



Report from the CEL/LSC Framework for Excellence and Governance

29 May 2008

Plaisterer's Hall London

1. Context

Jointly convened by the Centre for Excellence for Leadership (CEL) and the Learning Skills Council (LSC), participants received presentations on:

- Framework for Excellence (FfE): the policy context and the principles
- The implication of FfE for inspection (the view of Ofsted)
- Performance Management within a Self Regulating FE system (the view of Single Voice)
- FfE: the next steps

Group discussions, which were enabled at each table by 'witnesses' from those involved in this year's FfE pilot, focused on:

- The impact of FfE for colleges
- The impact of FfE for governance

2. Key messages for governors

The key messages drawn from the forum presentations and group discussions for governors were as follows:

2.1. The FfE introduces an extra dimension to college self assessment

The Self Assessment processes leading to the Self Assessment Report (SAR) will continue, as will Ofsted inspections (whether full inspections, Annual Assessment Visits or desk top reviews). The SAR is the college's opinion and judgment of its progress, drawn from a variety of internal sources and opinions. Ofsted's inspection grade is based on the opinion and judgment of other professionals. Both were described as "professional evaluative judgments".

FfE differs in that it is not judgment based; it reviews key assessment criteria drawn from college data or surveys, and the ensuing decision is "made for you". It was therefore described as a "data based evaluative tool". It also enables provider performance benchmarking, both internally for college managers and governors, and externally for learners and employers.

2.2. Workload resulting from FfE

Pilot colleges largely confirmed that the data is drawn from existing sources and required



Working together



Report from the CEL/LSC Framework for Excellence and Governance

29 May 2008

Plaisterer's Hall London

very little in the way of new systems or processes to produce the information, or for the LSC to extract it. However, they stressed that **accuracy of data on all learners (whether LSC funded or not) was essential.**

Training for staff on FfE requirements was also viewed as essential to ensure that staff understood what FfE was making judgments upon and the implications of data accuracy on those judgments.

A software tool is being developed to enable colleges to monitor their progress in-year on the key assessment areas in each of the FfE dimensions.

Training for governors, in particular on the scoring system of FfE in each dimension, is also essential, to ensure that they both understood how the judgments are being drawn together and to enable their monitoring role.

The LSC is implementing the Financial Management and Control Evaluation (FMCE), a new self-assessment report which will replace the SARQ. An annex on Governance is also being developed by the LSC.

2.3. Publication of the FfE outcomes

FfE introduces a new element to the publication of college data, in that the potential audience – i.e. other providers (collaborative and competitive), learners and employers - will be able to drill down into the college's Overall Performance Rating (OPR) and see the scores for each of the dimensions (responsiveness, effectiveness and financial) and the assessment scores from which they are drawn. The OPR is expected to be published annually from March/April 2010, reporting on the previous academic year, although some information and data relating to the more established measures will be published in 2009.

This appeared to be the element that had exercised the pilot colleges the most. The OPR outcomes for some of the pilots had been lower than they had expected; one Beacon college for example had received a lower than anticipated OPR (compared to their SAR and Ofsted judgments), and reported that as the scores are drawn from standardized methods, there is only limited scope to appeal before the results are published.

Additionally, due to the introduction of 4 grades on Financial Health (1-4) whereas there were previously 3 (A-C), a sizeable percentage of college's previously graded as A found themselves with a perceived downward grading of 2. However,



Report from the CEL/LSC Framework for Excellence and Governance

29 May 2008

Plaisterer's Hall London

only a proportion of current group C colleges would find themselves with a new grade of 4, 'inadequate'.

It should also be noted that other colleges had been pleased with their OPR and some dimension grades were higher than expected.

All of the above reemphasised the need for training for both staff and governors on FfE. It also emphasised the need to ensure that there is a good national outward communication strategy in place prior to the publication of FfE outcomes to ensure that the potential audiences for FfE results understand them; LSC advises that this is now being constructed.

Issues remain on the publication of destination data and data attribution/ownership for learners involved in collaborative/partnership learning processes, both of which are still being worked upon.

