



Quality Times

Issue Eight



Welcome to the eighth issue of our quality-focused newsletter

We promised at the start of this academic year to put a strong focus on supporting members to improve the quality of provision. While we have been busy putting the finishing touches to two new Natspec Transform services which you can read about in the final article of this issue of Quality Times, we have also been reflecting on the impact for colleges of the training and support we already offer. You can learn how Sense College East benefited from two linked training courses, while one of our associate team describes the work she has done over the past year to support two different colleges on their quality improvement journey. You will also find tips from our TechAbility team on assessing the effectiveness of your use of assistive technology, as shared with Ofsted, thoughts on the links between innovation and improvement, and details of Newfriars College’s work on creating an adaptive curriculum to meet individual needs.

We hope these articles provide you with food for thought. We’d also be delighted if they encouraged you to explore further the support on offer to members for quality improvement, whether that’s through use of [resources we’ve developed](#), having staff participate in [our wide range of member networks](#) or taking up [training, coaching or consultancy available from Natspec Transform](#). And if the article on innovation prompts you to [submit an entry to this year’s Natspec Innovation Awards](#), that would be the icing on the cake!

Finally, don’t forget that we are always on the look-out for contributors to Quality Times. If you’d like to share your quality improvement story in a future edition, whether that’s in relation to education, care or health, please do get in touch.

Ruth Perry – Senior Policy Manager at Natspec

Tracy Gillett – Director of Quality on the Natspec board

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The benefits of investing in staff development



Shari Welsford, Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality at Sense College East, explains how training from Natspec Transform has helped the college improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

We are fortunate at Sense College East to have an education team that includes highly skilled, qualified teachers and multi-sensory impairment practitioners. However, like many other colleges in the sector, we are experiencing recruitment challenges. These led us to developing our own trainee SEND tutor programme in the 21/22 academic year and putting increased time, energy and resource into upskilling our staff ourselves.

We are on what we describe as an 'aspirational quality improvement journey from Good to Outstanding'. One of the early steps we took on this journey was to book our newly formed cross-college observation team and centre managers onto the two-session Natspec Transform training 'Monitoring the quality of teaching, learning, assessment and support of learners with SEND'. We felt this training was relevant to their responsibilities for staff development and for quality of education.

The training provided a timely opportunity to increase staff confidence and knowledge about monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. The emphasis of the training was on observations and learning walks and it incorporated a balance of information and practical activity. Small groups, made up of staff from specialist provision across the sector, carried out an observation collaboratively with the support of the trainer, using a pre-recorded lesson video.

The key messages our staff took from the training were to:

- ensure observation comments reflected the impact on students and their learning
- remove personal judgements and replace them with direct quotes or examples of evidence observed against the college's effective practice standards.

Following this initial training, there was an increase in the uptake of learning walks and improvements in the way evidence from these was captured. Findings and actions were concise and organised into the categories of our effective practice standards. This offered leaders a clearer picture of how the college was performing and where to implement training. As a result of the training, we reviewed our observation policy. While formal lesson observations were to continue annually, there was a shift towards a partnered approach between teachers, managers and leaders.

In August 2022, the college commissioned Natspec Transform to deliver an inhouse training course aimed at our teaching teams: 'Building staff understanding of effective teaching, learning, assessment and support for learners with SEND'. This was the next stage of the

college's wider cultural change. We wanted to increase staff buy-in to the observation process by helping them understand how it could be used to enhance their skills as teachers. In particular, we wanted them to be able to assess for themselves the impact of their specialist teaching on students' learning.

It was really useful to have the training delivered in-house. It was both cost-effective and bespoke, and allowed us to upskill all teaching staff in a consistent way. The Natspec trainer drew on her extensive experience of supporting FE providers and detailed knowledge of the Education Inspection Framework (EIF) and tailored the training to meet our specific requirements, in particular linking it to the college's new observation process. We had shared our in-house policies ahead of the training with the trainer so she was able to refer to them during discussions. The training also reflected the EIF, with greater focus on curriculum articulation under the three I's (Intent, Implementation and Impact). The session gave staff a real learning opportunity to become more confident in their professional dialogues.

