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Quality Assurance Reviews Analysis 2019/20

Analysis of 49 Quality Assurance Reviews
of Modern Apprenticeship (MA) and/or
Employability Fund (EF) Providers

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Contents

Overview	3-5
Outline of Report	3-4
Breakdown of Providers	5
Summary of Areas for Improvement	6
Service Delivery	7-19
Initial Assessment	8
Induction	9
Learning and Assessment Planning	10
Equality Groups	11
Transferable Skills	12
Employer Involvement	13
Resources	14
Learner Goal Setting and Progress	15
Reflective Practice	16
Quality Assurance of Delivery	17
Effectiveness of Partnerships	18
Management of Sub-contractors	19
Leadership and Quality Culture	20-28
Developing the Young Workforce	21
Labour Market Intelligence	22
Strategic Engagement	23
Staff	24
Management and Support of Staff	25
Staff Development	26
Effective Self-assessment	27
Innovation and Change	28
Outcomes and Impacts	29-34
SDS Key Performance Indicators	30
Employer Feedback; Analysis and Use of Results	31
Learner Feedback; Analysis and Use of Results	32
SDS Equality Requirements	33
Awarding and Industry Body Requirements	34
Comparison with 2018/19 Analysis	35

Overview

Outline of Report

Summary

During 2019/20, 49 Quality Assurance Reviews of providers delivering Modern Apprenticeship and/ or Employability Fund provision were carried out. This report outlines the combined findings from the 49 reviews, providing a breakdown of the areas for improvement or development and identifying effective practice. A comparison is also made with the findings from analysis of [Quality Assurance Reviews in 2018/19](#).

This report has been developed for providers delivering Modern Apprenticeship and/ or Employability Fund provision to help support continuous improvement in the delivery of training provision.

Process

Areas for improvement and examples of effective practice were extracted from the 49 quality reports completed by Quality Assessors after quality review visits. There were over 110 areas of effective practice and over 530 areas for improvement noted across the reviews.

Presented by the three quality standards within the reports, the findings were categorised by the 25 quality themes for this analysis. Each effective practice and area for improvement statement was assigned to up to three quality themes.

Following the categorisation of the report content, each quality theme was analysed separately, producing an in-depth breakdown of the development issues found among providers within each individual theme.

Effective practice examples have also been identified to inform continuous improvement actions. The small selection in this report is not a comprehensive list of all the areas in which providers are doing well, but are examples to support continuous improvement in some of the areas for improvement reported.

The quality reports and this analysis are based on the [Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework 2019/20](#). The 'Theme Information' at the top of each page is taken directly from the accompanying 2019/20 guidance document and contains examples to illustrate the practices that a good provider and an excellent provider may adopt.



Overview

Note on Areas for Improvement

Whilst the high-level results broadly reflect the quality themes requiring the greatest improvement, the themes with a low number of providers demonstrating an area for improvement should not necessarily be interpreted as areas where all other providers are performing strongly (and vice versa, relating to effective practice). The actions relating to some quality themes may only be proportionate or relevant to a certain number of providers, depending on the size and nature of individual SDS contracts. Therefore, the results in certain quality themes may be applicable to a smaller number of providers and the quantity (or lack) of areas of improvement does not necessarily demonstrate a strong performance across the provider network.

The three quality themes in which most providers have an area for improvement are all within the Outcomes and Impacts quality standard:

- 'SDS Equality Requirements';
 - 'Employer Feedback; Analysis and Use of Results'; and
 - 'Learner Feedback; Analysis and Use of Results'.
- This is unchanged from the previous year.

It is important to note that the majority of areas for improvement around 'SDS Equality Requirements' are due to providers' statistics being below benchmark for one or more of the SDS key equalities groups. This does not necessarily mean that providers are not taking positive action. Areas for improvement relating to the lack of positive actions being taken to address equalities initiatives come under 'Developing the Young Workforce'.

The 'Employer Feedback' and 'Learner Feedback' themes largely relate to the processes in place for seeking feedback from employers and learners, and whether this feedback is analysed or utilised effectively. It is not a reflection of the level of satisfaction amongst employers and learners.

