How colleges improve

A review of effective practice

The purpose of this review document is to stimulate discussion in the further education sector about how improvement might best be accelerated and barriers to change overcome. The first part illustrates the characteristics of those colleges that improved their performance between first and second cycle Ofsted inspections. This is followed by a review of the factors impeding change in those colleges judged by Ofsted to be satisfactory but not improving in second cycle inspections.

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Introduction

This review has been written to illustrate the characteristics of those further education colleges which improved their performance between first (2001–05) and second cycle (2005–09) Ofsted inspections. In the sample of improving colleges chosen, about a fifth had improved their overall inspection grade from inadequate to good, the remainder from satisfactory or good to outstanding. The document also examines the barriers to change in colleges which have been judged satisfactory but not improving in second cycle inspections. The review is designed to stimulate discussion in the sector about how improvement might best be accelerated and barriers to change overcome.

The review was conducted in the winter of 2007/08. A desk review was undertaken of reports published since 2005 on colleges that have made significant improvement between inspections and those that have remained in the 'satisfactory' category. A sample of 15 colleges, consisting of 12 general further education colleges, two land-based colleges and one sixth form college, were visited by inspectors in January and February 2008. The review contains case studies from the visits to illustrate the observations in the text. Some of these describe work undertaken in one college. In a few instances where similar examples were found in more than one college, these have been combined to avoid repetition, but all elements contained in them were taken from the first-hand evidence obtained during the visits.

The review found aspects of good practice and barriers to change which were present in more than one of the colleges visited. The case studies illustrate how some of them have been applied and the conclusion offers a checklist for colleges to review their approach to improvement.

The following were the key drivers of improvement and barriers to change which the review identified.

Key drivers for improvement

Overall effectiveness

- Clarity of vision and mission based on raising learners' skills and achievement and promoting social inclusiveness.
- Leadership which promotes very high standards in a positive and supportive culture that aspires to excellence.
- Effectively raising the aspirations of all learners and staff on the basis that 'satisfactory is not good enough'.
- Productive partnerships and links with external agencies which benefit students.

Achievement and standards

- Performance at all levels constantly monitored and analysed using accessible and reliable data.

- A thorough, self-critical self-assessment process leading to clear action for improvement.

- Ambitious yet realistic targets set on retention, attendance and pass rates.

Quality of provision

- Clear and sustained focus on continually improving the quality of teaching and learning through a robust and accurate lesson observation programme effectively linked to staff appraisal and performance management.

- Effective staff development informed by lesson observation with a strong focus on updating teachers' skills.

- Excellent and wide-ranging support for learners which meets their individual needs.

- A strong emphasis on monitoring and reviewing the progress of individual learners.

- A focus on improving the experience of individual learners so that they make substantial progress based on their prior attainment.

- Prominence given to the views of learners, with feedback provided to them.

Leadership and management

- Well-informed governors who challenge managers vigorously on the college's performance.

- High priority given to building management capacity at all levels – that is, the skills, knowledge and confidence to undertake successfully roles at all levels in the management structure.

- A curriculum offer which provides opportunities to meet the needs of all learners and is constantly reviewed to ensure its relevance.

Barriers to change

Overall effectiveness

- Scatter-gun approach to initiatives; no coherent strategy; new initiatives or major projects imposed without consultation with staff and with insufficient explanation of rationale and intended outcomes, or how success is to be measured.

- Growth without long-term strategy; no clear mission-based rationale for the curriculum offer; a curriculum which has not been properly reviewed or re-focused.

- Unproductive divisions between service and support staff and teaching staff.

- Insularity, both within the institution and in relation to good practice elsewhere.

- Insufficient identification and celebration of success and achievement; staff not feeling valued and their achievements not recognised.

Achievement and standards

- Poor data and data management.

- Lack of accountability; performance not managed because standards have not been set clearly.

- Ineffective focus on quality improvement arising from quality monitoring; plans for action not time limited; progress reports not required and no one effectively checking on progress.

- Insufficient challenge where there is poor performance; performance management either nonexistent or weak.

Quality of provision

- Insufficient focus on improving teaching and learning, and challenging the attitude that 'satisfactory is good enough'.

- Ineffective lesson observation programme not linked to improvement; weak governance; governors do not challenge senior managers sufficiently; insufficient updating and training of governors to ensure they fulfil the demands of their role.

- No systematic and meaningful process for listening to the views of students.

Leadership and management

- Absence of a self-critical approach and lack of recognition of the need for change by governors and senior managers.

- Ineffective senior management; managers do not reflect enough; insufficient focus on strategic issues at executive meetings.

- Inability of senior managers to make timely decisions and to be decisive without being autocratic.

- Lack of a strategy for developing management capacity and providing managers at all levels with the skills and confidence to be effective in their roles; training provided insufficiently rooted in the skills and strategies needed to deliver the mission.

- Poor communication and lack of staff engagement in decision-making.

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■ The impact of a merger underestimated beforehand and difficulties not dealt with decisively

Recommendations

Governors and managers of colleges should consider using the checklist at the end of this document to review their strategies for improvement.

The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, together with the Learning and Skills Council, should consider what arrangements are needed to better support college governors in the exercise of their duties.

The findings of the review

The further education college sector is improving. Inspection grades over time demonstrate a trajectory of improvement: just over 60% of colleges are now categorised as good or better compared to just under 50% at the end of the 2001–05 cycle. Overall success rates in 2006/07 were 77.7%, compared to 60% in 2000/01. There is a low incidence of college inadequacy which is now close to 4%. Nevertheless, there are still too many colleges which remain only satisfactory and have not demonstrated significantly improved performance over time. The further education White Paper in March 2006 (*Raising skills, improving life chances*) set out the aim of 'raising the bar to ensure that all provision is good or improving'. The findings from this review should help colleges to achieve this.

Every college is different. The context in which a college operates and the history of its development may resemble others but are never identical. Importing a structure that worked at another college without considering the context, culture and challenges facing the home institution is no recipe for success. Likewise, particular initiatives to deliver the curriculum, to support students or to drive improvements are not necessarily transferable between institutions where the context in which they are to be implemented and the personnel responsible for their delivery will not be the same.

Key drivers for improvement

Overall effectiveness

1. A number of common features characterised the colleges that had most successfully brought about consistent and sustainable improvement. These colleges had developed a clear vision and mission based on improving learners' knowledge, skills and achievement and promoting social inclusion. They had thoroughly reviewed their curriculum offer to ensure that it matched the needs and aspirations of learners and the priorities for employers and the local community. The leaders in these colleges were strong, decisive, and often inspirational. They had focused on, and been effective in raising the aspirations of learners while also raising the expectations that staff had of learners. They aspired to excellence, promoting and demanding very high standards in a

positive and supportive culture, and making it clear that satisfactory is not good enough.

