Quality Assurance Arrangements

For Modern Apprenticeships

2024-25

Version History

Version	Revision(s)	Approved by	Date
1	First Publication	Karen Murray	01/05/24

Contents

1. Background

1.1 Introduction and context

The Quality Assurance Arrangements set out Skills Development Scotland's (SDS) quality assurance and improvement arrangements to enhance delivery of Modern Apprenticeship provision, which are effective from 1 April 2024.

These arrangements apply to all contracted Learning Providers (hereinafter referred to as "providers") directly contracted to deliver SDS funded work-based learning programmes, unless noted by exception.

2. Skills Development Scotland Quality Assurance Controls

2.1 Quality Monitoring

2.1.1 Purpose of Quality Monitoring

The purpose of quality monitoring is to:

- Give SDS assurance of the quality of service delivery of each individual provider (through robust contract management);
- Give SDS a strategic position in relation to the quality of delivery for different frameworks, types of provider and types of employer (through analysis of feedback);
- Provide SDS providers with an annualised evidence-based judgement on their quality of delivery that can inform the provider's own continuous improvement processes; and
- Provide SDS with information of excellent practice that can be shared with the wider provider network.

2.1.2 Process of Quality Monitoring

SDS will utilise a number of key methods to undertake quality monitoring throughout the year:

- Self-Evaluation and Quality Action Planning;
- Formal thematic reviews; and
- Ongoing monitoring activities (apprentice, employer and provider interviews, and observations of practice)

SDS will monitor the quality of service delivery of all providers in line with the Specification and Conditions; Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework (QAIF); and Invitation to Tender documentation. As part of routine monitoring, defined Key Performance Levels will be monitored at specific periods (months) throughout the duration of the contract.

The Skills Investment Advisers (SIAs) are the first point of contact for SDS MA delivery for their providers, including quality assurance and will be responsible for routine quality monitoring. Our Quality assessor (QA) team are specialised quality subject matter experts and will be responsible for specific in-depth quality assurance and enhancement arrangements, being the custodians of the QAIF. The respective roles that our staff undertake in relation to quality arrangements are highlighted in the content of this document.

In MA programmes, the level/ amount of interaction with providers depends on the status of our risk-based intelligence which is used to inform the level of monitoring and sampling of the end service users (apprentices and employers) that will be undertaken. This consists of a mix of face to face and/or remote employer and apprentice interviews and observations of practice which are triangulated with evidence provided by staff from the contracted learning provider. The monitoring evidence is synthesised into an annual summative, RAG rated, evaluative report by the learning provider's Skills Investment Adviser which is discussed and shared with the provider.

Appendix 1 summarises the Key Principles of Quality Reviews and Monitoring activity, including our Code of Conduct for SDS staff, and our expectations of providers.

2.2 Self-Evaluation and Quality Action Planning (SE/QAP)

2.2.1 Purpose of Self-Evaluation and Quality Action Planning

SDS requires all providers, with the exception of colleges[1], delivering Modern Apprenticeships to engage in the self-evaluation (previously described as self-assessment) and quality action planning process in line with our QAIF (see section 4). The purpose of this process is to:

- Ensure that providers are aware of the standards of delivery required by SDS;
- Ensure that providers engage with continuous improvement of their service offer;
- Offer our providers a useful business tool to understand and improve their service offer; and
- Provide SDS with a baseline of evidence for which we can interrogate the quality of delivery of training by providers

2.2.2 Process of Self-Evaluation and Quality Action Planning

SDS providers, with the exception of college providers, are required to maintain a valid self-evaluation record throughout the duration of the MA contract which is reflective of

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[1] We have an agreement to take assurance from self-evaluation requirements of colleges (Scotland) provision and inspection carried out by Education Scotland who undertake external scrutiny of Modern Apprenticeship provision. We do, however, offer our self-evaluation tools to be utilised by college contractors.

their current delivery model. In addition, providers must maintain a Quality Action Plan which identifies key areas for improvement the provider is addressing. Areas for Improvement could be identified through a number of sources e.g., the provider's own self-evaluation; SDS quality monitoring or review; Education Scotland external review; or an Awarding Body visit.

All provider QAPs will be monitored throughout the contracting year by SDS staff, and, as a minimum, we recommend the QAP is updated quarterly or more often as required.

SDS asks providers to record the SE/QAP process in a cloud-based web platform called mesma. Quality Assessors will provide information to individual providers on how to access the system, and a range of video guides and resources are available to support the use of mesma.