Note on Effective Practice

Due to a change in the method of reporting, incidences of effective practice identified are lower than last year (2018/19: >300; 2019/20: >100). This year, areas that work well have been identified as strengths in the reports, and the classification of 'effective practice' has been reserved for cases that are innovative or considered very strong practice.

Where examples of effective practice are not included for some themes, strengths have been identified instead.

Overview

Breakdown of Providers

Provider Characteristics

In 2019/20, there were 49 quality reports issued.

The high-level scores of the 49 providers reviewed are set out below:

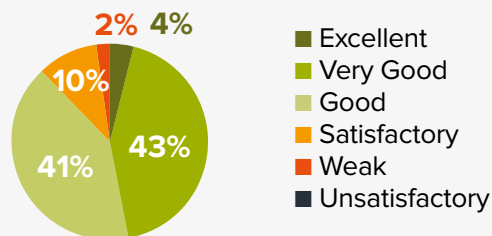
- **Grade 1:** Score over 601 (Excellent):
2 Providers (4%)
- **Grade 2:** Score between 501 and 600 (Very Good):
21 Providers (43%)
- **Grade 3:** Score between 401 and 500 (Good):
20 Providers (41%)
- **Grade 4:** Score between 301 and 400 (Satisfactory):
5 Providers (10%)
- **Grade 5:** Score below 300 (Weak):
1 Provider (2%)
- **Grade 6:** Score rating not awarded (Unsatisfactory):
None

Provider Size Definitions:

- **Large:** 100+ starts
- **Medium:** 50 to 99 starts
- **Small:** up to 49 starts

Grade received by Providers

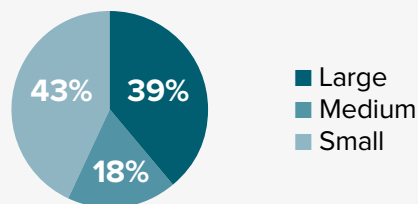
reviewed in 19/20 Quality Assurance Reviews



The size and type of providers who were reviewed was as follows:

Size of Providers

reviewed in 19/20 Quality Assurance Reviews



Type of Providers

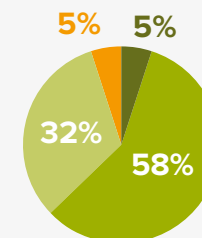
reviewed in 19/20 Quality Assurance Reviews



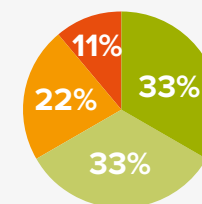
Overall Grade by Provider Size

The scores received by providers relative to their size are as follows:

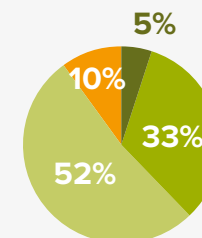
Large Size Providers (19)



Medium Size Providers (9)



