

 For consultation



Leading learning and skills

Framework for Excellence:

A Comprehensive Performance Assessment Framework for the Further Education System

July 2006

This document is of interest to everyone in the
learning and skills sector

Further information

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For consultation

Responses to this document are
requested by 20 October 2006

For information and action by colleges and
providers between July and October 2006

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Foreword

The past year has seen the publication of four important documents that chart the challenge for the future direction of the further education (FE) system. In August 2005 the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) issued the prospectus of *agenda for change*; in November we saw the publication of *Realising the Potential – A review of the future role of further education colleges*, Sir Andrew Foster's review of further education; in December Lord Leitch provided his interim report on *Skills in the UK*; and in March this year the Government published its White Paper *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances*.

The White Paper builds upon and takes forward recent secondary school reforms, the 14–19 and skills strategies, the Success for All programme, and the LSC's *agenda for change* reforms. It reflects how the wider public sector reform agenda applies to FE and it contains the Department for Education and Skills' (DfES') response to the Foster Review. It also anticipates the challenges that will need to be met in Lord Leitch's final report, expected later this year, and outlines in some detail how the reform of FE would enable it to tackle deep-seated and long-standing weaknesses in our national skills base and help this country become a high-skills economy.

The White Paper sets an ambitious reform agenda for the FE sector. At the heart of that reform is the requirement to develop an FE system that is responsive to the needs of learners and employers. For learners and employers this means that they can exercise informed choice in accessing programmes that are relevant to their needs in terms of quality, cost and responsiveness. For government and its agencies this means that we must develop an FE system that is responsive to the needs of our economy and our society, gives good value for money and has robust systems for performance management and in which learners' and employers' choices inform funding. For the FE sector itself it means we must develop a system that helps it to achieve consistently high standards of business performance and hence obtain a justified reputation for being an excellently managed part of our public services – delivering high-quality programmes that are valued by their learners, communities and employers. In short, we want excellence for all – and the Framework for Excellence is the process by which we are proposing to achieve this.

The Framework for Excellence is a comprehensive and radical approach to performance management in the FE sector. Fundamentally, it is the mechanism by which colleges and other providers can maintain excellent standards in their performance across a scorecard of measures – or know what they have to do to improve them to reach that level. All colleges and providers should be able to perform to excellent standards and we expect all provision that is not good to aspire to become so in a short period of time. The Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) is now positioned to assist colleges and providers in this process. The Framework for Excellence will provide the means by which the sector can be seen to be delivering well managed, high-quality and responsive programmes that meet the needs of our citizens and employers both now and into the future.

This consultation document outlines the principles that we believe should underpin the future development of the Framework for Excellence model. Early in 2007, the LSC will issue further documentation describing how the performance indicators for each element of the scorecard will be developed. We are looking to develop final proposals in close cooperation with the FE sector, the QIA and the inspectorates, so that when the Framework for Excellence is introduced it will have the confidence of all stakeholders.

In our joint introduction to the *agenda for change* prospectus we said it was a first step on the journey to radically change the whole of the post-16 landscape. The development of the Framework for Excellence is an important stage of that journey. We look forward to working with you to complete it.



Bill Rammell MP
Minister of State for Lifelong
Learning, Further and
Higher Education



Mark Haysom
Chief Executive
Learning and Skills Council

Executive Summary

This document is the first in a series of publications that supports the development of a new Framework for Excellence (the Framework) for the post-16 learning and skills sector. Its purpose is to present, for consultation, proposals of the underlying principles of the Framework and how it will be used by colleges, providers, the LSC, employers, learners and all other stakeholders. Subsequent publications will cover detailed arrangements for the form and phased introduction of the Framework. These will include the precise definitions of the performance measures together with the standards and benchmarks that will be used for the initial implementation.

Scope and purpose of this document

This consultation document describes the aims and objectives of the Framework; its rationale and the benefits its implementation will bring; and the purposes for which the Framework will be used, for example by individual learners and employers, colleges and other providers, and by various national bodies such as the LSC, the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) and Ofsted. This consultation document gives an overview of the Framework, the way in which assessment will be conducted and the guiding principles behind the construction of the performance rating from the set of seven key performance indicators (KPIs). It also proposes a schedule for the introduction and implementation of the Framework.

Aim and purpose of the Framework for Excellence

The aim of the Framework is to support learners' and employers' choices and decisions, assist improvements among colleges and providers, and support accountability. It will provide a transparent basis for performance assessment that takes into account all aspects of college and provider activity, including measures of financial and business efficiency. The Framework will provide readily understood measures of performance that can be used publicly to promote excellence and the reputation of the sector. This provision of a comprehensive yet simple universal framework is intended to reduce bureaucracy and the burden of assessment by different bodies.

The Framework takes forward the Government's commitments to ensure that there is clearer information on performance, as set out in paragraphs 5.13 to 5.19 of *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances*, which was published by the Government in late March 2006. It is intended to assist colleges and providers in their own quality assurance activities, help to assess value for money, and facilitate a proportionate approach to inspection and intervention.

The Framework will also provide a basis for colleges' and providers' own evaluation and improvement activities and will help the QIA to provide effective support. The LSC will use the outcomes of the assessment against the Framework to inform its commissioning decisions and the need for intervention, including the issuing of formal notices to improve. The Framework will complement the new improvement strategy, *Pursuing Excellence*, which was published in outline recently by the QIA in partnership with other bodies. The LSC will use the outcomes from the Framework, together with the

findings from inspection and annual assessment visits, to support assessment of risks to the quality of provision it funds.

The LSC will seek to work with Ofsted to align the business processes of the two organisations to enable assurance of the quality of provision as part of the Framework. Further alignment of these processes will help strengthen the focus within the annual assessment visits in cases where the quality of provision may be at risk. Ofsted will provide the means of assuring the quality of teaching and learning.

The components of the Framework for Excellence

The basis of the Framework is a scorecard of seven KPIs that can be brought together to describe the three key dimensions of a college's or provider's performance: responsiveness; effectiveness of provision (quality); and finance. Each of the seven KPIs will be derived from secondary measures and other evidence. Two options for grading the KPIs have been considered. One relies on precise quantitative definitions for the KPIs based on standard data. The second option would introduce additional qualitative measures.

There is a strong correlation between the seven KPIs and the evaluative statements in the Common Inspection Framework (CIF). The evidence needed to self-assess against the CIF should provide the information necessary to form much of the assessment against the Framework. This means that grading the seven KPIs will be consistent with the existing self-assessment process.

The grades for the KPIs will use the familiar four-point scale from the CIF, while the three dimensions and the overall performance rating will be graded against a new five-point scale, introduced to give greater differentiation in the quality of provision. It is proposed that the LSC, Ofsted and DfES will work together to design a single approach to scales that will form the backbone of the Framework.