2. The leadership teams were supported by trained, effective and empowered curriculum managers. Managers at all levels led by example, engendering an atmosphere of mutual respect among staff and learners alike. There was a unity of purpose throughout the college, which was constantly reinforced through highly effective arrangements where managers shared information with all staff and suspicion of hidden agendas was minimised. The management structure allowed for an appropriate balance of autonomy and accountability with clear lines of communication between all levels of staff. Teachers and managers had the confidence to be self-critical and shared the desire for continuous improvement. Service areas and support staff were valued equally. All staff were involved in a thorough, honest and self-critical self-assessment process which led to clear action plans for improvement. Implementation was linked to clear timescales and progress monitored rigorously.

3. The better colleges had embedded a culture of accountability based on universally understood indicators of success. The systematic use of good, accessible and reliable data to analyse performance at all levels and identify areas for improvement was embedded throughout the organisation. All staff understood what the data told them and how they could be used to measure success. Ambitious and yet realistic targets were set on retention, attendance and pass rates across curriculum areas and there was rigorous monitoring to ensure that these were achieved. High expectations went hand in hand with high rewards. Success was celebrated and rewarded and staff morale was high. Innovation was encouraged and experimentation fostered. There was a 'no blame culture', provided that everything possible had been done to minimise risk and achieve improvement. As a result, all staff had confidence in their leaders.

4. Governors understood their roles and responsibilities. They set a clear strategic direction and vision to which all subscribed. They were well informed and challenged managers vigorously on the college's performance. They set demanding targets and monitored progress against them rigorously. Governors were well served and advised by strong and independent clerks. Productive partnerships and collaborative arrangements which benefited learners had been established with a wide range of external agencies. There were strong links with employers, industry and the local community.

Achievements and standards

5. The first and critical step in driving up achievements and standards for the most improved colleges visited was to ensure that all achievements were being systematically recorded in a timely fashion and that the importance of this was understood and accepted by all. 'Cleaning up' the data and ensuring accurate and systematic reporting and recording on a centralised database was a

common feature in these colleges which immediately paid dividends in terms of improving overall success rates.

> In one college, the leap from good to outstanding was not made entirely through improving teaching and learning – much was due to managing the data more effectively. The data had to be made accurate and a centralised system established, so that teachers had confidence in the data. They had to be made easily accessible to teachers and curriculum managers. Appropriate training was provided to enable staff to become actively engaged in data management and to take responsibility for the accuracy of their own data. Barriers between management information systems staff and teaching staff had to be broken down and a collaborative approach to ensuring the validity of data fostered. When these things were done, and staff began to routinely monitor the data, they quickly understood their value and use in both improving and demonstrating standards.

> In another improved college, managers decided to raise the bar in the pursuit of high performance by agreeing with curriculum managers to benchmark their performance against the 90th percentile rather than the national average. This was far more than a data alignment issue: it was part of a concerted effort to pursue excellence across the institution and communicate clearly to all staff that average performance was not acceptable.

6. Getting the data right and getting staff to take ownership of data and be accountable for them is critical. All teachers and curriculum managers have to understand the data, why they are needed and how to use them. Then analysing and interpreting data becomes an essential tool, enabling staff to be self-critical and accurate in their self-assessment and in measuring progress and improvement. One of the improved colleges in the review built into its database a 'traffic light' system to provide early alerts as issues arose so that managers were made instantly aware of weaknesses and swift remedial action could be taken. Having the opportunity to pick up early warning signs was seen as key. For example, such indicators as a drop in attendance can be a sign that all is not well. Taking swift and decisive action can reverse a trend.

> This college now has a constant focus on outcomes for learners. Progress against targets is formally monitored every week. The college leadership group meets to consider performance against targets using the 'traffic light' system to highlight areas of concern and outcomes are disseminated to the curriculum managers' group. The managers then, through their individual curriculum team meetings, require swift remedial action to be taken. Progress is then monitored rigorously.

7. The most improved colleges had set targets which were clear, measurable and attainable, yet challenging. There were clear links between the institutional targets set in the strategic plan and the targets set at all levels throughout the organisation, including those set in service areas. Monitoring progress against targets was systematic and rigorous and seen as the responsibility of all.

Quality of provision

8. The most improved colleges had fostered an inclusive environment. They had a strong and supportive culture which focused on improving the experience of individual learners so that they made substantial progress based on their prior attainment. Effective procedures for recruitment and induction ensured that learners were on the right course and settled in quickly. Strong emphasis was placed on monitoring and reviewing individual learners' progress. A wide variety of effective support services were well used and valued by learners.

> In this college, the identification of students 'at risk' had long been undertaken. The college decided to extend this practice to include students who displayed any suggestion that they were likely to struggle on the course or be at risk of leaving early. These students were then monitored particularly closely. Managers held regular discussions with them about their progress and any issues identified which might confirm the 'at risk' judgement. This was part of the strategy at this college to develop its version of 'personalising learning', whereby each lecturer adjusts their teaching and learning strategies to accelerate the progress made by each learner. Instead of a class being taught as an entity, the culture has moved to helping a classroom of individuals to learn.

9. Getting the right range of courses is very important in the drive for improvement – it is the first stage in putting the learner and the learner's needs at the centre of all decisions. One of the most common approaches to effecting the changes required in the much improved colleges was to undertake a fundamental review of their curriculum offer. They had recognised that achieving very good retention generally leads to good achievement and therefore rising and sustained success rates. Getting students on the right course in the first place was key to this.

> In one college which had been underperforming, the incoming principal assured himself that the policies, procedures and associated advice to staff for enrolling students were robust and up to date. During the first term it became clear that retention was beginning to emerge as an issue, with students interviewed claiming that they had been enrolled on the wrong course. After an investigation, the principal discovered that whilst the policies and procedures were in place, staff had ignored them. The college had faced a significant financial crisis in previous years and staff knew the governors were considering options of redundancy. The competition from local schools and colleges was intense and entry

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requirements for courses were often waived if it meant recruiting viable numbers. The imperative for staff thus became the recruitment of as many students as possible to fill vacant courses, with a view to securing the staff's own jobs. The principal quickly shifted his approach from ensuring that systems were well defined to holding managers and staff to account for their implementation.

In one highly successful college the focus on underperformance was matched with an equal focus on working towards excellence. Although attention was given to areas which clearly needed to improve so that they moved beyond satisfactory, managers gave as much attention to creating centres of excellence. Those curriculum areas which were already good were encouraged to strive to excel in what they did. As a result the culture of the college was invested with a drive to pursue outstanding goals and not settle for just good. It paid off in the inspection when outstanding grades were awarded across the college.

