

Good Practice

in Teaching
and Learning



The Northern College
for Residential Adult Education



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for Residential Adult Education**

Guide to Good Practice in Teaching and Learning

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NORTHERN COLLEGE

GUIDE TO GOOD PRACTICE IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

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Section

1

GUIDE TO GOOD PRACTICE IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

1. Introduction: The Purpose of the Guide

- 1.1 This *Guide to Good Practice in Teaching and Learning* is meant primarily for staff at the Northern College. It is concerned with how all those involved in supporting or promoting student learning can explore, question, develop and enhance practice. It is informed by good practice in the process of teaching and learning in adult education, drawing upon the accumulated experience of staff and upon research findings.
- 1.2 The *Guide* seeks consistency with the College's *Strategic Plan*. In briefly contextualising the work of the College within national, regional and local strategies of widening participation and lifelong learning, it identifies the College's educational priorities and target groups, and relates these to its assumptions, values and philosophical positions on pedagogy. It attempts to address, in a coherent and practical way, some important learning issues identified within these broader strategies through the application of the experience and resources that the College currently has available.
- 1.3 Having done this, the *Guide* goes on to examine the nature and range of the College's students, practice relating to outreach and recruitment, student motivation and needs, the curriculum offer, course design and planning, session planning, teaching methods, adult learning, the place of key skills teaching in the curriculum, the use of learning aids and resources, the provision of guidance and support to students, the assessment of student achievement, and the evaluation of these various areas of work.
- 1.4 The various activities involved in the process of teaching and learning may not be clear and explicit, especially to intending or new staff. Even though the induction process for those coming to work at the College for the first time is rigorous, this process can be prolonged and the culture shift difficult to manage. The *Guide* is meant not just to help intending or new staff relate to the way in which the College works but also to reinforce good practice with established staff and to help practitioners in other institutions deal with some of the issues raised by the agenda of widening participation and lifelong learning.
- 1.5 In the initial sections of the *Guide* there is a deliberate inclusion of some background information. This is to ensure that all its users, and particularly those who are just beginning their jobs, have a sufficiently well-informed view of the College's origins, growth and role.

Section 2

2. Lifelong Learning and the Northern College

- 2.1 The Northern College is a *residential* adult education college that has worked for many years in the area of widening participation and lifelong learning. It is one of six long-term residential colleges in England and offers full-time and part-time programmes of study to help fulfil its mission – namely:
- to provide high quality learning experiences for adults who have had little or no opportunity for education and training
 - to do this in support of lifelong learning, widening participation, partnerships and community regeneration
 - to offer facilities for study in a residential learning environment, and, where appropriate, in a community setting or through distance learning, in order to assist individuals, groups, organisations and communities to realise their full potential
- 2.2 ‘Residence’ helps to create a rich, stimulating and deeply supportive learning community. Staff and students, as well as the provision of library, IT and other educational facilities, all contribute to creating such a community and to fostering a culture of serious intellectual work, debate and scholarship.
- 2.3 More specifically, residence gives adult learners opportunities to:
- experience enormous and often accelerated progress in confidence, ability and achievement
 - overcome the severe material, social, psychological and educational deprivations that might be otherwise suffered
 - define learning or life-centred goals or purposes
 - develop skills in respect of team or group work, such as an *esprit de corps*, a common identity, leadership roles and conflict resolution strategies
 - listen to others, share experiences, debate issues and generally build social and interpersonal skills
 - establish a whole way of working, studying and relating to society – in short, a common culture
- 2.4 Individuals and groups can, in circumstances of residence, put aside for short or long periods of study the normal distractions of everyday life (e.g. domestic and family obligations) and thus benefit from focussed and concentrated study. But much more than this, they can benefit from the links that residential adult education promotes with citizenship and participation in society.

Learner Comments

"The residential aspect of the College was crucial to my success. It meant that I could concentrate on my studies outside of class, and living and working in a learning community fostered my enthusiasm for learning. The social life was pretty good too!"

"I've had time to focus on just myself for a change, and I've had fun while learning in a relaxed, supportive and encouraging residential environment."

"By having the everyday stresses of life, such as cooking, cleaning, and getting kids off to school, removed, I was able to focus my attention completely on my studies. Besides, the incredible surroundings of the College really added tremendous value to my residential learning experience."

"As a residential student, I came to know other members of the group better, to meet people from all over the country and to share past experiences with them. All this helped to foster confidence building, opportunity awareness raising and a genuine sense of belonging."

- 2.4 Like the other residential adult colleges in England, the College offers a full-time programme of learning. This allows students to achieve a Diploma, which is a nationally recognised award validated by the Open College Network (OCN) and Sheffield Hallam University. The Diploma Programme recruits nationally, and those who obtain places are eligible to receive a maintenance grant from the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE).
- 2.5 Since 1992 the College has experienced a steady increase in its part-time short course provision, and in learning and training undertaken through special projects. The short course work now accounts for over 4,500 registrations a year, and this is set to expand still further. The size and diversity of the College's work outside of the Diploma Programme, represents a determined effort to widen access to and participation in learning on the part of many people who would normally be excluded from it, whether through cost, childcare, travel or other barriers.
- 2.6 With the College's expansion of its short course provision, some courses are increasingly being delivered on a non-residential basis in local community and other centres outside the College. Already the mobile IT Training Service has been an outstanding success in pioneering this type of outreach provision, and the move towards it has widened access to and participation in learning, particularly in isolated (e.g. mining) communities. It has also established a foundation for progression by which both individuals and groups move on to other residential programmes offered at the College, or programmes offered at other colleges and training providers in their localities.

3. Pedagogy

- 3.1 In its formative years the Northern College saw itself as operating within the extra-mural tradition of tutorial teaching and learning that was essentially university inspired, and regarded itself as a part of the higher education sector. The values, assumptions and practices of its pedagogy were based on:
- the 'liberal adult education' tradition of the universities' extra-mural movement and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) over the years, following the First World War and up to the 1980s
 - the ideas of some of the 'radical' adult educational theorists and practitioners of the 1960s and 1970s
 - the critique of the feminist scholars and activists who began to have a major impact on university curricula and research from the late 1960s
- 3.2 The College was established in 1978 as a charitable company by a consortium of four South Yorkshire local authorities (LAs): Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield. These local authorities, as well as other local authorities and trade unions which joined the Company as either full or associate members, made an annual financial contribution to the College in order to benefit from the College's educational provision. This unique partnership arrangement still continues and has influenced the College's recruitment strategy and curriculum offer.
- 3.3 In 1991, after a review of the adult residential colleges by the Department of Education and Science (DES), the College phased out the existing two-year full-time Diploma Programme, and by 1993 replaced this with the current one-year, modular programme with external accreditation and validation by the Open College Network (levels 2 and 3) and Sheffield Hallam University (CATS level 1).
- 3.4 In 1992 the creation of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) led to the adult residential colleges being designated as Further Education institutions, whose work was subject to the provisions of Schedule 2 of the Further and Higher Education Act. This led to the restructuring of the College's short course programme to contain largely Schedule 2 or accredited courses and a small proportion of non-Schedule 2 or non-accredited courses. A major part of the College's income henceforth came from the FEFC.
- 3.5 Both the requirements of accreditation, moderation and quality assurance set by outside bodies and the criteria laid down for inspection by the FEFC have profoundly changed the College's culture. While these factors have influenced some aspects of teaching and learning, the College is still primarily committed to:
- accept, respect and build upon the informal learning and experience that adult students bring to any new learning situation
 - recognise and help them overcome the lack of self-confidence (often due to previous negative experiences of education) that many mature students feel when they return to learning in a formal situation

- help students acquire the knowledge, judgement and skills and competencies that will enable them to develop their learning and realise their individual potential
- encourage students to become independent, self-motivated and creative thinkers and learners, capable of translating ideas into practical action for the benefit of their families, communities and employers

Significantly, although these have all been expressed as *teaching* aims, they could equally well have been stated as *learning* aims.

- 3.6 The College has also consistently recognised that staff and students teach and learn from one another in each other's company. This experience is often challenging, creative and passionate. It invariably leads teachers and learners to examine and alter their beliefs, ideas, values, conduct and actions.

<i>Learner Comments</i>
<p><i>"The staff show a real interest in what students have to say. They not only listen to students but learn from them."</i></p> <p><i>"You get the impression that tutors feel that they have something to learn from students."</i></p> <p><i>"Here tutors and students are on the same level. They learn from us, and we learn from them. It works both ways."</i></p> <p><i>"Tutors here appear to be down at our level. At other places tutors seem to be standing above you and seem to think that they can play around with you."</i></p>

- 3.7 The College's approach to teaching and learning has been based on a range of broad and non-prescriptive principles:

- Teaching should be student-centred so as to give those engaged in the learning an opportunity to determine what they learn and how, and to set the pace of their individual and collective progress.
- Learning should occur in a non-oppressive, facilitative and tolerant environment so as to give all participants an equal opportunity to participate in educational activities and to achieve desired learning goals.
- All College teaching and non-teaching services should be geared to support the learning process, and to provide a responsive, well-resourced and comfortable environment, in which learning can take place.
- All students should be afforded equal opportunities to learn in a way that takes account of individual circumstances and learning difficulties.

3.8 It should be emphasised that the core values and assumptions of the College have been shaped not only by the educational tradition of which it is a part, but also by contemporary circumstances. The two most significant are the social and economic situation in the College's home region, and the growth of IT supported learning:

- An increasing number of people are now being taught in local venues outside the College, and the development of learning centres with access to computer-based education and the Internet is now part of the strategy of learning partnerships across South and West Yorkshire.
- Since the early 1980's South and West Yorkshire, North Derbyshire and NorthLincolnshire have suffered industrial decline of such a magnitude that they are now among the poorest regions not only in the United Kingdom but also in Europe. In these areas levels of qualification and skills have fallen below the national average. Nearly all have Objective 1 or 2 status for European Social Funding (ESF). Thus the College has, since 1993, provided programmes to help people develop the skills and expertise for designing and running local regeneration schemes, and for entering the labour market and further training.