Standards for each of the seven KPIs will be developed by the LSC in consultation with the sector. These standards will define excellence and minimum acceptable performance. The principles published within the Framework and the combination of the KPIs will determine the grades for responsiveness, effectiveness and finance. These three grades will be used to decide the overall, single performance rating. The grades and ratings will be used by the LSC as part of its planning and funding discussions with colleges and providers from the 2007/08 academic year. It is also expected that the grades for the seven KPIs will be summarised in colleges' and providers' self-assessment reports and published in their annual reports.

The LSC, as part of its responsibility for commissioning and securing high-quality provision, will assure itself that the quality of provision assessed against the Framework is consistent with the performance of the provider. The LSC will expect to see evidence of appropriate validation of the self-assessment process and assessment against the Framework, to assure the LSC, stakeholders, employers and government that the outcomes are reliable. The LSC will work with the sector, the QIA, Ofsted and the DfES to develop

a robust and consistent approach to validation that will provide the sector with a basis for self-regulation.

Implementation of the Framework for Excellence

This consultation document also summarises the arrangements for implementing the Framework over the next three years. This will be a substantial programme of work, involving extensive design and development, consultation, communications, guidance, trialling and piloting. We envisage that colleges and work-based learning (WBL) providers will start to use the Framework to assess how they performed in the 2006/07 academic year. These outcomes will be used as part of the evidence for discussions between the LSC and individual colleges and WBL providers within the annual planning review in spring 2008.

Because performance assessment arrangements are not as far advanced in other kinds of provision, such as personal and community development learning and offender learning and skills, we envisage that implementation of the new Framework would take place one year later than for colleges and WBL providers.

The Framework will not apply to school sixth forms because performance information for them is produced by other means. However, we will explore with the DfES, Ofsted and representatives of schools, colleges and other parts of the system how information for all of them might most sensibly be synthesised and compared where this is appropriate.

The Framework will be developed during the period from August 2006 to December 2006. Initial definitions of the performance indicators, the results of modelling and emerging results from the trials will be published in January 2007. The publication of the full Framework, together with guidance on its implementation, will follow in June 2007. The Framework will be implemented in full across FE colleges, sixth-form colleges and WBL providers from August 2007 and all other providers in scope from August 2008.

Invitation to respond to this consultation

The LSC is seeking the views of anyone with an interest in post-16 education and training on the principles underpinning the Framework and its application across the sector. A response form together with details on where and how this can be submitted is given in Annex D. All responses should reach the LSC by 20 October 2006.

Section 1: Background and Context

1. This document is the first in a series of publications that will describe proposals to introduce a new Framework for Excellence for the post-16 learning and skills sector. Its purpose is to present for consultation proposals of the underlying principles of the Framework and how it will be used by colleges, providers, the LSC, employers, learners and all other stakeholders. Subsequent publications will cover detailed proposals for the form and phased introduction of the Framework. These will include proposals for the precise definitions of the performance measures together with the standards and benchmarks that will be used.

Further education reform

2. The FE reform White Paper *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances* (DfES, March 2006) stresses the importance of establishing a clear mission for FE that is focused on the employability and progression of learners. This is central to delivering the skills and qualifications that individuals, employers and the economy need. Alongside this stronger sense of purpose, there needs to be a decisive shift towards a system that is driven by the needs of service users. Learners and employers need to be put in the driving seat when it comes to determining what is funded and how services are delivered. If these aims are to be achieved, the extensive information already available to learners and employers needs to be clearer and more accessible. There needs to be a set of key performance indicators that are aligned with the reforms in the White Paper and that allow straightforward and meaningful comparisons.
3. The White Paper also emphasises the importance of continuing to drive up standards across all colleges and providers. There is much to celebrate in the FE system. There are many good and excellent colleges and providers. The sector has demonstrated great flexibility in adapting to new challenges. It has shown itself to be effective in reflecting and responding to the diversity of local communities and has a strong track record in tackling inequality and enhancing achievement. However, developing the sector's reputation will require higher levels of performance and the demonstration of this performance in ways that are easily understood by employers, learners, local communities and government.

agenda for change

4. The Framework builds on the work of the quality and excellence themes of the LSC's *agenda for change*, including the existing work on success measures and the new standard for employer responsiveness and vocational excellence. The Framework will define excellence and the way in which colleges and providers will be measured. It will make it possible to assess how economically, efficiently and effectively resources have been used to meet the needs of learners, employers and the wider community. An overall assessment of performance will provide a summative statement that will give a measure of the value

for money a provider achieves. Learners, employers and other stakeholders will be able to identify the level of service they can expect from a college and/or provider. This, together with the new standard, will assist employers in making choices about their skills training, as the standard will represent responsive, high-quality and flexible delivery that employers, over time, will recognise and trust. The LSC aspires to seeing a high proportion of the sector achieving outstanding levels of performance. The Framework will enable colleges and providers to demonstrate the achievement of high standards that will significantly improve the reputation of the sector for delivering high-quality education and training.

The Framework and schools

5. The Framework will not apply to school sixth forms. Performance information for them is produced by other means. Consequently, the arrangements that might apply to school sixth forms are outside the scope of this document and consultation. However, the LSC will work with institutions with 14–19 provision to ensure that robust, credible, consistent and comparable data on quality can be made available to learners and parents to ensure that they can make valid comparisons and choices, for example as material for local area indicators and 14–19 area prospectuses.
6. It is recognised that agreement on how a system of performance indicators and ratings that apply to colleges and providers can be dovetailed with comparable arrangements for schools will require extensive discussion and development. We will explore with the DfES, Ofsted and representatives of schools, colleges and other parts of the system how information for all of them might most sensibly be correlated and compared where this is appropriate. We will continue to work towards the development and implementation of a common approach for assessing and reporting the performance of all provision within the learning and skills sector, including school sixth forms.

The consultation

7. This consultation paper covers the broad proposals for the application of the Framework, the assessment and grading of the seven KPIs and their use to derive grades covering the key aspects of quality: responsiveness, effectiveness and finance. It also includes the proposed schedule for the development and implementation of the Framework. Throughout the consultation we will gather views on the proposals from all those with an interest in post-16 learning and skills, including employers, colleges, providers, representative organisations, other stakeholders and the wider community. The detail of the Framework has yet to be developed. This detail will be strongly influenced by the views expressed in responses to this document. Readers are invited to respond to the specific questions and to any other issues they feel are appropriate, using the form in Annex D.