10. Governors and senior managers from the better colleges observed were often willing to be rigorous in re-aligning the curriculum, and cutting courses.

This college identified and supported poorly performing courses, but if the courses failed to make marked improvements quickly it axed them. It also stopped offering courses which were not considered to be core business. These included courses for adults, low-level information technology in community centres, AS, A2 and GCSE courses which attracted low numbers of students and had variable outcomes, and performing arts, which was provided more effectively elsewhere. The college did not shrink from this even if it meant making redundant staff that could not be redeployed effectively.

11. They also concentrated on getting the learners to enter the curriculum at the right level. For example:

In the same college, managers looked carefully at the levels of achievement of their potential learners, particularly those hoping to take vocational pathways, and decided that more flexible provision was needed below level 1 to provide an appropriate starting point. Also, many young people in their catchment area were leaving school with very little record of any achievement. They wanted to address this priority cohort which might not enter employment, education or training. They introduced a pre level 1 programme called Vocational Plus. As well as providing vocational tasters, the programme had a significant focus on developing sufficient skills in literacy and numeracy to allow learners to gain the basic knowledge to progress and to be able to cope. It is a roll-on roll-off programme and on successful completion learners can fast track through level 1.

12. Making sure that learners have made the right choice before too much time has elapsed is critical for them as individuals and for the success rates of the institution.

> This college introduced a review week for all 16 to 18 learners towards the end of October entitled 'Right Place Right Course'. During this, every student has a one-to-one session with their tutor to formulate their individual learning plan and set their individual targets. In the course of this review their performance so far, and their ability to cope with the work, is rigorously assessed. If it is apparent either that they are not coping well or they are unhappy with the course, then they can change. If their attitude or behaviour has been an issue, they can be asked to leave. In all cases, parents or carers are consulted either by asking them to come into the college to meet with the tutor together with the learner, or they are contacted by phone. For work-based learners, their employers are contacted. These contacts are followed up with a letter outlining what has been agreed.

13. Giving students an entitlement to high-quality and targeted support arrangements was a key strategy at one college which moved to outstanding.

> There were gaps in the college's tutorial system and student support arrangements. The former was not given the same priority as subject lessons and attracted too little attention to make sure all students received the entitlement they were due. College managers revamped the tutorial curriculum, established a common induction arrangement for all students across the college and rigorously quality assured its delivery through observation and monitoring. At the same time they relocated the learning support provision to integrate it in the curriculum delivery by integrating the staff with curriculum teams. Combined with improved target-setting and action-planning the impact on success rates was dramatic.

14. Colleges generally recognise the need to focus energy and resources on improving the quality of teaching and learning, and it is not surprising that this was a feature of the most improved colleges visited. These colleges had a clear and sustained focus on continually improving the quality of teaching and learning, supported by a robust and accurate lesson observation programme linked effectively to staff appraisal and performance management. In all the most improved colleges in the review this was supported by an effective programme of staff development informed by the outcomes of lesson observation. This had a strong focus on the updating of knowledge and current industry practice together with the sharing of best practice. In terms of support services, work was undertaken to ensure all staff appreciated their key role in raising the quality of teaching and learning, and reflected on their contribution to raising standards overall.

> Managers in this college aligned their support service staff with teaching and curriculum teams. They worked hard to break down historical barriers by identifying and valuing the complementary roles of all staff, from premises managers who ensure a good working environment to management information service staff who provide a comprehensive range of learner and other data. They called this process 'constructive alignment'. All staff now accept that they have a role in improving teaching and learning.

15. The first step for many of the colleges visited, particularly those which had been judged by inspection to be inadequate, was to concentrate on eradicating unsatisfactory teaching. This generally involved strengthening the internal lesson observation procedures and ensuring that grading was more accurate. The practice of giving staff notice of the timing of observations was beginning to give way to a policy of observations without prior notice.

16. In the most improved colleges, not only were unsatisfactory lesson observations followed up with support and development opportunities, but a system for building on satisfactory grades had been instituted. Teachers whose lessons were graded satisfactory were offered development opportunities and then re-observed within a reasonable period of time. 'Satisfactory is not good enough' was the mantra. This had to go hand in hand with significant investment in appropriate training and development. Voluntary internal peer observation, as well as formal observation, was often encouraged as part of a continuous professional development entitlement. Many of the colleges had joined with other colleges to undertake peer review to broaden staff horizons and identify and share good practice.

> This college adopted an approach which was expressed by one senior manager as 'in order to achieve good you need to know what good looks like'. Improvement facilitators were recruited from among those staff identified as the best teachers. The role was seen as prestigious and they received many more applicants than positions, so a rigorous selection process was undertaken. The successful candidates were trained as observers. They used any generic areas for development arising from lesson observations to devise and deliver relevant staff development opportunities. They also mentored and supported individuals. One of the most significant drivers for them in bringing about improvement was getting teachers to shift their emphasis from 'teaching' as simply 'imparting knowledge' to ensuring that learning is taking place and encouraging and enabling learners to take much more responsibility for their own learning.

> In the same college, the improvement facilitators recently ran a 'Push to good' staff development session. The intention was to identify and share good practice and also to make concrete suggestions about what could be

improved and how, and what teachers felt they need to be provided with to help them. Attendance was voluntary. Seventy per cent of the teaching staff came and 144 suggestions were offered. These were collated by the teaching facilitators who presented the findings, with recommendations, to senior managers. The principal and senior managers were to respond at the next full staff meeting the following month. They regarded it as essential to involve staff and demonstrate that their views are valued by giving them feedback as quickly and positively as possible.

17. Where improvement in teaching was most marked, lesson observations had become regarded as a means to an end and not an end in themselves. They took place within the context of a search for quality and a commitment to drive up standards. They informed staff development for individuals and for groups of staff.

In one high-performing college the lesson observation system was completely revised. Managers who had conducted it in their own curriculum areas often made unreliable judgements and failed to encourage staff to recognise their role as learning managers rather than classroom performers. The system was revised. A carefully chosen group of 'grade 1' experienced staff from different subject areas were given the responsibility for conducting observations outside their own curriculum area with a clear focus on observing the management of learning in the classroom.

18. Linking lesson observation grades to appraisal, staff development and action planning was also a common theme among the most improved colleges in the review.

In one college where performance had improved from unsatisfactory to good, the first step had been to eradicate unsatisfactory teaching and tackle issues relating to poor achievement. The principal made it clear that unsatisfactory provision would no longer be tolerated. Again, a reward system was used to drive improvement. The principal believed that a problem cannot be solved just by throwing money at it; establishing a common goal that unites and motivates the whole college is more potent.

