

Arrangements for assuring and improving the quality of provision and services in Scotland's colleges

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Arrangements for assuring and improving the quality of provision and services in Scotland's colleges

Introduction

Education Scotland and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) have worked collaboratively to develop the following arrangements for assuring and improving the quality of provision delivered in Scotland's colleges.

The arrangements are predicated on colleges continuously improving the quality of their provision and services through a cycle of evaluation and enhancement planning. They are founded on colleges engaging staff, learners and key external stakeholders, including other educational providers and employers, in contributing meaningfully and productively to continuous improvement.

Aims of the arrangements

The arrangements seek to encourage colleges, with their partners, to be forward looking, ambitious and agile to respond to new situations and priorities. To enable this, the arrangements are designed to avoid duplication and to build on current and emerging systems and practices. These include:

- Strengthening of college ownership and responsibility for evaluation and planning for continuous improvement.
- Coherence of SFC and Education Scotland monitoring and formal reporting requirements to avoid duplication and reduce the burden of reporting by colleges.
- Promoting on-going evaluation to inform understanding of performance within a regional and national context to assist future planning of support and scrutiny.
- Identifying highly effective practice to share across the sector and through Education Scotland's National Improvement Hub.
- Ensuring external evaluation arrangements are independent and robust, and provide independent, external feedback.
- Providing external assurance of the quality of provision and services in colleges in line with Education Scotland principles of inspection and review.
- Providing external assurance regarding progress being made to address areas for improvement.

Quality and improvement framework

HM Inspectors of Education use a set of standards to evaluate and report on quality and improvement in colleges. These are set out in the quality improvement

framework [*How good is our college? \(HGIOC?\)*](#), and are based on the following four high-level principles:

- Leadership and quality culture
- Delivery of learning and services to support learning
- Outcomes and impact
- Capacity for improvement

HGIOC provides colleges with a structure for evaluation and enhancement which colleges, with their stakeholders, can use to identify what is working well and what needs to improve. It is designed to support collaborative evaluation internally and with external stakeholders who contribute to the learning experience. The framework incorporates and signposts links to SFC Outcome Agreement requirements and the Student Engagement framework.

Outline of arrangements

Evaluative Report and Enhancement Plan

Colleges will apply the four principles to produce an Evaluative Report (ER), which provides an assessment of the college's performance in relation to a prescribed timeframe. They will draw on the findings from the ER to produce an Enhancement Plan (EP), which identifies actions and timescales to address areas for improvement.

Colleges will not be required to produce an 'EREP' (as they are called collectively) every year. However, they will be required to maintain and update their EP and report annually to SFC on Outcome Agreement priorities as outlined in the annual Outcome Agreement Guidance.

Annual reporting requirements will be set out in Annex A of the SFC Outcome Agreement Guidance for Colleges, which is available at www.sfc.ac.uk/outcome-agreements-guidance.

Progress Visits

Progress Visits (PVs) will provide external evaluation of progress against actions for improvement within the EP. PVs will be carried out annually and planned collaboratively between the college, ES and SFC. Following a PV, a written report containing a statement regarding progress made against EP targets will be provided to the college and shared with the Board. ES will produce a summary report for SFC on completion of all college PVs.

Involvement of stakeholders

Colleges are expected to involve stakeholders systematically in evaluative processes. Stakeholder feedback should be reported in ERs with clear reference to which group

of stakeholders the feedback belongs, for example staff, learners, employers, schools, community learning organisations.

Learner engagement

Learner engagement is fundamental to the college's ability to identify areas for development. Colleges should view students as partners in supporting improvement and should have effective processes for engaging students in contributing to the development of the EREP.

The Student Engagement Framework for Scotland, developed by sparqs, applies to all sector agencies and representative bodies in the college and university sectors. Colleges are expected to use this framework to develop partnership approaches with learners and learner representatives. The full framework can be found here: [sparqs - Student Engagement Framework](#). Colleges should engage learners in contributing to:

- The evaluation of provision and services, as illustrated within the challenge questions.
- The planning and writing of the EREP.
- The evaluation of progress against the Enhancement Plan.

Employer engagement

HGIOC? requires colleges to work closely with local, regional and national employers to develop and deliver learning which meets the needs of learners, industry, communities and higher education institutions. Colleges should engage employers systematically in contributing to evaluation of how well the college is meeting employer and industry needs in relation to:

- Leadership
- Curriculum
- Learning, teaching and assessment
- Services to support learning

Partner engagement

Colleges should engage partner agencies, including schools, universities, and community partners in contributing to evaluation of how well the college is meeting the needs of learners in relation to:

- Leadership
- Curriculum
- Learning, teaching and assessment
- Services to support learning.

College nominee

Education Scotland will ask colleges to identify a senior manager with a comprehensive strategic overview to fulfil the role of college nominee. The nominee will play a key role in coordinating on-going engagement with Education Scotland and SFC and preparation of the ER and EP.

Arrangements in single and multi-region colleges

Within the arrangements, there is a requirement to align evaluation and reporting with the Outcome Agreement process and governance. Arrangements will therefore take account of the variations in operating contexts of colleges and recognition that Boards have responsibility and accountability for assuring quality of provision and services. These arrangements seek to take these into account as outlined below.

Single college regions

Arrangements will align with the *single* college Outcome Agreement and accommodate single Board oversight.

Multi-college regions

In the three multi-college regions, evaluations of provision and services will continue, as before, to function at the level of the individual college. However, the Outcome Agreement and governance arrangements in each multi-college region differ, and therefore each of these regions will agree with their SFC Outcome Agreement Teams and Education Scotland College HMIs how best to align Outcome Agreement evaluation and reporting with individual institutional evaluations and reporting in their regional contexts.