Section 2: Principles and Benefits of the Framework

8. The Framework aims to provide a performance assessment framework based on a hierarchy of consistent and complementary criteria, performance indicators and quantitative measures. These, when taken together, give an overarching description of an institution's performance in meeting the needs of learners, employers, the LSC and other stakeholders. It will provide a basis for colleges' and providers' own assessment and improvement activities, help the QIA provide effective support and be used by the LSC to inform judgements about planning, funding and intervention.

Principles

To provide a comprehensive basis for performance assessment

9. The overall aim of the Framework for Excellence is to provide a comprehensive basis for performance assessment that takes into account the key aspects of college and provider activity, including measures of financial and business efficiency as well as the quality of the provision. The Framework will provide readily understood measures of performance that can be used publicly to promote excellence and the reputation of the sector. Clearer performance information will assist colleges and providers in their own quality assurance activities and facilitate a proportionate approach to inspection and intervention, such as a formal notice to improve or the removal of funding. The LSC, as part of its discussions on the development of this Framework, will work with the sector, stakeholders, employers and employers' organisations, including the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), to consider how the Framework can be used to monitor aspects of performance locally, regionally and nationally.

10. The Framework will use a scorecard of key performance indicators (KPIs) leading to a single overall performance rating, along the lines of the comprehensive performance assessment system now in place for local authorities. The application of the Framework will also contribute to progress towards a system of self-regulation. It will provide transparency and accountability against definitive standards of performance.

11. The Framework will give learners, employers and the wider community reliable and robust information that will help inform their choices. The new performance indicators will feed into the *Employer's Guide to Training Providers* that is being developed and will contribute to information on 14–19 provision locally. Colleges and providers that are good or excellent will be able to celebrate the fact. A comprehensive performance assessment framework that recognises the diversity of the sector will give learners and employers reliable information about the level of service they can expect from colleges and providers.

To maximise the use of existing information and data

12. As far as possible, the KPIs and their contributory secondary indicators and measures will be derived from information and data that a college or provider may reasonably be expected to collect for itself in order to run its business or prepare its

annual self-assessment report. However, we may need to collect more data or collections may be done differently to ensure rigour in the Framework. At the same time, we will seek to avoid imposing additional burdens on colleges and providers and to reduce significantly the bureaucracy involved in the current arrangements across partner organisations for data collection and analysis.

To support the imperative for performance improvement

13. The LSC is working closely with the QIA on the development of the national improvement strategy, Pursuing Excellence. The consultation on the strategy has been published in parallel with this document. The LSC and QIA will jointly implement and support the strategy to help colleges and providers achieve higher standards and excellent provision for learners. Working together we will ensure that colleges and providers get the support they need to improve continuously. In addition to enabling individual colleges and providers to identify areas for improvement, assessment against the Framework will provide a basis for identifying common areas of underperformance that will further inform the development of the strategy.

14. If we are to build a truly world-class education and training system in which good or excellent performance is the norm, it is essential for each college or provider to take responsibility for measuring quality and realising improvement. With excellence and the route to it clearly defined, managers and governors will be able to form a clearer understanding of what they need to do to secure a good or excellent rating. The aim is to create demanding standards that will help the best colleges and providers maintain and enhance their excellent record, enable those that are good to reach the standards of the best, and provide a tool that will make clear to those that are average or not improving what they must do to raise their levels of performance.

To provide the link between performance assessment and commissioning

15. The Framework for Excellence will provide the basis for judging each college's or provider's performance. The KPIs within the Framework will allow for a more differentiated approach to the LSC processes of planning and commissioning provision.

16. The KPIs will also be used to agree priorities for improvement with each college or provider. A new category of "underperforming" will be introduced (see Section 6 for more details). This will make it possible to identify underachieving providers and take actions to bring about improvement. The FE Reform White Paper characterises this level of performance as "barely satisfactory" or "satisfactory but not improving". The Framework aims to provide a clear definition of underperformance that will give rise to the LSC issuing an improvement notice and the commissioning of support from the QIA.

17. There is a need to balance autonomy and reward for good colleges and providers against robust intervention where standards are low. Outright failure in colleges is now rare, although there is still too much poor provision by other training providers. There is also a much larger group of colleges and providers that are underperforming and showing insufficient improvement. Such colleges and providers must improve more rapidly if we are to eliminate inadequate or unsatisfactory provision across the learning and skills sector. From autumn 2006, we will be publishing benchmarks for minimum levels of performance. By September 2008 we will no longer be funding provision that does not meet or exceed all current benchmarks for minimum levels of performance. The Framework will enable underperformance to be recognised, triggering improvement actions by colleges' governing bodies and providers' boards of directors. Where improvement is not realised, or is too slow, the LSC will intervene to protect the interests of learners and employers.

18. There will be a robust intervention strategy to address colleges and providers that persistently underperform or are poor overall. This will be linked to the commissioning and funding proposals under the LSC *agenda for change* and the new arrangements for college trusts, federations and mergers. In all cases the LSC will issue a formal notice to improve within a specified short period, normally 12 months. If, at the end of the period, there is not sufficient improvement, the LSC will intervene in one or more ways. The options include: strengthening leadership, governance and management as appropriate; opening provision up to competition; and merging the institution with a stronger supplier. At the same time, we will encourage new structural models that make it easier for the best colleges and providers to spread their influence across the system and lead change. In addition, colleges and providers that are performing well will be strongly placed to expand their provision, including that for 14–19 year olds.

19. It is proposed that the LSC will publish the performance ratings for each college and provider on an annual basis. Colleges and providers will be expected to publish details of their performance ratings in their annual reports.

A comprehensive basis for self-assessment

20. In *Planning for Success*, we recognised that a rigorous and robust self-assessment process is central to the shared approach to strategic commissioning. It is proposed that, building on established practice, the Framework for Excellence should provide a comprehensive basis for self-assessment that identifies and enables rapid improvements in quality. The CIF forms the core of the Framework but extends its scope. The significance of some areas of the CIF will be enhanced by the emphasis in the Framework.

21. Many colleges and providers have taken substantial steps forward in developing rigorous and robust self-assessment that is used effectively to support continuous improvement. Where that has happened, the LSC can have greater confidence that

agreed development plans will be delivered and that the college or provider will manage the associated risks to quality accordingly. The LSC, working with the inspectorates and the QIA, will take appropriate action to improve capability where self-assessment does not prove to be rigorous or reliable and will develop arrangements to assure the validity of self-assessment. The LSC, working with the Association of Colleges and the QIA, is also currently exploring a range of "peer-referencing" strategies that may form the basis for further development of a system of peer assessment.

Benefits of the Framework

22. The implementation of the Framework is intended to:

- enable employers and members of the public to make informed choices about the best provider for their needs
- allow comparisons of performance across the post-16 sector
- allow value for money and the return on public funds to be assessed
- help colleges and providers compare themselves against standards of excellence
- provide coherence and allow the integration of processes across the sector
- minimise bureaucracy
- raise the sector's visibility and enhance its reputation
- allow progress towards self-regulation.