Case Study

Here a tutor talks about the sort of things that people in areas of industrial decline do in order to retrain and re-enter the labour market. He uses the example of an ex-miner who enrolled on courses that he taught...

After being laid off as a miner and being on the dole for 18 months, the individual decided to do the College's Learning to Learn programme, consisting of three courses. He explained: "I wanted these courses to help me with my future studies and with beginning another stage of my life." The courses helped to renew his self-confidence and to develop his enthusiasm to return to study. "I," he remarked, "appreciate the need of people from different backgrounds to take this second opportunity to achieve life goals." He went on to do short courses in Information Technology at the College and then applied for and got a position as a Trainee IT Technician under a scheme operated at a local university department. Since occupying this post he has also achieved other qualifications. Recently he applied for a full-time post and was short-listed. He was happy to report: "I got very positive feedback from the department and will stay on in my current post to gain more experience."

4. The Nature and Range of the Students

- 4.1 Since its founding in 1978 the Northern College has recruited students from a broad spectrum of domestic circumstances, work experiences and learning abilities. All of its students have, nevertheless, shared one thing in common: they have missed out on educational opportunities. The majority of the College's student intake have been:
- those describable as mature adults, mostly ranging in age from 25 to 65 years
 - those suffering from educational, as well as social and economic, disadvantage, with a high proportion falling into socio-economic categories C, D and E
 - those residing in South and West Yorkshire, North Derbyshire and North Lincolnshire.
- 4.2 The College has been successful in attracting women from the local communities of the region in which it operates; in fact, over 60% of its current student intake consist of women. However, although the decline of traditional industries in the region (coal-mining, steel-making, textiles, etc) has created widespread, long-term unemployment among men, the College has experienced, and continues to experience, a relative under-representation of men. It is not entirely clear why this is the case but, as research undertaken by the College and by others shows, it seems that men whose employment opportunities in the region were once favourable tend to be reluctant to return to education unless the curriculum is directly job-related and the pedagogy is appropriate for them. However, the College's male intake is higher than the average for the Further Education sector.
- 4.3 A range of external factors have influenced the College to become increasingly involved in community capacity building, and the kind of learning and training which that entails. The College has responded to:
- the FEFC's commitment to widening participation, inclusiveness and equal opportunities in further education
 - the present Government's lifelong learning aims, with their emphasis on skills acquisition and the use of communications technology to support learning and training,
 - regional and local initiatives to promote, through SRB and European Union Objective 2 funding programmes, social and economic regeneration in former coal-mining and steel-making areas

In practical terms, this has meant:

- working with community groups and voluntary organisations to enable their members to acquire the skills, knowledge and experience necessary to design and manage local social and economic regeneration projects
- delivering community-based education, mostly in the form of basic IT courses through the use of a mobile lap-top service in local centres
- establishing Animateur Training schemes to promote social and economic development among community groups and to train community health workers

4.4 These responses to national, regional and local agendas and circumstances, combined with the College's own strategic goals, have influenced the College's work and hence the profile of its student intake. Thus, since 1990 the College has:

- made increased provision to assist both disabled students and students with learning difficulties, and to promote equal opportunities in learning
- set itself targets for the recruitment of students from ethnic minority backgrounds
- devoted substantial staff resources to the teaching of basic and key skills
- undertaken a major investment in IT learning infrastructure, teaching and technical support staff
- made a significant departure in the delivery of a wide range of courses, including IT training, on an 'outreach' basis in community venues
- made direct efforts to link learning with social and economic regeneration in a number of fields

The College's capacity building work has led to the provision of OCN Level 1 courses and thus begun to widen access for the more excluded and hard-to-reach individuals and groups. The level of confidence and self-organisation of OCN Level 1 students is less developed than that of OCN Level 2 or 3 students, who have usually constituted the College's main target group.

4.5 In summary, the present student intake

- is determined by the College's response to the changing nature of its market, and local, regional and national agendas (not to mention funding regimes) for lifelong learning and regeneration
- has implications for what is taught, how it is taught, and how students are expected to learn.

Change in the student profile automatically leads to change – to a greater or lesser degree – in teaching and learning practice.

5. Outreach and Student Recruitment

- 5.1 The uniqueness of the Northern College as an institution has been its ability to bring learning to those sections of the adult community that do not usually access formal educational provision. The reason for its success in this area is that the College has managed to win – often with considerable effort – the confidence and trust of people *before* they ever enrol on a formal course.
- 5.2 The process by which this is done is usually referred to as ‘outreach and development work’. It may take a number of forms, depending on the nature of the communities, groups, and individuals targeted. As a concept, outreach not only has a long and changing history, but describes a number of related but distinct current practices in lifelong learning and adult education. Some of its more common meanings are:
- the activity of an institution in making contact and fostering relations with target groups
 - the extension of services to those not usually accommodated by an institution
 - the provision of support for the community
 - the establishment of links and networks with individuals and groups
 - curriculum development
 - a way or style of working
 - the targeting of provision to those who tend to be non-users

In the College’s work outreach figures prominently and constitutes a wide and multi-dimensional process involving a variety of activities and stages.

- 5.3 The College has undertaken the various activities and stages of outreach through the tutor organisers who have responsibility to manage local authority or ‘Company Member’ programmes. It has also gradually expanded and added new dimensions to outreach, especially after 1993, through the work of its Coalfields Learning Project (CLP), its Steel Areas Regeneration Project (STAR) and its Animateur Training Schemes, in the form of capacity building.
- 5.4 Given its formal partnership arrangements, the College is committed to recruit students according to the priorities set and monitored by the Liaison Groups that it has established with the Local Authorities concerned. These priorities are often to do with providing education and training to those who live in particular localities, those who are underrepresented in Further and Higher Education courses (black people, people with disabilities, women with children, etc.) and those who are engaged in community regeneration or capacity building work.
- 5.5 Generally, the College’s recruitment strategy for its various programmes is based less on conventional marketing and advertising than on personal contacts. It seeks to win trust and develop confidence amongst members of local community groups, as well as to help them focus upon and address local problems. Its links with the communities serve therefore as both learning and recruitment networks. It creates demand for a range of learning and training courses – sometimes

accredited, sometimes non-accredited – which are delivered occasionally in local venues and more frequently in the residential environment of the College, with all the learner support that goes with it.

5.6 The key to success in all these activities and stages is that individuals and groups decide what they will learn, and how they will learn it. The process is genuinely one of discussion and negotiation between tutors and the students concerned. Initially, these discussions focus upon:

- what local problems and issues a group will want to address, and how their members should organise themselves to the best advantage
- what action they will need to take, and how they should set about drawing up an action plan
- what individual and collective knowledge, skills and resources they already have, and what more they will need to acquire to achieve their aims
- what information (e.g. local survey, community audit, etc.) and what kinds of consultation they will need to carry out to obtain the support of their community and that of potential funding bodies

This process generates successive stages of recruitment as the students concerned move towards a greater degree of autonomy and eventual independence. At the same time those who are independent as learners are able to share with peers their existing knowledge and skills.

5.7 The College has, of course, other recruitment strategies that are closely bound up with its marketing and promotional activities. These involve:

- national, regional and local press advertising
- the dissemination of the *Prospectus* and of long and short course information
- participation in local events and the annual Adult Learners' Week
- word-of-mouth communication.

While the conventional publicity and advertising work are vitally important in raising the College's profile, they are mainly important in recruitment for the full-time Diploma programme.

5.8 Short course recruitment still depends mainly on word of mouth. Students and ex-students recruit friends and colleagues, or family members, and outreach tutors' contacts through community networks widen the potential student pool on which accredited short course programmes largely depend. Furthermore, a proportion of Diploma students also arrive at full-time education through their involvement in short course programmes. This process already provides clear pathways from the initial stages of returning to learn through the Diploma to university and professional qualifications.

6. Student Motivation and Needs

6.1 Adults who are traditionally underrepresented in educational institutions – unskilled or semi-skilled manual workers, unemployed people, women with or without children, older adults and ethnic minorities – constitute the College’s principal target groups. Detering or inhibiting factors to participation for these groups include:

- personal insecurity
- a lack of self confidence
- low aspirations
- poor, inadequate or incomplete schooling
- feelings of shame at low levels of achievement
- negative attitudes towards education
- a lack of day-time opportunities

It is not the case that the groups in question do not want to join formal education provision; it is the case that educational institutions do not always prioritise them in their recruitment strategies. The College’s mission implies that it reaches (to use an expression from a popular advertisement) those parts other educational institutions do not reach.

Case Study

How can new students be helped to recognise and address any actual or potential barriers to learning? Here is what one College tutor has to say....

Students often arrive at the College with negative feelings about their potential for learning due to past experiences. It is therefore important to empower them to reassess their feelings so that they can be more positively oriented towards their learning.

- 1. Students are asked to chat in pairs about some aspects of their lives. Once they are at ease with one another they are asked to identify at least three positive personal attributes. After this they are asked to report to the whole class what they have identified. The tutor records on a flipchart the range of attributes existing in the group. This can be an eye-opener for each individual as well as for the group as a whole.*
- 2. Students are asked to reflect on their past learning experiences within the context of the group so that group members and the tutor can support them in reassessing in particular their negative experiences and in realizing that these need not reoccur in adult learning settings. This helps them to ‘come to terms’ with their experiences and not feel that they are alone in the world.*

3. *Students are asked to consider the disadvantages that they might have suffered in their lives and how this might have impacted on their learning. Just knowing that there was, perhaps, potential in the past for them to have learnt differently can help to promote a change of attitude to learning. Thus, they may be able to set aside feelings of inadequacy, perhaps even the guilt of not engaging in learning at school and to cultivate an eagerness to develop further.*
4. *Students are asked to talk about their learning styles and to feel entitled to be 'different' in their individual learning approaches. It is of great benefit to them to identify what works for them and to consider other learning styles with which they have had little or no past experiences.*

6.2 Those adults who do decide to participate in educational activity at the College or elsewhere do so for a variety of motives rather than a single motive. The motives to participate vary with the different subjects studied and with the age, gender, ethnicity, physical or mental health and socio-economic position of each adult. Below is a typology of adults identifying some of their motives:

- those who want to know
- those who desire to be better informed
- those who want to take part in social activity
- those who desire to meet new people
- those who seek to obtain professional or career advancement
- those who hope to escape from daily routine
- those who plan to have a change in employment
- those who want to prepare for a new job
- those who desire to develop new skills and move ahead in life
- those who are committed to achieving change in their communities
- those who are interested to promote collective activity and social change

For any individual adult, most of the reasons for joining formal educational provision lie in a cluster of motivations that are similar.

