

## POLICY WATCH

2008/40

3 July 2008

### The Framework for Excellence prepares to launch for much of the learning and skills sector

After extensive trialling and considerable hard work, not least by the LSC, the new performance measure for the learning and skills sector - the [Framework for Excellence](#) prepares for launch in September. It will apply to colleges and work based learning providers in the first instance and to other funded providers by 2010.

It is arguably one of the more critical features of the new demand driven model of adult learning provision envisaged by the [Raising Expectations White Paper](#) earlier this year, "*the Framework for Excellence will underpin self - regulation by informing customer choice*" and the Minister was on hand last week to speed it on its way. "*I urge all colleges and learning providers to take this opportunity to show the quality of the provision they provide.*"

Back in March 2006 when the Framework for Excellence (FFE) was first announced in the FE White Paper of that month - "*we will introduce a single, standard set of key performance indicators covering the broad themes of responsiveness, quality and resources*" - the quality landscape looked pretty different. Ofsted was yet to swallow up the Adult Learning Inspectorate, the Quality Improvement Agency was about to kick off, the LSC was more concerned with funding than the future, the model of self - regulation was a twinkle in the eye and demand - led a new phrase on the lips.

Now just over two years later, the context around the Framework has changed considerably. Ofsted is now the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills; the QIA has morphed into a new sector owned organisation, the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS;) the LSC is beginning its final transition; the Single Voice has emerged and demand - led is all the rage. Things move pretty fast in the learning and skills sector but one thing remains constant - an emphasis on quality.

In many ways, the 'trading market' model of provision presumed under the *Raising Expectations White Paper* makes this emphasis on quality in general and on the Framework in particular even more important. To be able to compete effectively in the market place, providers will need to have a substantive quality profile. "*Funding will flow following choices made by customers and commissioners, and the sector is expected to use the tools available to it to achieve continuous improvement and innovation.*" (para 9.7 *Raising Expectations*.)

The Framework, along with the Training Quality Standard (TQS) for which reciprocal ratings are being developed, and possibly the DWP's own Star Rating system for contracted employment provision, provides one of those tools. In future, the Government envisages employers and individuals turning to the performance rating in the Framework to guide them as to which provider to use



when they want training. As the recent '*Putting the Framework into Practice*' Guide spells out, "*currently there are several quality marks presented to employers and employer - representative bodies, and from research we know that these are not recognised universally. We will replace these with just two: the Training Quality Standard and the Framework for Excellence.*"

Nor does it stop there. Brokers will "*use the Framework scores to support recommendations to employers;*" the LSC, and no doubt its successor system, will "*incorporate the Framework as a minimum quality threshold into the tendered commissioning process for provision to be delivered in 2010/11;*" while Ofsted is revising its handbook for September 2008 to "*include information on how inspectors should begin to take account of performance scores from the Framework.*" Oh and "*the LSC will expect all providers in scope to use the Framework's scores as part of the evidence for self - assessment from the academic year 2008/9.*"

The Framework is thus pretty important so what exactly is it?

In many ways it is not new having been developed out of the LSC's Agenda for Change programme three years ago. Essentially it is "*a comprehensive performance assessment tool*" which works by bringing together and recording provider achievement in three key areas of performance: responsiveness, effectiveness and finance. Each area, or '*dimension*' to use the official term, has two or three performance areas in turn 'measured' by a number of performance indicators. The areas under responsiveness for instance, are responsiveness to learners and responsiveness to employers. Data is collected under each to constitute an overall performance rating - an OPR in the trade.

It is thus a fairly simplified performance measurement system but one that does focus on what are considered to be the "*critical constituents of performance.*"

There was some concern when the Framework was first mooted that it might end up as a rather crude hotel star rating system for providers but it has been 'road tested' with a hundred providers over the last year against six objectives and although some issues were revealed particularly around the collection of data for the responsiveness area, these are now being resolved. As it is there will be further piloting in the coming year by adult and community learning providers and other providers not included in the first year of implementation and a further guide on self - assessment in the autumn. In addition work continues on developing further performance indicators such as retention rates for non - accredited learning and, significantly, a credit success rate indicator to reflect the growing impact of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF.)

A further interesting factor will be the extent to which school sixth forms and other providers offering what will increasingly become commissioned services for 16 - 18 year olds under become subject to a similar system. Some piloting of this is due from September 2009.

Either way the Framework will be extensively evaluated over the next five years, as it attempts to skip around the changes going on all around it.

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