Annex A expands further on these benefits.

Section 3: Overview of the Framework

23. The FE reform White Paper identifies seven KPIs that cover the three key areas of responsiveness, quality and finance in colleges and providers. In *Planning for Success* we sought to take a broader view of “quality”, one that included relevance and efficiency as key components and preferring to use the terminology “effectiveness” rather than a narrow view of quality that relates only to learning provision. In the Framework for Excellence we want to encourage a wider basis for assessment of performance and have chosen to use the term “effectiveness” to provide a summary measure of learner outcomes and quality of provision.

24. The basis of the Framework is a set of seven KPIs that can be brought together to describe the three key dimensions of a college’s or provider’s performance responsiveness, effectiveness and finance. The LSC will define the seven KPIs together with appropriate standards following consultation with the sector. The standards will define excellence and minimum acceptable performance. They will allow colleges and providers to grade themselves against each of the KPIs and derive an overall performance rating.

25. These KPIs are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: The key performance indicators

Responsiveness
i. Delivery against plan
ii. Responsiveness to learners
iii. Responsiveness to employers
Effectiveness
iv. Quality of outcomes
v. Quality of provision
Finance
vi. Financial health
vii. Financial control

- **Responsiveness:** a dimension that reflects the extent to which each college or provider is delivering provision that is responsive to the needs of learners, employers and the local community, and meets priorities and targets for learning provision. In *Planning for Success* the LSC stated that this dimension would provide a key indicator of the extent to which the provision was relevant to, and meeting, national, regional and local priorities for learning and skills. An important component of this dimension will be the new standard that will assess vocational excellence and employers’ views on colleges’ and providers’ responsiveness.
- **Effectiveness:** a dimension that reflects the extent to which each college or provider is enabling all learners and employers to achieve their goals, as well as the college’s or provider’s

capacity for further improvement. It is closely linked to the quality of provision and learners’ experiences as defined in the CIF and links directly to the concept of effectiveness of provision that we introduced in *Planning for Success*.

- **Finance:** a dimension that reflects each college’s or provider’s use of financial resources to deliver agreed plans through sound financial management and control. This dimension is linked to the efficiency measure in *Planning for Success*.

These dimensions have been chosen to furnish a comprehensive assessment of a college’s or provider’s ability to meet the needs of individuals, employers and the wider community while forming a basis for the assessment of excellence and value for money as indicated schematically in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The three dimensions that lead to the assessment of excellence and value for money



26. The seven KPIs will be supported by a range of more detailed criteria, indicators and measures. Some of these will relate solely to the institution as a whole, while others will be relevant to specific areas of provision within it. It is important to recognise that the new standard for employer responsiveness and vocational excellence will be a critical component of the Framework. The LSC is working with the sector to develop this standard, which will bring together the Quality Mark and Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) reassessment criteria. This will be an extensive, rigorous process, externally validated through the involvement of employers. Definition and application of this measure will be tested during piloting.

27. It is not the purpose of this consultation paper to provide detailed definitions of the measures for determining the seven KPIs, although possible approaches are discussed in Section 4. The definitions will be developed as part of the trial and transition phases of the Framework’s development.

Section 4: The Key Performance Indicators

28. The development of the KPIs and supporting measures will be based on the following principles:

- to support the overarching policy goals of the FE Reform White Paper and avoid perverse incentives
- to be criterion referenced rather than norm referenced
- to be fair and not put any college or provider at undue advantage or disadvantage
- to be capable of application across the learning and skills sector wherever they are relevant
- to be fit for their diverse purposes, including informing learner and employer choice, institutional management and external accountability
- to reduce bureaucracy overall
- to set out clear, simple and transparent criteria for assessment
- to be developed in close and active consultation with users and be agreed by the partner agencies that will support their implementation
- to be implemented in a coherent and consistent way
- to be statistically robust, and credible to third parties as valid and reliable measures of effectiveness.

29. There are strong links between the KPIs and the CIF. The mapping of the KPIs onto the CIF is indicated in Annex B. Discussions will take place between the LSC, the DfES and Ofsted to ensure further alignment of the Framework for Excellence and the CIF when the latter is next reviewed.

30. The precise definitions of the seven KPIs will be decided after the trials and further consultation with colleges and providers between August 2006 and December 2007. The following paragraphs give some indication of the basis that might be used for the KPIs during the trials.

Delivery against plan

31. This KPI provides an overall assessment of a college's or provider's performance in terms of meeting agreed requirements and priorities. The assessment of the overall performance against the plan agreed with the LSC will be based on the Summary Statement of Activity. We will explore the extent to which this indicator is based on delivery against other sub-sections of the plan.

Responsiveness to learners

32. This KPI will be based on evidence similar to that already used by colleges and providers to assess how well their programmes and activities meet the needs of learners and how well learners are guided and supported. This supports the current requirement of Questions 3 and 4 of the CIF. It is likely that the Framework will give particular weighting to an analysis of learner satisfaction and learners' destinations and progression.

Inspections produce information on the extent to which colleges and providers collect and use satisfaction data. Information on learners' destinations and progression is less well developed, even at local level. It is recognised there are technical issues here, and the LSC is currently carrying out development work to help to address this deficiency as part of the suite of New Measures of Success.

Responsiveness to employers

33. A new standard for employer responsiveness and vocational excellence is being developed by the LSC in response to the FE Reform White Paper. The extent to which colleges and providers meet this new standard is likely to be a heavily weighted constituent of the measure. The challenge will be to create an indicator that accommodates the substantially different types of colleges, providers and provision, while not creating perverse incentives. The LSC will also consult directly with employers and their representative organisations, including the CBI, to gather their views on the factors that need to be included in this indicator. The income that colleges and providers earn from employers, and the developing data from Train to Gain on colleges' and providers' success in winning both new and repeat business from employers, are likely to provide core measures for this indicator.

Quality of provision

34. Ofsted inspection judgement will be the key indicator. Another component will be the college's or provider's self-assessment against Questions 2, 3 and 4 of the CIF, particularly the effectiveness of teaching and learning and the other key learning processes.

Quality of outcomes

35. A quantified assessment of learner outcome is required. A range of measures will be investigated during the trials. These may include qualification success rates, which may be adjusted for the length and level of programmes offered. Value added, distance travelled and RARPA (recognising and recording progress and achievement in accredited and non-accredited learning) may become indicators for certain types of provision. This measure is very closely linked to Question 1 of the CIF, which requires an evaluation of how well learners achieve.

Financial health

36. Financial health is understood, accepted and used across the sector as an indicator of financial viability and performance. This indicator is currently being revised to focus on three measures:

- solvency (current ratio)
- sustainability (margin)
- status (net worth).