One of the most impactful aspects of the course was the coaching element. Staff worked through real scenarios, linking their reflections on evidence to the college's effective practice guidance and, in turn, to the EIF. Staff valued the insights of the trainer who added new perspective to the topics under discussion, for example, making explicit connections between life skills achievement and reduced student vulnerability in preparation for adulthood.

A simple but powerful learning point for the team was realising the need to 'shout about' the effective specialist intervention strategies and provisions we use daily and how they impact on students' progress. It quickly became clear to the trainer that the team were not always conscious of how specialist their skills are, how they are able to break down barriers to learning and adopt effective approaches. She helped remind staff that what may appear as small steps in progress can have an enormous impact on the individual's daily life. This was definitely good for staff morale.

Since staff took part in this training, we have seen more newsletters and case stories which celebrate learner success and form a valuable part of the learning journey. Likewise, the quality of impact evidence within student progress reports has significantly improved. There has also been an increase in students 'working ahead of predicted progress' in the autumn term of the 22-23 academic year, which reflects improvements in teaching, learning and assessment. Evidence from learning walks has given us a better understanding of staff teaching profiles, enabling us to identify where staff are well-placed to provide supportive input to their colleagues.

Following the shared experience of training, our trainee SEND tutors are building a positive peer-to-peer support network across the college. This is particularly important as we have teaching staff working in isolation across our geographically scattered college sites. Teachers' confidence in identifying the impact of their teaching on student's progress has led to an increase in good practice sharing. Teachers are now much more willing to showcase their work in meetings and to invite colleagues into classrooms to visit their sessions. Overall, there is a real sense of pride and accomplishment amongst the teaching team in enabling students to meet, and in some cases surpass, their aspirations. The Natspec Transform training session has



certainly played a part in this shift in confidence and in helping the college to make good progress on our 'aspirational quality improvement journey from Good to Outstanding'.

To find out more about training available from Natspec, visit [the Natspec Transform pages on our website](#).

Valuing innovation



Ruth Perry, Senior Policy Manager at Natspec, shares her understanding of the place of innovation in quality improvement and invites Natspec members to enter their innovative practice into this year's [Natspec Innovation Awards](#).

There's a new emphasis in this year's Natspec Awards on innovation – hence the new name: Natspec Innovation Awards. While many education awards focus on identifying the 'best' teacher, team, provision or student, the Natspec awards fulfil a different purpose. We want to unearth examples of specialist colleges doing things a little differently to great effect. We are looking for innovators who've had the courage to test out an unusual approach, take a risk or choose the path less trodden, all in pursuit of better outcomes for learners. Where colleges have succeeded in making a positive difference for learners as result, we want to celebrate that and share their good work around the Natspec network and beyond. We also hope that others will catch the 'innovation bug' and begin to be more adventurous in their own quality improvement journeys.

So – what do we mean by 'innovation'? Take a tip from me if you're looking to explore definitions: don't start where I did by asking Google. You'll be offered two impractical options if you do: wade through 300 million results or go with the self-referential 'the act of innovating', Google's own definition. I've now read a fair number of articles and assimilated the conflicting views of a wide range of different authors writing from a variety of perspectives such as business, technology, science, as well as education – and I'm still not ready to hazard a precise definition. But I have developed an understanding of the features or characteristics of innovation and feel reasonably confident that I'll now recognise it when I see it! I've also got a better idea of what it's not.

Innovation is not just about doing something new or different. It's about doing things differently and **more effectively**. Innovation brings about improvements; the practice or product must be new and better than whatever preceded it. Innovation is also not just 'a bright idea'. It's an idea that's worked through, tested, reviewed and refined, and which has proved its worth in practice. That's why innovation sits so comfortably in the context of quality improvement. Valuing innovation leads us to ask, 'Could we do something different or differently that would result in better outcomes?' It can also help in maintaining quality: 'As the world changes around us, do we need to innovate in order keep pace with these changes?'

