



**QAA**

# Developmental review

**Handbook for Developmental review of  
higher education in further education  
colleges (Northern Ireland) 2008-09**

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## Introduction

### Background

1 The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA) mission is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. QAA achieves this by working with higher education providers to define academic standards, quality and enhancement, and by carrying out reviews of higher education programmes using these definitions. The Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) in Northern Ireland has engaged QAA to conduct a review of higher education programmes in each further education college (college) in Northern Ireland in 2008-09.

2 The review method, Developmental review, was devised by QAA for DEL. A consultation during October and November 2008 provided the opportunity for colleges and their awarding bodies to comment on the proposals and to contribute to the design of the method. By awarding bodies, QAA means validating higher education institutions and other organisations that validate programmes of study leading to awards at level 4 and above of *The framework for Higher Education Qualifications for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, second edition, 2008*. Currently, the organisations which award the largest number of higher education qualifications delivered in the colleges are Edexcel, the Open University, Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster. A small number of English awarding bodies and several national professional statutory and regulatory bodies also validate higher education programmes in the colleges.

3 The main aims of Developmental review in Northern Ireland are:

- to help colleges improve the higher education offered to students
- to provide information about the maintenance of standards and the quality assurance and enhancement of higher education in colleges
- to provide accountability for publicly-funded higher education in colleges
- to inform the development of the next review cycle of higher education in colleges, to operate from 2009-10 onwards.

4 Developmental review, an evidence-based process lasting 20 weeks, is carried out through peer review. It includes preparation followed by two consecutive days of meetings with college staff and students and the scrutiny of documents at the college. Developmental review also normally includes a written submission made by student representatives to the review team (the team). Drawing on the QAA Academic Infrastructure as a source of external reference points (see paragraphs 16 and 17), Developmental review is designed to assist the colleges to identify good practice for wider dissemination. Teams will comment in the resulting Developmental review report (the report) on the effectiveness of the college's processes for managing its responsibilities for maintaining **academic standards** and for **assuring** and **enhancing** the **quality of students' learning opportunities** in its higher education programmes. The definition of the three **key areas** which provide the structure for Developmental review, are as follows:

- **Academic standards:** this refers to the level of achievement a student has to reach in order to gain a particular award or qualification
- **Quality of students' learning opportunities:** this considers the effectiveness of everything that is done or provided by the college to ensure that its students have the

best possible opportunity to meet the stated outcomes of their programmes and the academic standards of the awards that they are seeking

- **Enhancement:** for the purposes of Developmental review, this means the continuous improvement of a college's management of the student learning experience of higher education, for the benefit of students, and within the context of its agreements with awarding bodies.

These key areas are discussed more fully in paragraphs 25 to 30.

5 The developmental aspects of the review process include the opportunity for the college, in preparing for its review, to test, develop and refine internal quality assurance and enhancement processes. Development is also fostered by the inclusion of members of the college's own staff as full members of the team (**institutional reviewers**) carrying out the review (see paragraphs 49 to 52).

### **Purpose, scope and aims**

6 Developmental review is concerned with the extent to which the college, working with its awarding body partner(s), exercises its responsibilities for maintaining academic standards, and for assuring and enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities in higher education programmes. The review process is designed to assist the colleges to identify good practice for wider dissemination. Developmental review teams will comment in the report on the effectiveness of the college's processes for managing its responsibilities for maintaining academic standards and for assuring and enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities in its higher education programmes. Developmental review does not consider directly the responsibilities of awarding bodies. The responsibilities of the higher education institutions, as awarding bodies, are assessed separately through QAA's Institutional audit process.

7 Developmental review will enable each college to demonstrate the effectiveness of the management of its responsibilities for maintaining the academic standards and for assuring the quality and enhancing its higher education programmes, as set out in the agreement(s) with its awarding bodies. The report will set out good practice worthy of sharing within and between colleges as well as areas for development which the team identifies. The final Developmental review report is produced by QAA, and made available to the college and its awarding bodies, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) and DEL. As the purpose of these reviews is to be developmental, the reports will not be published.

### **The Northern Ireland context**

8 In planning, conducting and reporting on the reviews in Northern Ireland, QAA is sensitive to the recent restructuring of the colleges and subsequent changes. In this review method, QAA uses the term **site** to refer to each major location where higher education is delivered within the new college structures. The training of reviewers has included information and discussion on the structure and processes of higher education in Northern Ireland colleges and on the context in which it operates.

## The Developmental review process in summary

### Information and evidence

9 The college will provide in its portfolio of evidence supporting the reflective statement, an illustrative sample of documentation (see **Annex A**: Guidance on the reflective statement and portfolio of evidence). This will be sufficient to demonstrate how the college manages its responsibilities for maintaining academic standards, and for assuring and enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities. The portfolio will inform the planning meeting. It is likely that further information will also be requested during the planning meeting or during the review visit. This information may be from meetings with students and staff and the scrutiny of further documents provided by the college beyond the portfolio of evidence.

10 The team will have access to a variety of information in advance of the visit, including:

- a reflective statement and a portfolio of evidence from the college, outlining its approach to its role in the management of academic standards and to the assurance and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities (see paragraphs 22 to 24)
- an optional student written submission submitted by the student representatives of the college
- reports by relevant bodies produced within the three years preceding the Developmental review
- a copy of any agreements with awarding bodies relevant to the Developmental review and
- a briefing paper from QAA's Information unit which will include publicly available information about the college, statistical information about the higher education provision and key contacts.

11 At the planning meeting the review coordinator will agree with the college the information needed during the visit to support the thematic trail of assessment. This will include:

- a representative sample of assessed student work
- assessment criteria or guidance to markers
- examination or assessment board minutes

12 In addition, the team is likely to need the following information during the Developmental review visit. Information may include:

- professional, statutory and regulatory body reports
- student support materials
- student handbooks
- records of staff-student liaison committees or equivalent
- recruitment and student progression data including entry into employment
- the college's employer engagement (particularly important for vocational or Foundation Degree programmes of study)
- staff development documents
- college strategy documents

QAA is keen that the college is not overburdened with requests for information. Requests will be kept to the minimum for the team to reach conclusions. It is likely that colleges will have the information listed above to hand as part of its normal record keeping.

### **Key areas and thematic trails**

13 Developmental review is conducted through the key areas described in paragraph 4 and through thematic trails. The team looks at the ways in which the college's management processes and systems work in practice across the three key areas. Thematic trails are a method for focusing but not restricting the attention of the team within each key area. The thematic trails follow practical activities of the college within the three key areas. In this way, one thematic trail will allow the team to follow practical activities of the college within one key area.

14 The college will identify the thematic trails in order to demonstrate to the team the methods that the college uses to fulfil its responsibilities in maintaining academic standards and in assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities. These trails will be agreed by the review coordinator and the review support officer. The team will follow the thematic trails and consider the effectiveness of the college's processes.

15 The first thematic trail, within the key area of academic standards and common to the Developmental review in each college, is on student assessment. This has been agreed by DEL and QAA and will enable DEL to consider this aspect of the management of higher education across Northern Ireland colleges. It will also help to inform the further development of higher education in colleges in Northern Ireland. This trail looks at colleges' focus on an aspect of assessment and has been chosen because of the challenges that student assessment presents to all education providers, and because of its importance to academic standards. The college may select the focus of the trails for the other two key areas.

### **Setting and maintaining academic standards and quality: the Academic Infrastructure**

16 QAA and the UK higher education community have worked together to develop the Academic Infrastructure. This set of reference points is key to the process of setting the standards of awards, assuring quality and helping institutions to design and monitor their courses. The Academic Infrastructure consists of four components:

- *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, second edition 2008*
- subject and award benchmark statements
- programme specifications and
- the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*.

These components give all institutions a shared starting point for setting, describing and assuring the quality and standards of their higher education courses.

17 Higher education institutions and their partners will use these reference points to develop a range of quality assurance procedures and processes to set and maintain the standards and quality of their awards. It is likely that a college will not be conversant with the Academic Infrastructure and its terminology and how it has been used by the awarding bodies. **There is no expectation that colleges will have such an understanding of**

**the Academic Infrastructure nor be fully conversant with it by the time of the Developmental review visits in April/May 2009.** The report will identify the ways in which the college is currently engaging, or how it may in the future engage with, the Academic Infrastructure to maintain the standards of the award and the quality of the learning opportunities.

