

Integrated quality and enhancement review

Student engagement

Information bulletin 2010



Introduction

This information bulletin provides information about student engagement in quality assurance within colleges of further education. It draws upon information derived through the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA's) Integrated quality enhancement review (IQER). This is the method we use to review higher education courses within further education colleges in England.

The bulletin is intended to inform both college staff and students about emerging good practice in, and the benefits and potential challenges of, student engagement in quality assurance. It presents those features of student engagement identified through IQER as good practice. Additionally, the bulletin presents some case studies of student engagement, from the perspective of the college and the student.

The benefits and challenges of student engagement in our IQER process outlined in this bulletin are based on feedback received by us from students, review teams and colleges as part of our overall evaluation of IQER.

The first stage of the IQER process, Developmental engagement, supports the college's development of the higher education it provides. The second stage, Summative review, makes judgements about the effectiveness of the college's process for managing the student learning experience.

The story so far...

- following its introduction in 2006-07, we carry out IQER in colleges of further education in England
- IQER will complete its cycle in 2011-12
- to date, around 250 Developmental engagements and 140 Summative reviews have been completed in colleges of further education in England
- 105 student written submissions have been provided for Developmental engagements and a further 56 for Summative reviews
- student written submissions are typically prepared through various means including questionnaire surveys, focus groups, meetings with course representatives and using existing information
- between September 2008 and April 2010, around 150 students commented on their experience of IQER through post-review evaluation activities
- more than 1,000 representatives from institutions, awarding bodies, review teams and students have provided feedback on their experience of IQER and the associated benefits for students
- it is estimated that more than 2,500 students have participated in meetings with the review teams through IQER
- through the Developmental engagements and Summative reviews, review teams identified examples of good practice of student engagement in quality assurance, and in the design and development of assessments through student feedback and consultation.

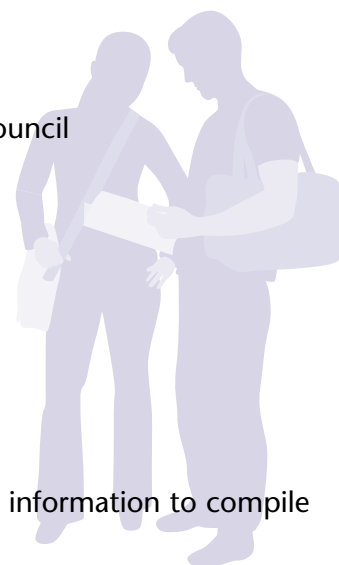
Typical approaches to preparing the student written submission

Information sources include:

- minutes from programme committee/subject forum meetings
- minutes from the college-based Higher Education Student Representative Council
- National Student Survey results
- annual student perception questionnaires
- subject-specific end of module/end of year questionnaires
- programme handbooks
- the college website.

Information gathering methods

In addition to using existing sources of information, other methods of gathering information to compile the student written submission include questionnaires and group discussions.



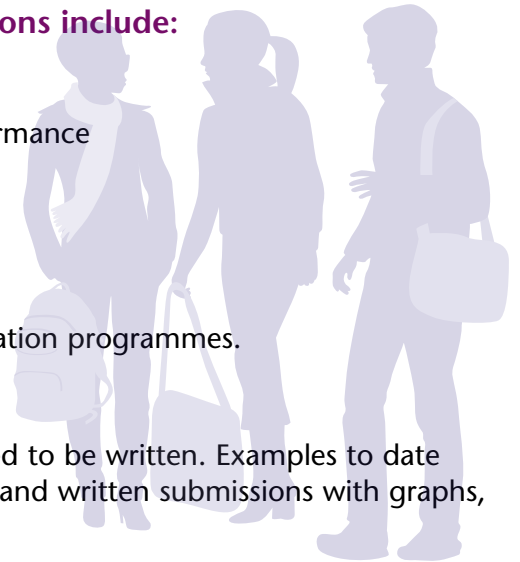
Questionnaires are often used, specifically developed to inform the student written submission. These have the advantage of gaining views from many students and are accessible to those who are based at alternative campuses, study part-time or via distance learning arrangements. Typically, questionnaires are short and contain tick box questions, plus the option to provide additional comments.

Questionnaires are also used in a group setting (at subject or department level, for example), where group perceptions are indicated by participants giving a show of hands in response to questions asked.

In some colleges, a meeting is arranged for a cross-section of students, nominated by their peers, to get together, share views and write the submission.

Typical areas of discussion within student written submissions include:

- information the college publishes about itself
- information provided by the college relating to academic performance
- experience as learners
- feedback from tutors
- learning resources and facilities
- opportunities to participate in the management of higher education programmes.



What a student written submission looks like

There is no set format for a written submission, nor are they required to be written. Examples to date have included DVDs prepared by the students for the review team, and written submissions with graphs, photos and text.

Benefits of student engagement

Many students consider that one of the primary benefits associated with contributing to IQER is that the process gives students a voice. Others identify actions taken by the college in response to matters raised through the student written submission and through student engagement more generally with IQER.