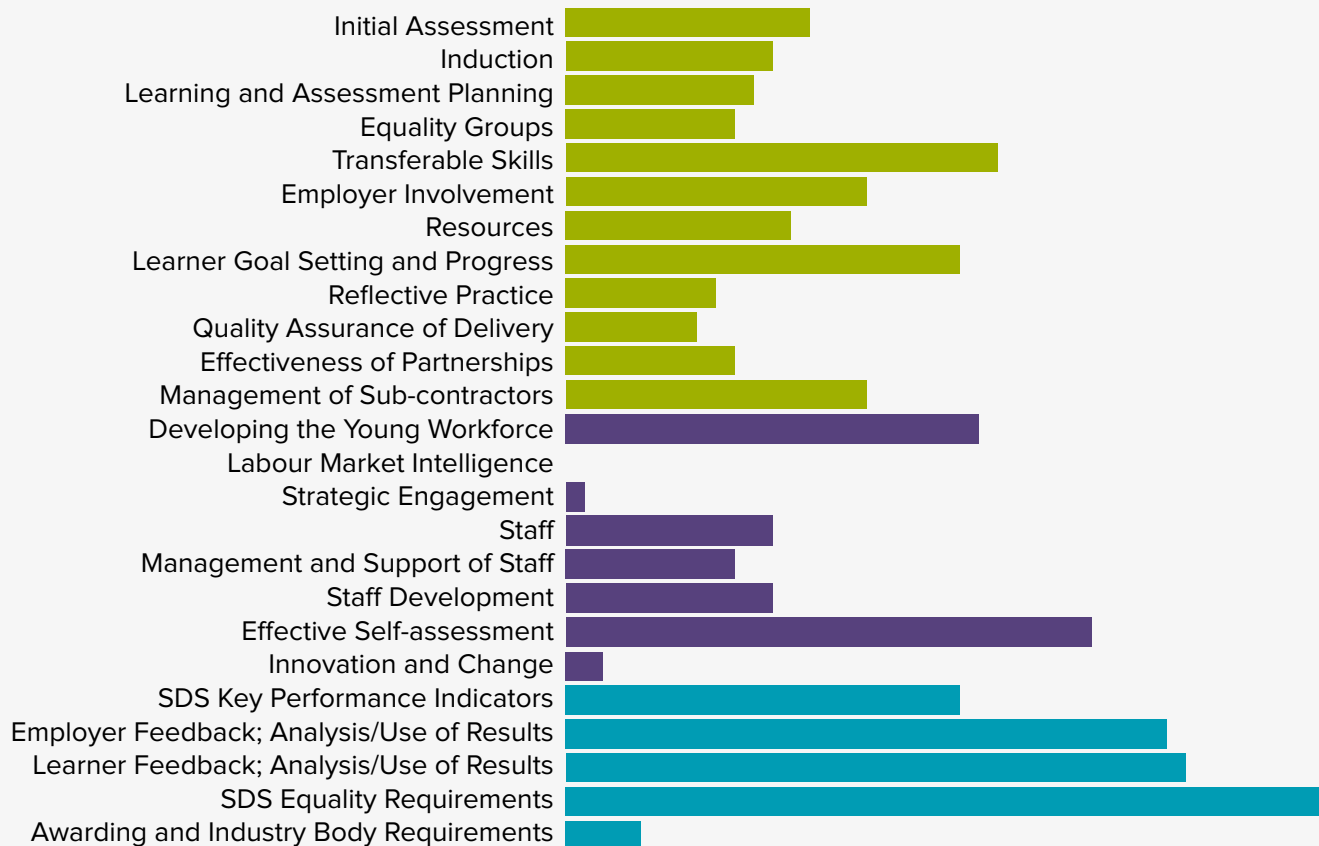
Small Size Providers (21)



Summary of Areas for Improvement

Number of Providers

who received an **Area for Improvement** in each **Quality Theme**



In instances where there are fewer areas for improvement under a theme, this is only an indication of the number of times it was mentioned in the QA reports. This does not necessarily mean that SDS considers that theme as less important than those with a larger number of areas for improvement.

The high-level results give an indication from these reviews where we found areas for improvement. It is a useful guide to where providers may wish to consider their own practice but care should be taken in over-interpretation as the methodology of capturing these is such that some issues belong to more than one theme. In addition, expectations of providers in relation to themes will be proportionate to the size and nature of the provider. The following pages of this document give a more in-depth analysis of the findings in relation to each quality theme where they have been broadly categorised.

Service Delivery



Initial Assessment

Theme Information



A Good Provider may:

- Have in place appropriate initial assessment processes, in proportion to the size and nature of their SDS contract and their role in delivering workplace learning.
- They will be able to provide examples of how effective initial assessment processes are for learners.



An Excellent Provider may also:

- Demonstrate how the implementation of initial assessment processes ensures that learning is tailored for every learner.
- They will measure and review the impact of their initial assessment processes for all learners.

Examples of Effective Practice



Prior learning is assessed during the recruitment stage using skills assessments and interviews. The results of these help to identify potential high achievers who may be offered opportunities to complete higher level qualifications.



Apprentices/Learners are given opportunities to disclose any additional support needs throughout the recruitment process, and adjustments are made to the process to ensure equal opportunities. Any identified additional support needs are communicated to all stakeholders involved in programme delivery to ensure continuity of support throughout all stages of training.



Minimum academic achievement levels have been removed to attract a diverse cohort of applicants. Instead, skills tests and interviews are used to assess suitability for the programme and identify candidate motivations for being on the programme.