In the first year of introducing a robust lesson observation programme in this college, anyone whose lesson was graded 1 received £200. This progressed to the college being set four major targets annually by the governing body. These targets were mirrored in the targets set for individual members of staff. If a target was met then the college closed for an extra day of holiday at Christmas. If all four targets were met then the whole college got a full week of extra holiday closure at Christmas. This was deemed to be effective as a mass motivator and the college believed that all members of staff from teachers and support staff to

premises managers and security staff knew exactly what they had to do to make their contribution. The targets set were challenging but attainable and had been achieved consistently over the previous three years. Also, if the challenging targets set for individuals were met they received a modest financial bonus.

19. Focusing on improving teaching has been a necessary strategy but is not in itself sufficient to improve the curriculum experience of learners. In one improved college, the structure of the delivery of the curriculum gave a key focus for improvement.

Managers in this college realised that simply observing lessons provided only a small sample of how learning was delivered. The college reviewed how the curriculum was delivered. Aspects such as the assessment strategy and the structure and sequencing of units or modules were reviewed to make sure that learners received the most appropriate development of their understanding and skills and that their workload was not unevenly distributed. This exercise, which was undertaken across the college, was as successful in improving the quality of the students' experience as had been strategies to observe lessons. To monitor its impact, students' files were regularly checked by curriculum managers and the process gave useful insights into the success of the initiative.

20. Enrichment opportunities have long been recognised as a source of student motivation. The expectation that students will keep turning up to lessons come what may has never been a secure strategy in the post-compulsory sector. The most successful colleges visited increasingly regarded their students as customers to be provided with a rewarding learning experience rather than passive consumers of information in order to achieve a qualification. Outside visits, projects involving local employers, options to extend professional qualifications and volunteering initiatives all featured as examples of such enrichment in successful colleges. In these colleges, students spoke of their experience with enthusiasm. They did not just relate what went on in the classroom, but gave examples from the broader experience of college life, such as meeting other students, having opportunities to share experiences in a safe and supportive environment, and being able to pursue their learning outside the classroom in well-equipped facilities where advice is on hand if needed.

In one college, managers raised the profile of arrangements to obtain feedback from students. In addition to questionnaires, students' representatives met in focus groups in curriculum areas. At college level a student representatives' meeting took place regularly, with either the principal or deputy in attendance. The students got feedback on what had been done and they recognised that in this way their views mattered.

Leadership and management

21. In the most improved colleges visited, ambition was seen as the most important catalyst for change. Instilling this across the whole institution was fundamental, but needed to be done in a way that did not alienate staff, but brought them on board and gave them a sense of ownership and shared aspirations.

> In one college, which was already judged good by Ofsted, the principal was acutely aware of the danger of complacency setting in. He invited his staff to consider collectively whether they were prepared to sign up to a strategy to achieve outstanding status. He gave them the option and was not sure himself what the answer would be, given the energy and hard work that would be needed to achieve such an ambitious goal. The staff agreed, however, and were involved in producing a programme of action which was demanding but had their full commitment. At the next inspection the goal of outstanding was achieved.

> In another college which had improved from satisfactory to outstanding, the principal described as 'seminal' the moment when he asked the whole staff what sort of institution they would deem to be suitable for any member of their family to attend. Unsurprisingly, no one wanted them to attend an unsatisfactory college. A few indicated they would accept satisfactory but the vast majority wanted good or outstanding. He used this public assertion to underpin and foster a shared vision and ambition for the future and involve them in the drive to improve the college.

> This cultural shift was seen as fundamental and essential. The principal also pointed out that it would take time to fully embed and implement the measures which would lead to improved outcomes: about two years to get from satisfactory to consistently good, and then only about a year to reach outstanding. Everything needed to be done in an atmosphere of mutual trust. If staff could demonstrate that they were really doing everything possible to improve their performance and the outcomes for their students, even if it did not all work initially, they would not be penalised. Help and support would be given, including the development opportunities they needed, until the goals were achieved.

22. The same principal saw it as crucial that high expectations should be matched by high rewards for staff.

> The college paid top rates to staff even though it was a relatively small college. Progression through pay scales was automatic if objectives were met. If objectives were exceeded progression was accelerated. All pay awards were consolidated and there were no one-off bonuses. Line managers, who were very important in the process, met with all staff

(including part-time staff) each term to review their progress against objectives. All teaching staff had between four and eight objectives which had to include their lesson observation grading and a tangible objective related to improving their own teaching. Also included was an outcome related to their students' work. It was seen as the manager's responsibility to ensure that staff were performing at the right level. If they were struggling in any way then it was the line manager's responsibility to put in place the development or support required to help them to improve.

23. The college's impressive improvement was achieved without any casualties among the teaching staff. No one left because of issues of competence. In order to improve the performance of the managers, an in-house programme of management development had been introduced using an external consultant.

The college worked on the premise that managers did not necessarily want to be deluged with theory but that what they needed, and wanted, was to be provided with the skills and tools to do their job effectively. The programme was therefore tailored to the needs of the institution and the individuals within it. This, according to the principal, was a critical factor in achieving commitment and success.

Managers were encouraged to adapt management action to the needs of the individual members of staff who reported to them. For example, a teacher who had achieved consistently high lesson observation grades and good outcomes for students would be observed less often than staff performing less well.

The feedback from participants about the strengths and weaknesses of college processes and procedures was used to refine and change them to make them more user-friendly and effective. It was a two-way process and the participants were instrumental in improving management practice in the process. Champions from the first programme were involved in the next and so on until now it is delivered almost entirely without the involvement of the external consultant.

24. If the quality of teaching is a critical success factor in any college, then the arrangements for the appointment, support and development of teachers are central to any quality improvement strategy.

In this college, a team of 10 carefully chosen advanced practitioners were allocated to work with new staff and part-time staff from the day of their appointment. They provided support and advice not just on teaching styles but on settling in to the college and making full use of college systems. They contributed significantly to the extensive provision of staff development at the college, which at all times was focused on the college mission and national priorities.

25. Open and effective two-way communication is also seen as an essential driver in achieving a shared vision and united approach to achieving excellence.

> In this college the principal made it clear that neither he nor senior managers should inhabit 'some sort of strategic ivory tower'. They needed to get out among staff and students to demonstrate a knowledge and understanding about what was going on in the college in order to show that they placed the learner at the centre of all their decisions, just as they were asking teachers to do in their classrooms. In short, they needed to lead the cultural shift by example. The senior managers had to work as a team and not be territorial. They were required to foster open and clear communication. The senior management team cascaded information and decisions from their meetings each Monday morning to the quality and curriculum committee in the afternoon and then the heads of faculty followed this up cascading to all their staff. The principal sent out electronic briefings to all staff to share key messages. Staff were encouraged to respond and/or raise any topic at any time via the principal's open mailbox.

