

Higher education in further education colleges in England (2006-07)

Introduction

During 2006-07 the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) carried out pilot reviews in 15 further education colleges (colleges) for the new Integrated quality and enhancement review (IQER) process. QAA is grateful to all of the colleges, awarding bodies and reviewers that took part in the process. Following an evaluation of the pilot reviews, *The handbook for a pilot study of an integrated quality and enhancement review* has been revised. In addition, QAA has carried out a further data collection exercise scoping the extent and nature of higher education in colleges in order to inform planning for the implementation of IQER.

The cycle of Academic review has drawn to a close. The reviews have provided a wealth of information on the quality and standards of higher education provision in colleges. QAA reviewers identified numerous strengths in respect of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities.

This information bulletin seeks to provide an overview of:

- the extent of provision and participation in higher education in colleges
- the outcomes of the 51 Academic reviews completed in England in 2005-06 and 2006-07
- the findings from the IQER pilot reviews
- the evaluation of the IQER pilot reviews
- news of what will happen next in the review of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)-funded provision in colleges.

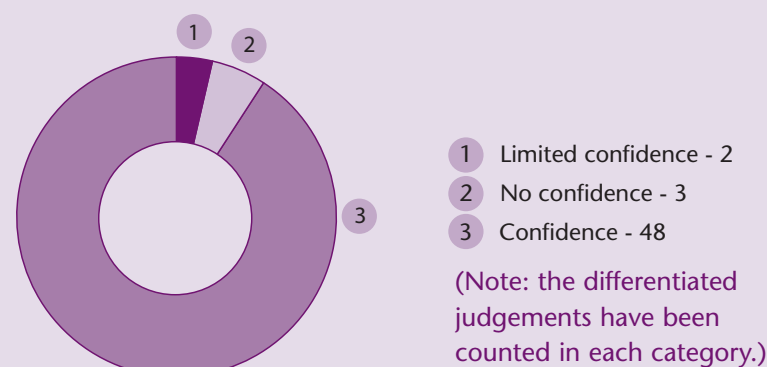
Key findings

- In 2006-07, some 96,000 students were enrolled on higher education programmes at 270 colleges in England.
- 89 higher education institutions and Edexcel awarded higher education qualifications funded by HEFCE and delivered through colleges in England.
- For most colleges, the outcomes of the 51 Academic reviews between 2005 and 2007 confirmed appropriate standards and approved the quality of higher education.
- The strengths identified through the Academic reviews and IQER pilot reviews confirmed that there is extensive good practice in higher education in colleges in England as well as potential for further development.

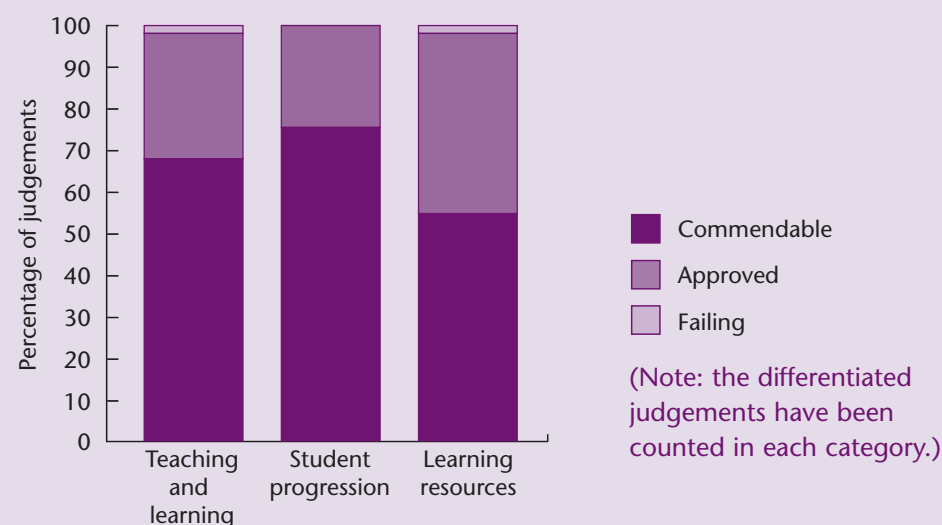
Academic review 2005-07

Between 2005 and 2007, QAA carried out 51 Academic reviews of higher education in colleges in England, drawing the cycle of Academic review to a close.

Judgements on academic standards



Judgements on the quality of learning opportunities for each element



The most successful colleges demonstrated strengths in the following areas.

Strengths: academic standards

Learning outcomes:

- well conceived and delivered
- reflect the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points.