## **Students**

18 Students have an important role in the Developmental review process. The students' representative body, normally the Students' Union or equivalent, has the opportunity to make a written submission to the team in advance of the review. The student written submission, where provided, helps to inform the focus of the review. The team will scrutinise a range of matters directly relevant to students, including the quality of the information provided for students, and the ways in which their learning is facilitated and supported. Students are invited to take part in meetings with the team during the review visit and have the opportunity to make the team aware of matters of primary interest to them. A guide for student representatives involved in Developmental review can be found at **Annex B**. Further information for college staff on student involvement in Developmental review can be found at **Annex C**.

## **Conclusion of the review and reports**

19 The review coordinator, accompanied by the team, presents an oral summary of the review findings to representatives of the college at the end of the visit. Awarding bodies attend this oral report if this has been agreed between the college and each awarding body (see also paragraphs 46 to 48). The main outcome of each Developmental review is a written report that identifies good practice for dissemination and includes recommendations for action by the college. In addition, the team will make evaluative comments about each of the three thematic trails. The college is asked to produce an action plan for inclusion in the final report, in collaboration with its awarding bodies, approximately 10 weeks following the review. This action plan should outline how the college intends to address the recommendations in the report. The report is not published but will be provided to the college and its awarding bodies, DEL and the ETI.

## **How the process works**

### **Initial planning and contact with QAA**

20 At the start of the round of Developmental review activity, QAA contacted the colleges about the proposed scheduling of the reviews. QAA provided a **briefing session** for the colleges and their awarding bodies to prepare them for the reviews. A representative of ETI also attended the briefing which included guidance on the reflective statement and the portfolio of evidence that colleges are asked to supply eight to 10 weeks before the team visits the college. A general timeline and flow process chart for the reviews is provided at **Annex D**.

21 Normally, a little after the start of the review period, and approximately six weeks before the review visit, the team will meet college staff and students in a **planning meeting** to agree arrangements for the review visit. This planning meeting will include discussion of the programme of activities, the college sites to be visited and the proposed thematic trails. The discussions at the planning meeting will help the college to identify any additional documents



that the team is likely to need to see as evidence during the review visit. An indicative agenda for the planning meeting is provided at **Annex E**.

### **Reflective statement and documentation**

22 Central to the process of Developmental review are the self-evaluative processes that demonstrate the college's effectiveness in the maintenance of academic standards, and the quality and enhancement of learning opportunities. To facilitate the review, each college is asked to provide a reflective statement and a portfolio of **existing documentary evidence** that addresses each key area and thematic trail. It will be an evaluative account of the college's approach to the maintenance of academic standards and to the assurance and enhancement of the quality for its higher education programmes, and how it satisfies itself about the effectiveness of its approach. The statement will be supported by a portfolio of existing documents to act as evidence to support the statement made. The portfolio should be cross-referenced to the reflective statement. Further information is provided in **Annex A**.

23 The college should send the reflective statement to QAA, referenced to and accompanied by a portfolio of evidence, normally eight to 10 weeks before the start of the visit. QAA will confirm this date with each college. One hard copy and one electronic copy of the reflective statement and the portfolio of evidence should be submitted. Colleges are asked to use as an electronic format either a CD-ROM or USB data key, with text documents saved as Word 2003 file.

24 QAA will acknowledge receipt of the reflective statement and portfolio. A copy will be sent to the review coordinator who will recommend whether the reflective statement and portfolio of evidence form an appropriate basis for the review. The QAA review support officer, responsible for oversight of the review, provides the final confirmation that the review can proceed. Once this has been agreed, QAA will notify the college and ask for hard copies of the reflective statement and portfolio of evidence to be sent to all members of the review team.

### **Key areas and the selection of thematic trails**

25 In its reflective statement, each college will prepare an evaluation under the headings of one thematic trail within each key area. Thematic trails enable colleges and their reviewers to consider in depth what the college is achieving in relation to each of the key areas. Developmental review is particularly concerned with the management of higher education and how the colleges oversee particular aspects. The generic thematic trail for academic standards has already been selected by DEL. This is the theme of assessment and the college may select an aspect of student assessment as a focus for the review of this key area. The thematic trails for the quality of learning opportunities and for enhancement are also proposed by the college. When the college has selected its chosen thematic trails, and before structuring the reflective statement around them, it will need to consult with the review coordinator and with QAA in order to be satisfied that the trails will enable the reviewers to explore satisfactorily the three key areas. The final decision on this rests with the review support officer.

### **Key area one: Academic standards**

26 The central question that the reviewers will consider under this heading is: to what extent does the college discharge its responsibilities effectively, as set out in its partnership agreement(s) with higher education institutions and other awarding bodies, for the

maintenance of the standards of the higher education awards that it offers on behalf of its awarding bodies? Some examples of thematic trails in assessment follow:

- how does the college know that their internal verification process is effective?
- how effective is the process of assessing students' work?
- what impact have external examiners' reports had in securing academic standards?

### **Key area two: Quality of learning opportunities**

27 The central question that the reviewers will consider here is: to what extent does the college discharge its responsibilities effectively within the context of its partnership agreement(s) with higher education institutions and other awarding bodies, for the management and delivery of the quality of the learning opportunities in higher education?

Some examples of the kind of thematic trail that the college might select are:

- how does the college ensure that academic tutorial support for higher education students is effective and enables students to achieve the learning outcomes for their programmes?
- to what extent is student representation on programme committees and arrangements for feedback from students effective in contributing to securing high-quality learning opportunities?
- how far do learning resources support students effectively in enabling them to achieve the learning outcomes of their programmes?

### **Key area three: Enhancement**

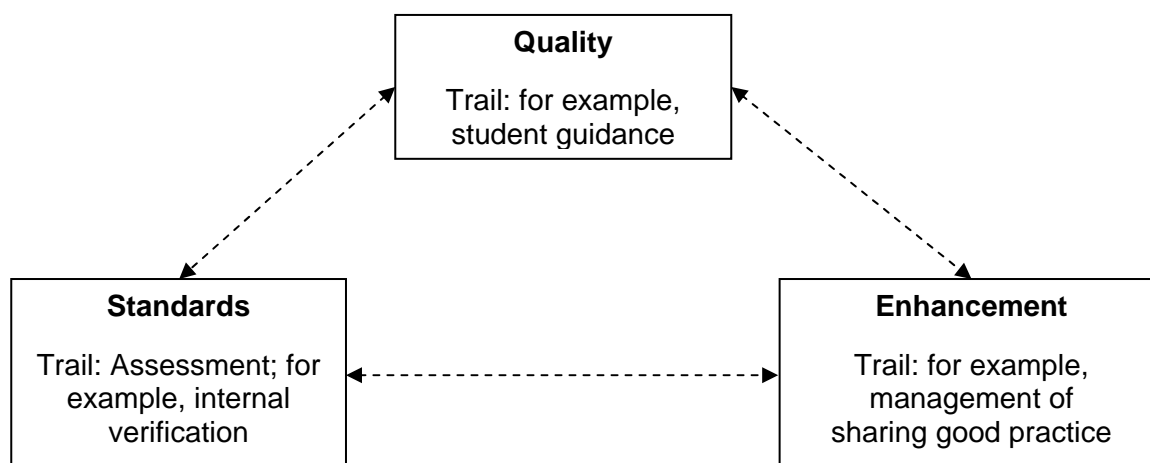
28 When addressing this key area, the team will consider how a college identifies and exploits developmental opportunities to improve the quality of the learning opportunities for the benefit of the students within the context of the agreements with the awarding bodies. This will involve the identification of enhancement opportunities based upon evidence collected and the **systematic steps** taken to bring about improvement for the benefit of the student. Developmental review teams will look for evidence of carefully thought through (systematic) planning for managing the quality of the learning opportunities available to students. Some examples of the kind of thematic trails that a college might select include:

- what mechanism(s) does the college use to identify enhancement opportunities and how effective are they?
- how does the college measure the effectiveness of its enhancement strategies?

29 These example thematic trails are indicative. They are not intended to restrict college choice. It is important that colleges select a trail for each key area that will be most productive in enhancing the quality of the provision as a result of Developmental review.

30 The relationship between the three key areas is represented diagrammatically in the Figure 1 below. The dotted lines indicate the interdependence of key areas. This suggests that the key areas are not watertight compartments. Rather, they support each other. Each thematic trail is likely, therefore, to provide information that will support the evaluation of the others.