Areas for Improvement

- Additional support needs are not effectively identified or there are limited opportunities for apprentices/learners to disclose additional support needs (e.g. group assessments)
- Apprentice/Learner motivations for being on the programme are not identified or the value of the apprenticeship is not clearly communicated during initial assessment
- There is no recognition/assessment of prior learning, or training plans do not sufficiently consider prior learning
- The initial assessment process is ineffective (e.g. not tailored to specific frameworks, limited methods of assessment, inconsistent approach across the organisation, apprentices/learners were unclear on the process)
- There is no process for assessing the effectiveness of initial assessment questions

Induction

Theme Information



A Good Provider may:

- Implement/have in place induction activities that clearly benefit all learners, and which give each learner the best chance of success. (They are likely to cover all the areas in the guidance prompts in the Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework and be timetabled/ have time specifically allocated.)
- Have in place an induction that clearly explains the programme/training to be undertaken and answers questions about the expectations of learners and employers.



An Excellent Provider may also:

- Provide a thorough introduction for learners and employers or workplace partners.
- Provide support to the supervisor in relation to coaching the learners.
- For apprenticeships – make sure that employers fulfil obligations in relation to induction to the workplace. Employers may also co-design and deliver learner induction programmes.

Examples of Effective Practice



The induction process for apprentices/learners is comprehensive and follows a clear timetable. Apprentices/ Learners receive an overview of the company, a tour of the workplace, an overview of the programme and expectations, an opportunity to meet the staff who deliver the programme (including the employers and college staff) and a question and answer session.



Apprentices/Learners receive an induction pack that is individually tailored to their framework and units. The pack includes a range of quizzes and exercises that help apprentices/ learners confirm their understanding of the induction sessions.

Areas for Improvement

- Employers are not consistently involved in the induction process
- Induction does not fully convey content and expectations of programme
- The induction is not individualised for each apprentice/learner
- The induction process is too long and overwhelming for apprentices/learners
- Some apprentices/learners did not receive an induction from the provider

Learning and Assessment Planning

Theme Information



A Good Provider may:

- Effectively develop, prepare and schedule where and how learning, teaching and assessment will take place for each area/programme of delivery in line with the nature of their provision.
- Have a good relationship with the employers they work with and an understanding that both parties are clear what their expectations are in relation to learning, teaching and assessment.
- Have given consideration to the practicalities of delivery for the learners.
- Have a partnership agreement or equivalent with all their employers and have in place clear mechanisms for communication and monitoring which ensure that employers are delivering to the expected standard.



An Excellent Provider may also:

- Clearly tailor and adapt their planned arrangements for learning, teaching and assessment for each individual. Fully engage learners and employers (where relevant) in this planning.
- Provide each learner with a tailored individual learning and personal support plan which the learner 'owns' and understands, and which adds value to their learning experience.

Examples of Effective Practice



The provider issues the apprentice/learner with a detailed plan of the year during the induction. This details all the training and assessment required for the whole programme, broken down into a weekly schedule.



Flexibility is built into the programme and the provider uses social media to communicate programme changes to apprentices/learners and provide relevant resources for upcoming topics.



The Individual Learning Plan is tailored to individual needs. It reflects any identified barriers to learning and details the support that will be put in place to assist apprentices/learners to achieve their goals.

Areas for Improvement

- Employers are not always consulted on learning and assessment and/or learning plans are not always aligned to the job role
- Apprentices/learners do not always sufficiently understand their learning plan or the plan is not sufficiently detailed
- Not all apprentices/learners are given sufficient work experience or flexibility
- Apprentices/Learners are not involved in selecting optional units*
- Apprentices/Learners are not given allocated time to work on their portfolio during working hours
- The provider completes the Individual Training Plan without input from the sub-contractors (i.e. those delivering the training)

*Please note that not all frameworks have optional units and this AFI is specific to frameworks that do.

Equality Groups

Theme Information



A Good Provider may:

- Make clear and reasonable adjustments to their planning for delivery and assessment processes to meet the needs of individuals from specific equality groups to optimise their chances of success. They will be able to exemplify, demonstrate, and produce evidence of instances where they have actively planned this.