26. In another college a particularly helpful and popular innovation improved two-way communication dramatically.

> The virtual learning environment was used very effectively in this college to undertake live whole college debates and to elicit staff views and reactions on issues raised. The last one debated 'professionalism' live and in real time. Staff could react and make comments and see other people's views and suggestions. The participation rate was excellent. Afterwards the points made were collated and published in the next staff newsletter.

27. A lesson learned at an early stage of one college's ambitious building programme provides a salutary example of the importance of the involvement of staff.

> This college embarked upon a strategy to improve from good to outstanding. Staff had signed up to this strategy, but early on in the pursuit of it a staff survey indicated some negative responses. The principal acted quickly to get to the bottom of staff concerns and discovered that, while the college prided itself on its open communication strategy, staff felt they had not been involved in contributing to the design of the new building, which was planned to incorporate innovative approaches to delivering the curriculum that in turn would depend on staff changing their teaching and learning styles. Fortunately there was time to address the staff's concerns and their suggestions were incorporated into the architects' final design.

28. A dilemma faced by managers is how to move fast enough to address the issues, but at a pace that will ensure improvements are embedded and not

superficial. Having a clear strategy for action and the commitment and energy to pursue it is paramount.

> In two of the most improved colleges visited, a similar approach was adopted by both principals but in very different circumstances. One had been at the college for some years, knew the college and its staff well and was well supported by an able deputy who shared the principal's vision. In the other, the principal came from a different part of the country and knew little about the college apart from the information he had acquired during the application process. He had no deputy in post who could share his ambitions. What they both did, however, was engage the staff from the outset with a commitment to their vision for improvement. Once the commitment was received they acted quickly to identify the key actions to be taken and prioritise them. 'Do the hard things first' became their approach. Managers who could not or would not engage with the vision were sidelined or removed and key individuals were promoted or appointed in their place. In one college all staff changes were completed within two months so that the new team could get on with the agenda for improvement.

29. In all of the most improved colleges visited, the focus on giving managers the skills and knowledge needed to drive improvements was not directed solely at senior level. The vision at the top cannot be delivered unless it is shared by those at the sharp end of delivery. Curriculum and support managers engage most regularly and closely with staff and if they misinterpret the messages from senior managers, or inadvertently construct an alternative message, then no amount of exhortation from the top will change matters.

> In one general further education college with outstanding results, the principal identified a lack of confidence in middle managers to drive forward improvements. Difficult issues were passed up to senior managers to resolve when they should have been tackled lower down. Managers had spent so much time on compliance with college systems that they had lost both the confidence and vision to drive improvement. At the same time, although the college had a relatively flat management structure, managers were beginning to behave like territorial chieftains, retreating into the security of their silos. The college embarked on a strategy to develop the middle managers as individuals and as a corporate team. On one of the rare occasions when the college employed an outside consultant, a bespoke programme of management development was devised and delivered. At its heart was a series of projects which involved middle managers working together to problem-solve issues facing the college and areas for improvement. The change in attitude and behaviour was marked and the college now has a fully functioning middle management team where sharing of practice is common and individuals feel empowered to contribute with confidence to policy-making and problem-solving.

30. There are times when the structure of management in a college needs to be changed to better fit the demands placed upon it or to reshape arrangements to deliver the curriculum. No one management structure fits all, although simple and clear structures where staff understand their role and who is responsible for what have the advantage over more complex matrix structures. A feature of the most improved colleges is the focus on behaviour and not structure. Moving staff into different roles can provide some re-focus, but if their attitudes remain the same, there is not likely to be dramatic change.

> In one improved college, the principal recognised the diverse management styles of his management team. Each individual had considerable skills but a different style, which on occasion led to tension within the team. The principal used this tension to play to their strengths. He dismissed the alternative strategy of moulding his management team into clones of himself in the interests of consistency of approach. The managers themselves felt empowered to manage their staff in their own way as long as they recognised and delivered the shared vision which the principal has invited the college to sign up to.

31. There are few things which irritate teaching staff more than unnecessary bureaucracy. As quality assurance arrangements have developed over the years, colleges have responded with widely differing approaches to external accountability. Although self-assessment is now embedded in most colleges, the procedures, including arrangements for standardisation and verification, vary enormously. In the best colleges, managers have sought to minimise the burden on staff through streamlining documentation; dovetailing course reviews, self-assessment and action planning; and making data easily accessible.

> In two of the outstanding colleges visited, a concerted effort had been made to slim down administrative demands on staff. In one, middle managers and their staff had been involved in the redesign of key documentation, and now had a much better understanding of and commitment to the processes involved. In the second college, procedures had been simplified so that each manager had one plan to work to, no more than two pages long, which was informed by self-assessment. Elaborate and lengthy documentation had been discarded in the process and both managers and staff engaged more productively with the requirements.

32. In recent years leadership and management inspection has focused very firmly on college staff. However, a common characteristic of the most improved colleges visited was the crucial role and influence of an effective governing body in raising achievement and standards. These colleges recognise that governors need to supply high-level, constructive challenges, not only in

relation to strategic direction and mission, but aimed at assuring achievements and standards, and the quality of provision.

> In this college, in order to ensure that all governors offered the constructive challenge required of them the committee structure was dismantled, apart from those committees which are required under the Instruments and Articles. It was decided that having lots of committees served to disempower some members as too many items only came to the full board for approval and debate was minimal. They streamlined the agendas and papers going to the full board but reinstated its role as the decision-making body. For the same reason the role of link governors associated with curriculum areas was abolished as it was decided they could become too attached to their area, sometimes giving the full board a false sense of security. The college has avoided the board membership becoming too static and entrenched by introducing a maximum service of two four-year terms for all governors.

Barriers to change

Overall effectiveness

33. Just as there is no single recipe for success so there is no one reason why colleges underperform. The review identified a number of common features of the colleges which made too little progress between inspections and appear to be underperforming. The importance of each of these features varies between institutions but the majority of them are present in some form or other in all the underperforming colleges reviewed. To some extent they are the flip side of the factors which have influenced the most improved colleges but their impact is often shrouded by managers' rationalisations of hurdles others have managed to overcome.

34. Ineffective governance and management lay at the root of many of the weaknesses seen in the underperforming colleges. The relationship between the board of governors and the college management is key to improving performance. In the underperforming colleges visited this relationship was often supportive without being challenging and rigorous. Governors demonstrated an interest in the financial position of the college but paid less attention to students' success and the quality of the curriculum. The information presented by senior managers was not questioned effectively.