2.3 Thematic reviews

2.3.1 Purpose of Thematic Reviews

Throughout the contracting year SDS may carry out thematic review(s). These could focus on a specific theme within the SDS Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework or may focus on a specific process of the apprenticeship delivery. The purpose of these reviews is to:

- Give SDS assurance of the quality of approach to the "theme" of the individual providers within the sample;
- Give SDS a strategic position in relation to the quality of approach undertaken by the provider network in general, in relation to that theme;
- Present providers with a benchmark against which they can judge their own approach to the theme; and
- Present providers with information on excellent practice and areas for improvement.

2.3.2 Process of Thematic Reviews

We will identify a suitable sample of providers to be part of a thematic review, based on a number of factors and considering the scope of the review.

These are short reviews, conducted by an SDS Quality Assessor, and, depending on the topic, may consist of a number of discussions with provider staff, apprentices, and employers. At the end of the individual provider review, the QA will provide verbal feedback, and this may be followed up with a short report.

On conclusion of the review fieldwork across all providers in the sample, a national report will be prepared and published on the SDS website, highlighting key strengths; areas for improvement; excellent practice and any relevant case studies.

SDS will disseminate the key findings from the review to the wider provider network and also highlight and showcase excellent practice of individual providers[2] identified during the review process.

2.4 Exceptional Full Quality Review

In exceptional circumstances SDS may conduct a full formal review of a provider's Modern Apprenticeship provision. These reviews will only be undertaken where there is a perceived higher risk that apprentices and employers are not receiving a satisfactory level of service and/or the provider is not meeting the minimum quality standards expected by SDS.

We may plan a full review visit to a provider at any time should there be concerns about the quality of MA provision.

3. External Quality Scrutiny by Education Scotland

The external review of Modern Apprenticeships (MAs) by Education Scotland builds upon and complements SDS current quality assurance arrangements and is carried out by Education Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Government.

Education Scotland undertake formal review of individual providers' provision in accordance with their own arrangements which can be found **here** and their reports are published **here**. The requirements of Education Scotland regarding the quality of delivery are fully aligned to those of SDS (see Appendix 3).

SDS and Education Scotland liaise on a regular basis and SDS share data and intelligence regarding the performance of SDS providers for the purposes of external formal quality review (in accordance with a formal Data Sharing Agreement).

SDS takes assurance of apprenticeship delivery within colleges from Education Scotland's college inspections. The external review arrangements encompass off-the-job training approaches within MA programmes and focus solely on the contribution made by all types of providers and the quality of the training they deliver.

4. The SDS Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework

4.1 Introduction

The SDS Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework is a set of quality indicators which we use to support the evaluation and quality improvement of SDS contracted work based learning provision.

The Framework is built on three high level Standards:

- Service Delivery

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[2] Only shared when the learning provider gives their consent.

- Leadership and Quality Culture
- Outcomes and Impacts

Under each Standard are a number of Quality Indicators (11 in total) and these in turn are separated into Quality Themes (23 in total). Full detail is included in Appendix 2.

4.2 Core Topics used for internal SDS quality control

To streamline the process for providers, we have combined the 23 themes into six high level topics which form the basis of the "Invitation to Tender" process for 2024/25, summarised below:

Standard	Topic
Service Delivery	Initial Assessment and Recruitment
	Learning and Assessment Planning/Learner Goal Setting & Progress
	Employer Involvement
	Equality
Leadership and Quality Culture	Continuous Improvement in Delivery and Performance
	Fair Work First (FWF)

These six Topics form the basis of SDS quality assurance controls.

Providers are required to self-evaluate their provision against these, and all ongoing monitoring and reporting carried out by Skills Investment Advisers is also aligned to these six topics.

4.2 Alignment of the SDS Quality Controls to the Education Scotland external scrutiny

For 2024/25, in order to simplify and streamline various processes, we have aligned our Invitation to Tender; Self-Evaluation; and Quality Monitoring processes and mapped all of these to the overarching SDS QAIF and also the Education Scotland Quality Assurance Arrangements (for Modern Apprenticeship provision).

A mapping document outlining this alignment is included in Appendix 3.

5. Concerns and Complaints

5.1 Dealing with Concerns and Complaints.

Concerns and complaints can be raised in several situations relevant to the quality monitoring and review processes within NTP:

- In relation to the implementation of the quality processes themselves, and/or the behaviour of members of staff.
- In relation to the quality of delivery by the provider and/or employer (where an apprentice takes the opportunity to complain during an interview).
- In relation to other processes relevant to the SDS funded contract but not about the quality of delivery per se.