**Figure 1: The interrelationship between the key areas and the thematic trails.**



### **Use of external reference points**

31 As stated in paragraph 17 there is a series of nationally agreed reference points used by UK higher education providers for setting and maintaining standards and for assuring the quality of higher education awards. This is called the Academic Infrastructure. These reference tools are used by all of the higher education institutions which validate higher education in the colleges. **There is no expectation that colleges will have a full understanding of the Academic Infrastructure nor be fully conversant with its components by the time of the Developmental reviews in April/May 2009.** Each Developmental review will enable the team to report to the college on the extent to which it is already using the components of the Academic Infrastructure and/or achieving an equivalent effect in its procedures and processes.

### **The review visit**

32 The review visit will take place over two consecutive days, during which two or three college sites delivering higher education will normally be visited. The detailed programme for the visit will be agreed between the college and the review coordinator at the time of the planning meeting (see **Annex E**)

33 During the two day visit, the team will divide for part of the time to visit the different sites agreed at the planning meeting to gain evidence to inform its overall evaluation of the higher education at the college. The team will divide so that at least two members (usually one reviewer and one institutional reviewer) visit each site to meet staff and students. The visit to each site will use the same agenda for meetings. The whole team will reassemble at the close of the day to share findings (see **Annex F** for details and team roles).

34 The review visit will provide the team with opportunities to read further documentation and to hold discussions with staff and students. Within this further documentation, a small sample of students' assessed work will be needed in order to assist the team to follow the

thematic trail on student assessment. Student work should not be sent in advance as part of the portfolio of evidence. It should be supplied at the visit as part of the further documentation. Student work supplied to the team should have passed through all stages of marking, feedback to students and moderation. Documentary evidence is important in helping the review team to evaluate the college's management of the quality and enhancement of learning opportunities and its role in the maintenance of academic standards. The only material in the portfolio and further documentation required by the review team will be that which is already held by the college or its awarding bodies. The only freshly authored documents required in Developmental review will normally be the reflective statement which introduces the portfolio, and the student written submission.

35 The team may carry out direct observation of some elements of provision as part of a thematic trail. This could be, for example, learning resources. Evidence of teaching quality will usually be obtained from a documentary study of procedures such as the college's observation of higher education teaching, meetings with students, and the analysis of student questionnaires and other arrangements for gathering feedback. The team will not carry out any direct observation of teaching.

36 The review visit will end with a brief oral summary of conclusions and recommendations. This will be made to the college by the review coordinator accompanied by the other members of the team. Further information on the review visit, including an indicative visit schedule and guidance on the conduct of meetings, is provided in **Annex G** and **Annex H** respectively.

## **Reports and the college's response**

37 As described above, at the end of the review visit, the review coordinator will offer an oral summary of findings to the college and its awarding bodies. The review coordinator will confirm this summary in a letter to the college director. The main outcome of the review is the written report. A template of the Developmental review report is provided in **Annex I**.

38 Developmental review reports will identify the features of good practice that the team considers, in the context of the college, to make a particularly positive contribution to the college's approach to maintaining academic standards and to assuring and enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities.

39 The report will also include recommendations for improvement for the college. These indicate the extent to which the college discharges its responsibilities as set out in the partnership agreement for maintaining academic standards and for assuring and enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities in its higher education programmes.

40 Recommendations made in the report will be at one of three levels.

- **Essential** recommendations refer to important matters which the team believes are currently putting quality and/or standards at risk and which require urgent corrective action (see also paragraph 44 and 45).
- **Advisable** recommendations refer to matters which the team believes have the potential to put quality and/or standards at risk, and require preventative corrective action.
- **Desirable** recommendations refer to matters which the team believes have the potential to enhance quality, build capacity and/or further secure standards.

41 The review coordinator will send copies of the draft Developmental review report to the college and its awarding bodies for comments about four weeks after the end of the review visit. This gives the college and its awarding bodies the opportunity to draw the team's attention to any areas which they regard as inaccurate or incomplete. The college should send a single reply which incorporates any comments from the awarding bodies to the review coordinator. The team is then responsible for considering these comments and any supporting evidence which the college may offer at this stage, and for agreeing whether or not any aspect of the report should be amended in response. Teams will only be able to consider supporting evidence that was available at the time of the review visit.

42 The review coordinator will return the revised draft report to the college. At this stage, the college is also asked to complete an action plan in response to the conclusions of the report. QAA will provide a template for this action plan (see **Annex J**). The action plan is intended to support the college in the continuing development of its higher education programmes by facilitating its expression of how it intends to address the findings of the Developmental review. The college will wish to consult its awarding bodies on the action plan. This plan should set out how the college intends to share or sustain good practice, how it plans to address the team's recommendations and how it plans to evaluate its actions.

43 QAA will incorporate the action plan into the Developmental review report. A final version of the report will be sent to the college and its awarding bodies, to the ETI and to DEL. This completed report containing the action plan will form part of the evidence base for the future review of higher education at the college. QAA will also monitor the implementation of the action plans of the Developmental reviews through the subsequent review cycle.

44 Should a college Developmental review result in essential recommendations, DEL may ask the college to send QAA a progress report detailing how it has addressed the recommendations, and to provide evidence that the action has been effective. This progress report will normally be required within six months of the Developmental review visit.

45 In exceptional circumstances DEL may also commission a second Developmental review following consideration of any report that contains essential recommendations.

### **Involvement of awarding bodies**

46 To enable awarding bodies to manage their responsibilities for their collaborative arrangements and their involvement in Developmental review effectively, QAA will copy all the Developmental review correspondence it sends to the colleges to the heads of the relevant awarding bodies and/or to their nominated contacts. Such correspondence may include confirmation of the dates of any meetings or visits, provisional outcomes of visits and draft reports. QAA encourages colleges to copy to their awarding bodies all correspondence they send to QAA.

47 Awarding bodies may wish to support their partner colleges through Developmental review, by assisting, for example, with the preparation of the reflective statement and by attending various Developmental review events, including review visits. The extent of an awarding body's involvement with Developmental review should be decided in discussion between the partners, taking account of the arrangement and the provisions of the partnership agreement, and it is at the discretion of the organisations involved in the collaborative arrangements. The participation of the awarding body should be considered against the maturity of the relationship between the partners; the extent of the

responsibilities which the awarding body has conferred on the college; and the accuracy and completeness of existing written evidence about these responsibilities.

48 Developmental review teams will be pleased to meet awarding bodies' representatives at any stage of the process, and occasionally may encourage awarding body representatives to attend particular events should they regard it as likely to aid their understanding of the college's responsibilities. However, DEL and QAA has no desire to make unreasonable requests for awarding body involvement in this method which focuses on the responsibilities of colleges. Awarding bodies should not assume that they have to attend any part of the review.

### **The Developmental review team**

49 In Developmental review, the review coordinator works with two types of reviewer, the first external to the college being reviewed, the second internal. Both types are full members of the review team. QAA has drawn external reviewers, referred to here simply as **reviewers**, from various sources, including from Northern Ireland colleges. In the interests of identifying and disseminating good practice within Northern Ireland, QAA agreed with DEL to select one reviewer from each college to be invited to participate as a reviewer in the Developmental review of a Northern Ireland college other than his/her home college. These applications were subject to QAA's normal reviewer screening and selection processes. Other reviewers in Developmental review were drawn from QAA's pool of existing trained reviewers and auditors and have expertise in managing the collaborative provision of higher education in colleges.

50 Each college in Northern Ireland has also been asked to identify either two or three members of staff to take part in the review of their own college. These reviewers are called **institutional reviewers**. In identifying its institutional reviewers, each college was asked to consider the pivotal role that the institutional reviewers will play in liaising between the rest of the team and staff, and the extent of their knowledge and experience of the college's higher education policies and procedures, and sites. The institutional reviewer needs qualities and experience which will assist in handling effectively any sensitive matters which may arise during the course of the Developmental review. Also, the institutional reviewers were chosen according to their management responsibilities so that they may take a significant role in sharing good practice and implementing any recommendations set out in the report.

51 The size of each Developmental review team has been calculated by QAA. For colleges where the team will visit two sites, the team will number five, and consist of two reviewers appointed by QAA, two institutional reviewers nominated by the college, and a QAA review coordinator who manages the review on behalf of QAA. All reviewers will be present throughout the review visit. For reviews which involve reviewers to visit three sites, the team will number seven, and will consist of three reviewers, three institutional reviewers and the review coordinator.