Case Study

Here a tutor gives a brief account of the changing nature of a student's motivation to study....

The student attended a range of Information Technology courses in the years 1999 and 2000, initially in the College's community-based centre in Doncaster and later in the College itself. When she first attended a residential course at the College, it was actually the first time in 10 years that she had been away from home due to an ongoing illness. Returning to study opened up a whole new world for her. As her repertoire of IT skills grew, she became more and more confident and enthusiastic not just to learn but to make contact with other people. She built up a strong friendship with a student from another area of Doncaster; prior to attending the College they did not know each other. Between courses she worked at home to develop her IT skills further. She is currently studying part-time on the College's Diploma Programme. In spite of having several family commitments, she is determined to carry on with her studies.

6.3 Generally, motives for returning to education are usually mixed in the adult population. It is nevertheless possible to identify four broad categories of adults and their motives:

- those who want simply to have a break and enjoy the social life
- those who want to achieve something through a qualification, whether this (something) is a better paid job or an interesting career
- those who want personal and intellectual development, whether this is for realising their own potential, improving their skills or gaining knowledge for its own sake
- those who have a collectivist orientation to life and want to study to enhance their potential of working with others to bring about social change

The majority of the College's students fall into the second, third and fourth categories.

6.4 The second category implies 'a means to an end' or instrumental approach. Students motivated by this approach are concerned with the grades achieved and the approval gained from others. They can be seen as being extrinsically motivated; they study for external reasons.

6.5 The third category implies a 'learning for learning's sake' approach. Students motivated by this approach are concerned with the real or potential challenges offered by mastering a subject or acquiring new skills. They can be seen as intrinsically motivated; they study for personal satisfaction.

6.6 The fourth category implies a political commitment to larger purposes in life. Students motivated by this approach are often already involved in local or national organisations (voluntary groups, political parties, trade unions, etc.).

Case Study

Here a College tutor describes how an adoptive mother was motivated to come to the College and to thereafter work as a volunteer in a community centre....

The woman came to the College first as part of a group from South Yorkshire involved in a course exploring issues of being effective parents. After this introduction to the College she returned on an openly recruited course entitled 'Black Children, White Mothers'. This was designed for white mothers bringing up black children. The course explored black history, black children's experiences, 'mixed race' relationships and ways in which parents can support their children to feel positive about their identity. Having been involved in a range of volunteering opportunities in her hometown, she was appointed to a substantial part-time post in a community centre, with particular responsibility for supporting volunteers. This included responsibility for undertaking training for volunteers. She enrolled on the College's City and Guilds 7307 course, which leads to the Adult and Further Education Teacher's Certificate. She used her work at the Community Centre as her teaching practice experience and ran a very effective series of sessions on the role of volunteers.

- 6.7 It may be worthwhile for a tutor to find out from individual students whether they are intrinsically or extrinsically motivated and to ascertain, over time, whether there is any relationship between motivation and academic achievement.
- 6.8 The College's students are often intrinsically and also to some extent extrinsically motivated. They come to the College to realise their individual potential and to acquire skills, knowledge and understanding that will help them to gain employment, go into further or higher education, or apply what they learn in some other area such as voluntary work or trade union activism. There are also students who come to the College as part of a group (e.g. a tenant's group, a disabled people's group, a women's group, etc.), and with the aim of using what they learn to further the objectives of that group. (It is not to deny that personal and intellectual development also takes place, but this is not – at least, not at first – the primary aim of the individual student.)

Case Study

Here a tutor highlights how a student's involvement with the College motivated not just her but also those who belonged to her local community group - the Well Christian Fellowship....

The student first started Information Technology classes in the community in late 1999, and later got members of her group to attend a range of courses at the College, including a beginners IT course as well as Deaf Awareness and Drug Awareness courses. These courses helped the group to develop skills in handling difficult situations in the community and to build their individual confidence levels. Two members successfully managed to gain part-time employment, one in a pharmacy and the other in a junior school. This was

partly due to the skills and confidence that they had gained whilst studying at the College. The student and the rest of her group remained strongly motivated to study, and maintained contact with the College to find out how it might continue to assist them again.

- 6.9 Student needs are defined mainly (but not exclusively) in terms of learning needs. Participating in an educational activity is one of a number of ways through which students satisfy their learning needs. Students may, for example sample a range of short courses before establishing what it is that they want to learn. Their motivation to participate in formal educational provision thus reflects an interest in identifying and satisfying their learning needs. Their learning needs express their 'interests', 'desires', 'wants' or even 'demands' regarding education, and the College helps them make sense of all this through the guidance and support services that it provides.

Learner Comments

"This is the first course that we've been on that has offered us what we ourselves want rather than what others think what we want."

"It's the feeling that the tutors care about you that makes learning different here. You feel that you're an individual – not just an anonymous face in a class of other anonymous faces."

"Tutors don't put us down or make us feel inadequate. Even when we get things wrong, they don't blame us; instead, they help us to see what our mistakes are and how to correct them. This really helps us to understand the subject better and to move ahead."

"Tutors make a real effort to find out what difficulties students are experiencing."

"Tutors value everything that you produce, even when you know it is not good enough. You get the feeling that you are valued for what you are. This encourages you to study."

"You're never made to feel small. Whatever you do is always valued and appreciated."

"Tutors value our experiences. This makes us more inclined to talk in class."

"Tutors make time to give us extra help."

- 6.10 The College creates programmes of learning that are responsive to the learning needs of individuals and groups. This is reflected in how its tutorial and other staff members view and work with students. Thus:

- Tutors accept students as they are and not as they should (ideally) be. They view students as having different starting or entry points into learning. They take the students' current needs, personal or intellectual, as being paramount.

- Tutors are pro-active in eliciting student needs. They ask students *what* and *how* they want to learn. They discuss, elicit and negotiate the content and process of learning to the extent to which this can be done or is appropriate. They do this by 'going out' to meet individuals and groups in their communities, and they do this again in the classroom.
- Tutors foster a sense of ownership amongst students for their intended programmes of learning.
- Tutors value students for what they *really are*, irrespective of what they have achieved or not achieved academically. They value students as persons with experiences that are both unique to themselves and shared with others.
- Tutors create a non-threatening learning environment so that students can feel safe to explore and confront their anxieties, difficulties and real or imagined barriers to learning.

Section 3

7. The Curriculum Offer

- 7.1 The Northern College's curriculum consists of the courses or programmes of learning that it organises and offers in its educational provision. To talk of the College's curriculum as if it were a homogeneous entity may be misleading; it is perhaps truer to say that there is no singular curriculum but that the College has diverse curricular traditions. In reality, these curricular traditions have included:
- adult and continuing education
 - trade union education
 - information communications technology
 - access to higher education and higher education itself
- 7.2 Over the years a large number of influences have impacted on the College's curricular traditions. The College's curriculum as a whole has, for example, been influenced by the changes in government policy, the numbers and kinds of students enrolling for courses or on programmes, the variations in funding methodologies, and so on.
- 7.3 The College has, like other adult educational institutions, followed a curriculum model that has been seen as valid for the education of adults. This model contains the elements that occur in nearly every teaching and learning process. It includes:
- a statement of aims (or purpose) and of outcomes (or objectives)
 - some selection and organisation of content or subject matter
 - certain patterns of teaching and learning
 - a programme to assess outcomes
- 7.4 It may be useful to highlight some issues concerning each of the above elements.
- We need to examine the relationship between aims (or purpose) and outcomes (or objectives) and more particularly whether the latter reflect the former. Recently there has been an emphasis on behavioural objectives or outcomes, but this, even though it may be appropriate on a skills-based course, say in Information Technology (where it is easier to identify what students 'can do'), may not be so useful in cognitive-learning or knowledge-based courses, say those in the Humanities and the Social Sciences. The assessment of analytical and critical-thinking skills that the cognitive-learning courses require (and that can, for example, be demonstrated through essay writing) are of a very different order from the assessment of competency that a skills-based course requires. Assessment for the two types of course is therefore fundamentally different.
 - We also need to be aware of the criteria for the selection of content or subject matter. Curriculum content may, for example, be influenced by the tutors' personal or professional interests and their view of the relevance and usefulness of given topics or areas of knowledge. This has tended to be the basis of

deciding the curriculum content in the College's long courses. However, in the College's short courses there has been more scope to negotiate the subject matter between tutors and students. Tutors are able to identify the students' learning needs prior to the course and to join with them in planning and organising the content.

- What the students learn, where their learning takes place and how their learning is facilitated should all relate to, and be appropriate for, their learning needs and their learning styles. What tutors use as 'teaching methods' relates not just to the subject matter but to either their individual or shared educational philosophy. Where the methods allow the students to enhance their skills and knowledge as well as their self-worth and humanity, the methods can be seen as 'good practice'. The tutor's effectiveness thus relates to the use of appropriate methods to achieve cognitive and humanistic goals.
- The aims (or purpose) and outcomes (or objectives) of a course form the starting point for its evaluation. Evaluating the success of students in achieving intended outcomes may, however, be of limited value. Given that students may deviate from the selected aims and even from the subject matter to go beyond the intended outcomes, it is useful that both the tutor and students are involved in the evaluation. Good practice in teaching and learning implies that both tutor and students are involved in the formal process of evaluation.