Providers should be clear that while they may make complaints about the way that a review is conducted, about the lack of consideration of evidence, or incorrect factual accuracy in reports, it is not legitimate to complain about the evidenced conclusions reached through the review.

The SDS staff member who receives the complaint should endeavour to resolve the issue locally and as quickly as possible, but all complaints must be dealt with in line with the SDS Complaints Policy[3].

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[3] **SDS Complaints Policy**

Appendix 1 – Key Principles of Quality Reviews and Monitoring

Key Principles of Quality Reviews and Monitoring

Quality Assessors and Skills Investment Advisers will:

- ensure that quality review and monitoring activity is of high quality and responsive to the needs of all apprentices;
- ensure that judgements are secure, reliable, valid, and based on first-hand evidence;
- involve providers fully in the quality review and monitoring activity ;
- use the providers' self-evaluation as the starting point for the quality review and monitoring activity to identify key areas for review, along with other intelligence gathered as part of the planning arrangements
- keep to a minimum, any requirements for documentation and preparation by the provider;
- gain the apprentices' perspective and that of employers and other stakeholders;
- be constructive in identifying and supporting providers with important areas for improvement; and
- Identify excellent practice and disseminate learning across the provider network.

Code of conduct for SDS staff

Quality Assessors and Skills Investment Advisers should uphold the highest possible standards in their work. When conducting the quality review and monitoring activity, SDS staff will:

- clearly identify themselves explaining their role and approach;
- carry out their work with integrity, courtesy, and due sensitivity;
- evaluate the work of the provider objectively;
- report honestly, fairly, and impartially;
- communicate clearly and openly;
- act in the best interests of apprentices and employers; and
- respect the confidentiality of all information received during their work.

Expectations of Providers

To ensure that quality reviews and monitoring activity is constructive and beneficial, it is important that assessors and providers establish and maintain a professional working relationship based on mutual courtesy, respect and professional behaviour. SDS staff are expected to uphold the SDS code of conduct, but we also expect providers to:

- apply their own codes of conduct in their dealings with SDS staff;
- enable SDS staff to conduct their assessment in an open and honest way;
- enable SDS staff to evaluate provision objectively against the SDS Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework;
- provide evidence that will enable SDS staff to report honestly, fairly and reliably about their provision;
- maintain a purposeful dialogue with the SDS staff;
- recognise that SDS staff need to observe practice and talk to staff, apprentices and other stakeholders without the presence of a manager or a senior leader;
- draw any concerns about the quality review to the attention of SDS staff in a timely and suitable manner;
- work with SDS staff to minimise disruption and stress throughout the quality reviews and monitoring; and
- ensure the health and safety of SDS staff while on their premises.

Appendix 2 – SDS Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework

Service Delivery	
Quality Indicator	**Theme**
1.1 Providers develop and prepare effective work-based learning provision	Initial Assessment and Recruitment
	Induction
	Learning and Assessment Planning
	Equality groups
	Transferable skills (core, meta and career management skills)
	Employer Involvement
1.2 Providers plan resources for effective delivery of work-based learning provision	Resources (delivery environment, learning materials and technology)
1.3 Providers effectively deliver and manage work-based learning provision and ensure quality of delivery	Learner goal setting and progress
	Quality assurance of practice leading to improvement and enhancement of services
1.4 Providers manage partners and stakeholders to deliver outcomes for learners and employers	Effectiveness of partnerships to support transitions and/or progression
	Management of sub-contractors

Leadership and Quality Culture

Quality Indicator	Theme
2.1 The provider's work-based learning strategy is based on the current and future needs and expectations of stakeholders, employers and learners	Diverse recruitment to support youth/employment.
	Future focussed strategy underpinned by Labour Market Information (LMI)
2.2 Leaders ensure appropriate staffing resources are in place to deliver the work-based learning strategy	Management and support of staff
2.3 Leaders ensure staff are appropriately skilled and motivated to deliver work-based learning provision	Staff development
2.4 Leaders take ownership for the continuous improvement of quality and performance of work-based learning provision	Effective self-evaluation and continuous improvement
	Innovation and change
2.5 Leaders ensure commitment to Scottish Government's Fair Work First policy	Fair Work First (FWF)