Better minds than mine have identified four main types of innovation:

Incremental innovation

Also known as [continuous improvement](#), it involves improving an existing product or service. It is often associated with a collaborative approach, where innovative ideas, perhaps in the form of multiple small tweaks, are as likely to come from staff on the ground as from leaders. It

relies on organisations valuing the ideas of all staff and of customers or service users. It may not be 'big bang' stuff, but it's just as important.

Adjacent innovation

Adjacent innovators use existing capabilities (like technology or knowledge) to reach a new audience or enter a new market. In business situations, it's commonly associated with expansions or take-overs. But it's also about applying what has been learned in one area to another, perhaps in an unexpected way. In a college context, that might be about transferring and adapting what works in one setting to another or the principles behind the success with one cohort to a different learner group.

Disruptive innovation

This is the type of innovation where an organisation shakes up an industry or sector by coming from a completely different angle that challenges traditional ways of doing things. Think Netflix or Uber. As a result, the whole sector has to up its game and in most cases, the established companies are forced to adopt some of the practices of the disruptor in order to meet customers' increased expectations. Disruptive practice in an education context might involve blowing away some of the assumptions about what is and isn't possible typically held by most colleges and daring to demonstrate that what others may think unachievable can be done.

Radical innovation

Radical innovators create a brand-new product or service that nobody saw coming and perhaps at the time nobody thought was needed. It appeals swiftly to those who define themselves as 'early adopters' but over time often becomes a must-have for a much wider market. The Kindle is great example for me. I loved books, the physical objects, the smell and feel of them, and couldn't see why anyone needed an e-book. I can't remember when I last read a whole physical book. I'm team-Kindle all the way now. Can colleges be radical innovators? I can't see why not. The fact that I can't really come up with suggestions for radical college innovation just plays into the definition. When it happens, we'll recognise it for what it is – but we won't have seen it coming!

If you recognise yourself, your colleagues, your college, or aspects of your provision in any of these definitions of innovation, then check out the [Natspec Innovation Awards](#). Remember we are looking for snippets of innovative practice rather than seeking to make judgements about the quality of your provision as a whole. You can use [our new innovation checker](#) to test out how innovative your practice might be before applying.

Help us evidence and celebrate the way in which innovation, however large or small and of whatever variety, can help colleges maintain and improve the quality of provision for learners. You have until 4pm on 29 March to apply.

What are the quality indicators for effective Assistive Technology?



Neil Harrod Beck is the Assistive Technology Projects Lead for Natspec's Assistive Technology support service, TechAbility. Here he shares the information and advice he recently provided to Ofsted inspectors about assessing the quality of assistive technology. It's full of suggestions that will be helpful to colleges in carrying out their own self-assessments.

Ofsted recently approached TechAbility to request a video resource to give inspectors an overview of Assistive Technology (AT). The resource was to form part of a broader training package for FE and Skills inspectors. Ofsted wanted to know about the most common technology in high needs provision and the student experience of that technology. It was a great chance to reflect on what we look for when reviewing AT provision in colleges and centres when we visit them. One point we were keen to make was that, as TechAbility consultants, we tend to focus much less on the technology itself and much more on everything that lies behind it. It was also interesting to consider the challenges that Ofsted inspectors, who are not generally AT specialists, face when carrying out an inspection.

So, what did we share with Ofsted that might help colleges when they are reflecting on the quality of AT in their own settings?

First of all, we acknowledged that as an onlooker, it is not easy to distinguish between a student who is as well provided for as possible and one who has not been given an appropriate range of options or the support they need. Indeed, even an experienced Assistive Technologist can sometimes be fully convinced that a particular method is right for a student, only to change their mind once appropriate assessment and provisioning processes are applied. So, we urged inspectors not to go looking for AT provision to match expectations based on a particular student profile. Inspectors already expect learning support to be provided on the basis of individual need, not condition or disability; the same applies for AT.