7.5 In its formative years the College placed much emphasis on student-centred learning, and this emphasis has been reflected in the development of the curriculum model to which the College subscribed. Below are the most salient assumptions underlying this model.

- Adults are self-directed in their learning.
- Their experiences constitute a rich learning resource *per se*.
- They become more motivated to learn if they know why they are learning.
- Their own motivation for learning is paramount.
- They study to enhance their skills, knowledge and understanding
- They focus more on learning 'really useful knowledge'.
- Learning is directed towards the performance of valued social roles or jobs.
- They are life-centred and also life-long learners.
- They learn more effectively as collaborators rather than as competitors.
- They want to learn in order to contribute more effectively to community-based initiatives.
- Adult learning is constantly self-assessed.
- Adult learning produces critical thinking.

In curricular terms this implies that course content should relate to the experiences and needs of students themselves.

7.6 Course content can be decided on the basis of two broad sets of criteria:

- Criteria concerning the selection of skills and knowledge that meet the individual students' motivation and needs
- Criteria concerning the selection of courses that have relevance for the economy and society of the future

More specifically, a number of things can be done:

- Some parts of the curriculum can be devoted to help students acquire basic skills and knowledge so as to enhance their competence to communicate with others and to access knowledge.
- Some parts of the curriculum can be devoted to help students acquire a general education, one or more 'specialisms' or 'concentrations', and an understanding of the integration of theoretical and practical knowledge.
- Some parts of the curriculum can be devoted to help students acquire 'an education for citizenship'. The last implies that we accept that an informed, engaged and critical citizenry constitutes, in a democratic society, the most important agency for change processes in this century.

8. Course Design and Planning

- 8.1 The Northern College designs and plans the totality of its educational provision at two broad levels: the *programme* level, and the *course* level.
- At the programme level the students' learning is organised within a range of programmes (e.g. the Pathways Programme, the Diploma Programme, the Higher Education Programme, etc.) The programmes are validated and moderated by outside bodies, and each programme is managed by a co-ordinator.
 - At the course level the students' learning is organised within discrete or identifiable short courses (in the Pathways Programme), modules (in the Diploma Programme) or units (in the Higher Education Programme). Each short course, module or unit is further broken down into sessions or lessons. Quite often a short course, module or unit is apportioned to one member of the tutorial staff, and that member is given the responsibility for its development and delivery.

Case Study

This account of the College's three-week linked *Women's Studies* course illustrates the progression route of some students. It also shows how the College's flexible delivery mode makes the course an attractive one.

The course comprises three periods of five days residential education and a complementary programme of study to be completed in between each period of residence. It is aimed at students who are interested in returning to full-time study but who need a more gradual introduction to academic study. It combines aspects of the Women's Studies curriculum with Key Skills, and is designed to provide students with a more continuous and integrated experience of study than that afforded by discrete short courses.

Each student is allocated a personal tutor who is involved in the delivery of the teaching on the course. The role of the personal tutor is to provide students with individual feedback on their academic work, both that completed during the residential blocks and that completed at home, as well as guidance on future educational opportunities.

An important feature of the student experience is peer support. Students not only form friendships, they also provide support for each other with the academic demands of the course, including contacting each other between the residential blocks and arranging to meet up to share ideas about the work to be completed in preparation for the next period of residence.

Often a considerable proportion of any one intake progresses onto the Northern College Diploma Programme - in some intakes as much as fifty per cent. Feedback from students suggests that the regular contact with tutors and other students (including those already following the Diploma Programme) over an academic year, plus how each residential block of learning is designed to build on the previous one, and how the work completed in between periods of residence serves to reiterate and consolidate learning, all help to deepen

knowledge and understanding and therefore to increase self-confidence in relation to further study. Moreover, having a personal tutor and being part of a group which provides positive support, are important factors contributing to the likelihood of progression onto a more demanding course.

- 8.2 What currently informs course design and planning at the College is the outcomes-based approach. Such an approach requires a short course, module or unit to be designed in such a way that both tutors and students are clear about not just what is to be learnt (the course content) but also where the learning is to finish (the learning outcomes).
- 8.3 Learning outcomes define the learning that students are expected to have acquired at the end of a session, course, module, unit or programme. The College identifies this as the ‘primary learning goal’. Learning outcomes indicate that a change in the behaviour of students has occurred as a result of a learning experience. When this change is observed, it is possible to assert that learning has taken place.
- 8.4 Learning outcomes are intended to make the expectations of a learning experience transparent and explicit. They should be:
- written in a language that is easily accessible and understandable
 - related to explicit statements of achievement
 - capable of being achieved and assessed

Unambiguous words, no matter the level of learning to be achieved, should be used to word learning outcomes. Below are some suggested words for outcomes at different levels:

Level	Suggested Words
Knowledge	Define, list, name, identify
Understanding	Describe, explain, discuss, clarify
Application	Show, illustrate, apply
Analysis	Analyse, dissect, distinguish
Evaluation	Evaluate, assess, appraise, compare

Table 1. Advice for Writing Learning Outcomes

- 8.5 The College ensures that students learn what they view as educationally desirable or important. The process of identifying learning *aims* defines what tutors want students to learn; it focuses on the inputs to the learning experience and can be described as tutor-centred. By contrast, the process of identifying learning *outcomes* defines what students will be able to do at the end of a session, course, module, unit or programme; it focuses on outputs of the learning experience and can be described as student-centred.
- 8.6 The advantages of adopting an outcomes-based approach to organising teaching and learning are manifold. Such an approach allows tutors to:
- make learning manageable and achievable
 - give purpose and direction to student learning
 - allow for flexibility and innovation in learning activities
 - focus on the more important elements of a subject
 - make specific interventions if students experience difficulties in learning

An outcomes-based approach helps tutors to clarify for themselves the explicit or intended outcomes as well as (by, for example, paying careful attention to what and how students learn) the implicit or unintended outcomes that are always part of any teaching and learning activity.

- 8.7 The outcomes-based approach to organising teaching and learning can be implemented systematically. Its various steps are outlined in the table below.

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
Identify the learning outcomes	Consider important aspects of the students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • their starting points • their learning styles • their attitudes • their motivation and needs 	Design the courses, modules or units	Choose and use appropriate teaching methods and learning activities	Assess student achievement in terms of the learning outcomes
Sequence the topics to be covered in accordance with the learning outcomes	Relate these to the learning outcomes		Relate these to the learning outcomes	

Table 2. The Outcomes-Based Approach

In all of the steps indicated above the identification of learning outcomes is a central concern.

8.8 The College is concerned with organising all of its educational provision systematically and effectively. Thus:

- The College avoids making the design and planning of courses a haphazard or *ad hoc* process. Tutors are briefed individually or through staff training sessions as regards the in-house requirements for developing a course curriculum.
- The College allocates the task of designing and planning the curriculum of a course within a programme of learning to those who have knowledge, expertise or experience in teaching that course.
- Programme co-ordinators produce evaluation reports to identify those aspects of course design and planning that might require improvement. Similarly, course tutors engage in reflective inquiry of their approach to the organisation of teaching and learning with a view to improving it. They record their observations on an evaluation pro-forma once they have completed a course.

9. Session Planning

- 9.1 In adult education there exists a wide variation with respect to the tutors' approach to session plans. This is true as much for the Northern College as for other institutions in this sector. As a matter of good practice, all tutors are advised to plan their sessions with care and to prepare in advance detailed and well-organised session plans.
- 9.2 Effective session planning can be seen to consist of three stages. In the first stage, lasting about 10% of the overall time, tutors should plan to say something about the session itself so that students can have a clear idea of what to expect both in terms of the subject matter and how it is planned to be handled. Aspects for this stage of the session that tutors might want to include are:
- personal introductions (where appropriate)
 - the students' starting points (i.e. their entry level of knowledge and skills)
 - an overview of the session
 - a brief description of what students expected to do *during* and *after* the session
 - the learning outcomes of the session
- 9.3 In the second stage of the session, lasting about 70 to 80% of the overall time, tutors should plan to use a range of teaching methods and learning activities to ensure that active learning takes place and interest is maintained. It is important to plan this stage so that it is not so tutor-led and content-driven that students do not have sufficient time to participate actively in their learning.
- 9.4 In the third and final stage of the session, lasting about 10 to 20% of the overall time, tutors should plan to summarise the main points of all that has been said and done. Whilst they might have checked that learning has been taking place throughout the session, it is most important that they do this again at this stage. They should plan to leave some time to allow students to reflect on what they have learnt and to provide feedback. Aspects for this stage of the session that tutors might want to include are:
- a revisiting of the learning outcomes
 - an assessment of learning through a question-and-answer review of the session or through some other activity that shows that students have understood the session and achieved its learning outcomes
 - a review of the main points of the session
 - some guidance about the preparation that students might want to undertake for the next session or for another course
- 9.5 Overleaf is a proforma for a session plan that tutors might want to use to successfully complete each of the three stages described above.

Session Plan

The topic or subject to be covered:			
The time available for the session:			
Classroom arrangements:			
Class size:			
Student characteristics:			
The students' expected entry behaviour:			
The learning aims (or purpose) of the session:			
The learning outcomes of the session:			
Stage/Time	Teaching Methods	Learning Activities	Learning Aids/Resources
Introduction 10% of the time available			
Development 70 – 80% of the overall time			
Conclusion 10 – 20% of the overall time			

10. Teaching Methods

- 10.1 It is not uncommon for tutors at the Northern College to consider a range of teaching methods that they might use, experiment with them, assess their usefulness, and thus build up experience, expertise and confidence in teaching. Being as it were 'on the job' does help them to find out that what works well with one group of students in one situation does not work at all with another group in a similar situation, and that what works well with one group of students in one situation does not work at all with the same group in every situation. In general, tutors critically reflect on student feedback regarding what works well or what does not in order to respond with a different approach. Doing this time and again helps them to develop some notion of effective teaching.

