

Specialist Paper 10

Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER): Guide for External Examiners and Centres

What is IQER?

IQER is a review method specifically devised for higher education in further education colleges in England. It replaces academic review of subjects, which ended in 2006/7. IQER does **not** apply to publicly funded FECs in Wales or Northern Ireland.

What provision is covered by IQER?

All HE provision funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), whether it is directly or indirectly funded, or funded through a consortium.

Which centres will be subject to IQER?

It is QAA's intention that every centre delivering publicly-funded HE programmes will have some engagement with IQER during the period 2007/8 to 2011/12.

What are the underpinning features and design principles of IQER?

IQER is:

- a peer review, rather than an inspection process
- a process with self-evaluation at its heart
- a development from Academic Review
- an external review process comparable to Institutional Audit, used within HEIs
- a method which draws on evidence from college inspections and other external reviews and provides evidence for future inspections
- an approach which recognises the specific needs and circumstances of colleges and the environment in which they operate

IQER shares a number of features with other QAA review methods in that it:

- focuses on the management of HE quality assurance in colleges
- is based upon the Academic Infrastructure
- expects that colleges and their awarding bodies will carry out reviews and evaluations of their own programmes
- involves an evidence-based peer review process, characterised by a continuing dialogue with, and the provision of, regular feedback to, the college

- relies on a college's self-evaluation and visits to colleges to meet students, staff and, where appropriate, external stakeholders
- acknowledges, in part through the facility for the student representative body to make a written submission, the centrality of the student experience
- uses available data for higher education in colleges
- carries out selective and focused enquiries
- results in oral and written reports based on evidence-based evaluations, judgements and recommendations
- requires the review team to take collective responsibility for judgements, conclusions and recommendation about the HE provided in each college
- identifies good practice and areas for development or improvement in the management, quality assurance and enhancement of HE in Colleges.

In short, IQER is designed to:

- assist colleges in identifying and confirming their strengths and limitations in their HE quality assurance management and self-evaluation processes
- provide independent and reliable information about HE provided in colleges to present to prospective students and to other interested stakeholders
- contribute to colleges' increased and enhanced capacity to manage their responsibilities for higher education, as set out in partnership agreements
- identify features of good practice
- deliver constructive reports to colleges, their awarding bodies and HEFCE

How does the IQER method achieve its aims and objectives?

The IQER method is structured around three **core questions**. These are;

- 1 Does the college discharge its responsibilities effectively, as set out in its partnership agreement(s), for the management and delivery of the standards of the award(s) it offers on behalf of its awarding body(ies)?
- 2 Does the college discharge its responsibilities effectively, as set out in its partnership agreements, for the management and assurance of the quality of the learning opportunities to enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes?
- 3 Can reliance be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the college is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers?

What is the structure of an IQER?

IQER has two distinct and related elements:

- **Developmental Engagement (DE)** - usually, but not always, in student assessment. The college's good practice in its management and delivery of student assessment is identified and recommendations are made for the improvement of its policies and procedures. These recommendations fall under three headings which are, in order of increasing priority, desirable,

advisable and essential. One particular feature of the DE is that two of the four members of the review team are Institutional Nominees and, as such, members of the college staff. Another particular feature is that there may be more than one DE, with the second being an aspect of the college's management and delivery of HE programmes other than student assessment. The findings of the DE team are accompanied by an action plan, which forms part of the unpublished report.

- **Summative Review (SR)** - some time after the DE, to allow the college time to implement the action plan developed as a result of the DE. In the SR a college's management and delivery of all of its HEFCE-funded HE, and its responses to the DE action plan, are examined, and judgements are made. This element of the review is carried out by QAA reviewers (usually one coordinator and three peer reviewers), without Institutional Nominees this time, but with a member of the college staff acting as a Review Facilitator. On completion of the review an SR report is published.

What lessons have been learned so far?

A pilot of the IQER method was carried out in 15 FECs during 2006/7. The outcomes of the pilot were generally positive, much good practice was identified and several recommendations were made. The most commonly reported recommendations related to:

- the need for college staff to participate in training and development relating to the QAA Academic Structure and its application and, in particular, the linking of intended learning outcomes with assessment criteria and the gathering of student feedback on the quality and standard of the education they are receiving or have received
- the importance of ensuring that a college's quality assurance systems and processes adequately address HE programmes as well as FE programmes
- the need to develop effective written feedback to students on their assessed work
- the importance of sharing good practice between programmes validated by different HE institutions and between HE institutions and Edexcel programmes.

Where can I access more information?

The first port of call should be the QAA website www.qaa.ac.uk for the IQER Handbook and the frequently updated page of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) at www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/iqer/faq.asp