

**Bureaucracy Reduction Group
Framework for Excellence
Scrutiny Report
September 2007.**

Introduction

- Framework for Excellence is a single set of standard performance indicators for all colleges and training providers covering responsiveness, effectiveness and finance. Seven key performance indicators will produce a single overall performance rating on a balanced scorecard.
- Framework for Excellence is still at an early stage of development (between policy and implementation). A Project Brief has been agreed, a Sponsoring Board established and an initial pilot has begun with 100 colleges and training providers.
- The Senior Responsible Officer is Henry Ball, LSC Regional Director for the South East region.
- The new Framework approach is supported by the DIUS, LSC, Ofsted, and QIA. They are currently agreeing the business case for the project. The accountable Department is DIUS; DIUS and the DCSF have endorsed the plans for the pilot.
- The Framework aims to improve learner and employer choice, provider quality, commissioning and intervention decisions through a recognised and consistent approach to performance assessment.
- The indicators will use performance information any good or outstanding provider would want for its own business needs. The Framework is designed to simplify performance and quality assessment and support a performance management system which will reduce bureaucracy.

Increase/Decrease in Bureaucracy

- New requirement on colleges and training providers to adopt a set of core questions within their learner survey
- A short, new employer survey will be introduced
- It will be important that provider burden is evaluated as part of the pilots.
- Potential long term opportunity to rationalise performance management approaches across a wider range of funders and regulators e.g. Jobcentre Plus, HEFC, QCA, Sector Skills Councils.

Other reductions possible in principle if school sector uses common system.

Frontline Impact

- Initial assessment of impact only discussed with College managers to date.
- Resources already agreed for Communications, Workforce Development and Staff support/ development.
- Enables a move towards more self regulation and clearer accountabilities.
- New Information Authority has considered the information implications of the Framework.

Outcomes Predicted

- Better choice and decision making for learners and employers
- Consistent approach to holding publicly funded providers to account by Government and its agencies
- Improved provider quality
- Closer match between the learning offered and learner and employer needs/requirements
- Greater investment by employers and learners in education and training
- Simplification of performance and quality assessment

Issues raised by the BRG

- Will Colleges run it as a new, additional system?

Key issue to resolve in the next stage of design (Action 1)

- *What is the impact on the front line teaching staff?*

Needs to be captured in next stage (Action 2)

- Front line involvement in the design?

No direct front line involvement to date. Current plan is only to communicate (Action 2)

- Will the evaluation measure bureaucracy reduction, including whether employers and learners take advantage of the new framework?

Yes. This is a key focus of a planned independent evaluation of the Framework. The project team does not favour systems of measurement which might themselves increase bureaucracy (action 3)

- Is there a risk that learners and employers will not take advantage of this new framework and that there is a risk of duplication e.g. with the new Standard/other measures?

Significant issue of Government, its agencies, providers, employers and learners trusting the framework (action 4)

- How will the existing LSC/Provider systems be used?

The response was "helpful" with confirmation that the Framework will mainly draw off existing information but there will be some additional system requirements (action 5)

- Impact on Learner surveys by providers?

Providers will continue their surveys, but they will be required to introduce a small set of core questions and report the results. However, potential increased administrative burden for small providers (action 6)

- Impact on funding?

Machinery of Government changes makes the landscape unclear at the moment

Framework is intended to support both commissioning decisions and demand led funding (action 7)

- How will the Framework assist Self assessment?

Standard cross provider benchmarking information should inform self assessment (action 8)

- What does the Project Plan say about bureaucracy?

The current business case does not quantify benefits in respect of reduced bureaucracy. This needs to be addressed (action 9)

- When should BRG review the Framework again given there were a number of unanswered questions?

May 2008 when information from the pilots will be available.

BRG RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE ACTION

1. The Framework for Excellence programme board is requested to specifically ensure that the implementation plan does not agree **any** additional systems without reducing existing systems. This topic will be fully reassessed as part of the pilot stage.
2. The programme board should establish without delay a front line focus group to aid the design evaluation and implementation impacts for front line bureaucracy.
3. The programme board should work with DIUS to consider whether implementation of the SCM (Standard Cost Model) of measurement would give stronger evidence of impact on bureaucracy.[DN what is this?]
4. Learner and employer focus groups should be established to measure the impacts and confirm the benefits expected for them.
5. Impact measurement proposals in respect of the claimed benefits should be established as a matter of urgency. A more detailed response should be submitted in writing within 3 months.
6. The response did not fully address the risk of increased bureaucracy from new learner survey requirements, especially for smaller providers and further scrutiny will be undertaken at the next stage.
7. The Machinery of Government changes bring a risk of increased bureaucracy in respect of funding systems. This will be an item BRG will want to review, as future plans become clear.
8. The BRG welcomes the introduction of a degree of discipline, coherence and consistency in self assessment and will await fuller details from pilot stage.
9. The project plan should be reviewed to produce actions in support of the aim to reduce bureaucracy.
10. BRG will undertake a further scrutiny of the Framework in May 2008.