Case Study

Here a tutor outlines an approach for enabling students to make active use of concepts to make sense of experience and apply it to different scenarios....

Students are asked to handle a realistic problem that they themselves may well face. For example, they are asked to formulate a strategy to tackle the under-representation of women in particular university departments. Information on the availability of childcare etc. is included in the case study to make for a more detailed scenario. The students tackle this problem in groups of three or four, providing an opportunity for co-operative learning. Each group has to formulate a strategy that they then share with the other groups who are given the opportunity to critique the strategy. The role of the tutor is to help each group probe how it understands the problem and how it might solve it rather than providing the 'right answer'.

- 10.2 In practice, effective teaching involves a range of practices *vis-à-vis* students:
- showing concern and respect for students and their learning
 - appreciating where students are starting from
 - taking account of students with different abilities
 - motivating students and developing in them a commitment to learning
 - helping students to learn about something that they know little or nothing about
 - engaging students at their level of understanding
 - promoting students' understanding
 - extending and modifying the students' approach to learning
 - helping students to value curiosity, integrity and accountability

- helping students to communicate with each other and to develop their interpersonal skills
- helping students to think for themselves
- listening to and learning from students' criticisms
- conducting one-to-one or group tutorials with students to provide constructive feedback on any completed assignments
- developing critical, creative thinking in students
- helping students to become independent or autonomous learners

Case Study

The account here incorporates some of the more important principles of effective teaching....

"I always start a course by establishing a relaxed and friendly atmosphere amongst the students and by putting them at ease. I emphasise that there is no pressure on them and that they are free to work at their own pace.

I establish the level of ability of all the students by asking general questions rather than singling people out. I then make it clear that to begin with I will ensure that everyone has the basic skills necessary to do the work, and that once this has happened everyone can work at his or her own pace. I find that this gives confidence to the less experienced in actually trying out the skills and makes those with existing skills feel more confident in their own knowledge.

Once I am sure that everyone has reached a certain level of ability, I let the students work at their own pace. I find this puts less pressure on those less able to keep up with the more advanced students, who in turn do not feel held back. As the students progress, I give less and less direct instruction and let the students explore for themselves, although I am always available for guidance.

I consider special needs at all times; for example if a student has sight difficulties with the computer screen, I help to enlarge it for him or her. I try not to make any big issue of this, and try to help in any way to make learning easier.

I keep the general atmosphere light-hearted. This helps the students to learn more effectively if they are enjoying themselves, and to alleviate pressure on those who are finding particular tasks more difficult. I also constantly check on the progress of students and give them helpful tips to improve their work, without necessarily telling them that what they are doing is wrong.

My first few exercises allow the students to achieve the skills necessary for the credit level. This allows the slower students to manage to cover all their skills while the faster students are able to carry on with more exercises to improve their skills. I emphasise to all students that they are all there to learn for themselves and that there is no competitive side to the course. If any

student does feel intimidated by another's ability, I tend to emphasise that they are all attending the course for different reasons and that anything that any of them get out of it is a positive thing.

My preferred method of teaching is to be attentive and constantly available to guide the students, to let them practise their skills and to help them remember. I feel that simply giving them written instructions is not as effective, as when the instructions are not available, the students often cannot remember how to do some tasks.

I find that encouraging the students to communicate with each other and to get to know each other also helps with their confidence-building. This also reduces nervousness amongst the students and produces a more relaxed environment for learning to take place.”

- 10.3 Tutors are effective when they make their classroom sessions interesting. Any session that they teach can appear interesting if it contains elements of performance. Tutors as performers can be vibrant and engaging in the classroom. This implies that a tutor should think of developing an appropriate teaching or classroom *persona* – one that students would like, listen to, be inspired by, learn from, and even emulate.

Learner Comments

“Tutors are really interested in their subjects and that rubs off on students.”

“I came to the course uninformed and unmotivated and went home inspired.”

“Tutors enthuse. You get your enthusiasm from them.”

“Tutors make the subject interesting, and you want to know more.

“My tutor made the learning easy and very interesting.”

“Tutors catch your imagination. They go out of their way to make the sessions interesting.”

- 10.4 Tutors are effective when they possess a good enough or even a high level of knowledge and understanding of their own disciplines or areas of teaching. They as scholars can contribute to the development of their disciplines. They should, at the very least, keep abreast with current research and scholarship in their disciplines and integrate this into their teaching.
- 10.5 Tutors are effective when they become adept at using as many teaching methods as they can and choosing the most appropriate ones for the groups that they teach. The choice of teaching methods is often related to the individual tutor’s character or personality. However, there are some overall guidelines that the tutor needs to take into account.

- The learning outcomes of a session, course, module, unit or programme should be linked to teaching methods. Thus, a lecture might achieve low-level objectives (such as the acquisition of knowledge) while a seminar might be more appropriate to achieve higher level objectives (such as analysis and evaluation).
- In making a choice about the appropriateness of various teaching methods it is necessary to consider such factors as the size of the group, the motivation and needs of students, and the ability and learning styles of students.

In the rest of this section of the *Guide* three teaching methods will be explored in some depth: small group or 'classroom' teaching, the modified lecture and the tutorial.

- 10.6 Small group teaching encompasses all the various forms of teaching in which two or more (but usually not more than twenty) students are brought together to engage, as collaborators, in their own learning. This is a useful format for promoting students' learning, because it allows them to improve self-confidence, develop interpersonal skills, promote team building, articulate views, show critical thinking, and so on.
- 10.7 In small group teaching the learning contract can be used to jointly agree on the ground rules of behaviour amongst participants, the learning aims and outcomes of a session or course, the assessment procedures and criteria of a course, the timetable for the completion of tasks and activities, and so on. (A learning contract is a framework of learning that is agreed between students and tutors, each agreeing to undertake certain roles and responsibilities. For example, the students agree to submit assignments on time, and the tutors agree to return marked assignments within a specified timeframe.)
- 10.8 Whilst small group teaching may appear a loose and unstructured activity, it can be effective if proper planning and preparation is undertaken for it.
- Tutors should give careful thought to the learning needs and prior knowledge of students, to the intended learning outcomes, and to the appropriateness of certain types of teaching methods.
 - Tutors have to prepare not just themselves but also students to participate effectively in a small group. They need, for example, to reflect on the ground rules of behaviour and other aspects of the learning contract, on the arrangement of furniture within a physical environment (e.g. a classroom), and the involvement of all students in discussion, paying special attention to those who might remain silent (because of nervousness or some other factor) and those who might dominate.
- 10.9 Tutors employ many different methods of small group teaching: the brainstorming exercise, the role play, the seminar, the group tutorial, collaborative learning, and so on. They remain open-minded and flexible about using as wide a range of methods as possible. They avoid relying on one method only or too frequently; this could have a negative effect on students' learning. The criteria for choosing one or more of the various teaching methods depends on how a tutor sees their suitability for a certain session or group, their potential for student participation, and their practicality for the physical environment in which the session is conducted.

10.10 Tutors need to develop a range of skills for ensuring that small group teaching is really effective. Two important skills are listening and responding.

- Listening has both cognitive and affective dimensions. It requires a comprehension, analysis, synthesis and evaluation of what students say (content) and an appreciation of what students feel (tone and significance).
- Listening with interest and seriousness helps tutors to know how and when to respond and in what ways. Tutors respond appropriately when they take into account the learning outcomes of a session, course, module, unit or programme and the intellectual and interpersonal needs of students.

10.11 The lecture is an important means of promoting student learning. It remains the most widely used teaching method in higher education. Generally, it is seen as necessary for quickly providing the information that students require before they can learn independently and can effectively participate in classroom discussion. More specifically it is seen as a useful method to:

- transmit information already documented in publications
- provide information not usually found in published sources
- enable students to find a framework in which to fit new facts and ideas
- highlight similarities and differences between two or more phenomena
- organise the subject matter in a way that suits particular student learning styles
- share the tutor's/lecturer's personal experiences
- communicate a passion for a particular subject

While the lecture may be effective in transmitting information, it is less effective than other methods for promoting thinking and changing student attitudes.

10.12 The College does not encourage tutors to use the traditional lecture as part of their teaching methodology. In this sort of lecture students take on a largely passive role and are afforded little or no opportunity for active learning or for actively engaging with the subject matter. Students do not engage in the deep processing of information, thus missing out on the opportunity of 'uncovering' it. As educational research demonstrates, students concentrate up to a certain point, say for the first ten minutes of a 50-minute lecture, and then their attention levels drop. They frequently forget, or never learn, much of the subject matter, especially those aspects presented after the first ten minutes. Given these limitations the important question to ask is: How can the lecture involve more active communication between the lecturer and the students? One way to do this is to use an interactive approach as a means to promote active learning. This can be done by regularly punctuating the lecture with questions to some or all students and by encouraging students themselves to ask questions during the lecture. It is important that the modified lecture has a clear enough structure to allow students to take a more active part in their learning. A lecture will thus be effective if it:

- identifies the learning aims and outcomes
- is not overloaded with content
- has an easily recognisable structure or outline
- is delivered at an appropriate pace
- pitches the material at the right level
- allows for student participation
- maintains high levels of attention
- provides students with a solid framework into which they can fit new knowledge
- is supplemented with handouts
- allows students to take notes in a range of appropriate formats (concept maps, spray diagrams, linear outlines, sequential notes, etc.)
- provides a summary of the main points covered

10.13 To break the monotony of a tutor-dominated lecture, a variety of strategies can be used to keep students actively involved. For example:

- video footage can be used to illustrate points
- material from the internet can be presented to introduce new data
- students can be asked to briefly work in small groups to clarify issues
- questions can be raised to prompt students to think and provide answers

After the lecture it may be helpful to students if a PowerPoint presentation is mounted onto the Internet so that they can reinforce their learning at a time more suited to them.

