

Further information

The QAA website www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/iqer/default.asp contains the IQER handbook and a report on the evaluation of the IQER pilot.

IQER and the Academic Infrastructure

In considering colleges' management of higher education provision IQER teams are guided by the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure.

QAA has worked with the higher education sector to establish the various parts of the Academic Infrastructure, which are:

- *The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- frameworks for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland
- subject and award benchmark statements
- programme specifications.

The *Code of practice* is a statement of good practice that has been endorsed by the higher education community. Sections particularly relevant for student assessment are:

- Section 4 on external examining assessment
- Section 6 on assessment.

Further information on the Academic Infrastructure can be found at www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/default.asp

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Core themes and lines of enquiry

IQER has three core themes (known as core questions in the pilot phase):

- academic standards
- quality of learning opportunities
- public information.

Both the Developmental engagement and Summative review stages and IQER are fundamentally concerned with reviewing the college's management of its responsibilities for HEFCE-funded higher education according to these three core themes. During each college's first Developmental engagement, reviewers consider these responsibilities within the area of student assessment.

The first Developmental engagement for each college focuses on student assessment because of the significance of assessment for academic standards, and because assessment was the area identified as most in need of improvement in earlier methods of review.

Lines of enquiry

Through the Developmental engagement stage, the college is invited to suggest lines of enquiry it would like the team to pursue in order to assist the college with development and enhancement. Developmental engagement teams use lines of enquiry as a way of reviewing the evidence and formulating conclusions about the college's management of higher education. They can be regarded as lenses through which teams view the area in question. QAA recommends three lines of enquiry for each Development engagement. Each line of enquiry can relate to more than one core theme.

Examples of lines of enquiry for a Developmental engagement in student assessment

Academic standards

- How does the college assure itself that it is fulfilling the requirements of the awarding body, in relation to assessment?
- How does the college assure itself that its assessment strategy ensures the maintenance of appropriate academic standards?

Quality of learning opportunities

- Are the requirements for feedback on assessed work well understood and do they support the learning of all groups of students and the achievement of intended learning outcomes?
- How do the arrangements for academic support for students on assessment ensure achievement of the intended learning outcomes?

Public information

- How does the college ensure the accuracy, currency and consistency of information it publishes about assessment?
- Is the information published and issued to students in relation to assessment fit for purpose and is the information appropriate, relevant, accurate and timely?

Some lines of enquiry relate to more than one core theme, for instance:

Academic standards and quality of learning opportunities

- How effective are staff development activities in achieving consistency in the quality and standard of marking and feedback to enhance and raise achievement?

Quality of learning opportunities and public information

- How are assessment procedures and information concerning assessment communicated to students?

Higher education in further education colleges in England

Findings from the IQER pilot reviews:
Assessment

Information bulletin 2008

Introduction

This information bulletin is part of a series about higher education in colleges of further education. It provides recommendations for the improvement of student assessment.

During 2006-07 the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) carried out pilot reviews in 15 further education colleges for the new Integrated quality and enhancement review (IQER) process.

IQER is an **evidence-based peer review** of a college's management of the student learning experience and performance of its responsibilities for the academic standards and quality of its higher education provision. The IQER usually comprises a Developmental engagement and a Summative review, and results in a published summative review report

This information bulletin seeks to provide an overview of:

- the outcomes of the IQER pilot reviews
- emerging good practice and recommendations about how the college might improve the management of its student assessment.

Within IQER, good practice is defined as practice that makes a particularly positive contribution to the college's management of academic standards and/or academic quality, and which is worthy of wider dissemination within and/or beyond the college.

The information presented in this information bulletin is derived from the 14 Summative review reports published so far, and draws on the findings from the Developmental engagements, where appropriate. QAA has amended elements of the pilot method and terminology in response to the evaluation and details of these can be found in *The handbook for integrated quality and enhancement review*.

Good practice in student assessment

Much good practice emerged from the Developmental engagements and Summative reviews. Specific areas of good practice focused on:

- assessment design, practices and procedures in colleges, including arrangements for marking and moderation, employer input into the design of assessments and the alignment of assessment with intended learning outcomes and external reference points
- colleges' involvement of employers in curriculum design and development, which helps to ensure vocationally relevant programmes of study
- employers' contribution to the design of assessment and opportunities for students to undertake work-based projects
- information such as programme handbooks and other relevant documentation that is made available to students and staff to inform them about assessment
- the high quality and timeliness of written and oral feedback provided to students on their assessed work
- the productive partnership arrangements between colleges and their awarding bodies which help to ensure that colleges understand the extent of their responsibilities for assessment
- the opportunities for staff development in assessment, both as part of the new teacher induction process and also as part of continued professional development, provided for staff by colleges and also by awarding bodies.

Key stages of IQER¹

Developmental engagement

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Briefing | -18 weeks |
| Agreement of awarding body involvement to QAA | -17 weeks |
| Self-evaluation and student submission to QAA | -12 weeks |
| Preparatory meeting | -9 weeks |
| Development engagement visit | 0 weeks |
| Draft report and action plan to college and awarding body | +4 weeks |
| Final report and action plan | +10 weeks |

The time between the Developmental engagement and the Summative review is usually not less than 12 months.

Summative review

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Self-evaluation and student submission to QAA | -12 weeks |
| Preparatory meeting | -9 weeks |
| Summative review visit | 0 weeks |
| Provisional judgement meeting | +1 week |
| Draft report with provisional judgements to college and awarding bod(ies) | +4 weeks |
| Report and action plan published | +15 weeks |

In exceptional circumstances, the Summative review team will conduct a second visit to the college to review further evidence. This will happen within 10 weeks of the first visit.

¹ Please see the IQER handbook for adaptations of IQER for colleges with very small higher education provision at www.qaa.ac.uk

Recommendations for the improvement of student assessment

At the end of each Developmental engagement and the Summative review, the teams made recommendations for the improvement of student assessment. The recommendations primarily focused upon the need for colleges to:

- improve and make available appropriate, accurate and complete programme and assessment information to current and potential students, for example in programme handbooks or on the college website
- ensure that information about assessment is appropriate to student needs, and that there is consistency and rigour in the mechanisms for the approval of information
- ensure that all students receive sufficient, high quality and timely feedback on assessed work in order to improve their performance and facilitate their progression
- increase opportunities for staff to gain benefit from professional development and scholarly activity in assessment
- ensure that appropriate monitoring and annual review arrangements are in place to secure consistent application of assessment policies and procedures
- promote and extend the awareness of the Academic Infrastructure and ensure that it is used appropriately as an external reference point, particularly Sections 4 and 6 relating to external examining and assessment.

Priorities for action

The most frequently occurring recommendation related to the information made available to students about assessment and assessment practices. Recommendations made reference to the types of information that should be available to students, for example:

- assessment schedules
- detailed assignment briefs
- assessment and progression criteria
- expectations for the timeliness of feedback
- media for the dissemination of information about assessment.

These findings suggest that colleges would make a significant contribution to the development of their higher education programmes if they improved the accuracy and completeness of the information on assessment provided to students and staff.