35. The self-critical culture that was highly developed in the successful colleges visited was often absent in the underperforming colleges. The validity of inspection judgements was denied and the myth of success was perpetuated without any external verification. Actions which needed to be taken were postponed as governors and/or managers rationalised away the issues in order to avoid taking difficult decisions. Occasionally, action was delayed because of the arrival of a new principal who had to spend time and energy understanding

the reasons behind underperformance and securing the appointment of new key managers to help drive a programme of improvement. Where the chair of governors is in denial, the principal is isolated and has few sources of support outside the college.

36. The management ethos in the college is critical to success. Too often in the underperforming colleges, executive management was autocratic and there was insufficient focus at senior management meetings on strategic issues. Senior managers did not reflect enough or function as a team, utilising the complementary skills of all to their full potential. There was insufficient focus on defining and implementing a clear strategy for the curriculum. Clear standards and expectations were not set and performance was not managed. There was no culture, understanding or acceptance of accountability – these managers were not constructively self-critical and frequently looked for something or someone to blame when things went wrong or improvements were not forthcoming. In these colleges, the views of middle managers were not sought or valued, and if proffered were disregarded. Staff did not feel valued and lost motivation. Achievement and success were not celebrated and rewarded.

37. There is a clear distinction between strong leadership and what may be perceived as bullying; between a blame culture and a healthy accountability framework; between empowerment of managers and allowing them a free reign to pursue their own agendas; between consulting staff and simply informing them. Performance management is sometimes perceived to be either punitive or a bureaucratic process which inadequately trained or ineffective middle managers implement without producing any positive benefits. Quality assurance and self-assessment likewise generate a mound of paperwork that blocks out the core purpose of pursuing a self-critical culture. Action plans abound but action is rare. Staff become cynical and demoralised, and superficial compliance, justification of inertia and 'satisfactory is OK' become features of the culture. In these underperforming colleges the attitude is not uncommon that quality begins and ends at home. They become insular and either do not seek advice from good practice elsewhere or are unaware that it exists. Too few staff visit other colleges and industry to update and gain ideas and an appreciation of current practice. There is little identification and sharing of good practice within the college. Too few people join the college with recent experience elsewhere to bring new ideas and perspectives: the inability to attract and recruit high-quality staff in one or more specialist areas was cited as a major issue in just over half of the colleges visited.

38. With few exceptions, a common feature of management in the underperforming colleges was the lack of attention paid to the crucial role of middle managers, who were not trained effectively or provided with development opportunities to give them the skills and confidence they needed. Often, no overall strategy and direction had been developed in partnership with all staff to take the college forward. Whatever strategy there was had been

devised in isolation by senior managers and handed down, rather than communicated effectively so that everyone signed up to it.

39. Sometimes staff were given new roles without a clear remit. Some were reluctant to manage the staff they worked closely with and be responsible for the quality of provision, taking the difficult measures necessary to improve the provision. Often, too many initiatives were imposed at once or were imposed one after another without consultation with staff and with no coherent strategy being apparent. There was a continuing divide between support staff and teaching staff and no recognition of the mutual dependence of roles and the relative importance of all.

40. When colleges go through periods of major change, there is a need to define and delegate roles and responsibilities to ensure there is still a focus on the core business of the college. In one of the colleges visited, the full impact of a merger between a college previously judged to be good and an unsatisfactory college had not been anticipated sufficiently. The challenges had been underestimated and difficulties had not been dealt with decisively. When another college was undertaking a major new build project, both governors' and managers' time and attention was deflected to the detriment of learners' success.

41. Two colleges that had expanded their remit into new areas had not ensured that the mix of staff skills and experience matched the requirements of the new provision and that existing staff understood the new demands expected of them, or that the resources required to deliver the new provision were fit for purpose. The curriculum had been configured more by inertia or staff preferences than by a rigorous review of what programmes might best serve the needs of the locality and/or meet national priorities. The resources and energy of managers were excessively focused on observing teaching and learning, on the misguided assumption that the observation itself would lead to improvement. The analysis of underperformance, the provision of remedies, the raising of aspirations to achieve success and the monitoring and celebration of success had not been joined together.

Achievements and standards

42. Where the colleges visited had failed to make improvements, several aspects of data featured in barriers to improvement. Key to getting staff to sign up to the need to improve is an accurate understanding of the current position. Where data are unreliable because of inefficiencies in gathering accurate information, staff often keep their own and use them to challenge any conclusions which managers or external commentators might derive from them.

> In this underperforming sixth form college, staff and governors were unable to make an accurate judgement on the performance of the institution. The inaccuracy of the data was compounded by a

misconception developed over time that the college was performing much better than it really was. There had developed a culture of regarding college data as unreliable so the myth of good performance was perpetuated and could not effectively be challenged by the new managers until the data were 'cleansed' and managers and staff trained to interpret them.

43. A common theme in the underperforming colleges visited which has an impact on students' success was the use of national averages to measure performance. Since their introduction, national benchmarks published by the Learning and Skills Council have been a useful tool, enabling colleges to measure their performance against other institutions in the sector. However, their use has too often, albeit inadvertently, reinforced the view that compliance with average performance is somehow a legitimate aspiration. A whole vocabulary of justification for satisfactory performance has built up around national averages.

In one underperforming general further education college, managers had not only routinely used national averages to measure performance but had used them to set targets for improvement where performance fell below the benchmark. Senior managers had accepted this approach and never questioned why, if the reasons for underperformance had been correctly analysed, challenging targets for achievement to exceed national averages should not have been set.

In a college originally judged good by inspection prior to the introduction of the Learning and Skills Council benchmarks, managers at all levels measured their performance against locally generated benchmarks, comparing similar colleges in similar localities, rather than national benchmarks. As a result, they considerably overestimated their own performance. This practice continued, with staff focusing on pass rates and not success rates. When, at a subsequent inspection, this issue was highlighted, and inspection grades fell from those awarded previously, they found the judgements difficult to accept. The college appealed the grades but this was not successful. Some actions have been taken to try to improve standards, for example removing provision shown to be performing poorly: 'We have done the negative things. We had to get rid of provision to change the data.' However, the acceptance of the reality of the situation and the instigation of a real strategic drive to change the culture and strive vigorously for improvement have yet to take place throughout the institution.

Quality of provision

44. Changing the mix of the curriculum without changing the capacity to deliver is a common barrier to change. The further education sector has a number of high performing colleges which have successfully diversified to cater for young

learners, adults and the business community. However, where the mission is changed without the corresponding staff skills, student support arrangements and curriculum experience, then not only do the new students fail to receive a good enough experience but the impact on existing students is negative.