We decided the most useful thing we could offer Ofsted would be an explanation of the approach we take, as TechAbility consultants, to identifying whether a student's needs are being well met by the AT with which they have been provided.

Useful lines of enquiry

When we visit a college, we determine if a student is well provided for, using the following lines of enquiry, asking both student and staff:

What access methods have been tried? How has this been explored? What was the reasoning behind these methods?

When we ask these questions, we are looking for evidence that:

- a range of appropriate options has been tried with students
- there is strong justification behind the selection of the chosen method(s)
- the AT has been introduced in a feasible manner for that student.

Who was involved in this process and what did they contribute?

When we ask this question, we are looking for evidence that:

- there has been beneficial input from a range of appropriate people including the student and, as appropriate,
 - parents for their knowledge of the individual young person
 - speech and language therapist for communication strategies
 - occupational therapist for independence and living skills/support
 - physiotherapist to look at range of movement, teacher/keyworker for activities
 - assistive technologist for advice on technology adoption.

What were the considerations when identifying a suitable AT intervention?

When we ask this question, we are looking for evidence that:

- those involved have thought about costs, associated training needs (for students, staff and parents) and the different environments in which the AT is to be used, as well as learner preferences and intended impact.

How successful has the AT intervention been?

When we ask this question, we are looking for evidence that:

- the AT has had a positive impact for the learner, e.g., in improving access to learning or social activities or to increasing independence
- that any costs (e.g., financial, time or other investment of resource) are outweighed by the benefits.

What is the plan to develop the student's access method(s)?

When we ask this question, we are looking for evidence that:

- the student is being supported to learn how to make optimal use of the access method
- staff are working with the student to ensure they can use the access method across multiple activities, with adaptations being made where appropriate.

Indicators of potential concerns

We also advised Ofsted on indicators of potential concerns that should trigger deeper investigation. These include:

- students being unable to access the curriculum, work experience or leisure activities, to communicate with staff and peers, or to exercise independence
- lack of AT assessment kit, despite there being an evident need
- lack of access to a transdisciplinary team to inform AT decisions
- lack of referral systems to apply in situations that call for AT knowledge beyond that of staff
- lack of effective use of networks to share AT knowledge and gain peer support
- teachers not producing accessible materials.

We emphasised that while these lines of enquiry and indicators will be useful tools, for inspectors to make informed judgements, they need to be supplemented with a background knowledge of AT. The same applies to college staff responsible for self-assessment of AT.

If you're looking to improve your ability to self-assess AT in your college or to improve your use of AT, then check out the support available through TechAbility. Natspec members (and Karten centres) can nominate a [TechAbility Champion](#) to keep up to date with AT practice, receive peer support and trial technologies. You can access a range of [upcoming training, webinars and events](#) and there is a free guide to good assistive technology practice with the [TechAbility Standards](#). We can also carry out AT assessments and help you to set up the processes for you to do your own; email techability@natspec.org.uk to find out more. Follow us on Twitter [@Tech_Ability1](#) and be sure to [sign up to our newsletter](#) to help keep tabs on all the latest opportunities.

Supporting quality improvement in specialist colleges: a Natspec associate perspective



Dawn Green, one of our Natspec Transform associates, describes the work she has been doing to help colleges improve the quality of their provision.

Over the last 12 months, I have been involved in three different types of support offered by Natspec Transform: health checks, bespoke consultancy and the new college improvement partner service. It is really rewarding to work in a supportive, developmental capacity with college leadership teams and to feel that when you leave the college, you have made a difference and helped them find the right way forward.

Health checks are typically taken up by colleges relatively new to Natspec or not long established. Many have yet to have their first new provider monitoring visit or first full inspection. This year I have carried out health checks with several providers in this situation. The health check helps the college identify whether it has all the basic requirements for a specialist FE college in place, what's already working well and where improvements are needed. The methodology and approach we use on a health check promotes openness and transparency and from the outset a collaborative and supportive relationship is developed with the college. With a foundation of mutual trust, I have been able to have very open and honest conversations which is important in reaching agreement about next steps and future support.