Each of these measures will be benchmarked and allow detailed financial and efficiency analyses. The criteria for financial health

should be sufficiently robust to ensure that well-planned capital investment does not have an inappropriate impact on the overall judgement.

Financial control

37. The financial control indicator will be based on the evidence of auditors and other financially based reviews of providers. It will pick up qualitative factors in financial management that are not conveyed by the numbers in the financial health indicator. Examples are the institution's soundness of internal control, regularity and propriety in use of LSC funds, and quality of deployment of college financial resources in achieving the college's objectives.

Section 5: Assessment Against the Framework

38. There are two options for deriving the performance assessment. The first option would be to derive a numerical value for each KPI based on a set of well-defined quantifiable measures. Pre-determined standards for each KPI would then directly relate a numerical score for the KPI to a grade. The advantages of this option are that it is well defined and straightforward to implement and that the grades are easy to verify. A difficulty is that it might lead to the need for a range of standards to ensure that performance assessments are reasonable and reflect the diversity in colleges' and providers' aims.
39. The second option is to incorporate additional qualitative measures, based on defined criteria, for each KPI. The advantage of this option is that it enables a more refined and contextual assessment of performance. The difficulty is that this removes the element of simplification and transparency and would make the comparison of grades between providers more difficult.
40. Annex C gives a diagrammatical representation of these two options.
41. The second option would ensure that assessment is well founded on both data and professional judgement against well-defined criteria and based on clear evidence. At the same time the generation of the scorecard from a pre-determined data set would provide a basis for comparison and verification of the self-assessment. The implications of adopting these approaches are outlined in the following paragraphs. However, we would welcome your views on these options (see Question 8).
42. Under both these options, assessment against the seven KPIs would be used to decide the grades for each of the three dimensions. There are two methods that could be used in determining these grades. The first would be to assign a national weighting to each KPI. The second would be to allow colleges and providers a degree of discretion in setting the weighting of each KPI. The grades for the three dimensions would then be used to determine the overall single performance rating. We would welcome your views on these two methods (see Question 9).
43. To implement the Framework, colleges and providers will continue to carry out a self-assessment against the CIF. They will be expected to grade their provision against each of the seven KPIs using the same four-point scale set out in the CIF:
- | | |
|----------|---------------------|
| Grade 1: | <i>Outstanding</i> |
| Grade 2: | <i>Good</i> |
| Grade 3: | <i>Satisfactory</i> |
| Grade 4: | <i>Inadequate</i> |
44. Assessment will be based on the definitions and criteria in the Framework and will use evidence collected as part of self-assessment. The application of the Framework will permit measurement against the KPIs at the sector subject area level. This will be an important element within each college's and provider's self-assessment. It is proposed that the grades for the seven KPIs will be summarised in colleges' and providers' self-assessment reports.
45. There is a strong correlation between the seven KPIs and the evaluative statements in the CIF. The evidence needed to self-assess against the CIF should provide the information necessary to form much of the assessment against the Framework. This means that grading the seven KPIs will be consistent with the existing self-assessment processes. We will work with the sector to ensure that the introduction of the Framework requires the minimum of additional work by those who conduct a comprehensive assessment of their performance.
46. The LSC, as part of its responsibility for planning and securing high-quality provision, will assure itself that the quality of provision assessed against the Framework is consistent with the performance of the provider. The scorecard will provide an objective assessment of performance. The LSC will continue to assess the extent to which a college or provider meets the objectives and targets set out in its delivery plan. The LSC's provider financial management function will ensure that the assessments for the finance dimension are consistent with its judgements and those of externally appointed auditors.
47. The role of the LSC is not to assess the quality of teaching and learning. The LSC will seek to work with Ofsted to align our business processes to enable assurance of the quality of provision as part of the Framework. Further aligning these processes will help to strengthen the focus within the annual assessment visits in cases where the quality of provision may be at risk. Where the LSC has concerns about the outcomes of the self-assessment or the grades, it will work with Ofsted to resolve any appropriate concerns and may commission an inspection of the college or provider where necessary.
48. The LSC, working with the QIA, Ofsted, the DfES and the sector, will develop a consistent approach to the validation of assessment against the Framework. Governing bodies and company boards must also take responsibility for ensuring that the process for undertaking their self-assessment is consistent with this approach, and confirm in their annual report that these arrangements have been followed. Chairs, principals and chief executives will be expected to make a signed statement in annual reports to the effect that the performance ratings are an accurate reflection of the college's or provider's performance.

Section 6: Determining the Overall Performance Rating

Grading responsiveness, effectiveness and finance

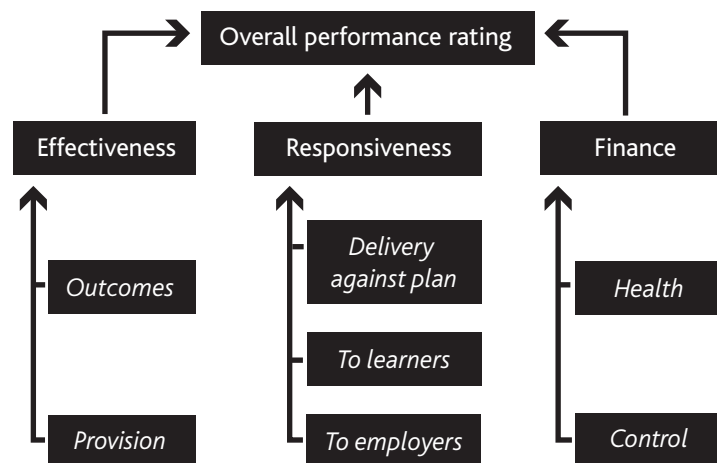
49. The issue of grades is complex. Established practice is the four-point scale used in the CIF. However, the FE Reform White Paper states there is a need for a fresh look at this area to allow greater differentiation in the assessment of the quality of provision. It is proposed that the LSC, Ofsted and the DfES will work together to design a single approach to scales that will form the backbone of the Framework for Excellence. In the interim, it is proposed that two grading scales will be used:

- i) the familiar four-point scale from the CIF, which will be used to create grades for the KPIs; and
- ii) a new five-point scale which will produce grades for the three dimensions and the overall performance rating. The new five-point scale will allow greater differentiation in quality assessment and enable the clearer identification of that provision that is underperforming.

Following consultation, the LSC will publish further guidance on this.

50. The grades for the seven KPIs provide the basis for judgements on the three dimensions of responsiveness, effectiveness and finance and enable an assessment of the overall performance rating to be made. This is shown schematically in Figure 2.