Engagement and support

The college link HM Inspector and Outcome Agreement Teams will work with colleges to provide both support and constructive challenge as they develop the EREP.

At the start of each year, the college link HM Inspector and Outcome Agreement Team for each college will have a pre-analysis meeting to share intelligence about the work and performance the college.

The college link HM Inspector, OA Teams and college nominee will draw on findings from the pre-analysis meeting to agree a schedule of engagement activities. The activities will be predicated on supporting, challenging and monitoring arrangements by the college to evaluate provision and services and identify actions for improvement.

The college link HM Inspector will work with the nominee to identify any specific areas of the college which may require additional support and challenge.

Cycle for reporting and monitoring of progress

Each year, colleges will produce an OA self-evaluation report as part of the Outcome Agreement process. Detailed guidance on reporting requirements in relation to the production of the EREP, or interim update report, will be issued annually.

External endorsement of EREPs

The arrangements for external endorsement of the ER and EP consist of three stages.

Stage 1 - external endorsement meeting

Education Scotland HM Inspector and SFC OAMs review the EREPs to formally endorse, or not endorse, that:

- The ER provides an accurate and appropriate account of the quality of provision, services and outcomes being delivered by the college, including appropriateness of grades.
- The EP is well informed by and linked appropriately to the findings of the ER, and communicates clearly plans to address areas of provision, services and outcomes which require improvement.

The college, college Board and for multi-college regions, the RSB will be advised in writing of the outcome of the meeting and *provisional* endorsement statements by Education Scotland and SFC.

In the event of EREPs which cannot yet be formally endorsed, communication to the college, the college Board, and for multi-college regions, the RSB will provide suggested amendments to the documents including adjustments to grades, areas for development and main points for action. Colleges will be advised to amend and resubmit their EREP in light of comments from Education Scotland and SFC.

Stage 2 - Formal notification of endorsement

In relation to the ER, formal notification will identify whether:

- Education Scotland /SFC **endorses** that the ER of (name of college) provides an *accurate and appropriate account* of the quality of provision and services being delivered by the college; or

- Education Scotland/SFC **does not endorse** that the ER of (name of college) provides an accurate and appropriate account of the quality of provision and services being delivered by the college.

In relation to the EP, formal notification will identify whether:

- Education Scotland /SFC **endorses** that the Evaluation Plan of (name of college) is *linked appropriately* to the findings of the ER and *communicates clearly* plans to address areas of provision and services which require improvement; or
- Education Scotland/SFC **does not endorse** that the EP of (name of college) is *linked appropriately* to the findings of the Evaluation Report, and *communicates clearly* plans to address areas of provision and services which require improvement.

Stage 3 – Board presentation

The final endorsement statements will be presented to the college Board at its next appropriate meeting. The presentation will be delivered by the college HMI. The SFC Outcome Agreement Team may also attend.

Publication of college EREP

Education Scotland and SFC will publish on their websites, college ERs and EPs with accompanying Education Scotland and SFC endorsement statements.

Arrangements when Education Scotland and SFC do not endorse the EREP

If Education Scotland and SFC agree that they are not able to endorse a college's ER and/or EP, they will work together to take appropriate action, which may involve intensifying their engagement with the college.

An ER and / or EP may not be endorsed if the college:

- Failed to identify a significant weakness within its Evaluation Report
- Identified an area of weakness but is not sufficiently clear of the cause(s) resulting in the weakness.
- Has made insufficient progress (over a reasonable timescale) to address a significant weakness.

The college link HM Inspector and Outcome Agreement Team will work with the college to identify and plan arrangements to intensify engagement with the college during the next year of activity with a view to securing improvement.

On-going engagement

On-going engagement between the college link HM Inspector, SFC OA Team and the college, is a key factor of the arrangements in securing improvement across the college sector. On-going engagement activities will take account of changes to the operating context of colleges and will accommodate evaluative activity to bring about improvement.

The arrangements will involve Education Scotland in additional enhancement activity which will be informed by intelligence gathered by Education Scotland and SFC and will be based on supporting and securing improvement. Education Scotland and SFC will work together to agree the scope and specification of enhancement activities.

Principles of on-going engagement

HM Inspectors and Outcome Agreement Manager(s) will carry out regular engagement with colleges to maintain an evaluative overview of the college and promote continuous quality improvement. On-going engagement activity will be focused on:

- Supporting colleges to secure improvement within evaluation and forward planning processes.
- Planning Progress Visits.
- Identifying highly effective practice which is worthy of wider dissemination.
- Providing a current, sector-wide perspective of the quality of provision and services in Scottish colleges.
- Communicating aspects of college-sector operation which require additional support or development, to external stakeholders who have a role in facilitating improvement.

Concerns

If a college believes that Education Scotland or SFC has arrived at a judgement in relation to EREP endorsement, or the outcomes of a Progress Visit, which does not take sufficient account of all relevant information or evidence, it should submit any additional evidence in writing to the college link HM Inspector and/or Outcome Agreement Managers within five working days of the receipt of their formal notification or report. This must consist of evidence which is new in nature and is not a further submission of evidence of the type previously considered. Education Scotland and/or SFC will consider additional new evidence and convey the decision to the college in writing.

Complaints

Education Scotland is committed to providing high-quality services. Occasionally things go wrong and when this happens it is important that we act quickly to resolve the situation. The Education Scotland [complaints handling procedure](#) covers concerns and formal complaints about our work and the work of our staff. It also details how to complain and how we use your feedback to identify what we need to do to improve. If you wish to complain, or raise concerns about the services we offer, please contact +44 (0)131 244 4330, [write to us](#), or email: complaints@educationscotland.gov.scot.

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