The health check gives the provider the chance to direct the process, providing the flexibility to spend time on issues identified as priorities by them, as well as allowing a re-focus if the associate during the visit identifies matters which they and the college agree to be of greater significance. Due to the supportive and developmental nature of the process, we can spend time on considering issues in depth, collaborative problem-solving, experimenting and testing things out with different groups of stakeholders. This is very different to an inspection scenario or a 'Mocksted' (the term sometimes given to a visit by one or more consultants who replicate the Ofsted inspection process) which Natspec does not offer. In these circumstances, the direction definitely comes from the inspection team and the process is about judgement rather than support. The input we offer as Natspec associates is developmental and collaborative; as a result, college staff feel free to talk about areas for improvement or things they are uncertain about rather than being tempted to 'pull the wool over our eyes.' That said, the health check is a rigorous and intensive process, both for the college and the associate. It also results in a detailed, constructive report which includes suggested next steps. The report, together with the conversations held on the day, helps leaders to prioritise and focus their quality improvement actions. They tell us that having a supportive external perspective is invaluable. (You can read about the health check from a college point of view in [Issue 7 of Quality Times](#).)

I care deeply about associated outcomes and impact for the providers that I work with. That's what really motivates me to do this work. After completing a health check, I leave the college thinking about the impending challenges as well as the amazing opportunities that lie ahead and wondering what the provision will look like in a year or two when some of the plans have been implemented. That's why I particularly enjoy the opportunity to work with colleges over a longer period than the two-day health check. The most satisfying quality improvement work for me comes where I am able to develop a relationship with a college and provide them with support on a more ongoing basis. I really enjoy being able to continue to contribute to the quality improvement journey over a period of time and see first-hand the impact of the work undertaken.

I would like to highlight a couple of examples of this longer-term support. In these two cases, I first met the colleges when I carried out their health check, although that's by no means a pre-requisite for taking advantage of the bespoke support available through Natspec Transform. Following the health check, each college requested additional support and it was fabulous to be asked to develop a bespoke package of support based entirely on the needs of the college at that moment in time. This way of working gives control to the college, enabling them to identify the issues and the support they need, whilst matching these needs to an associate with the relevant skills and expertise to help. Because I had already done the health checks in these colleges, my prior understanding gave me a really good foundation on which to build the next phase of support.

One of the colleges I work with identified a specific need around the use and development of their management information system (MIS). We agreed that I would provide support on an infrequent basis when requested by the college. The college wanted me to review the use of its MIS and the plans for developing its use further. We agreed dates to monitor progress and next steps. Due to my knowledge of the sector, I was able to make suggestions for peer visits to other providers and these have been beneficial to the college. This college is highly aspirational and it has been a pleasure to see the progress they have made in a relatively short period of time. The leadership team has clear strategic direction and an excellent understanding of what they need from their MIS.

The support that I provide for the second college is broader in scope. Following the health check, I spent a day on site and worked with the principal to carefully plan the work that I would undertake in supporting the college. We agreed that I would carry out a two-day quality improvement visit each term and provide support for the college's trustees for the principal's appraisal and performance management. The quality improvement visits now form an integral part of the college's quality calendar. My regular visits provide the opportunity to focus on progress made since the last visit and to monitor progress against the college's quality and post-Ofsted improvement plans. I do this through a range of activities including document review, quality walks, meetings with members of the leadership team, staff and learner forums, learner tracking and work scrutiny. Documents are reviewed ahead of the visit and an outline programme is agreed beforehand based on progress and priorities for that particular visit. We find this helps to make the best use of the time available. At the end of each visit, I provide a summary report where we capture progress made since the last visit, identify recommendations



and agree the focus of the next visit. Natspec Transform has now developed a new service, based on this way of working, which will be offered to all colleges seeking to make rapid improvements after a disappointing inspection or monitoring visit. I'm delighted to have been asked to join the team of associates who will provide this support and who will be known as 'college improvement partners'.