An Excellent Provider may also:

- Develop an inclusive culture by building into their overall design and preparation for delivery, the flexibility to respond proactively to the needs of individuals in equality groups that face barriers, while ensuring those individuals are not singled out.
- Create a positive environment which encourages disclosure by learners, allowing the provider to shape and design delivery for each individual.

Example of Effective Practice



The provider works with external partners to identify the type of resources and level of support required for an individual. Once this is established, good use is made of the Access to Work Grant which is used to fund the acquisition of specialist equipment. Training and coaching on how to use the equipment ensures that apprentices/learners can effectively use the tools to support their progress through the programme.

Examples of Strengths



Apprentices/Learners with dyslexia are given access to a scribe, coloured paper, and / or overlays. The provider is also looking at wider adjustments they can make across their business, including moving to an online system to support anyone who may be dyslexic, including workers and apprentices/learners.



The provider adjusts learning materials, learning and assessment strategies and the online learning package to ensure that they are accessible to all apprentices/learners.

Areas for Improvement

- Additional support needs for apprentices/learners are not adequately identified or considered
- Resources for additional support needs are not being sufficiently signposted for apprentices/learners, employers and/or staff

Transferable Skills

Theme Information



A Good Provider may:

- Design and prepare to deliver transferable skills to be in the context of each programme.
- Ensure that the best use is made of naturally occurring evidence (i.e. generated through work-related activities in a balanced way).
- Ensure that learners value the development of transferable skills and do not just see it as requirement.



An Excellent Provider may also:

- Design methods for delivery of transferable skills that clearly add value and contribute to the career progression and personal development of learners.
- Go beyond the minimum requirements of a qualification in order to support this.

Examples of Effective Practice



An excellent range of development opportunities is available for apprentices/learners, enabling them to experience activities and challenges beyond the MA framework specifications. This is effective in enhancing their transferable skills and adds considerable value to their overall learning journey and their CV.



One-to-one interviews with an assessor take place to explore current transferable and soft skills and apprentices/learners are encouraged to register on My World of Work and make use of the career management resources on the site. An employability action plan is then drawn up to record any additional units or training that would enhance the individual's employability.



Optional modules have been introduced to offer an additional qualification and support apprentices to reflect on their own career paths and options for the future.

Areas for Improvement

- Not all apprentices/learners are aware of core skills, how they are delivered, or their relevance to the qualification
- Core skills delivery and/or materials are not fully contextualised
- Not all apprentices/learners discuss career management skills (including next steps) or are aware of career skills resources
- The provider does not monitor how subcontractors deliver core skills
- Provider staff lack an awareness of the relevance of core skills to the apprentice's/learner's training
- Core skills are not considered until end of training

Employer Involvement

Theme Information



A Good Provider may:

- Demonstrate that they have involved employers and the employer voice in the design of their work-based learning provision.
- Demonstrate one or two examples where programmes have been tailored to meet specific requests from individual employers.



An Excellent Provider may also:

- Have clear evidence that the employer voice is integral to the design and delivery of all provision and clearly adds value to the delivery.

Examples of Effective Practice



Bespoke programmes are designed to reflect specific employer requirements, ensuring that apprentices/learners are more effective in the workplace. This is highly valued by employers and leads to strong levels of repeat business.



Employers are fully involved in all aspects of delivery, from the initial assessment phase, through to the induction and ongoing training. Discussions about apprentices'/learners' training and progress also involve employer input.



The provider effectively engages with employers to identify products and brands they use as part of the service they provide. This ensures that resources are of high quality and meet the industry standards.

Areas for Improvement

- Employers are not consistently involved in discussions regarding apprentice/learner progress or receive progress review documentation
- Employers are not consistently involved in learning and assessment planning
- Employers are not consistently involved in induction
- Some employers or workplace staff are not clear on their roles and responsibilities

Resources

Theme Information



A Good Provider may:

- Demonstrate that they have tailored their resources in the design of their work-based learning provision.
- Provide examples and/or evidence of where tailoring and responding to individuals' needs is making a difference.



An Excellent Provider may also:

- Have clear evidence that tailoring of provision includes a wide range of high-quality learning and assessment materials/approaches that are integral to the design of provision.
- Demonstrate that this tailoring of resources reflects feedback from staff/learners, is innovative and addresses industry developments and future requirements.

