is funded through BIS.

Activity

The role of government agencies

As a clerk you will need to be aware of the role of Government agencies in monitoring quality and standards at your college. You should also be aware of any intervention measures being taken by these agencies. Work through the following questions to check your awareness of this area.

Tick a box to answer 'yes', 'no' or 'not sure'.

	Yes	No	Not sure
Have you seen any reports relating to minimum standards?			
Are you aware of any areas of performance where your college may be at risk?			
Is your college currently subject to an inadequacy warning - Notice of Concern?			
Are you familiar with the performance of your college in relation to minimum standards?			

Viewpoint

Thinking about these questions should inform you about how these agencies are monitoring quality at your college and if there is any intervention likely as a result of this monitoring. If it has raised any doubts in your mind or questions that you want to ask, make a note of them in your 'Action Planner'.

Module review

This module has looked at your responsibilities as a clerk in terms of supporting Governors in their role of monitoring the quality of all aspects of provision and for raising standards of student attainment. It has also identified some of the critical issues that governors need to consider in reviewing their own responsibilities for monitoring the quality and standards of provision.

If you have worked through the whole module you should be confident that you can:

- describe structure and processes for improving quality and raising standards in the FE sector;
- explain the responsibilities governors have for monitoring quality and standards in the FE sector;
- explain the major policy drivers underpinning these structures and processes;
- describe the scope and purpose of the common inspection framework;
- monitor how well your college is meeting requirements for annual self-assessment;
- identify the critical success factors for quality improvement planning;
- explain the role of government agencies in quality improvement in the FE sector;
- manage agendas to make sure this area is well covered; and
- determine the training needs of governors.

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 re-read the relevant section.

Summary of key learning points

- In this module you have looked at an overview of the structures and processes used to review performance and raise standards. The responsibility for improving quality and standards lies with the college, and governors are expected to set the institutional tone and character to achieve this.
- There are certain key policy drivers that underpin all national strategies, frameworks and processes for raising standards in the FE sector. Governors need to ensure that the college understands and is responding actively to these policy drivers, particularly areas such as the needs of students and apprentices, employers, equality and diversity, and other key policy areas.
- The inspectorate (Ofsted) makes periodic inspection visits in order to offer independent accounts of the quality of learning, the standards achieved and the efficiency and effectiveness with which resources are managed by colleges. Ofsted is responsible for the inspection of learning and skills provision against terms set out in the common inspection framework (CIF). This framework requires governors to play a critical role in the college's strategic direction and to receive regular reports on performance, and where appropriate to be enquiring, challenging and ambitious.
- Colleges are advised to carry out an annual self-assessment to evaluate all aspects of their provision. They are also advised to produce a quality improvement plan, with clear targets and actions for improvement identified in the self-assessment report. Governors are required to approve the self-assessment report and should be able to evaluate the effectiveness and accuracy of the self-assessment process. In addition governors should also monitor the implementation of the quality improvement plan.
- The role of Government departments and their agencies in relation to quality improvement is subject to frequent change. As a clerk you need to be aware of the role of Government agencies in monitoring quality and standards at your college. You should also be aware of any intervention measures being taken by these agencies.

Where next?

You have now completed work on Module 9: Quality & Standards. 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

[Ofsted: Common Inspection Framework \(2012\)](#)

[Ofsted: Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills \(2012\)](#)

[Ofsted: A Good Education for All \(2012\)](#)

[Ofsted: How Colleges Improve \(2012\)](#)

[The 2012/13 Annual report on Ofsted findings for FE and skills](#)

[New Challenges, New Chances](#) - Section 9 (page 26) - Quality assurance, transparency and data management

[AoC Governance Library](#)

[Excellence Gateway - FE Governance](#)

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