> In one underperforming sixth form college, the decision was taken to diversify its provision to cater for adults. However, an inherited financial deficit meant that the resources to support diversification were not available. Staff were committed to catering for the 16 to 19 age group and were not as familiar with the needs of adult learners as they should have been. Staff development had not prepared teachers for the different demands of adults and too little thought had been given to managing an all ages institution.

> A similar but reverse situation occurred in a small general further education college which diversified to cater for 16–19-year-olds. The staff had taught mature students for some years and the culture of the institution assumed an adult focus. Little attention had been paid to what needed to be done to adopt the features of successful colleges which cater for younger learners. Assumptions made by staff that young school-leavers could behave with the maturity of adults were proved false and the culture of the institution was not then adapted to cater for both.

45. The high public profile of level 3 qualifications, especially GCE A levels, has led colleges too often to retain a curriculum mix which is not appropriate for the students they recruit. Colleges which deliver successful outcomes for learners make sure that they are provided with the most appropriate qualifications for those they recruit but, equally importantly, also offer the advice and guidance needed to secure the most appropriate match of learners to courses.

> In one underperforming general further education college, the GCE A level offer continued to attract healthy numbers. The results were not good and parents and students were never provided with sufficient advice on alternatives which might be more suitable. As a consequence, staff who enjoyed teaching their subject at this level continued to recruit school-leavers even though their chances of success were variable. The attempt by the principal to review the GCE A level provision was not helped by the fact that results in school sixth forms locally were even worse. There had been no strategic steer on provision on the part of the Learning and Skills Council or local authority.

> In one underperforming sixth form college, some of the challenges of managing multi-site institutions were highlighted. Curriculum options were arranged so that students and staff had to travel some distance between sites during the week. Little thought had been given to how the timetable

could be reconfigured to minimise travelling and reduce down-time. Only when student punctuality and retention issues were analysed and multi-site travel appeared as a significant factor was action taken to improve matters. Management arrangements originally assumed that managers at one site could remotely manage the other without having a significant presence there. Problems started to arise and students compared their curriculum experience at one site unfavourably with that of their peers at the other. The college has now instigated more robust curriculum management which is campus-specific at both sites.

46. Student support is usually a strong feature of good colleges but in underperforming colleges it is often assumed to be better than it really is. The spotlight on teaching and learning is not routinely focused on the tutorial and support arrangements underpinning individual student progress.

In one underperforming college, there had been some resistance from staff to the lesson observation system. Staff, through their union representatives, had blocked the observation of the tutorial system and managers had not effectively challenged them, even though the college had identified student support as a key item on its improvement agenda. The judgements the college made in its self-assessment were therefore not adequately supported and there were delays in addressing issues of inconsistency in support arrangements. The situation had been compounded by the absence of a senior manager with clear responsibility for student support functions.

In another college, after a second 'satisfactory' inspection there was an initial sense of relief and 'taking the foot off the pedal'. Then, senior managers imposed a number of initiatives without consultation or explanation. One was the introduction of monthly curriculum audits to be undertaken by members of the senior management team. This was not well received by staff, who saw it as an unnecessary imposition. Resistance was further exacerbated when the 'auditors' often did not turn up. When they did undertake this work, the staff received either no feedback or only negative comments. Another initiative was to 'strengthen' the programme of lesson observations. Over 60 curriculum leaders were trained as observers but across such a large number of lessons, judgements were inconsistent. Issues were not followed up effectively and no link was made between the results of observations and the design and provision of staff development. Middle managers identified the problems and reported them to senior managers but they were not listened to or supported.

47. In underperforming and inadequate colleges, it is not unusual for there to be at least one curriculum area which is good. Invariably, however, there is too little effort by key curriculum managers to identify good practice both inside and outside the institution and to share it with staff. Further, as managers concentrate their efforts on the underperforming areas, managers in the good provision feel neglected as resources are prioritised to make improvements elsewhere. Where a culture of insularity has been allowed to develop in an underperforming college, change is made even more difficult. As one principal commented, 'My staff do not know what "good" looks like so how can they aspire to it?'

48. Inherited financial difficulties can limit the flexibility of managers to provide the resources needed to deliver a high quality curriculum. The assumption that mergers will of themselves resolve tough issues in a college is not always supported by experience.

> This underperforming college had been created as a result of a merger between two colleges several miles apart. Following the merger the college had experienced severe financial difficulties for several years. The lack of information and communication technology facilities to support learning, the poor condition of some of the accommodation and the general shortage of resources in the classrooms were compounded by the slow pace with which governors and senior managers addressed the underperformance of a key manager in property and estates. As a result, staff were frustrated at the lack of resources to support learning and the quality of teaching and learning clearly suffered.

Leadership and management

49. If leadership is key to the quality improvement of a college, then governance is also central to its success. Governing bodies in most colleges take pride in the performance of the college, but too often in underperforming colleges board members do not fully understand how performance is measured and whether that pride is justified. They accept too readily the presentation of information from senior managers without being able to question it adequately.

50. Where loyal and committed governors have acquired a more favourable impression of the college than its actual performance warrants, new managers trying to drive an improvement agenda will have to spend time convincing them that their support to make the changes is crucial. The impetus for change and improvement has to be accepted by the governing body. They, and the principal, have to lead by example and be key instigators of strategies for change. If they remain in denial then the status quo will prevail.

51. Sometimes governors are ineffective because they have served for too long and had insufficient training to keep them up to date with the demands of their role. Whereas in the highly successful colleges principals had persuaded their boards

to seek high-profile and challenging members to fill vacancies, in the underperforming colleges principals had either inherited or been content with dedicated and well-meaning but less effective members.

> In one underperforming college, the incoming principal estimated that two out of three governors were effectively inactive and contributed little to decision-making. The clerk and the chair dominated proceedings and even tried to exclude the principal from attendance at key discussions of the full board – discussions where the principal had no conflicts of interest and could constructively contribute to the debate. Little or no strategic thought was undertaken by the governors – the quick fix was preferred. Their unduly rosy picture of college performance, acquired under the principal's predecessor, proved a barrier to ensuring the improvement agenda was accepted in the college. Hence the principal received little or no backing for the hard decisions needed to take the college forward.

52. Management culture and style can have a profound effect on the way staff engage with change. A fine balance needs to be struck between leadership and empowerment. If handled badly, leadership can become aggressive with little empowerment provided to staff. The focus on accountability, if badly managed, creates a culture of fear which serves only to provide the incentive to staff to cover up their mistakes and engage in overstating their achievements.