I think the key to meeting provider expectations in my role as a Natspec associate is ongoing, honest and open communication, with no surprises. It's also good to be part of a Natspec Transform team. Where a college needs something beyond what I can offer myself, it is really good to be able to signpost to other Natspec services that they could benefit from, whether that's [free member networks](#), training opportunities or the support of another associate with different specialisms.

To find out more about consultancy support from Natspec, including health checks, visit the [Natspec Transform webpage](#). If you are interested in becoming a Natspec associate, contact yola.jacobsen@natspec.org.uk.

An adaptive curriculum: an approach to personalisation in SEND



Dr Kathryn Taylor, Head of Vocational Pathway at Newfriars College, describes how the college has run with the idea of 'adaptive' teaching and applied it not just to curriculum delivery but also to curriculum design.

'Adaptive teaching' has come to replace the term 'differentiation' in the last few years. It permeates the Early Career Framework, in particular, Standard 5 which reads

'Provide opportunity for all pupils to experience success by:

- adapting lessons, whilst maintaining high expectations for all, so that all pupils have the opportunity to meet expectations
- balancing input of new content so that pupils master important concepts
- making effective use of teaching assistants.'

Jon Eaton, in [a guest blog](#) for the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) notes that 'Over the past few years, 'differentiation' has become an increasingly unpopular term in teaching'. He suggests that it has come to represent an administrative burden for teachers as they design multiple worksheets and multiple mini-lessons for different groups within a class, and a potential lowering of expectations for some learners. So, if 'adaptive teaching' describes the process by which we enable all learners in our classrooms to experience success, should we not then, as leaders, think bigger? What if we could make the whole curriculum 'adaptive', rather than just the teaching and learning?

This is what we have set out to do in our vocational pathway offer at Newfriars College. We are an independent specialist college of 192 learners aged 16-25 with SEND, based in Stoke-on-Trent. 83 of those learners access our vocational pathway, which is designed to prepare young people for employment, alongside their Preparation for Adulthood goals.

We have built an ambitious and aspirational curriculum, which covers five key areas:

1. Preparation for adulthood (independent living skills and a wider curriculum carousel offer, with a programme on Accessible Technology, for example)
2. Employability/vocational learning and qualifications (accredited and RARPA, the college's Step Up Programme) covering a broad range of vocational options including health and social care; mechanics; trades; ICT; business; catering; sport; conservation; art and design; performing and visual arts; photography; and horticulture
3. English, maths and IT (accredited, including GCSE and Functional Skills; RARPA [Step-Up] and embedded)

4. Good health, wellbeing and enrichment
5. Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) outcomes (threaded through the offer) including therapies.

The timetable for our five-day offer for 16–18-year-old learners is as follows:

- Monday: Maths or English/PfA
- Tuesday: Vocational option 1
- Wednesday: Employability (accredited programme)
- Thursday: Vocational option 2
- Friday: Maths or English/PfA.

However, there are some learners for whom some of these options may not be the best fit for their needs. Let's take Will, for example. Will is autistic and requires 1:1 support for his social and emotional needs. He loves performing arts and the outdoors. When Will first started with us, he accessed the curriculum as described above, with art as his option 1, and performing arts as his option 2. It soon became apparent that Will was struggling with the classroom-based nature of art and of his Wednesday employability programme.

So last year, in consultation with Will and his family, we put together a modified offer, whereby Will accessed half a day of art instead of a full day, with music therapy put in place for the afternoon. His Wednesday employability offer was changed from classroom-based accreditation to a community employability placement, working in the college garden. This year, when planning for Will's curriculum, and again in consultation with his key workers and his family, we designed a bespoke curriculum to suit his needs. His vocational option 1 this year is travel training (he has continued performing arts), and his employability work takes place out in the community, undertaking a work placement with the Canal and River Trust.