52 The reviewers and institutional reviewers are chosen for their relevant experience of the management and the delivery of higher education programmes, including knowledge and understanding of:

- higher education delivered in further education colleges
- quality assurance and management
- teaching, learning and assessment
- academic management

- staff development
- the Northern Ireland context.

For further details on the roles of the review team members, please see **Annex F**. QAA has provided training for all institutional reviewers, reviewers and review coordinators in the same event.

53 QAA will send brief details of the proposed reviewers to the college before the review begins. Colleges should discuss with QAA any concerns about the suitability of the proposed team as soon as possible after receiving these details. These concerns may include matters of which QAA is not aware. It is essential that any concerns, for example, about a conflict of interest or the team's match to the college to be reviewed, are made in writing and discussed with QAA no later than two weeks from notification to prevent delay in further review planning.

### **Evaluation of the process**

54 QAA is committed to monitoring and evaluating its work, in an open and reflective manner. It does this within the context of its Evaluation Policy. The Policy is implemented through such procedures as:

- questionnaire surveys of colleges, review coordinators, students, reviewers, and institutional reviewers. QAA will encourage colleges, and their staff who have acted as reviewers or institutional reviewers to contribute to the evaluation of the Developmental review process by inviting comment on the reviews in which they have participated
- focus groups of representatives of those who took part in the review to explore particular issues in greater detail.

55 Full details QAA's Evaluation Policy are available on its website at [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/policy/evaluationPolicy.asp](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/policy/evaluationPolicy.asp)

### **Complaints**

56 QAA will endeavour to conduct reviews in a way which is effective and satisfactory for each college. Should a college have a need to complain about the conduct of a Developmental review, the complaint will be considered by QAA under the formal procedures published on its website at [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/policy/complaints.asp](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/policy/complaints.asp)

57 QAA is committed to working in an open and accountable way. This includes responding positively to complaints from institutions by investigating them thoroughly, putting mistakes right wherever possible and learning from the complaints.

## **Annex A: Guidance on the reflective statement and portfolio of evidence**

### **Background**

1 Developmental review is concerned with the extent to which the college, working with its awarding body partner(s), exercises its responsibilities in maintaining academic standards, and in assuring and enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities in higher education programmes. The review process is designed to engage the colleges in reflection and peer review focused on evaluating and improving the management of higher education. It is also designed to identify good practice for wider dissemination.

### **Introduction**

2 The reflective statement is the starting point for the Developmental review and is centred on the three key areas:

- academic standards
- quality of learning opportunities
- quality enhancement.

Definitions of the three key areas are given in appendix 1 of this annex.

3 These guidelines are intended to help the college to prepare its reflective statement. The Developmental review team (the team) will use the reflective statement as a basis for planning and conducting the review, for example, by testing and verifying the claims made and the evidence cited by the college.

### **Structure and content**

4 Each college is asked to submit only one reflective statement which applies to all of its higher education provision. The reflective statement is likely to be no more than 10 sides of A4 in 11 point font in Arial or similar. This excludes the contextual information, as outlined in paragraph 5. The reflective statement will be an evaluative account of the college's approach to the management of academic standards and of the assurance and enhancement of the quality for its higher education programmes, and how it satisfies itself about the effectiveness of its approach. The statement will be supported by a portfolio of existing documents to act as evidence to support the statement made. The documents in the portfolio should include a list of the college's higher education courses and the awarding body for each course and should be cross-referenced to the reflective statement.

5 The college may wish to provide background information about the college in order to provide the team with context. This material could include:

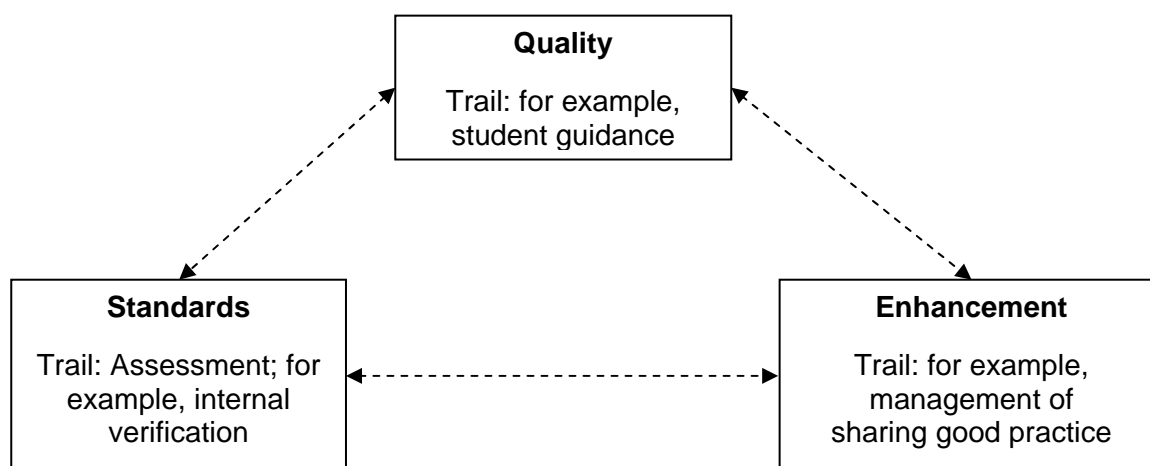
- the college's mission statement
- a brief overview of the college, including size and location, history
- details of any significant changes to the college or its higher education within the past academic year.

This contextual information can be included as a preface to the reflective statement and should not exceed two sides of A4. This is in addition to the 10 sides for the reflective statement.



6 In its reflective statement, each college is asked to prepare an evaluation under the headings of one thematic trail within each key area. Thematic trails enable colleges and their reviewers to consider in depth how the college is managing its higher education provision. The relationship between the three key areas is represented diagrammatically in Figure 1 below. The dotted lines represent the interdependence of key areas. This suggests that the key areas are not watertight compartments. Rather, they support each other. Each thematic trail is likely, therefore, to provide information that will support the evaluation of one or more of the others.

**Figure 1: The interrelationship between the key areas and the thematic trails**



7 The thematic trail for academic standards has already been selected by the Department of Employment and Learning. The broad heading for this trail is student assessment, however the college should suggest a focus for this trail, for example, the effectiveness of the internal verification of the assessment of higher education programmes. The college selects the thematic trails for the quality of learning opportunities and for enhancement. The college should discuss its proposed thematic trails with the review coordinator in the first instance. Each review is assigned a review support officer, a member of staff at the QAA. The review support officer is responsible for approving the thematic trails before they can be used as the basis of the Developmental review.

**Summary table: Key areas and thematic trails**

<b>Key area</b>	<b>Thematic trail</b>
Academic standards	Assessment: the college can propose a focus for this, for example, internal verification.
Quality of learning opportunities	The college will propose the trail, for example, student guidance.
Quality enhancement	The college will propose the trail, for example, management of sharing good practice

## **Portfolio of supporting evidence**

8 The portfolio documentation should draw upon reports of robust internal and external review and validation procedures. A portfolio of documentation which contains an accurate and comprehensive evaluation is likely to limit the need for the college to supply further documents.

9 The college is asked to provide in its portfolio an illustrative sample of documentation. This should be sufficient to demonstrate how the college manages its responsibilities in maintaining academic standards, and in assuring and enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities in higher education programmes, within the context of its agreement with its awarding body partner(s). The college does not necessarily need to provide documentary evidence about its entire higher education provision. The amount of documentation the college submits as its portfolio will depend in part upon the nature of the thematic trails. It would be useful, however, for it to include a sample from programmes which have different awarding bodies, differing patterns of student attendance and from different faculties within the college. The list below sets out the documentation which QAA considers it would be necessary for the college to support the thematic trails and key areas. For the programmes in the scope of the Developmental review, the college will need to supply:

- the partnership agreement(s) and/or samples of any reviews of these agreement(s) with the awarding bodies
- the programme specifications
- a sample of external examiners' reports (previous three academic years)
- a sample of validation documents (latest)
- a sample of annual monitoring reports (previous three academic years)
- a sample of evidence from student course evaluations
- extracts from quality assurance and/or enhancement documents which provide detail of policies and procedures and the effectiveness of their implementation
- other evidence that the college wishes to provide in support of the agreed thematic trails.

10 QAA will provide the team with:

- a briefing paper from QAA's Information unit which will include publicly available information about the college statistical information about the higher education provision and key contacts
- ETI published reports (to provide contextual information)
- relevant QAA reports, for example, Institutional audit or Collaborative provision audit of partner higher education institutions.