10.14 Perhaps more than any other teaching method that is used in adult education it is the tutorial that promotes deep and intensive learning, often leading the individual student to reflect on and change a particular learning style and the level of academic performance. The College uses three types of tutorials.

- The tutorial manifests as a meeting between a tutor and a student to identify the literature that can be used to complete an assignment (especially an essay) and to work out an approach to planning and structuring it. In this type of tutorial the tutor acts primarily as a guide to facilitate the development of skills in respect of research, reading and writing.
- The tutorial manifests as a meeting between a tutor and a student to go through an assignment that the latter has completed and submitted for marking. In this type of tutorial the tutor goes through comments, shows ways in which the work can be improved, and explains the mark, grade or level awarded to the student.

- The tutorial manifests as a meeting between a tutor and a student to help the latter identify his or her learning needs, assess his or her progress and consider progression routes. This type of tutorial is commonly called a *personal tutorial*.

If the tutorial is to prove to be effective, the tutor must show an understanding of and sensitivity to the processes of human relations.

Section 4

11. Adult Learning

- 11.1 It is likely that adults coming to study at the Northern College have already been taught in school and other educational institutions, in informal settings and in the workplace. This implies that they are not starting as - so to speak - a blank sheet; rather they have had a great deal of experience of learning. For some this experience might have been rewarding and pleasurable, whilst for others it might have been unrewarding and painful. The learning experience which adults have gained during their lives has a profound impact on their attitudes to learning and plays an important part in any of their learning activities in the future.

Learner Comments

"It's in an adult environment that we study here. We're a nice mixture of adults, ranging from around 24 to around 74. We've all come here with our own individual learning experiences, and we're been able to share them."

"My experience of learning at Northern College is so different from my experience of learning at school. At school we had to memorise facts and reproduce them in the examinations. At Northern College we try to make sense of facts and see how they fit together. This helps us to understand the whole picture and not worry too much about all the details."

"I guess my whole perception of the nature of learning has changed. At school nobody was interested in what I thought. Here tutors are genuinely interested in what I think."

"I think the teaching today is very different from my instruction at school. Learning at the College has, for me, been very informative and has left me with greater confidence and the ability to implement the skills taught."

- 11.2 If tutors are going to be effective in teaching adults, they should not ignore the fact that adults come to learning with unique sets of experiences and approach learning activities with pre-conceived ideas about *what* they set out to learn and *how* they are going to do it.
- 11.3 Increasingly tutors are expected to teach in a way in which they can show that learning has taken place. This, of course, implies that they should try to grapple with the vexed question, what is *learning*? No attempt will be made to answer this question in any depth here. Suffice to say the term 'learning' can be seen as encompassing knowledge, skills and understanding. Learning thus implies that students acquire knowledge, skills and understanding in a form in which they can retain, retrieve and apply newly acquired learning.
- 11.4 One way to understand learning is to see it as a transactional or contractual process in which tutors and students alike agree to do something of mutual benefit so that the desired outcomes are achieved. This may take time but the process can be accelerated if tutors:

- allow students to articulate their learning needs
- give students the opportunity to discuss their perceived barriers to learning
- enable students to actively and creatively contribute to the learning situation
- provide students with constructive feedback and praise so that they feel supported and valued
- value experiences of past learning situations
- encourage students to respect others in their class or in the broader learning community
- help students to be free from narrow-mindedness and prejudice

Case Study

The account below shows how a tutor's encouragement to talk allows students to see themselves as resourceful people....

Students are offered the chance to talk or make oral presentations about a topic related to their course. Once they get going, they are likely to bring out valid past experiences to support the work or research that they are currently undertaking. Almost without realising it, they use their experiences to impart knowledge to others, and in the process they all learn from each other. Ultimately they come to realise that they have had all kinds of valid experiences in their lifetime, which is often disregarded but which forms in fact a very important learning tool.

- 11.5 Another way of understanding learning is to distinguish the learning which takes place in the cognitive domain from that which takes place in the affective domain. Cognitive learning runs in tandem with affective learning so that at the same time as students acquire knowledge their behaviour as learners also changes. They begin not just to feel good about the learning process but to value it. This helps them to appreciate the role that knowledge plays which, in turn, encourages them to learn further.

Learner Comments

"The course has made me review my whole attitude to history. In future I shall no longer be satisfied with one version of events, but will seek other accounts so as to put together the jigsaw of facets of the truth. I have learnt to pick out emotive, prejudiced accounts and to extract the bare bones of the truth. I have learnt that historians use primary sources on which to base their history books (secondary sources) and these give facts, but also contain conjecture. It is great fun to distinguish between these."

- 11.6 Learning is frequently thought of in terms of adding more knowledge to an existing store. But this is a misconceived view. Learning is concerned not just with adding more knowledge but with bringing about change to pre-existing knowledge or its understanding. This is particularly the case with adult learning. Adults can be seen engaging with their learning not in a passive way but in a way that makes possible internalisation and transformation.
- 11.7 Adult students approach their learning in many different ways. They can thus be seen not just as developing different *learning styles* but as preferring some styles over others. Those responsible for organising teaching and learning must take into account how students prefer to learn and how they might be helped to learn more effectively.
- 11.8 It is possible to identify in any group of students at least four learning styles, each having its own characteristics. The table below lists the main characteristics of these styles.

Learning Style A	Learning Style B	Learning Style C	Learning Style D
<p>The student ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • works independently • finds it difficult to work with others • plans effectively • meets deadlines frequently • follows instructions carefully • takes good notes • is more concerned with detail than with the 'big picture' 	<p>The student ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • organises material effectively • likes to solve problems • works things out on paper • is precise and thorough • sees links between ideas • tries to obtain lots of information • is overcautious • does not always think creatively • learns well in formal settings 	<p>The student ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • thinks creatively • is more concerned with the 'big picture' than with detail • identifies new questions • is sometimes uncritical • has difficulty in classifying • is easily distracted • works in bursts • responds to a variety of stimuli 	<p>The student ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • works well with others • tries out new ideas • is intuitive • likes change and variety • reads quickly • does not always plan ahead • leaves things to the end • dislikes attending to detail • has some difficulty in organising time • is a divergent thinker

Table 3: Learning Styles

No one style should be seen as better than another. Whilst a student may have a dominant style (say style A), he or she may also adopt aspects of other styles.

- 11.9 Tutors can be more effective in addressing the problems that students might experience if time is spent to identify various learning styles.
- 11.10 All those who are involved in organising teaching and learning in the Northern College or other adult educational institutions would benefit from having some knowledge of the different theories that explain how students and more especially adults learn. They would also benefit from having some knowledge of the works of a number of scholars who have contributed to theoretical knowledge on adult education (e.g. Paulo Freire, Malcolm Knowles, Carl Rogers, etc.). This *Guide* will make no attempt to discuss the different theories of learning except to stress that they are worth exploring for the insights, practical or otherwise, that they provide with regard to student\adult learning.

12. Key Skills

12.1 According to the New Shorter Oxford Dictionary, the term 'skill' denotes "an ability to do something, acquired through practice or learning". This definition implies that skills are associated with work. Indeed, there has been a growing awareness that the skills needed in the world of work, or even more generally, in life are similar to the study and learning skills that are acquired in education. However, since the early 1990s it has been widely believed that students have not been adequately prepared with these skills. Hence the aim has been to enable students to develop the skills that would help them succeed at work and in life generally.

12.2 Initially, two types of skills were identified: 'basic' and 'core'. The definitions developed by the Department of Education and Employment are quoted here in full:

- "Basic skills are the abilities to read, write and speak English and to use mathematics at a level necessary for work and society in general."
- "Core skills build upon basic skills and are broader in scope. Transferable core skills are considered necessary for employability; they underpin effective performance across all occupations and at all levels. They include skills that are capable of precise measurement, such as communication and information technology, as well as less tangible attributes of personal effectiveness such as motivation and initiative."

In 1996 the term 'core skills' was changed to key skills. In the Northern College we do not make a specific distinction between Basic Skills and Key Skills. We aim to develop skills at a variety of levels across the curriculum offer of the College.

12.3 The Dearing Report (1996) defined key skills as "competence in communication, the application of number and information technology". This report also accepted that it was important to develop "wider skills, including inter-personal skills particularly team working, presentational skills, a problem solving approach and the ability to manage one's own learning".

12.4 There is considerable debate about the place of key skills teaching in the curriculum. Basically, two broad approaches exist:

- Free-standing or separate key skills courses or modules should be designed and taught.
- Key skills development should be integrated and embedded within the teaching of all courses or modules.

Both approaches have their respective advantages and disadvantages. The free-standing approach ensures that skills are covered and that specific courses or modules could be targeted at supporting the needs of particular students. However, this approach is problematical because students may see little or no relationship between the courses or modules concerned and their main programmes of learning. The integrated approach involves embedding the identified key skills as part of courses or modules either through linking the process of skills development to existing course elements or through redesigning

the curriculum. Again, however, this approach is problematical because the skills are so integrated that students may not separately identify or value them.

12.5 The Northern College handles the issue of key skills at two levels: diagnostic and developmental.

- At the diagnostic level, assessment is made of each student's key skills development and learning needs. In the full-time programmes this is done at an early stage, and in the part-time programmes it is done prior to the beginning of a course.
- At the developmental level, courses or modules are provided on both an integrated and free-standing basis to help students build their key skills.

The College has a full-time key skills tutor to oversee the teaching of key skills at both these levels and across all programmes of learning.

12.6 The College's curriculum for key skills development has a range of components:

- A number of courses or modules across all the various programmes of learning are designed specifically to develop key skills.
- On the full-time programmes all students follow a course or module focussing specifically on key skills.
- Other courses or modules develop key skills on an integrated basis.