> In one underperforming college, several features of management contributed to a blame culture. Lesson observations were conducted as judgemental exercises with no provision of support to improve. Action plans were drawn up but never followed through or monitored to identify progress. Change was perceived as a threat, as it was never acceptable for staff to admit that they might not know what was expected of them. Staff in underperforming areas focused on hiding or explaining away the underperformance rather than seeking to address it. Where there were high-performing areas there was no incentive to share good practice or to assist others in improving their own performance. It was too risky to innovate – thus reinforcing the 'satisfactory is OK' culture which prevailed.

53. The key role of middle managers is well exemplified in this underperforming sixth form college. The assumption that senior management, however pro-active, can effect change on their own is well illustrated.

> Curriculum managers at this college had a well-entrenched perception of their role as that of administering timetables, arranging cover and distributing the consumables budget. When the new principal introduced changes they were often reinterpreted by some curriculum managers as impositions from above and not as part of an agenda for which they had responsibility. Those of their peers who were behind the changes were frustrated at the lack of decisiveness of the senior managers in dealing with the barriers. When new systems were introduced in particular lesson

observations, their usefulness was limited by the approach adopted by several curriculum managers who paid lip service to the process. The result was an over-optimistic profile of the quality of teaching at the college which was exposed when the college was inspected by Ofsted. Since then, action has been taken to train and develop these key managers. Some have left but those that remain are now fully engaged with the improvement agenda. Quality assurance has now begun to change in the minds of staff from something done to them to something they own.

In another college, separate elements of the quality assurance arrangements were treated as stand-alone activities to be undertaken – usually reluctantly. Lesson observations were intrusions into the usual routine. They might result in cursory mentions of staff development needs but led to nothing. Course reviews and self-assessment made judgements about the quality of teaching but were not informed at the curriculum level by the outcomes of lesson observations. Action plans were drawn up but never seriously monitored and no review of progress was made in the following year's self-assessment. This, combined with an over-inflated view among staff and governors of the quality of provision, meant that little effectively improved.

54. The role of external inspection and the Common Inspection Framework are both cited as valuable contributors to helping colleges improve. The opportunity for an external check on quality which is independent of the institution helps to inform the college's improvement strategy and acts as a check on the effectiveness of the college's self-assessment processes. Occasionally, however, inspection does not help in the way managers might have hoped, such as where inspectors award a grade higher than college managers consider the curriculum area deserves. In one underperforming college, progress in addressing weaknesses in a key subject area was inhibited because curriculum area managers used the Ofsted grade to defend performance when they were reluctant to act on the areas that senior managers considered needed improvement.

55. The consequence of some colleges, post incorporation, continuing with the practice of allocating to teaching staff responsibilities for which they were not professionally trained is well illustrated in the following example:

This college had no professionally trained human resources manager, having decided to maintain responsibility for personnel matters with an existing academic manager. The college performance review system was not well designed and managers were not adequately trained to implement it, nor was the process properly monitored. The new principal tried to act on areas of underperformance but was met at each stage with a lack of professional advice and a lack of confidence on the part of key

> managers to take the action necessary. As a consequence, underperforming managers and staff were given too much leeway over too long a period to improve, resulting in a loss of momentum and mixed messages being given to staff on the urgency of action. The college now has in place a professional human resources team and progress to eliminate underperformance has accelerated.

56. The demands on management time need to be carefully prioritised. External networking and engagement with stakeholders are key roles of managers. However, the consequences of striking the wrong balance between internal management and external involvement can be significant.

> A general further education college in a city which prided itself on its extensive networks between institutions in the city had established myriad committees, action teams and networks for managers to engage in. Too much of their time was taken up outside the college, with the result that the day to day management of their roles in the college suffered and the quality of their curriculum areas and compliance with college systems suffered. There was also an implicit assumption that within the local network good practice might be identified and spread. The assumption that the network of colleges they happened to be involved with could be the main source of good practice was never tested, as little time or energy was left to explore good practice elsewhere.

Conclusion

57. There is no single strategy for moving a college from satisfactory to good or from good to outstanding. The background, context and recent history of the institution will vary, as will the current culture, curriculum and student profile. However, this review suggests that there exist common features which have assisted successful strategies in the colleges reviewed. These may vary with the context and the personalities leading the institution, but it does seem likely that in some form or other, all the features need to be present as part of a successful strategy for rapid improvement.

58. Governors and managers should review which, if any, of the following are required in their institution and take action accordingly.

Overall effectiveness

- Clarify the mission and the vision and the values required for delivery. Make sure they are understood by staff and key stakeholders.

- Involve the staff in shaping strategies to deliver the mission. Deal with their apprehensions, respond to their concerns and empower them to contribute.

- Communicate and listen. Share all information with staff and keep no hidden agendas.

- Make sure the resources, including staff, match the delivery of the mission. If not, retrain or reconfigure.

- Be impatient for success. Do the hard things first and make the impatience infectious.

- Build trust, be visible – live the vision and values with integrity.

- Set high expectations and invite staff to do the same for themselves and their students. Make 'satisfactory is not good enough' your and their mantra.
- Celebrate success – of individuals, teams and the institution as a whole.

Achievement and standards

- Encourage teams to pursue excellence and eliminate any tendency to aspire to be average by simply focusing on eliminating weaknesses.

- Get the data right and make sure governors, managers and staff can interpret them.

- Review, revisit and review again. Keep systems smart and slim. Reduce unnecessary administrative procedures. Involve staff and middle managers in leading system reviews.

- Target and prioritise. Identify key barriers and drill down to investigate the issues.

Quality of provision

- Get the curriculum offer right to match the needs of your students.

- Get the advice right at entry. Make sure parents, potential students and employers are well informed. Give students options to succeed, not just options to study.

- Make sure you thoroughly analyse the individual needs of students, not just at entry but throughout their course. Broaden your definition of students at risk; target them with support and monitor their progress closely.

- Encourage innovation. Regard compliance as a necessary but not sufficient goal of success. Make sure that systems contribute to success and do not demand compliance for their own sake. At the same time encourage innovation and initiative.

- Build a culture of critical self-review. Make sure quality assurance is also quality improvement. Make self-assessment, action planning, support and target-setting a seamless process. Avoid diagnosis without prescription.
- Focus on improving the students' experience in the round. Do not focus exclusively on teaching and learning. Review curriculum structure and delivery. Make sure students can enjoy as well as achieve.

Leadership and management

- Build informed governance. Tackle underperforming governance. Train governors to be challenging, not just supportive, and to play their part in an informed way in shaping the mission.
- Train and retrain your middle managers, as individuals and as a team. Empower them to drive the mission and to have confidence in their roles.