Curriculum:

- informed by professional and vocational needs, with extensive contributions from, and engagement with, employers
- reflects areas of staff expertise
- current and vocationally relevant, with design and content of the programme well-aligned to learning objectives.

Assessment:

- well conceived assessment strategies
- good range of assessment methods for both formative and summative assessment
- effectively communicated, applied and verified assessment criteria
- successful student achievement of learning outcomes.

Strengths: quality of learning opportunities

Teaching and learning:

- effective strategies and a wide variety of methods used for teaching and learning
- supportive staff appropriately qualified and experienced for the subjects they teach.

Student progression:

- effective arrangements for recruitment, admissions and the induction of students
- good pastoral and academic support available to students.

Learning resources:

- effective staff mentoring and continuous development of subject and pedagogical knowledge and skills
- good specialist, library and computing accommodation, equipment and consumables, which support students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Recommendations

In order to increase their success, other colleges are recommended to:

- improve the clarity of information for students about intended learning outcomes and assessment
- increase opportunities for staff to take part in continuous professional development, including scholarly activity, and incorporate this in the design and delivery of the programme
- provide greater opportunity for employer involvement in curriculum development and delivery
- increase consideration of external reference points in the design of assessments
- increase students' access to learning resources which support them to achieve intended learning outcomes.

Integrated quality and enhancement review

During 2006-07, 15 colleges in England took part in the IQER pilot. Fifteen of the 16 Developmental engagements focused upon student assessment. Through the Developmental engagements, significant good practice was identified.

Developmental engagements: good practice

- assessment design, practices and procedures
- information made available to students about assessment
- high quality feedback to students on assessed work
- the match between assessment and intended learning outcomes.

Summative reviews: good practice

- partnership arrangements between the college and its awarding body(ies)
- opportunities provided for staff development
- student support mechanisms
- involvement of employers and professional bodies in the design of the curriculum and/or assessment.

Summative reviews: recommendations

- improve and make available appropriate, accurate and informative programme information to current and potential students
- ensure appropriate monitoring and annual review arrangements are in place
- ensure that there are appropriate mechanisms and opportunities for staff development related to higher education
- promote and extend the awareness of the Academic Infrastructure and ensure that it is used appropriately as an external reference point.

Provision and participation

HE student full-time equivalent by college

Number of students	Number of colleges
1-49	48
50-99	38
100-199	53
200-299	41
300-499	49
500-999	31
1000-1999	7
2000+	1

Number of awarding bodies by college

Number of colleges	Number of awarding bodies
85	1
64	2
56	3
36	4
16	5
22	6 to 10

For example, 85 colleges had one awarding body.

Number of colleges by awarding body

Number of awarding bodies	Number of colleges
19	1
5	2
7	3
6	4
5	5
31	6 to 10
17 (incl. Edexcel)	More than 10

For example, five higher education institutions each made higher education awards at two colleges.

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Evaluation of IQER

The IQER pilot was externally evaluated by the Higher Education Consultancy Group. The external evaluation was supplemented by QAA's normal internal evaluation processes. Overall, IQER was well received by colleges, awarding bodies and students.

Benefits to the college included:

- providing opportunities for critical self-reflection and for staff development
- raising the profile of higher education within the college
- acting as a catalyst for change, improvement and enhancement
- generating greater awareness of the Academic Infrastructure within colleges
- providing a mechanism for the identification and confirmation of areas of good practice, strengths and areas for development.

Benefits to awarding bodies included:

- contributing to the assurance of colleges' management of programmes
- providing a check to ensure that policies, procedures and processes are in place, and are operating effectively
- providing an external and independent monitoring and evaluation process
- enriching the relationship between awarding bodies and colleges.

Benefits to students included:

- providing students with an opportunity to provide feedback on their education and highlight good practice or concerns
- providing an external/independent monitoring and confirmation of standards of provision
- acting as a catalyst for change, informing improvements in provision for current and future students.

Main challenges identified through the evaluation included the need to:

- ensure that there is a clear and shared understanding of the role of all partners within IQER
- secure student contribution to the process through the most appropriate means
- minimise the potential burden placed upon colleges, awarding bodies and students through the IQER process.

What happens next?

IQER will be formally implemented from January 2008. In the first year, we expect to carry out 31 Developmental engagements focusing on student assessment. QAA will support the implementation of IQER through a series of roadshows, briefing and training events.

QAA would like to thank all of the colleges, awarding bodies and the reviewers who have supplied data as part of the scope and preference exercise or have been involved in the Academic reviews and IQER pilot reviews.

Useful information sources:

IQER evaluation report

The handbook for an integrated quality and enhancement review

Learning from higher education in further education colleges in England 2005-07

Higher education in further education colleges in England

Information bulletin

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