Figure 2: How the KPIs lead to the overall performance rating



51. Within the five-point scale, we are proposing to introduce a new category of performance that will be used to identify colleges and providers that are barely satisfactory or satisfactory but not improving, as described in the FE Reform White Paper. This new category will be designated as "underperforming". Satisfactory provision contains significant areas of weaknesses as well as strengths. Provision that is at or around minimum acceptable levels of performance is failing significant numbers of learners. Colleges and providers need to look critically at this provision and will be required to take steps to improve from satisfactory to good in order to secure more sustainable provision.

52. To avoid confusion between the two scales in this interim period, it is proposed that the four-point scale continues to use numeric grades while the five-point scale uses the descriptors, "excellent", "good", "satisfactory", "underperforming" and "poor". Identifying underperformance is an important step in enabling colleges, providers and the LSC to highlight provision that requires improvement. The grades for the dimensions will differentiate between dimensions where all component KPIs are at a satisfactory level and those where some aspects of performance are weak or not improving. The combination rules for deriving the grades for the three dimensions from the grades for the KPIs will be decided after consultation with the sector and using the outcomes from the trial implementations.

53. To realise significant improvement in provision across the sector and transform its reputation, it is essential that we not only eradicate poor provision but also ensure rapid improvement in provision that is "barely satisfactory" or "satisfactory but not improving". The classification of definitive, rather than just average, standards of performance, at the level of the KPIs, will ensure that the LSC, colleges and providers are able to diagnose clearly performance that is not acceptable. We will work with the sector, the DfES, the QIA and the inspectorate to establish definitive standards that will ensure all underperforming provision is identified. The LSC will require action to be taken to improve underperforming provision or, where the college or provider fails to improve to meet acceptable standards, to seek alternative provision.

The overall performance rating

54. The grades for the performance dimensions will be combined to form an overall performance rating that is based on the same five-point scale as that used for the performance dimensions. It is proposed that all colleges and providers would use the same combination rules to decide their overall performance rating. This is because each dimension should have the same significance in relation to overall performance across all colleges and providers. The combination rules to derive the overall performance rating, like those for the three dimensions, will be determined after consultation with the sector and will use the outcomes from the trial implementations.

55. Modelling work is under way to investigate the sensitivity of the overall assessment to different sets of guiding principles and for different parts of the sector. This modelling, together with information from this consultation and the trials, will be used to develop the combination rules.

56. It is proposed that the LSC will publish the overall performance rating and the grades for the dimensions for each college and provider once a year. The declared overall performance rating may be in the form of a single descriptor, a Star rating, a statement describing the performance or a combination of these.

Section 7: Schedule for the Development and Introduction of the Framework

57. A phased introduction of the Framework for Excellence is proposed. The first phase would cover further education colleges (excluding former external institutions), sixth-form colleges and WBL providers. Development work to derive initial definitions for the seven KPIs, together with appropriate standards and the combination rules for the dimensions and the overall performance rating, is being carried out by the LSC in consultation with colleges and those bodies that represent colleges and providers. Various options will be trialled by a small number of FE colleges, sixth-form colleges and WBL providers from August to December 2006. At the same time as the trials are taking place, the LSC will consult with those bodies, for example the Audit Commission and the Healthcare Commission, that have experience and expertise in the implementation of comparable activities.
58. After the evaluation of the trials, the LSC will publish, in January 2007, a consultation paper containing the definitions for the KPIs, the standards and criteria against which they can be judged, and the combination rules for the derivation of the responsiveness, effectiveness and finance dimensions and the overall performance rating. The final, full Framework for Excellence will be published in June 2007, after a consideration of the consultation responses.
59. The second phase of the implementation would cover all other providers apart from school sixth forms. Trials across a representative sample of these providers will be conducted during summer and autumn 2007, to test the applicability of the Framework and support its refinement. These trials will be supplemented by discussions with providers, their representative bodies and other stakeholders before publication of the final Framework in June 2008.
60. For each phase of the implementation, there will be a year of transition from the current to the new arrangements. In the transition year, the Framework for Excellence will be used in full and will be included in the commissioning discussions with the LSC. The transition programme will also provide an opportunity to make appropriate adjustments to meet the different circumstances of different types of provider across the sector. For colleges and WBL providers, the transition year will start in August 2007. For all other providers, the transition year will start in August 2008.
61. To make the implementation as smooth as possible, the LSC will encourage all colleges and providers to start their preparation for introducing the Framework in 2007. Expressions of interest from colleges and providers in taking part in the trial phases are welcome. This would allow lessons for a successful implementation to be learned early and support the smooth transition to the new performance assessment system.
62. A summary of the consultation, development and implementation schedule for the Framework is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Schedule for the Framework for Excellence

Task	Proposed timeline
Consultation on concept and scope of the Framework for Excellence ends	20 October 2006
Development of Framework and supporting systems for further education colleges, sixth-form colleges and WBL providers through modelling and trials	August to December 2006
Publication, for consultation, of full Framework for Excellence covering further education colleges, sixth-form colleges and WBL providers	January 2007
Evaluation of consultation	April 2007
Publication of final Framework for Excellence covering colleges and WBL providers	June 2007
College, provider and stakeholder briefings	June and July 2007
Framework for Excellence used in FE and sixth-form colleges and WBL providers	From August 2007
Development of Framework and supporting systems for all other providers through modelling and trials	September to December 2007
Discussions with colleges, providers and their representative organisations	January to March 2008
Publication of final Framework for Excellence covering all providers	June 2008
College, provider and stakeholder briefings	July 2008
Framework for Excellence used in all providers	From August 2008

Annex A: Benefits of Implementing the Framework

The use of the Framework across colleges and providers will enable employers and members of the public to make informed choices about the best provider for their needs.

1. The Framework will provide a comprehensive set of scores covering responsiveness, effectiveness (quality) and finance alongside an overall performance rating. The overall performance rating together with the constituent grades will be published externally. Employers, learners and other stakeholders will be able to compare colleges and providers using a consistent and readily understood set of measures, with the assurance that they will get what they expect to receive. The LSC will also be able to aggregate the results of college and provider grades at local, regional and national levels, which will allow them to demonstrate the sector's standards and value to all stakeholders.

The Framework will allow comparisons of performance across the entire post-16 sector.

2. The Framework will provide transparent and valid comparisons that take account of the differences in the characteristics and missions of the different colleges and providers. The mechanics of assessment will be sensitive to the college's or provider's particular circumstances and aims. However, while judgements will be informed by measures that could be adjusted for context, the Framework will ensure a consistent basis for comparison of performance. The LSC will work with the sector to ensure that robust and verifiable judgements can be built up from the measures. The Framework will define standards of excellence in provider performance that can be applied across the whole sector.

The use of the Framework will allow value for money and the return on public funds to be assessed.