11 The role of the institutional reviewers is critical for gathering information before and during the review. The institutional reviewers will be familiar with the information and will also be able to guide the team to information held by the college which was not included in the portfolio. For example, the institutional reviewer could guide the team through areas of the college's intranet, or would be in a position to assemble small groups of relevant students or staff, should the team wish to discuss a particular topic.

## **Submitting the reflective statement**

12 The college should send the reflective statement to QAA, referenced to and accompanied by the portfolio of evidence, usually 10 weeks before the start of the visit. One hard copy and one electronic copy of all documentation should be submitted. Colleges are asked to use as an electronic format, either a CD-ROM or USB data key, with the reflective statement saved as a Word 2003 file. These materials should be sent to:

Michelle Daszko  
Administrative Assistant  
Logistics and Deployment Team  
The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education  
Southgate House  
1 Southgate Street  
Gloucester, GL1 1UB  
Email: [m.daszko@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:m.daszko@qaa.ac.uk)

## **What happens next?**

13 QAA will acknowledge receipt of the reflective statement and portfolio. A copy will be sent to the review coordinator who will recommend whether the reflective statement and portfolio of evidence form an appropriate basis for the review. The QAA review support officer makes the final decision as to whether the review can proceed on the basis of the reflective statement and portfolio of evidence submitted. Once this has been agreed, QAA will notify the college and ask for a hard copy of the reflective statement and portfolio of evidence to be sent to each member of the review team.

14 It would also be helpful if the college could send a location map and directions to each site being visited as part of the review to each team member at the same time as the reflective statement and portfolio of evidence. Please also send a copy of this map and directions to Michelle Daszko at the address in paragraph 12. This will assist QAA staff to plan the travel and accommodation for the review teams.

15 If you require any further help or advice in preparing your reflective statement, please contact the Method Coordinator, Derek Greenaway (01452 557146, [d.greenaway@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:d.greenaway@qaa.ac.uk)) or the Deputy Method Coordinator, Ronni Littlewood (01452 557119, [r.littlewood@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:r.littlewood@qaa.ac.uk)).

## **Annex A (appendix 1)**

### **Definitions of the three key areas:**

The three key areas of Developmental review are defined as follows:

**Academic standards:** this refers to the level of achievement a student has to reach in order to achieve a particular award or qualification.

**Quality of learning opportunities:** this considers the effectiveness of everything that is done or provided by the college to ensure that its students have the best possible opportunity to meet the stated outcomes of their programmes and the academic standards of the awards.

**Enhancement:** for the purposes of Developmental review, this means the continuous improvement of a college's management of the student learning experience of higher education, for the benefit of students, and within the context of its agreements with awarding bodies.

## Annex B: Developmental review of higher education in further education colleges in Northern Ireland: a guide for student representatives

### Introduction

This guide invites student representatives to help improve the quality of teaching and learning at their college by taking part in an external visit organised by the Quality assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) called Developmental review.

The ultimate aim of Developmental review is to help the college improve the higher education offered to students, so it's really important that students' views are considered. After all, no-one really understands what it's like to study at your college as you do.

### How does Developmental review work?

It has two roles: to make sure academic standards at your college are at an appropriate level; and to help your college improve the learning opportunities available to students.

By **academic standards** we mean the level of achievement a student has to reach in order to achieve a particular award or qualification. The term **learning opportunities** refers to everything which the college does to support its students to meet the learning outcomes and achieve the academic standards of their course. Developmental review is also concerned with **enhancement**; that is, the extent to which the college engages in a process of continuous improvement of its management of the student learning experience.

A team of people who teach on courses similar to yours at other UK colleges and universities will visit your college to discuss how the college meets your needs. At the end of the visit, the team will write a report about your college. This report will identify good practice and make recommendations to the college on how to share effective practice or make improvements.

The Developmental review at your college is based on three **thematic trails**. These are topics suggested by the college which will form the basis for an evaluation and which will provide a focus for the review team. Each thematic trail is aligned to a **key area** for the review, as illustrated in the table below:

### Summary table: key areas and thematic trails

Key area	Thematic trails
Academic standards	For example, how does the college manage its internal verification of assessment? In other words, how does it ensure that its assessment processes are fair, appropriate and reliable?
Quality of learning opportunities	For example, is the support and guidance which the college provides for students effective?
Quality enhancement	For example, how does the college identify and share good practice?

Your college will be able to give you details of the thematic trails which have been agreed for the review, and these may be useful for you in structuring your feedback on areas which are particularly relevant for the review.

### **How do we get involved?**

There are several ways for student representatives to contribute to the Developmental review, by:

- producing a written submission (in other words a summary of students' feedback) for the team to read before the visit at your college
- attending a planning meeting between your college and the coordinator managing the review
- talking to the team during the review visit
- completing an evaluation questionnaire after the Developmental review visit.

### **How do we develop our written submission?**

Perhaps the most important thing to say about the written submission is that it should, as far as possible, reflect the views of the majority of students rather than a minority. This is because there should only be one student written submission for each college for the Developmental review. This is also why we are asking student representatives to write the submission. We appreciate this might be difficult, but as a student representative you will already know about the sorts of issues that are regularly raised. You may also find that you already have lots of useful information to help you prepare a representative response, for example, student survey results and records or notes with meetings at the college. Where appropriate, please refer to sources of evidence that would aid the team, for example, minutes of meetings, copies of correspondence between the students and the college or reference to questionnaires.

Whatever you include, you must explain how you compiled the submission, who wrote it and how far it has been shared and agreed with the student body as a whole. Reviewers may want to know what proportion of the higher education students at your college were consulted about the written submission, or whether it focused on particular groups or programmes. For example, if you have only included the views of full-time undergraduate students, you need to make this clear.

You should also make sure that the submission does not include personal grievances, single out individual members of staff or identify any individual, either directly or indirectly.

### **What sort of things should we cover?**

As mentioned above, the Developmental review will be structured around three thematic trails, and staff at your college will be able to provide you with details about the thematic trails which have been agreed for your college.

While all of these thematic trails are likely to be relevant to the college's work in supporting students, it is likely that the trail linked to the quality of learning opportunities will have the most direct influence on your experience as a student at the college. You might want to use the following list of topics as a focus:

- the information the college publishes about itself – whether it is accurate and complete
- the information the college gives you about its expectations of your academic performance (this might be in your student handbook)
- your experience as a learner, including the quality of academic and personal support
- the feedback you get from your tutors
- the quality of learning resources and facilities available to you
- the opportunities you have to take part in the management of higher education programmes within the college (this might include opportunities for committee representation at college and programme level, and other means of providing feedback to staff).

The areas you cover in your written submission will also depend to a large extent on the views of your fellow students. The suggested list of topics above is given as a guide, rather than a complete list of topics which should be considered in your submission.

### **How much detail should we include?**

Not too much. Remember that the team will have read a great deal of information about your college provided by the college and in publicly available documents provided by QAA. Therefore, a short but focused written submission is most helpful. A few sides of A4 should be enough to capture the most important information.

### **Which students' views should be represented in the submission?**

The opinions of all student groups taking higher education courses will be relevant, including, but not exclusively, full and part-time students, mature students, undergraduate and postgraduate students, overseas students and students with disabilities. While it is preferable that the written submission is as comprehensive as possible, you may find that it is not practicable to reflect the views of some student groups, and the team will understand this as long as you make it clear in your submission whose views are being represented and why others are not.

### **Can our written submission be confidential?**

Yes it can, but we strongly encourage you to share your submission with the college and the college to share its self-evaluation with you. This openness is desirable because it enables the team to discuss both documents freely with staff and students during the reviews, and to check the accuracy of their contents. If you want the submission to be confidential, this must be stated clearly on the front of the document. We will respect this wish, although the usefulness of your submission will then be restricted by the fact that its contents are unknown to the college's staff, and the reviewers will not be able to discuss it with them nor comment upon its content in the report.

### **What happens to the submission once it has been written?**

The written submission should be sent to QAA **four weeks before the visit**. The team will read and consider the written submission.