Regarding the last component, it needs to be mentioned that tutors not only let students know what key skills they are expected to develop but comment on their key skills achievement in the assessment pro-formas completed at the end of courses or modules.

Case Study

All students on the full-time Diploma programme complete the Key Skills Project module. This module is designed to develop and assess a range of transferable academic skills within the context of students' individual curriculum specialisms. Students are asked to work in small groups to research one of a number of broad-based titles drawn from across the programme's curriculum areas. Each group reports on the findings made or data collected via (a) an oral presentation and (b) a written report. Each also (c) completes a Library and Research Skills exercise and (d) produces a list of sources consulted. An assessment is made of all four elements of the module and of the group dynamics, including the role played by each student. Overall, the assessment procedures are designed to contextualise and integrate the development of different transferable skills.

12.7 Tutors make a deliberate effort to integrate the use of study, library and information technology skills in order to enhance the students' confidence to learn. Thus:

- Tutors ensure that students receive materials that are appropriate to the achievement of their primary learning goals. They introduce students to such reading strategies as scanning, skimming and the so-called SQ3R method. (SQ3R stands for *survey, question, read, recall and review.*)
- Tutors guide students on the use of appropriate note-taking and note-making techniques.
- Tutors help students to undertake research on the Internet to find materials relevant to a course or module. This happens sometimes even in courses where students have not previously used computers or the Internet. It is thus not unusual for students to develop the enthusiasm to seek further training in information technology.

Learner Comments

"The library skills were fantastic. Once I got into using the library, I was able to find what I needed. It was very good."

"SQ3R actually broke down everything for me. It made reading more accessible and manageable for me. I will find it useful, even for reading personal letters. I had difficulty in reading for a long time, and I often blanked out. This SQ3R method has helped me to concentrate for longer, and now I don't switch off easily."

"I found the note-taking exercise extremely helpful. No one had previously taken the time to show me the different ways in which notes can be made."

"I have learnt to search for information using the Internet. This was a large obstacle for me before coming on this (deaf awareness) course. I am now thinking of applying for the Computers for Beginners so I can learn some more skills."

"Using the computers in the library has really opened my eyes. I now feel I could do an IT short course. Maybe I could even do a full-time IT course in the future."

12.8 The College's Library and Learning Resources Centre has a range of resources designed to develop key skills. Some of these are intended for self-access by students; others are for use by tutors in planning and delivering classes.

13. Learning Aids and Resources

13.1 Tutors support their classroom teaching with a range of appropriate learning aids and resources. The main ones are:

- the white board
- the flip chart
- the overhead projector transparency

Tutors use the above skilfully in the sessions that they plan and deliver.

13.2 Both the white board and the flip chart are used to record information with coloured markers. Care is taken that anything written on them is sufficiently large (at least 6 cm in height) and is presented in an easily readable style. Sheets from the flip chart are sometimes hung in the class to reinforce learning at various stages of the session.

13.3 The overhead projector is used to project an image from an acetate sheet or transparency onto a screen. The transparency has a number of advantages:

- Daylight conditions can prevail in the classroom.
- The tutor can talk to and face the class.
- Other learning aids and resources (the white board, flip chart, etc) can be used simultaneously.
- Materials can be developed before a session and further developed as the session proceeds.
- Materials can be stored and re-used many times over.
- Hard copies can be made before or after the class.
- Overlays can be used to present complex data.

Care is taken to ensure that the size of the lettering, typed or hand-written, on the transparency is sufficiently large (at least 6mm in height) so that students can easily read the information. Care is also taken to ensure that the transparency is not cluttered with too much information.

13.4 In addition to the above aids and resources, tutors often use handouts to help students achieve the session's outcomes. The handouts are of two basic types:

- *Information handouts* give an overview or summary of the topic, reproduce carefully selected passages from books or articles, contain the full transcript of the session itself or of a reading, and/or provide factual or graphical data.
- *Worksheets* contain questions or activities that students are asked to complete.

Some handouts (e.g. the overview or summary of the topic) are given out at the beginning of the session, while others (e.g. worksheets) are given out at different stages of the session. Care is taken to ensure that the handouts are not just error-free but easy to read and understand. Handouts are either hand-written or, better still, typed and presented to a near-professional standard with the use of word processing and desktop publishing computer programmes.

13.5 Other learning aids and resources that tutors use are:

- Audio aids (e.g. a pre-recorded audiocassette played through a tape recorder)
- Visual aids (e.g. a collection of film slides displayed through a slide projector)
- Audio-visual aids (e.g. a pre-recorded videocassette played through a video recorder)
- Multi-media aids (e.g. a PowerPoint presentation prepared on a computer and displayed through a multi-media projector)

In their everyday lives students are already exposed to a range of media (e.g. television, radio, videos, advertisements, magazines, posters, postcards, and so on). They are thus able to relate to the classroom better if they can use the same or all of the senses (hearing, seeing, feeling, and so on) that they normally use in their encounters with the media.

13.6 Learning aids and resources, especially the visual ones, are more effective when they are:

- simple and straightforward
- brief and to the point
- relevant and focussed (i.e. related to learning outcomes)
- interesting and colourful

The London Underground map can be seen as an excellent visual graphic because it is not only simple and straightforward but represents geographical information in an interesting and colourful (though not accurate) way.

Tutors ensure that the classroom is suitable for using the various learning aids and resources to the best advantage. They also regularly evaluate the various learning aids and resources by asking students and other tutors about their suitability for a particular subject or topic and about their role in assisting student learning.

13.7 In general, learning aids and resources constitute an extremely useful aspect of the tutors' teaching repertoire. Amongst other things:

- They arouse and sustain students' interest in the topics raised.
- They help students reinforce their understanding.

- They help students retain information.
- They provide variety in learning.
- They allow for a more effective use of class contact time.
- They facilitate and improve communication skills amongst participants.
- They enhance the achievement of learning outcomes.

14. Student Guidance and Support

14.1 The Northern College provides students with a range of support services. Such services offer guidance, tutoring, counselling and mentoring. They help students to develop the skills to do various things:

- to reflect on their personal, academic and vocational objectives
- to set career or life goals
- to adopt an appropriate learning style
- to cope with difficulties and crises
- to review their progress in and beyond formal education

14.2 The College supports student learning by providing various types of guidance:

- Academic guidance on the nature and requirements of courses or programmes
- Career guidance on the relevance of formal education to jobs or careers
- Learning guidance on the availability and use of specially created facilities (e.g. for people with learning difficulties)
- Personal guidance on financial, welfare and other personal matters
- Administrative guidance on pre-entry, entry, on-programme and post-programme aspects of the formal educational system to which students will relate

All those who come into contact with students and, more especially, the teaching staff and the specially trained staff based in a dedicated student services unit share the role of guidance.

14.3 Tutors accept that they have a role to play in supporting students above and beyond their teaching responsibilities. In fact, they perform a pivotal guidance role for full-time as well as part-time students.

14.4 The tutors' guidance role manifests in different ways and stages:

- Students come to tutors to discuss and explore their needs and interests.
- Students are helped to set specific goals with a view to realising them.
- Students are advised to explore possible ways to act and to implement any self-chosen action plans.
- Students are helped to evaluate their progress vis-à-vis their goals.

In each of the above stages, and more especially in the initial ones, students are made to feel welcomed, 'cared for' and safe so that they are able to develop trust in those who provide them with guidance.

- 14.5 A formalised mechanism for helping students become adept to studying and living in the College is the general induction process. In the case of full-time Diploma and Higher Education students this takes place before the relevant programme actually begins, and in the case of part-time students it takes place during either day visits or the introductory session of a short course.
- 14.6 Tutors also take on the role of personal tutors to provide guidance in relation to study and other matters where required.
- 14.7 Students whose personal or family situation is of such a nature that it impacts negatively on their academic performance make arrangements to seek guidance and support from part-time qualified counsellors.
- 14.8 'Specialist' support is provided to benefit students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This is done in line with the College's equal opportunities policy.

Students who are hearing impaired...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have access to induction loop systems • receive support in applying to buy specialist equipment • can make arrangements for hiring scribes for making notes in the classroom
Students who are visually impaired...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have access to fixed or portable CCTV readers • are encouraged to use computer software for text enlargement • can hire magnifying glasses and sheets • can take out a selection of audio books from the library
Students with dyslexia...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are provided appropriate learning materials • have access to portable electronic spelling checkers • receive appropriate tuition
Students with mobility problems...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attend classes in accessible areas • can use touch screen computer facilities • take benefit of adapted accommodation • use designated wheelchair access routes

- 14.9 Generally, the College's guidance and support system spans all aspects of campus life from student entry through to student exit.

Section 5

15. Assessment

- 15.1 The word 'assessment' is derived from the Latin *ad sedere*, meaning 'to sit down beside'. As its etymology implies, assessment is primarily concerned with providing guidance and feedback to students. Generally, assessment refers to any procedure used to estimate student learning for whatever purpose.
- 15.2 Assessment is a process that involves looking at, making inferences about and estimating the worth of a sample of students' work. The sample may include hand-written or typed essays, oral presentations, practical tasks, examination scripts, and so on. The work sampled may be specific to a course, may relate to general progress and may involve explicit or implicit assessment criteria. On the basis of the sample examined, it is possible to make inferences about the students' achievement, potential, ability, intelligence, motivation, learning style and, perhaps even, personality and to produce measures of worth in the form of grades, marks or levels.
- 15.3 Some problems relating to assessment are:

- The sample may not be representative of the students' capabilities and may be overweighted towards particular skills (e.g. essay writing).
- The inferences drawn about students' work may vary widely from one assessor to the next, especially if explicit criteria or marking schemes are not used.
- Measures of worth in terms of grades, marks or levels may, likewise, vary from one assessor to the next.