Within the finance dimension, the financial health assessment, and the impact of a Capital Project on the outcomes, was acknowledged, and the forum was advised that the assessment systems will take project impacts into account to an extent. However, it was also acknowledged that a downward grading from that previously expected by some colleges was possible and that the ensuing finance dimension grade might impact on the overall college OPR, potentially leading to a lower OPR than the self-assessment grade for overall effectiveness, and the most recent Ofsted overall college judgment for overall effectiveness.

[Note – it is unlikely that the financial health grade impact alone would have this effect - under the proposed approach to the OPR (which is still under review) a college which achieves even a grade 3 for financial health can still achieve a grade 2 for the Finance Dimension based on FH, FMC, and UOR, if its grades for FMC and UOR are 1s or 2s. If that college also achieved grade 1s for Responsiveness and Effectiveness, then the OPR would still be an OPR of 1. However, if a college whose financial health fell to grade 3 also performed less well in other aspects across the three dimensions then the OPR could be affected.]

New guidance on Self Assessment is expected in summer 2008 which it is hoped will be helpful in assisting colleges to include FfE in their SAR processes. Those already including it in this year's SAR were commended.



Report from the CEL/LSC Framework for Excellence and Governance

29 May 2008

Plaisterer's Hall London

2.4. The introduction of online surveys for learners and employers

These will be short surveys conducted at specific times of the year, with results drawn together by the LSC. Pilot colleges regarded the 'management' of these surveys as essential; colleges need to ensure that employers and learners understand the questions and grades to be awarded in the survey. Colleges were also advised to consider those students with lower literacy skills, such as ESOL students, who may have difficulty understanding the survey or students lacking the necessary IT skills to complete it online.

The sample size of employer surveys was an issue for some colleges, with the sample available too small to make a judgment on.

2.5. Manager and Governor Monitoring

Colleges review the outcomes of the previous year's SAR action plan, and complete their SARs in November, with action plans ensuing for the coming year. The FfE outcomes will not be published until the following March/April.

To overcome this time lapse FfE is recommended to form part of the self assessment process, making it essential that college progress on FfE dimension assessment criteria can be monitored and form part of the in-year monitoring by college managers and governors.

It was suggested that Governing Board's will want the Audit Committee to have a scrutiny role on the data processes involved in FfE and that internal auditors could be directed to review these areas periodically.

Interestingly, resulting from the most recent review of the key elements of both good and weak colleges, there was a strong suggestion from the Ofsted speaker that Governing Boards should reconsider their business objectives and then align their annual business plans and governance framework to those objectives.

2.6. The future

Work is ongoing to develop FfE, including ensuring that it provides the information Local Authorities (LAs) will require in the future.

An impact evaluation of FfE will be conducted over five years.



Report from the CEL/LSC Framework for Excellence and Governance

29 May 2008

Plaisterer's Hall London

It remains the intention that schools will also be included in FfE; whether the scope is for 16+ learners, or for 14+ learners (which many schools have suggested), is not yet known. Again, this emphasizes the need to ensure that arrangements are made to acknowledge and attribute 'collaborative learners' within FfE.

FfE is expected to lead to a "preferred provider list" and reduce the need for regular re-tendering for provision. However, as the funding arrangements under the new government funding agencies are not yet known, this cannot be guaranteed.

The success of FfE is viewed as essential to sustain the momentum towards a self-regulating FE sector.

Additional performance indicators are being developed and considered:

- minimum level of performance (to be piloted next year)
- retention rates for non-accredited learning
- measures of full level 2 and full level 3 achievement
- responsiveness to communities

Thank you to Sheila Selwood (Clerk to the Corporation, West Herts College), Mike Field (Chair of Great Yarmouth College) and Sue Parker (LSC) for their valuable contributions to this report.

Action Points for Governors and Clerks to consider:

- Training for governors, clerks and staff on FfE requirements, in particular the scoring system in each FfE dimension.
- Awareness raising with collaborative partners and stakeholders of the availability and using of the FfE Overall Performance Rating (OPR) for each provider.
- Including FfE in your self-assessment/SAR processes.
- Recruiting the audit committee to have a scrutiny role on the data processes involved in FfE.
- Processes for keeping up to date with future FfE developments.