Please send your student written submission saved as a Word 2003 file to Michelle Daszko, Administrative Assistant, Logistics and Deployment Team, The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, at [m.daszko@gaa.ac.uk](mailto:m.daszko@gaa.ac.uk)

### **Is what we say going to make a difference?**

Yes. The team will consider all information given in the written submission and in meetings. The submission may not directly inform the report that the team makes, but it could inform the types of questions the team asks throughout the review. This may lead the team to find out something really good about how the college works, or might lead to a recommendation to improve something that students are concerned about. For example, if students do not feel that their opinions are valued by the college, or on the other hand if they think the institution really listens to them, this is likely to become apparent through talking to the students and through reading the written submission.

### **Where can I go for help?**

QAA is more than happy to provide any help and advice you need. Please contact the Method Coordinator, Derek Greenaway (01452 557146; [d.greenaway@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:d.greenaway@qaa.ac.uk) ) or the Deputy Method Coordinator, Ronni Littlewood (01452 557119; [r.littlewood@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:r.littlewood@qaa.ac.uk) ) who will be able to give you some tips and advice on ways of preparing the student submission, the process of Developmental review and how you can get your views across.

Further information about Developmental review of higher education in Northern Ireland colleges can be found on QAA's website at:

[www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/developmentalReviewNI/default.asp](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/developmentalReviewNI/default.asp)



## **Annex C: Student involvement in Developmental review: information for college staff**

1 QAA values greatly the involvement of students and the role that they may play in Developmental review. Students are able to contribute to Developmental review in several ways. Students may:

- produce or contribute to a student written submission prior to the Developmental review
- attend the planning meeting between the college and the review coordinator
- meet reviewers during the Developmental review visit so that students are able to directly offer their views on the quality of learning opportunities available to them
- contribute to the evaluation of the review.

2 The most important thing to say about the involvement of students is that it ought, as far as possible, to reflect the views of the majority of the higher education students in the college rather than just a minority.

3 Student involvement in programme approval and review processes may provide evidence to assist the team to evaluate the level of influence exercised by students, as well as the contribution of students to self-evaluative processes. It is usual for colleges to seek the views of students during their normal processes of annual monitoring, programme approval and programme review.

4 The team will normally expect to see examples from colleges of how students' views are sought, for instance, students' representation on committees and their role and effectiveness within them. The team will seek evidence of the effectiveness of student-support mechanisms as well as evidence of where the views of students have influenced change.

5 The effectiveness of the colleges' processes for securing the wider views of the higher education students will be analysed. During meetings with students, the team will seek students' views of their input and impact on the college's management of academic standards and quality.

### **Student written submission**

6 QAA invites a representative body of the higher education students to make a written submission of their collective views on their experience as learners and the opportunities that they have to participate in the management and quality of standards. To help student representative bodies to prepare a written submission for Developmental reviews, QAA has written a separate briefing note for Developmental review. This follows at Annex B and is also published separately. The notes provide contact details for the QAA officers managing the review process, who will answer students' queries about Developmental review.

7 QAA asks students to ensure that the submission does not include personal grievances, single out individual members of staff or identify any individual either directly or indirectly. While QAA will respect any wishes for confidentiality, QAA encourages the student body to share its submission with the college. This openness is desirable because it enables the team to discuss both documents freely with staff and students during the reviews

## **Guidance on the format, length and content of the student written submission**

8 As a general guide, the written submission should:

- be written around the thematic trail, assessment, identified by DEL and the two trails identified by the college
- include a statement of how it has been compiled, who wrote it, and the extent to which its contents have been shared with, and endorsed by, higher education students. If it only includes the views of full-time undergraduate students, it needs to make this clear.
- be a maximum of 1000 words
- refer to sources of evidence that would aid the team, for example, minutes of meetings, copies of correspondence between the students and the college, or reference to questionnaires
- not identify any individual either directly or indirectly.

### **Student meetings**

9 The students' experience of their education is fundamental to the college and the awarding bodies, and informs the entire process of Developmental review. Meetings with students enable the team to establish student views on the key areas and/or thematic trails being considered, and inform the team on the quality of the student learning experience.

10 The team holds meetings with representative groups of current students. The group should include some students who compiled the student written submission. These meetings provide an opportunity to hear directly the views of those present and to establish more generally whether there are effective arrangements for student feedback and representation. The meetings are held in confidence and comments made at the meeting are not attributed to any individual.

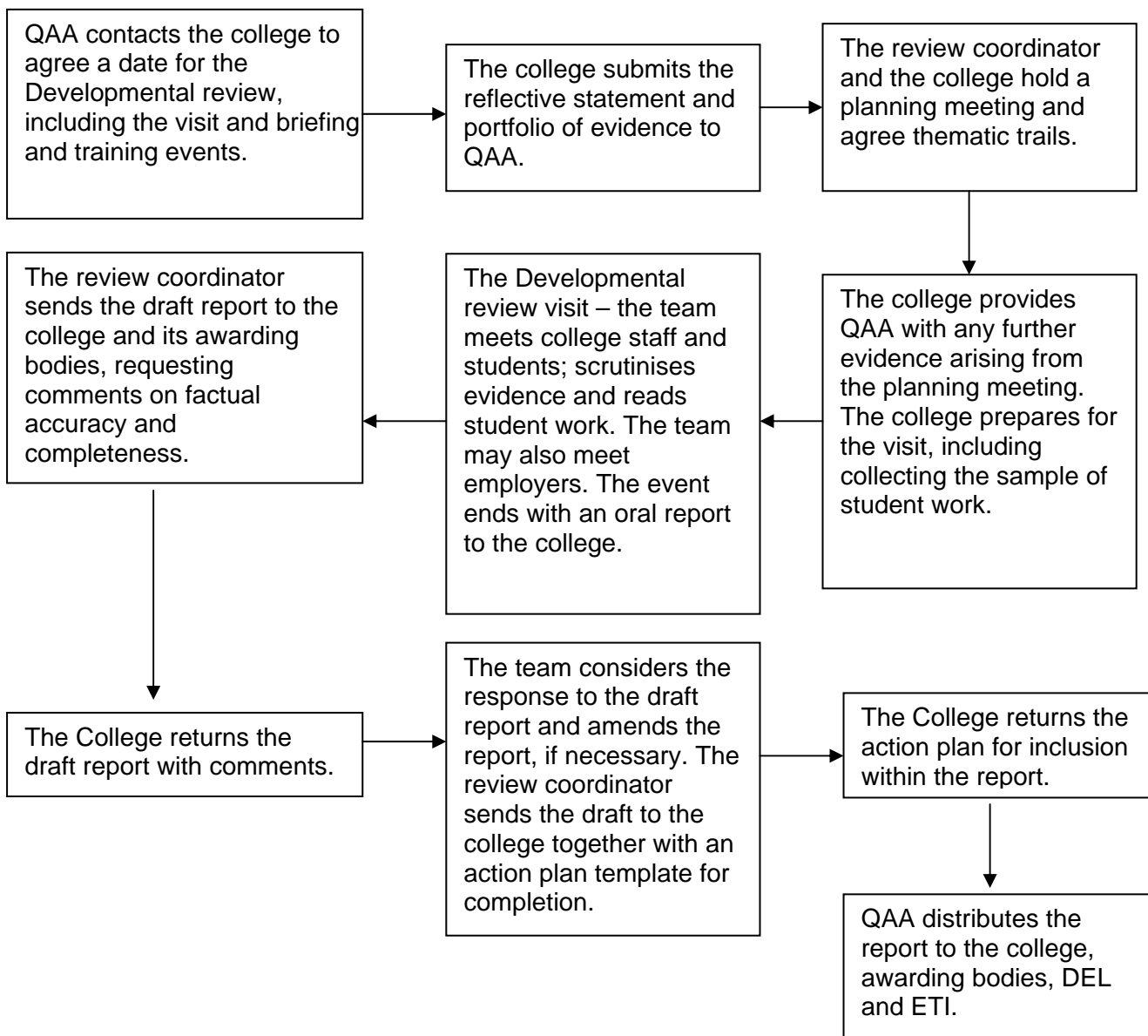
## Annex D: Timeline for the Developmental review process 2008-09

This schedule of activity is set out in relation to planning activities that began earlier in 2008.