Examples of Effective Practice



The employer voice is used effectively to make key investment decisions to maintain resources to a very high standard. Both apprentices/learners and employers consider the facilities on offer to be “state of the art”.



The electronic portfolio for apprentices/learners includes interactive resources to support various modules. This is promoted on their social media channels to encourage apprentices/learners to use the available resources.



The provider has designed a comprehensive training and induction process for mentors. The training explores learning styles, values, communication, mental health and wellbeing, and body language. It also teaches mentors how to identify when they are able to support the apprentices, and when they should refer them on to other agencies for support.

Areas for Improvement

- Not all apprentices/learners or employers are aware of, or effectively use, available resources, such as electronic portfolios
- Apprentices/Learners are inhibited by a lack of, or lack of access to, physical/online resources (e.g. online resources are unavailable due to persistent IT problems)
- There is no effective use of social media to communicate with apprentices/learners and employers
- There is a missed opportunity to pair the apprentices/learners with a workplace mentor
- There is duplication of work between workplace portfolios and college/training logbooks

Learner Goal Setting and Progress

Theme Information

A Good Provider may:

- Have clear learning and assessment progress reviews with timeframes for specific learning tasks for all learners.
- Have approaches that clearly support tailored learner progression.
- Demonstrate that, for almost all:
 - learner review is happening at least at the frequency required by SDS requirements;
 - learners and employers value the process; and
 - learner reviews are contributing to progression and achievement of the learners.

An Excellent Provider may also:

- Demonstrate they have effective/innovative approaches for meeting individuals' goals and monitoring and reviewing progress that go beyond SDS minimum requirements.
- Ensure full involvement of the employer, the individual and the learner.

Examples of Effective Practice



In advance of progress review meetings, apprentices/learners and employers complete an electronic questionnaire which is used effectively by delivery staff to encourage apprentices/learners to reflect on their performance and build confidence.



The review process is an effective collaboration between apprentices/learners, sub-contractors, employers and the provider. This allows everyone involved to have an understanding of where the apprentice/learner is in their journey. It also helps to set realistic goals which supports progress towards achievement.

Areas for Improvement

- Progress reviews are ineffective in supporting apprentice/learner progress (e.g. apprentices/learners are unclear on progress, targets are not set, or records of discussions and agreed next steps are poor or not given out to all those involved in the review)
- Employers/line managers are not always clear on apprentice/learner progress or consistently involved in progress reviews and goal setting
- There is disruption to apprentice/learner progress due to changes in assessor or delayed feedback
- Provider's communication style when delivering feedback is not constructive
- Performance reports from sub-contractors about apprentices/learners are infrequent
- There is no process in place to check that assessors meet progress review requirements

Reflective Practice

Theme Information



A Good Provider may:

- Demonstrate that their staff use reflection to inform improvements in their delivery.
- Evidence this with a few examples of changes which have been implemented because of reflective practice.



An Excellent Provider may also:

- Demonstrate that reflection and sharing practice is integral to improving delivery. All staff will be able to provide examples of this.
- Depending upon its size, have clear processes in place to facilitate this and benchmark themselves against other similar providers/businesses.

Example of Effective Practice



The provider makes good use of social media to share good practice, learning and motivational quotes related to the vocational area. All staff and managers are encouraged to identify and post relevant articles to this page.

Examples of Strengths



There are regular opportunities to discuss apprentice/learner progress, share best practice and make improvements to the programme. This is an informal approach that ensures speed of response and means that tailored improvements can be made to meet the needs of individual apprentices.



Team meetings take place regularly and all staff participate in standardisation meetings. Staff use team meetings as an opportunity to discuss apprentice/learner and employer feedback, industry developments, external verification reports and to share best practice.

Areas for Improvement

- There is limited evidence of reflective practice and how reflective practice is used to inform future improvements to delivery
- Standardisation meetings are ineffective (e.g. do not involve all the relevant staff, or these meetings take place outside normal working hours which discourages staff from attending)
- Reflections and ideas on enhancing the apprentice/learner journey from tutors/ assessors are not formally captured

Quality Assurance of Delivery

Theme Information



A Good Provider may:

- Have a process (in proportion to the size and nature of their SDS contract) of ensuring the standards of delivery of all their staff. This may be formal or informal. They should be able to show that this has led to improvements in delivery.