The implication here is that an effective assessment methodology is one that addresses these problems

- 15.4 The Northern College's assessment methodology has undergone several modifications to reflect good practice. Thus, for example, with respect to the Diploma and Higher Education Programmes steps have been taken to address a number of problems:
- Students are not overloaded with too many assignments.
 - Students are given enough time to complete assignments.
 - Students are made aware of what is expected of them.
 - Tutors provide students with appropriate levels of assistance in either one-to-one or group tutorials.
 - Tutors provide feedback to students on their assignments.
 - Tutors take into account any explicit assessment criteria or marking schemes.
 - Tutors finish written assessments in a specified time-period (namely, within three weeks of submission of assignments).

- Student progress meetings are held to identify individual students' difficulties and to recommend action strategies for students who come to be 'at risk' because of not submitting assignments or not performing at acceptable levels.

15.5 Assessment can either empower students or damage them. Students might carry the scars of their earlier encounters with assessment, remembering for example that they had failed certain examinations or shown little or no aptitude for English composition. It is therefore important that assessment is seen as something that is not harmful to students but beneficial to tutors and students alike.

15.6 Tutors need to be aware of the range of assessment methods available to them (essay writing, short answer questions, multiple choice questions, practical exercises, examinations, vivas, and so on) and to select the most appropriate methods. In practice, they are likely to adopt a number of different methods instead of just one. The methods should be appropriate for the purposes for which they are intended. From the students' point of view the common purposes of assessment are:

- to identify students' starting points
- to provide students with feedback
- to identify students' strengths and weaknesses
- to improve students' learning
- to develop students' skills in self-assessment
- to record students' achievement in terms of marks, grades or levels
- to licence students' progression
- to predict students' success in other courses

From the tutors' point of view, the common purposes of assessment are:

- to provide feedback on the course taught
- to improve teaching
- to identify a course's strengths and weaknesses
- to maintain records of students' progress
- to make the course credit-worthy to other institutions or employers

The guiding principle in the design of assessment methods should be the provision of help to students.

15.7 Essay writing is the dominant mode of assessment for the College's Diploma and Higher Education Programmes; it is also used occasionally in short courses in the College's other programmes. Essays allow students to show a degree of creativity and individuality. It is important that tutors avoid the pitfalls of impressionistic marking when assessing essays. One way in which they do manage to accomplish this is to allocate points or marks to various aspects of essay writing, such as:

- the use of the English language
- the selection and organisation of material
- the extent of reading
- the level of analysis and interpretation
- the handling of referencing

To further reduce the likelihood of subjective judgement, the tutors' first marking is undertaken against the College's overarching criteria of assessment, and this is again checked for *validity* and *reliability* in a verification exercise involving other tutors.

15.8 Assessment is undertaken at formative as well as summative levels:

- *Formative assessment* takes place during a course. It is intended to elicit diagnostic information about student learning - to gauge the strengths and weaknesses of performance and to provide feedback while there is still time to take action for improvement. The implication here is that if students are to know how to improve their future performance, tutors must identify areas for development and indicate next steps.
- *Summative assessment* typically comes at the end of a course. It is intended to judge if the outcomes of a course have been achieved through the completion of essay writing, final examinations or some other mode of assessment. It leads to the award of a final mark, grade or level.

The assessment of students' work is usually formative and summative. Thus tutors provide feedback to students on their performance and award them marks, grades or levels that count towards their final achievement scores. The awards are checked by internal as well as external verifiers.

15.9 The College has, like other institutions in the adult and further educational sectors, opted to place emphasis on the following:

- **Coursework.** A major advantage of coursework is that tutors obtain multiple points of assessment. Coursework also has the potential to measure the capacity to gather and select information from various sources, to deepen understanding and to develop skills vis-à-vis research, reading and writing.

- Explicit assessment criteria. In various programmes of learning explicit criteria for measuring students' performance are increasingly used. If the criteria are known to tutors and not to students, uncertainty can develop among students as to whether the measure of their performance is adequate and fair. Also, the use of implicit criteria leads to impressionistic marking and this creates inconsistencies in the marking pattern amongst tutors.
- Tutor-designed and student-agreed assessment procedures. Students are made aware of the requirements of a course and its assessment procedures. They are often asked to undertake self-assessment and to compare this with tutors' feedback and the award of marks, grades or levels so that they can develop a sense of ownership and commitment to the assessment methodology.
- Process assessment. The assessment of process is usually formative but can be included in summative assessment. Students can, either on their own or with the help of tutors, assess their various *process* skills, such as timetabling, researching, reading, writing, collaborating with others, and so on.
- Outcomes. The use of outcomes enables tutors to explore in a more open fashion student learning. Outcomes do not necessarily have to be tied to a specific performance variable and may include what other things have been learnt or achieved.
- Skills. Whilst doing a course, students usually develop a cluster of skills which they can transfer to a variety of settings. The emphasis on skills provides a framework for identifying outcomes as well as the transferable skills and subject expertise that students require.
- Prior learning. Students' prior learning may or may not have been assessed and/or certificated. It is based upon acknowledgement of and reflection on the acquisition of skills and knowledge in the past and the transferability of this to new settings. It can be used to gauge the students' readiness to enter a course or programme of learning and also for ascertaining how it enhances or even hinders student learning.

15.10 Tutors use the results of assessment for both judgmental and developmental purposes.

- *Developmental assessment* is concerned with improving student learning, and is based on trust between students and the assessment methodology.
- *Judgmental assessment* is concerned with licences to proceed to the next step, and is underlined by consistency, uniformity and fairness in the marking of assignments.

Given that assessors usually have varying and idiosyncratic marking techniques, it is important that care is exercised to ensure that assessment is consistent, uniform and fair both to individual students and to groups of students.

15.11 The design of the College's assessment methodology is such that it helps students to reflect on their performance and to chart their progress.

15.12 The College has developed a comprehensive monitoring system to ensure that its assessment methodology is rigorously and fairly applied on its Diploma and Higher Education Programmes. The system involves the second marking of student assignments together with the internal verification of assessment practices. On the part-time programmes the College has developed an internal moderation system in which the award of credits for a carefully chosen sample of short courses is checked and verified.

16. Evaluation

- 16.1 Evaluation is an important part of quality assurance in teaching and learning. Generally speaking, it can be defined as the process by which any activity is, after its completion, reviewed, and informed judgements made, on the basis of available evidence, as to its overall success or failure to achieve its aims. The judgements themselves will focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the activity in relation to what it sets out to achieve, and its impact on those participating in it, or directly and indirectly affected.
- 16.2 Rather like audit exercises, evaluations can be both internal and external. In terms of the teaching and learning activities of a college - certainly of the Northern College - this means that teaching staff conduct their own ongoing evaluations of courses (and sometimes programmes), and that these are fed into the College's quality assurance mechanisms. These can be regarded as 'internal evaluations'. External evaluations of various kinds are made by a range of different individuals and bodies. These are likely to include:
- FEFC inspectors
 - Course moderators
 - OCN and University validation panels
 - Consultants (usually employed to evaluate externally funded projects)

However, in all cases, the evaluations made - whether internal or external - will be made on the basis of information (interviews, discussions, documents and examples of student work) provided by the College through its staff, students and former students.

- 16.3 All evaluations contribute to good practice in teaching and learning. However, the ongoing, internal evaluations are probably the most important. Firstly, they provide a major part of the information on which external evaluations are likely to be conducted. Secondly, they require teaching staff to reflect upon their practice, and to change it where necessary. Thirdly, they draw students directly into the process of evaluating not only their individual learning experience, but enable them also to contribute to improving the experience of other learners.
- 16.4 Collecting the information on which evaluation exercises can be based should therefore become an important part of teaching and learning practice. It should be a routine procedure in fact, and is likely to be built in to any comprehensive quality assurance policy and its related procedures. Information (or evidence as it may also be called) is likely to be of the following kinds:
- Student evaluation questionnaires, completed for each course, module or course unit
 - Records of peer observation of individual teaching sessions
 - Student attainment records and examples of work (i.e. learning diaries, essays, project work etc.)
 - Course and programme reviews

Reports of external moderators and examiners, and feedback and reports from inspectors will frequently be taken into account when carrying out course and programme reviews, but are not evidence over which the College has any direct control.

- 16.5 The final stage of the teaching and learning evaluation process comes after the completion of a course or programme review. The evidence obtained, and the judgements formed may indicate that not only do certain changes need to be made, but that they should also be the subject of planned staff development and training. This can then be implemented over a period of time.
- 16.6 The most difficult part of the internal evaluation process is clearly the course or programme review. This is a time-consuming exercise, requiring the detailed and painstaking sifting and consideration of evidence. Sometimes the accuracy and validity of the evidence available needs to be checked. At the end of this work, a report has to be made and agreed. Full-scale exercises of this kind cannot occur frequently in the course of a year: one or two at most are possible, given time constraints and other commitments. However, they should be planned in advance, and regarded as an important part of the overall quality assurance procedure, with designated senior staff - usually programme area co-ordinators - being given the responsibility for completing them.
- 16.7 It is, of course, vital that evaluation should be a means of actively improving teaching and learning, and should not be allowed to become an exercise that is empty bureaucratic. This is always a danger, and where it happens, the real work of quality assurance - to make sure that where teaching and learning can be improved, the changes necessary to bring this about are made - will be weakened.

Section 6

17. Conclusion

- 17.1 The Northern College is committed to the creation of a learning environment that embraces all its activities, and to the ongoing identification and dissemination of good practice. The debate about learning – its changing purposes, value and effectiveness – needs to be a continuous one, in the light of which teaching practice must be modified to suit changing circumstances. This *Guide* therefore has sought to provide a starting-point and focus for that debate; one that invites feedback from those who read and use it. It constitutes the baseline from which self-assessment and review can proceed as the College strives for continuous improvement.
- 17.2 Inevitably, ‘good practice’, like practice of any kind, is concerned with what is done, and the way in which it is done. And since we rarely do things without what we perceive as good reasons, what we judge to be beneficial and effective is constantly being measured against what our experience tells us is less so.