Months 1 - 2 Early August - end September 2008	QAA develops the proposed review method and accompanying handbook and consults with DEL. In response to DEL's comments, QAA prepares and consults on the revised draft handbook.
Months 3 - 4 Early October - mid November 2008	QAA consults on the draft review handbook.
Months 4 - 5 End November 2008	QAA's Information Unit analyses responses to consultation. QAA revises draft handbook in response to the consultation and sends it to DEL for comment.
Month 6 December 2008	QAA holds briefing events in Northern Ireland for colleges and other stakeholders.
Month 7 January 2009	QAA holds training events for review teams in Northern Ireland.
Months 7 - 8 Mid February 2009	The college proposes the thematic trails to QAA. QAA confers with coordinator and accepts or suggests modification to proposal.
Months 7 - 8 Mid February 2009	The college sends to QAA the reflective statement and portfolio of evidence to support the review.
Months 8 - 9 March 2009	QAA holds a planning meeting between the review coordinator and the college. The QAA Review support officer attends.
Months 10 - 11 April 2009 - May 2009 Developmental review visit	The Developmental review team works at the college for two days. This involves meetings with staff and students (and employers if appropriate), scrutiny of further documentary evidence, (including a sample of students' work), and an oral report to the college. The QAA Review support officer attends throughout.
Months 11 - 12 May - June 2009	QAA sends the draft written report to the college and its awarding bodies for comments on factual accuracy and completeness.
Months 12 - 13 June - July 2009	The review coordinator amends the report as appropriate, after discussion with the team, and returns it to the college, and requests that the college completes the action plan template. QAA incorporates the completed action plan into the report before distribution to the college, awarding bodies, DEL and ETI.

This timeline is indicative. Individual events may be varied to accommodate circumstances such as Christmas, vacations or examinations. However, QAA will endeavour to complete the distribution of the review report within 10 weeks of the visit.

### Flow process chart for the Developmental review process 2008-09



## Annex E: Indicative programme for a Developmental review planning meeting

1 The agenda below is indicative and QAA considers it the minimum necessary to enable the college, its awarding body(ies) and the review coordinator to establish the requirements of the Developmental review. The review coordinator, the college and its awarding body(ies) may feel it appropriate to include additional items. In practice the programme for each college may vary. The review coordinator should have the opportunity to meet a wider group of staff than those who will be involved directly as reviewers, and have a separate meeting with students. QAA will give further guidance about who might attend the planning meeting at the briefing event.

2 It is important that colleges prepare to discuss each item on the agenda by, for example, ensuring that they have up to date information available at the meeting. The planning meeting provides college staff with a valuable opportunity to clarify their understanding of the review method.

Time	Activity	Suggested participants
1000	Overview of Developmental review: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a standard presentation about the method</li> <li>• questions from college staff.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the head of the college or a representative and relevant members of the senior management team</li> <li>• staff responsible for managing higher education and/or heads of faculties, schools or sections providing higher education; other staff who deliver higher education</li> <li>• the institutional reviewers</li> <li>• awarding body representatives, (if agreed in advance between the college and awarding body).</li> </ul>
1030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How the Developmental review will operate: clarification of the scope of the review process</li> <li>• questions from college staff</li> <li>• next steps.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• college staff responsible for managing higher education</li> <li>• the college's reviewers</li> <li>• awarding body representatives, (if agreed in advance between the college and awarding body).</li> </ul>
1130	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The role of students: introductions</li> <li>• purpose of the planning meeting</li> <li>• the clarification of the method and the place of the Developmental review visit within the process</li> <li>• the clarification of the thematic trails for the Developmental review</li> <li>• questions from students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• students</li> <li>• students' representatives, for example Students' Union officers</li> <li>• college staff with responsibility for liaison with students.</li> </ul>
1230	Lunch	

1300	<p>Detailed planning, including confirmation of the team's requirements for the visit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• questions arising from the initial analysis of the reflective statement</li> <li>• confirmation that the statistical data are correct and accurate</li> <li>• the reviewers' requests for information to date</li> <li>• establishing the programme of review activities, including site visits</li> <li>• clarification of the availability of evidence, including student work</li> <li>• 'housekeeping' arrangements</li> <li>• remaining questions from college staff or awarding body representatives</li> <li>• next steps.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• college staff responsible for managing higher education</li> <li>• college's nominees or facilitator</li> <li>• awarding body representatives, (if agreed in advance between the college and awarding body).</li> </ul>
1430	End of meeting	

## **Annex F: Roles of the Developmental review team members**

1 The role of the review team in Developmental review is discussed below following the time sequence of a review.

2 **Preliminary stage** (after receipt of college's documentation)

- analyse the reflective statement and portfolio of evidence and identify possible topics for enquiry within the thematic trails
- communicate with the review coordinator on matters arising from this analysis
- post material to QAA's Academic Reviewer Communication Service (ARCS), the secure electronic folder dedicated to the review.

3 **Developmental review visit**

- agree the main areas of enquiry for exploration during the visit, and select and study evidence to support that exploration
- participate in discussions with staff and students of the college on areas of enquiry as agreed by the team as a whole, with due attention to the protocols of discussion as a peer group
- draw conclusions from the areas of enquiry being explored during the visit, with reference to evidence to underpin those conclusions
- keep sufficient notes to be able to respond subsequently to the college's comments on matters of factual accuracy during the report production phase
- keep sufficient notes to be able to respond subsequently to requests from the college for clarification on the insights gained from the Developmental review
- post material to the ARCS folder
- agree good practice and recommendations.

4 **After the visit**

- prepare a section of the Developmental review report, and send this to the review coordinator by the deadline set
- comment on the draft report prepared by the review coordinator, responding to any requests for extra text or reference to evidence to agreed deadline
- post material to the ARCS folder.

### **Developmental review team role descriptions and person specifications**

#### **Review coordinator role**

5 The review coordinator, appointed by QAA, manages the Developmental review process.

6 Key responsibilities include:

- leading reviews for QAA
- providing clear briefings to a wide range of college participants on the Developmental review method
- discussing and agreeing with the college during the planning meeting the thematic trails and review agenda that form the basis of the review (See annex D for indicative planning meeting agenda)

- discussing and agreeing focused review activities with the college and the review team to ensure effective use of time
- organising and coordinating review activities to ensure that conclusions and recommendations are sound and evidence-based
- liaising effectively with the colleges and teams through face-to-face, telephone, email and written communications to ensure the smooth running of each review
- providing additional training for reviewers and institutional reviewers, if necessary
- making effective use of ARCS, QAA's secure electronic folder system, throughout the review to ensure that a full evidence base is available to the team and QAA staff in a timely manner and that it is archived promptly
- respecting protocols on confidentiality
- producing high-quality reports that inform all stakeholders of conclusions, good practice and recommendations where appropriate.

### **Reviewer role**

7 The reviewers contribute to evaluating the college's management of academic standards and the quality of higher education provision through a peer-review process. They engage in a variety of activities designed to gather and analyse evidence so that they can arrive at considered conclusions, recommendations and judgements. These outcomes help the college being reviewed to prepare an action plan to enhance higher education provision.

8 Key responsibilities include:

- reading, analysing and preparing written commentaries on the reflective statement submitted by the college and the portfolio of evidence sent in advance of a review
- adhering to the review schedule agreed between the college and the review coordinator
- participating in visits to the college in order to gather, share, test and verify evidence
- drawing conclusions, identifying good practice and making recommendations on the college's management of academic standards and the quality of the learning opportunities provided
- recording evidence gathered from a variety of review activities and submitting this to the ARCS secure folder in a timely fashion
- drafting sections of the report that are referenced to evidence gathered during the review
- respecting protocols on confidentiality
- contributing to and commenting on the compilation of the report of the review to agreed schedules and deadlines
- being available for the whole period of a review for which the reviewer has been selected and completing all processes of a review embarked upon.

### **Institutional reviewer role**

9 The role provides an opportunity for members of a college's staff to consider the quality and standards of higher education across the college and to be part of the team testing the effectiveness of the college's reflective processes. Where colleges are considering the revision of internal review processes, participation in a Developmental review team as an institutional reviewer may contribute to ways in which processes might be revised.



10 Key responsibilities include:

- reading, analysing and preparing written commentaries of the reflective statement submitted by the college and the portfolio of evidence sent in advance of a review
- adhering to the review schedule agreed between the college and the review coordinator
- participating in the review of the college in order to gather, share, test and verify evidence
- drawing conclusions, identifying good practice and making recommendations on the college's management of academic standards and the quality of the learning opportunities provided
- recording evidence gathered from a variety of review activities and submitting this to the QAA electronic review folder in a timely fashion
- drafting sections of the report that are referenced to sound evidence gathered during the review
- respecting protocols on confidentiality
- contributing to and commenting on the compilation of the report of the review to agreed schedules and deadlines
- helping the college to draw up its action plan to implement the team's recommendations
- playing a lead role in the implementation of the action plan within the college following the review
- being available for the whole period of a review for which the institutional reviewer has been selected and completing all processes of a review once embarked upon.