An Excellent Provider may also:

- Clearly demonstrate that review of the standard and quality of delivery is integral to their service and has had an impact on improving delivery of training. This may include formally implemented policies for peer review, observation of practice or performance management.

Examples of Effective Practice



The provider has a dedicated staff resource who assesses the quality of training delivery. They make regular visits to employer locations to observe assessors in their role and provide an evaluation of the quality of training and assessment delivery.

A record of the visit is completed and discussed with the company director to provide them with assurance about the standard of delivery and where there are opportunities to standardise and improve.

Verbal and written feedback is offered to the assessor and this provides them with an opportunity to reflect on their own delivery practices and discuss different approaches. Staff appreciate this feedback and the support provided which ensures that high standards are maintained in relation to learning and assessment and staff feel supported in their delivery role.

Areas for Improvement

- Limited evidence of staff observations being carried out or records of observations and quality discussions are poor
- Corrective actions identified through quality assurance activities are not followed up which limits improvements being made to the programme

Effectiveness of Partnerships

Theme Information



A Good Provider may:

- Use partners effectively to support learners who need extra/specialist support and can evidence instances where this has happened.
- Support the transition of school pupils e.g. Foundation Apprentice to MA (where this is relevant), or EF participant into MA. They will be able to evidence instances where this has happened.
- Use partners effectively to support the progression of their learners into the next stages of learning and/or employment. Staff will be able to provide evidence that this has happened on a few occasions.



An Excellent Provider may also:

- Proactively seek out partnerships and expect their staff to routinely support progression for their learners into, through and out of their provision. They will support all their learners in this way.
- Monitor and review the effectiveness of these relationships and the impact on progression and success for their learners.

Examples of Effective Practice



Staff meet regularly with external partners (e.g. Community Learning and Development workers) who work with individuals with impairments or care experience. Such approaches have been successful in providing a pathway onto the programme for those from under-represented groups and ensures they are able to make informed choices as to their next steps.



The provider recognises that some of the learners that they work with are from disadvantaged backgrounds, with some facing financial challenges as they are on limited incomes. To address this, they partner with local organisations who donate suits, workwear, personal protective equipment, and food to apprentices/learners to support progression.

Areas for Improvement

- The provider has a no/few external partnerships to support learners/apprentices (including partnerships that help address additional support needs)
- The provider misses opportunities to progress apprentices/learners internally (e.g. from a Foundation Apprenticeship or the Employability Fund to a Modern Apprenticeship)
- There is limited engagement with schools to promote/encourage the recruitment of equality groups
- Communication between the provider and partners is ineffective

Management of Sub-contractors

Theme Information



A Good Provider may:

- Have in place, and effectively implement, appropriate mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the quality of delivery of sub-contracted provision.



An Excellent Provider may also:

- Be able to demonstrate that their sub-contractors:
 - Comprehensively review provision in accordance with SDS quality standards; and
 - Implement improvements as required by the primary contractor
- Demonstrate (as the primary contractor) that they are effectively reviewing and monitoring the quality of sub-contracted provision.

Examples of Effective Practice



Formal, signed contract documents are in place for each sub-contractor that detail roles and responsibilities of each party, performance expectations and reporting requirements, SDS requirements and conflict resolution approaches. Documents are reviewed annually by staff and updated as appropriate.



Each contract year, two formal contract review meetings are scheduled for sub-contractors and provider staff to attend. In addition to these strategic level meetings, provider staff visit each venue on a regular basis to meet with delivery staff and apprentices. Regular informal communication further strengthens the positive relationships established.



Sub-contractors are included in staff development opportunities because they are valued as part of the delivery team.