3. The Framework describes the totality of performance in a few key indicators. This provides a clear demonstration of the value that is being created from the resources a college or provider receives from the LSC (and other funding agencies). The KPIs will be used to assess the responsiveness, effectiveness and financial aspects of each college's and provider's performance. When taken together, the indicators will provide an overall indication of value for money. A college or provider that is delivering effective provision that meets the needs of all stakeholders with the efficient use of resources is giving value for money.

The Framework will help colleges and providers compare themselves against standards of excellence and support continuous improvement through self-assessment.

4. The Framework supports continuous improvement by providing, where applicable, appropriate national data, standards and benchmarks for the measures for comparative purposes. The use, wherever possible, of absolute standards rather than relative benchmarks allows all colleges and providers to aspire to and become good or excellent.
5. The Framework will enable colleges and providers to examine performance at increasingly finer gradations of provision and detail. They will be able to look more closely at the judgements of responsiveness, effectiveness and finance and drill down to see where there are strengths to develop and issues to be resolved. This will aid analysis and monitoring of improvement initiatives. Colleges and providers will be able to see clearly where they are strong, where they need to improve, and the effect that will have on their public rating.

The Framework will define the level of interaction between the LSC, other agencies, and colleges and providers.

6. The LSC will use the outcomes from the Framework, together with the findings from inspection and annual assessment visits, to support assessment of risks to local and regional delivery. The LSC, as part of its discussions with colleges, providers and other stakeholders, will also investigate the potential for using the outcomes from the Framework to monitor wider aspects of performance locally, regionally and nationally as well as for assessing individual provider performance.
7. As the Framework incorporates each of the New Measures of Success, the measures used in financial assessment and the key questions of the CIF, it will provide the quantitative input into the risk assessment at local and regional levels. It also specifically includes assessment of the extent to which each college's and provider's provision is being directed at national and local priorities, which are critical to informing the commissioning process.
8. Assessment against the Framework may be used by the inspectorates along with other evidence to inform their assessment of the level and degree of inspection that is required. It may also be one of the key tools used by the QIA to identify what support for colleges and providers is necessary. Determining how the QIA and the inspectorates will use the Framework in these ways will form part of the development work prior to full implementation of the Framework.

The Framework will provide coherence and allow the integration of processes across the sector.

9. A key goal of the Framework is to support colleges' and providers' drive for continuous improvement through the use of largely quantifiable measures to support self-assessment and identify potential areas for improvement. The Framework will support this process by giving colleges and providers a common perspective on what should be measured and how. It will bring together the hitherto separate assessments of financial performance, academic quality and community relevance. Colleges and providers have complained that they are asked to demonstrate the contribution of their work through a number of measures of quality that have been given frequently changing priorities. These proposals will help by bringing together all the aspects of performance into a single, coherent framework. The rigorous use of a single framework by colleges, providers, the LSC and the inspectorates to describe performance will result in substantial increase in coherence and transparency across the sector, as set out in *Planning for Success*.

The implementation of the Framework will minimise bureaucracy.

10. The LSC is keen to ensure that the new Framework does not add to the bureaucratic burden on colleges and providers. Fairly assessing the work of large organisations enrolling thousands of students and managing multi-million pound budgets will never be simple, but the LSC will work with colleges, providers and their representative bodies to create an economical and coherent new system. The existence of a sector-wide framework will strongly support simplification as the Framework will bring together into a single set the myriad different measures currently used by different stakeholders to assess the same aspects of performance. This process of simplification will also support valid comparisons of different colleges, providers and modes of delivery.
11. As far as is possible, the data and other evidence used to derive the grades for each KPI will be that which is collected and analysed by the institution for its own planning and development purposes. For example, information on qualification success rates, value added (where applicable) and self-assessment grades using the criteria in the CIF will provide much of the information an institution will need to make a judgement on its effectiveness. Similarly, financial information already provided by each institution to the LSC will provide the basis for a judgement on the finance dimension.

The Framework will raise the visibility of the sector and enhance its reputation.

12. The implementation of the Framework will enable colleges and providers to demonstrate excellence where it already exists and as it develops. This will play a key role in enhancing the reputation of the sector. The use of a common framework with a few high-level indicators will facilitate public and stakeholder recognition that the Framework deals with absolute rather than relative assessment. Colleges, providers and stakeholders will contribute to the definition of what constitutes excellent performance.

The implementation of the Framework is a major step on the journey to self-regulation.

13. The National Audit Office's 2005 Report, *Securing strategic leadership for the learning and skills sector in England*, recognised that the increasing effectiveness of self-assessment is helping colleges to focus clearly on quality and on improving performance. The report referred to the need to develop a more holistic review that "would take greater account of the environment that colleges operate in than inspections can easily do" and would support the development of self-regulation. The Framework provides a common basis for an overall performance assessment. This will greatly help providers to work together to review, improve and demonstrate the rigour of their self-assessment and the use of good practice. This combination of a common framework of performance measures with peer review of self-assessment will help facilitate progress towards self-regulation in the sector.

Annex B: Table of Measures

Key Performance Indicator	Possible basis for the constituent measures	Mapping to the CIF
Delivery against plan	Assessment of the overall performance against plan will be based on the Summary Statement of Activity together with the agreed improvement indicators. It will incorporate the Provision Matrix.	Question 5
Responsiveness to learners	The composite will involve self-assessment, but will probably include an analysis of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learner satisfaction • learner destination and progression • college's or provider's equality and diversity impact measures. 	Questions 3 and 4
Responsiveness to employers	This will be a composite indicator that will require judgements against criteria to be made. An initial indicator can be developed from quantitative indicators together with qualitative data such as accreditation to the new standard (building on CoVE and the Quality Mark). The resultant indicator will have to be mission specific.	Questions 3
Quality of provision	The primary component will be Ofsted judgement and the second component will be the institution's self-assessment against the CIF validated by peer review, annual assessment visits and inspection.	Questions 2, 3 and 4
Quality of outcomes	A quantified assessment of learner outcome is required. It is likely that the assessment will be based around the New Measures of Success currently being introduced.	Question 1
Financial health	Financial health is being revised to focus on three key measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • solvency (current ratio) • sustainability (margin) • status (net worth). Each of these measures will be benchmarked and allow drill-down to further financial and efficiency analyses.	Question 5
Financial control	The financial control measure will be based on the evidence of auditors and other finance-based reviews of colleges and providers. It will pick up qualitative factors in financial management that are not conveyed by the numbers in the financial health measure, for example the institution's soundness of internal control, regularity and propriety in use of LSC funds, and quality of deployment of financial resources in achieving the college's or provider's objectives.	Question 5