## Annex G: Indicative Developmental review visit schedule

There are opportunities to tailor the programme to the college, its higher education provision and the number of former-college sites to be visited. This example is not intended to be prescriptive, but offers an approach to organising the activities.

<b>Day 1</b>	
0830	<b>First (private meeting)</b> of the team to confirm topics for enquiry
0945	Scrutiny by team of selected supporting evidence
1100	Team's <b>initial meeting with the college</b> to summarise findings and confirm agenda for further meetings with staff and students
1130	Team members travel to other major college site(s) where higher education is delivered
1300	Lunch
1330	Meeting between team and key staff of the college site visited
1445	Meeting of the team with current students of the college site visited
1545	Team members travel back to the college site at which they are based to share evidence gained
1700	Team meeting to confirm the review activities completed, the range of evidence, the tentative evaluations and the matters that remain outstanding to be completed on day 2.
<b>Day 2</b>	
0830	Meeting of the team to confirm the emerging evaluation and the agenda for day two
1000	Meetings with employers and/or awarding bodies, if appropriate
1100	Further scrutiny of selected evidence and any additional meetings that are needed
1230	Lunch
1300	Final team meeting to reach conclusions and to finalise the key points for the oral summary
1530	Oral summary to college staff (and awarding bodies if present) provided by the review coordinator, accompanied by the team.
1600	End of visit

## **Annex H: Conduct of meetings**

### **Guidance on the conduct of meetings**

1 During the reviews, colleges, their awarding bodies and members of the team may wish to consider the following illustrative approaches to the key meetings held. In applying the guidance to local circumstances, all participants are encouraged to bear in mind:

- the purpose and intended outcomes of the review
- the importance that QAA attaches to open dialogue between peers
- the need for the team to reach conclusions and to prepare a report.

2 Team members should not attempt a comprehensive and exhaustive scrutiny, but use the reflective statement and documentary evidence to inform their scrutiny of the thematic trail(s); use the meetings to confirm good practice or areas for recommendations; clarify any matters arising from the evidence, and seek examples of policies and procedures in practice.

### **Illustrative approach applicable to the range of meetings**

3 In preparing for and conducting meetings, the team may wish to identify the areas of enquiry for discussion using the following prompts:

- what are the salient features of the reflective statement and portfolio of evidence that inform the discussion?
- in particular, what can be readily confirmed as verified evaluation and information?
- what can be clarified by reference to existing additional documentary evidence outside the meeting?
- what points arise that deserve a focus within the meeting?

### **Suggested protocol and guidance for meetings with students and staff**

4 In optimising the value of the discussions in meetings, it is suggested that for each meeting the following arrangements are made:

- an agenda is shared with all attending
- the review coordinator usually chairs the meeting and another member of the team takes a record of the meeting and shares it with the team; the exception to this will be when pairs of reviewers visit different college sites
- the chair will briefly introduce the team, invite participants to introduce themselves, summarise the purpose of the meeting, the opportunity it provides for the exchange of views within the chosen focus and remind the meeting of this protocol
- the dialogue with students will normally start with a question to establish the basis on which the students were selected to attend the meeting. Throughout the meeting, students will be given opportunities to raise points not covered by the reviewers' agenda
- all attending should feel encouraged to put forward their views, confident in the knowledge that all perspectives and views are respected in an open discussion. It is important that the participants are assured that no comments are attributed to any one person
- the timing of the meeting should be controlled within the agreed agenda and timetable. In exceptional circumstances, if any of the participants or staff believe that additional

attention and time are required to address adequately the agreed agenda or other matters arising, the chair may, with the agreement of the meeting, either extend the meeting for a short time (for example, by 15 minutes) or take steps to arrange an additional meeting at a later stage in the visit programme

- in closing the meeting, the chair will summarise the key points addressed, thank the participants and close the meeting.

## **Annex I: Indicative Developmental review report structure**

The indicative report structure is set out below.

### **Preface**

Standard QAA text

### **Purpose of Developmental review**

Standard QAA text here

### **Evidence**

Standard QAA text here

### **Developmental review**

#### **[Name of participating college]**

#### **A Conduct of the Developmental review**

[Para number] This report presents the findings of the Developmental review conducted at [participating college]. The Developmental review was carried out by [Developmental review team members in alphabetical order with designation reviewer or institutional reviewer] and was coordinated by [name of review coordinator] on behalf of QAA.

[Para number] The Developmental review was conducted by the team in negotiation with the college and followed the method set out in *The handbook for Developmental review of higher education in further education colleges (Northern Ireland) 2008-09*, published by QAA. The team included two/three institutional reviewers drawn from the college's staff, who were full members of the team. Evidence in support of the Developmental review included **[for example, documentation supplied by the college, meetings with staff, students, employers and partner colleges, and from inspections by the ETI]**.

[Para number] The Developmental review also considered the college's familiarity with the Academic Infrastructure, developed by QAA on behalf of the higher education sector. Before starting the programme of Developmental reviews, QAA was aware that the college may not be conversant with the components of the Academic Infrastructure and its terminology and how these have been used by the awarding bodies. There was no expectation that colleges would have developed such an understanding of the Academic Infrastructure nor be fully conversant with it by the time of the Developmental review visit. This report therefore identifies the ways in which the college is currently engaging, or how it may in the future engage with, the Academic Infrastructure to maintain the standards of the higher education awards and to assure and enhance the quality of the students' learning opportunities.

#### **Students' written submission**

[Para number] Students studying for higher education qualifications at the college were invited to present a written submission to the team [outline whether the students' written submission was submitted, any support or guidance provided by the college to the student

representatives in the event]. The team was not expected to evaluate the quality of the students' written submission.

### **Context of the Developmental review**

[One or two paragraphs detailing facts about the college, including its history, mission, total student numbers, higher education student numbers and any relevant information on structure and/or relocation]

### **Higher education at the college**

[This section outlines the range of programmes offered, in bullet list form against the respective awarding bodies]

### **B Outcomes of the Developmental review**

[Para number] The following addresses key area one.  
Thematic trails [Their theme title or descriptor]

The following addresses key area two.  
Thematic trails [Their theme title or descriptor]

The following addresses key area three.  
Thematic trails [Their theme title or descriptor]

### **C Conclusions**

[Para number] Based upon discussion with staff and students and scrutiny of evidence provided by the college, the team identified a number of features of good practice in the college's discharge of its responsibilities for the assurance and enhancement of learning opportunities and for the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of its awarding bodies. The team also makes some recommendations for consideration by the college. The areas of good practice and recommendations are set out below.

[Para number] During the Developmental review, the team identified the following areas of **good practice**:

- [Referenced bullet list of findings reflecting the broader main narrative addressing the thematic trails]

[Para number] The team also agreed the following areas where it would be **essential** for the college to take action:

- [Referenced bullet list reflecting the findings detailed in the narrative]

[Para number] The team agreed upon a number of areas where the college is **advised** to take action:

- [Referenced bullet list reflecting the findings detailed in the narrative]

[**And/or...**]

[Para number] The team also considers that it is **desirable** for the college to:

- [Referenced bullet list reflecting the findings detailed in the narrative]

[Para number] The team agreed the following conclusions in respect of the three key areas:

**Annex J: Action plan templates**

Name of College .....

<b>Action plan relating to Developmental review: Date</b>						
<b>Good practice</b>	<b>Action to be taken</b>	<b>Target date</b>	<b>Action by</b>	<b>Success indicators</b>	<b>Reported to</b>	<b>How evaluated?</b>
In the course of the Developmental review the review team identified the following areas of <b>good practice</b> that are worthy of wider dissemination within the college:						
•						
•						
<b>Essential recommendations</b> The review team agreed the following areas where it would be <b>essential</b> for the college to take action:						
•						
•						



<b>Advisable recommendations</b>						
The review team agreed the following areas where it is <b>advisable</b> for the college to take action	<b>Action to be taken</b>	<b>Target date</b>	<b>Action by</b>	<b>Success indicators</b>	<b>Reported to</b>	<b>How evaluated?</b>
•						
•						
<b>Desirable recommendations</b>						
The review team agreed the following areas where it is <b>desirable</b> for the college to take action:						
•						
•						