Benefits identified include:

- informing improvements within the college relating to the student experience
- giving students a voice which is listened to
- confirmation that student views are valued in and beyond the college through their engagement with the process and through the opportunity to feed back to an external agency
- an opportunity for students to have their say beyond normal internal processes
- an opportunity for students to develop their ability to analyse the quality of their programmes, creating a sense of ownership of these programmes
- developing an identity as a group of higher education students within a college of further education.

Challenges

Through our evaluation of IQER, students on higher education programmes within colleges of further education identified a series of challenges in getting involved in IQER. These were:

- the lack of time available to commit to preparing a written submission
- difficulties associated with attending meetings and events, particularly for students studying part-time or in employment
- getting a representative sample of respondents
- limited or unavailable resources for securing student input through a written submission.

There was an additional challenge noted by review team members and colleges of securing a student written submission to inform the review.

The college perspective

The following examples were identified as good practice through IQER Summative reviews.

Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education

The review team found that feedback from student representation at faculty and programme meetings, together with student representative involvement in such matters as programme design, enhancement and pre-validation, has resulted in several significant improvements in the student learning experience. To support transparency and an open relationship between staff and students, a Higher Education Funding Council for England-funded student-led project on feedback to students has resulted in a good practice guide *Good Quality Assessment Feedback: An Undergraduate Perspective*.

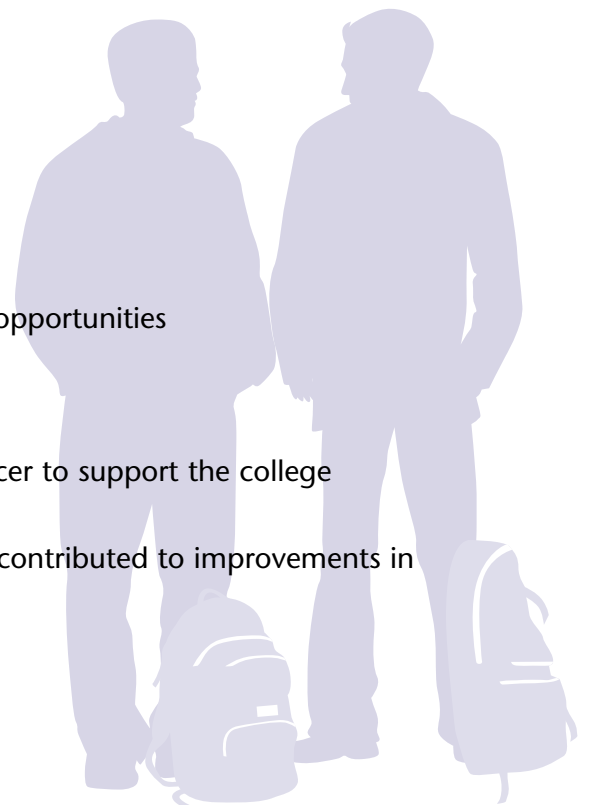
This gave rise to a number of recommendations, including promoting formative and summative assessment feedback which makes clear reference to module learning outcomes and assessment criteria, and that the Institute continues to make the best use of collecting student feedback to ensure that the learner voice is continually heard. The team noted that these recommendations had been acted upon. The student written submission and discussions with students offer further positive evidence of the effectiveness of student support. Students are consistent in their appreciation of the support from individual staff.

North Hertfordshire College

There is a strong student voice within the College. The maintenance and enhancement of teaching and learning is assured through annual monitoring, with student representation on the programme committees that review action plans, and on the Higher Education Committee. The Students' Union organises elections for student representatives, and students report good attendance at programme committees. Small group numbers enable representatives to identify issues for discussion and to report back effectively on actions taken by the College. There is a separate Students' Union building on the Hitchin campus, where space dedicated to higher education students enhances the provision.

Examples of good practice identified through IQER Developmental engagements include:

- student involvement in the development and design of assessment through consultation and feedback
- opportunities for students to provide feedback through module evaluation and student perception questionnaires
- student membership of committees, to include:
 - staff-student consultative committees
 - course and programme team meetings
 - pre-validation boards
 - governing body
- use of findings from the National Student Survey
- focus groups with students used to identify enhancement opportunities
- learner voice strategy within a college
- course representation system
- funding by the university of a university-based student officer to support the college student representative
- actions taken in response to student feedback which have contributed to improvements in the student experience.



Information and guidance

We provide a variety of information for students in preparing for IQER.

Through feedback from the evaluation questionnaires, students who have participated in IQER encourage other students in colleges that are due an IQER to get engaged and use the information resources available on our website.

Students found also that their college and review coordinator had been helpful in providing information about the review and student participation.

For further information about student engagement in IQER please contact:

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IQER and the student written submission
www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/iqer

Mini guide: a brief student guide to IQER
www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/iqer

Case studies: producing the student written submission
www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/IQER/sws

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ISBN 978 1 84979 127 4

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