We now modify the curriculum for many of our learners to support their individual needs and enable them to achieve their goals. We have also changed our strategic direction when it comes to curriculum planning. In the summer term, we now carefully review each individual learner whom we know will be continuing with us, through consultations with staff, parents and learners. This allows us to individualise the curriculum for the following year, based on a holistic understanding of the learner and what they need to support their further progress. For new learners, we organise more transition visits and interviews so that we are getting to know each learner better before we start planning their curriculum. This way we are clear about the right offer for our new learners, right from the start of their journey. Getting the curriculum right from the beginning is no easy task, but knowing your learners is key, as is regular review of the curriculum offer, and being open to change when something isn't working.

New support for quality improvement from Natspec Transform



Ruth Perry, Senior Policy Manager at Natspec, introduces two new quality improvement services for members.

I often describe the [health checks](#) that Natspec offers new members as an 'opportunity to check that you have all your ducks in a row'. They are intended to help colleges to determine if their governance, workforce, curriculum and safeguarding measures are appropriate and sufficient for a specialist FE college. I used the 'ducks in a row' phrase when explaining to an experienced principal in an established college that the health check may not be quite what she was looking for. "So," she asked, "what QI support does Natspec offer those of us whose ducks are lined up pretty neatly? But maybe some of the ducks aren't swimming as well as others, or one or two of them may be heading off in the wrong direction?" And so the seed for our new quality reviews was sown.

Quality reviews will be primarily aimed at established member colleges. The review will support colleges to improve an aspect of their provision which they have identified through self-assessment as in need of improvement. An experienced Natspec associate will check the accuracy of the college's self-assessment, identifying what's already working well and where improvements are needed. They will suggest reasons why things aren't working as well as intended and recommend improvement actions. In order to reach these conclusions, the associate will review relevant reports, policies and paperwork before undertaking a two-day visit including an agreed set of on-site review activities. These activities might include, for example: discussions with senior leaders, conversations with staff in different roles, learners, employers or families; observation of sessions; a site tour; work scrutiny; a review of learners' folders, their progress records, or attendance, safeguarding, achievement and destination data. Most of these activities will be done jointly with the college's quality lead so that the experience is collaborative and developmental and leads to increased capability within the college to self-assess and quality assure provision in a robust way.

There was another other gap in our support services that had also begun to trouble me. How do we help colleges respond to a disappointing inspection or monitoring report? We normally write to a college once its Estyn or Ofsted report is published and offer congratulations or commiserations, as appropriate. We also say, 'Natspec is here to support you; let us know if we can help in any way.' Listening to a podcast on bereavement made me reflect on how unhelpful that sympathetic but rather vague offer might be. One contributor to the podcast advised that if you genuinely want to help a bereaved friend, don't just say, "Let me know if I can help in any way"; instead offer them something specific that you could do that would be useful - like



picking up their kids from school or helping sort out some paperwork. It occurred to me that it would be much more useful for members if we could offer them a service focused on helping them make rapid improvements post-inspection. That service in the form of a college improvement partner, is now ready to go.

From now on, we will proactively offer the college improvement partner (CIP) service to any member who receives a Requires Improvement or Inadequate grade or Insufficient Progress judgements in a monitoring report. If they take up the offer, they will be introduced to an experienced associate, to be known as an improvement partner or CIP, who will work with them to help create a post-inspection action plan, and then stay working alongside the college for an agreed period, supporting with the implementation of the plan, monitoring progress against it and evaluating the impact of improvement actions. The service will be highly bespoke, with the CIP and the college determining over what period they will work together, how many days of the CIP's time are needed and how that time is used.

We hope by adding these two services we have addressed two significant gaps in our QI support offer. You can find details of these services on our [Transform webpage](#) which also includes information about other forms of consultancy and coaching that we offer. You can [request a quality review](#) by completing a short online form on this webpage. If you think you are eligible for the [college improvement partner service](#) but have not been offered a CIP, you can contact ruth.perry@natspec.org.uk to discuss your needs.