Outcomes and Impacts (Your results)	
Quality Indicator	**Theme**
3.1 Providers achieve and maintain high levels of service delivery and outcomes for all work-based learning provision, ensuring all regulatory, statutory, equality and funding body requirements are met	Achievement and analysis of SDS Key Performance Indicators
	SDS diverse recruitment
	Awarding Body and Industry Body requirements
3.2 Work-based learning provision meets the needs of learners, employers, and stakeholders	Systematic gathering, analysis and use of employer perception data
	Systematic gathering, analysis and use of learner perception data

Appendix 3 – QAIF Mapping

Self-Evaluation Title and ITT Question	Maps to SDS QAIF Theme	Maps to Education Scotland Quality Indicator
Initial Assessment and Recruitment	**1.1.1** (initial assessment and recruitment) **1.1.4** (equality groups) **1.1.5** (transferable skills) **1.1.6** (employer involvement) **1.2.1** (resources) **1.4.2** (management of sub-contractors)	**1.1** How effective are providers at achieving and maintaining high levels of service delivery? **5.4** How well is training delivered?
Learning and Assessment Planning / Learner Goal Setting and Progress	**1.1.2** (induction) **1.1.3** (learning and assessment planning) **1.1.4** (equality groups) **1.1.5** (transferable skills) **1.1.6** (employer involvement) **1.2.1** (resources) **1.3.1** (learner goal setting and progress) **1.4.1** (effective partnerships) **1.4.2** (management of sub-contractors)	**1.1** How effective are providers at achieving and maintaining high levels of service delivery? **2.1** How well do apprentices make progress and achieve individual outcomes? **5.4** How well is training delivered?
Employer Involvement	**1.1.1** (initial assessment and recruitment) **1.1.2** (induction) **1.1.3** (learning and assessment planning) **1.1.4** (equality groups) **1.1.5** (transferable skills) **1.1.6** (employer involvement) **1.2.1** (resources) **1.3.1** (learner goal setting and progress) **1.3.2** (quality assurance) **1.4.1** (effective partnerships) **1.4.2** (management of sub-contractors) **2.1.1** (diverse recruitment)	**5.4** How well is training delivered? **5.5** How well do staff reflect on provision to improve training?

Equality	**1.1.1** (initial assessment and recruitment) **1.1.2** (induction) **1.1.3** (learning and assessment planning) **1.1.4** (equality groups) **1.1.5** (transferable skills) **1.1.6** (employer involvement) **1.4.1** (effective partnerships) **1.4.2** (management of sub-contractors) **2.1.1** (diverse recruitment) **2.3.1** (staff development)	**1.1** How effective are providers at achieving and maintaining high levels of service delivery? **1.2** How well do providers adhere to statutory principles and guidance? **2.1** How well do apprentices make progress and achieve individual outcomes? **5.4** How well is training delivered? **9.5** How well do leaders secure improvement of quality and impact of training?
Continuous Improvement	**1.3.2** (quality assurance) **1.4.2** (management of sub-contractors) **2.1.2** (future focused strategy) **2.4.1** (effective self-evaluation) **3.1.1** (achievement and analysis of SDS KPIs) **3.1.2** (diverse recruitment KPIs) **3.1.3** (awarding / industry body requirements) **3.2.1** (employer / stakeholder perception data) **3.2.2** (learner perception data)	**1.1** How effective are providers at achieving and maintaining high levels of service delivery? **1.2** How well do providers adhere to statutory principles and guidance? **2.1** How well do apprentices make progress and achieve individual outcomes? **5.4** How well is training delivered? **5.5** How well do staff reflect on provision to improve training? **9.5** How well do leaders secure improvement of quality and impact of training?
Fair Work First Practices	**2.2.1** (management and support of staff) **2.3.1** (staff development) **2.4.1** (effective self-evaluation) **2.5.1** (fair work first)	**1.2** How well do providers adhere to statutory principles and guidance?

Appendix 4 – Glossary

Term	Definition
Area for improvement / Enhancement	Something identified that needs "fixed" to improve what and how things are done to deliver better results, or opportunities to build on existing processes and delivery working towards continuous improvement.
Partners	Schools, Colleges, Awarding Bodies, Sector Skills bodies, third sector, local authorities, local or national groups, other Learning Providers.
Quality Action Plan (QAP)	A plan of action which captures areas for improvement / enhancement to develop provision and improve outcomes for the provider and those that the provider serves (apprentices and employers).
Self-Evaluation (SE)	A business process providers use on an ongoing basis to review their delivery of apprenticeships and identify key areas of focus for improvement.
Stakeholders	Apprentices, Skills Development Scotland, Scottish Government, Employers, Parents.