Annex C: Options for the Derivation of the Overall Performance Rating

Figure 3: Option 1 for deriving the overall performance rating

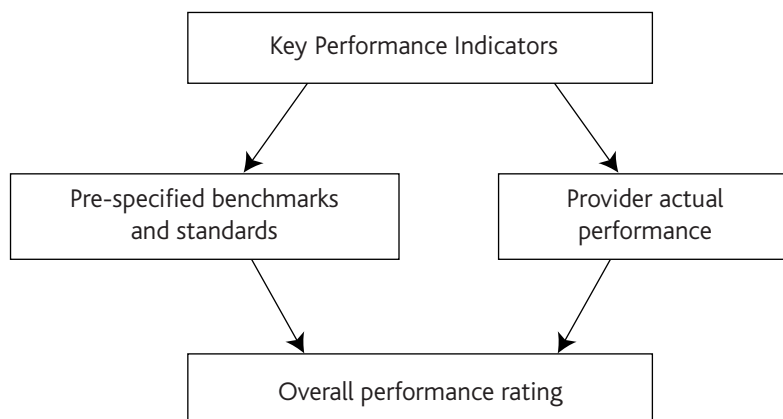
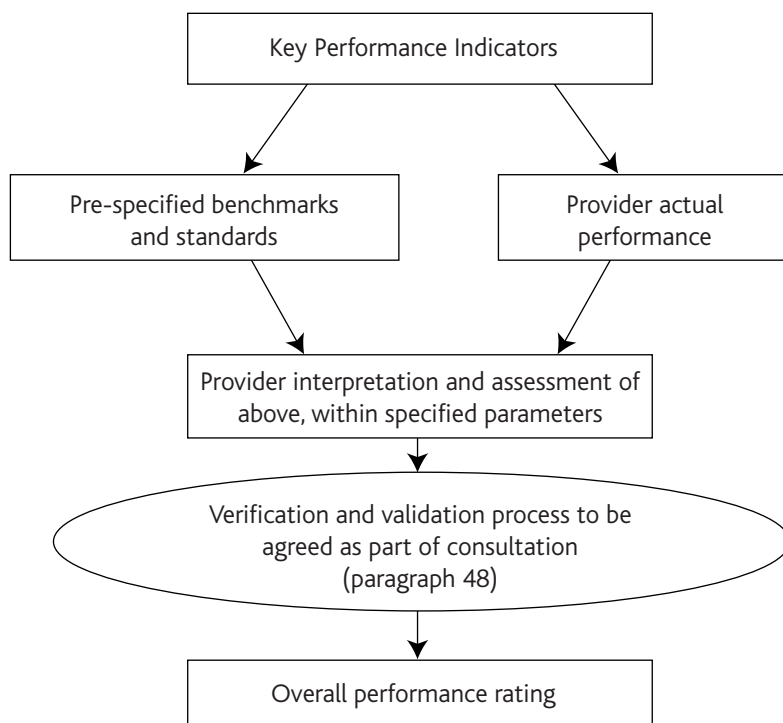


Figure 4: Option 2 for deriving the overall performance rating



Annex D: Form for Responding to this Consultation Document

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Leading learning and skills

(Reference: Consultation on the development of the Framework for Excellence – a comprehensive performance assessment framework for the further education system)

Please complete and post this form to the above address (or fax to 024 7682 3334) by no later than **20 October 2006**. A copy of your response will also be forwarded to your local LSC for information. A Microsoft Word version of this response form is available on the LSC website (www.lsc.gov.uk) and can be completed and emailed back to: framework-for-excellence-consult06@lsc.gov.uk if preferred.

Early responses would be greatly appreciated.

Name (*please print*):

Role or title:

Organisation:

Address:

Postcode:

Please respond below by ticking the appropriate box or deleting as appropriate and entering your comments in the space provided.

Do you wish your response to remain confidential?

Yes

No

Which of the following organisations do you work in and/or represent?

Employer

Further education college (including representative bodies)

Higher education institution with further education provision

Local authority

Other public sector institution (including representative bodies)

Private training institution

School

Sixth-form college

Specialist college (for example, agriculture or art and design)

Specialist college for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

Specialist designated institution

Ufi/**learn**direct

Voluntary sector institution (including representative body)

Other (please specify)

Comments are invited on the following questions:

Question 1: Do you think that a comprehensive performance assessment should incorporate the Common Inspection Framework?

Yes No

Comments: _____

Question 2: Do you agree that the three dimensions of responsiveness, effectiveness and finance based on the seven key performance indicators (KPIs) are sufficient for comprehensive performance assessment or are there other aspects that need to be included? *(please specify)*

Yes No

Comments: _____

Question 3: Do you agree that the proposed Framework of KPIs is applicable to all the types of colleges and providers that make up the further education system?

Yes No

Comments: _____

Question 4: Do you agree that the information needed for the proposed Framework should be assembled, as far as possible, from the information that any well-managed college or provider would collect and analyse?

Yes No

Comments: _____

Question 5: Do you agree that the principles proposed in Section 4 provide a suitable basis for the development of the KPIs?

Yes

No

Comments: _____

Question 6: Do you think that the proposed factors contributing to the KPIs described in paragraphs 31 to 37 are a suitable basis for initial development and trials?

Yes

No

Comments: _____

Question 7: Do you think that there are any additional or alternative objective, quantifiable indicators that should be used to define the KPIs, particularly where they draw on existing data sources?
(please specify)

Yes

No

Comments: _____

Question 8: Do you agree that the approach to determine the KPIs, as proposed in Section 5, should include an element of qualitative assessment as well as quantitative measures?

Yes

No

If not, how do you think the KPIs should be determined? (please specify)

Comments: _____

Question 9: Do you think that all the KPIs and dimensions should carry the same weight or significance when contributing to the overall performance rating? If not, what should be the weighting or significance placed on the KPIs and/or the dimensions and why? *(please specify)*

Yes

No

Comments: _____

Question 10: Do you think that the requirement to assess the dimensions against the five-point scale place a significant additional burden on colleges and providers? If so, please explain why.

Yes

No

Comments: _____

Question 11: Do you agree with the interim arrangements for grading scales proposed in paragraph 49?

Yes

No

Comments: _____

Question 12: Do you think that the overall performance rating should be a Star rating, a one-word descriptor, a statement or a combination of these?

Star rating

Yes

No

One-word descriptor

Yes

No

Statement

Yes

No

Combination of the above *(please specify)*

Yes

No

Comments: _____

Question 13: Do you think that your organisation or those you represent will have difficulty in implementing the Framework and, if so, why? *(please specify)*

Yes No

Comments: _____

Question 14: Do you agree with the proposed schedule for the operational introduction of the Framework for Excellence set out in Section 7?

Yes No

Comments: _____

Question 15: Is there anything else that you would like to add? *(please specify any other considerations, comments or issues you may have)*

Comments: _____

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