Areas for Improvement

- There are no Service Level Agreements in place with sub-contractors or these are not sufficiently formalised and do not take account of quality requirements
- There is limited monitoring of sub-contractor performance and limited evidence that External Verification results are reviewed for each sub-contractor
- Sub-contractors have limited opportunity to engage in the self-assessment process or share best practice
- Changes in sub-contractor personnel has hindered progress for apprentices/learners
- Sub-contractors are not delivering to a good standard (e.g. core skills are not incorporated into the delivery)
- There is no effective process for seeking apprentice/learner and employer views on sub-contractors and survey feedback is not disaggregated by sub-contractor

Leadership and Quality Culture



Developing the Young Workforce

Theme Information



A Good Provider may:

- Consider their performance in relation to results for under-represented groups and put in place at least one or two measures to improve equality outcomes (starts/achievement rates etc).
- Ensure measures implemented are proportionate to the nature and size of their SDS contract.



An Excellent Provider may also:

- Proactively design their business model to improve recruitment and achievement of underrepresented groups.
- Proactively recruit Foundation Apprentices through partnership arrangements in their MA contract where this is relevant.

Examples of Effective Practice



Attendance at careers fairs and school events offer valuable opportunities to meet with potential apprentices/learners and promote training opportunities. Specific activities and events have been developed to address gender imbalances in their programmes (e.g. encouraging females into STEM and males into early years care).



Staff training workshops have been developed with equalities partners to support the recruitment and progression of apprentices/learners with additional needs.



In partnership with the SDS Equality Team and equality organisations, the provider delivers a programme on how providers and employers can support apprentices/learners who are care experienced.

Areas for Improvement

- There is limited evidence of positive action to address under-representation of one or more equality groups
- Promotion of MA/EF programmes is ineffective (e.g. providers do not: use social media platforms; include equality promoting content; effectively showcase success stories; or share vacancies to equality partners)
- There is a lack of effective engagement with employers in relation to inclusive recruitment
- There is a missed opportunity to share best practice with other local providers in relation to inclusive recruitment

Labour Market Intelligence

Theme Information



A Good Provider may:

- Be able to demonstrate that they have considered current labour market intelligence in formulating their bid. This should be proportionate to the size and nature of their SDS contract.



An Excellent Provider may also:

- Demonstrate that regular review of the local/ sectoral and/or national labour market underpins their SDS bid and their delivery responds to market requirements.

Example of Effective Practice



The provider actively seeks out local training and employment needs, gathering intelligence from employers, schools and other partners. This information is used effectively to identify specific qualifications that will meet industry need and fill potential skills gaps created by aging workforce.

Example of Strengths



The provider works closely with employers to understand their workforce planning aspirations. The provider utilises these relationships and the resulting intelligence to inform their strategic plan and annual contract bid to ensure employer and industry needs are met.

Strategic Engagement

Theme Information



A Good Provider may:

- Have a clear way of communicating with strategic partners that is effective and informs improvement in their service.
- Be able to provide examples of how this works for them.
- What they do will be proportionate to the size and nature of their SDS contract.



An Excellent Provider may also:

- Actively seek to improve their strategic engagement with partners and can demonstrate how this has led to improvements in their provision.

Example of Effective Practice



Through strategic engagement, the MA programme is now more embedded into both the provider's recruitment processes and recruitment by local employers. Where internal job vacancies are identified by different departments or where external employer vacancies are identified by an employer engagement team, recruiting managers are encouraged to consider whether the vacancy could be an apprenticeship post.

Areas for Improvement

- There is a lack of engagement with the senior management team to regularly review strategic and operational objectives

Staff

Theme Information



A Good Provider may:

- Have sufficient staff with the required skill set available to deliver, proportionate to the size of their SDS contract, geographical spread etc.
- Be able to react to challenges such as staff illness, staff leaving or premises issues to ensure learners are not disadvantaged because of these or other challenges.



An Excellent Provider may also:

- Have a clear contingency strategy and plans in place for challenges such as loss of staff or a centre being out of operation, that can be implemented quickly and effectively.

Example of Strengths



The provider has considered appropriate staffing resources are in place to deliver the programme. For example, contingencies are in place to ensure that there is no disruption to apprentices/learners if any member of the team is absent.

Areas for Improvement

- Provider has no staffing contingency plans
- There is some disruption to training delivery due to provider staffing issues

Management and Support of Staff

Theme Information



A Good Provider may:

- Provide staff with a tailored induction programme that ensures staff fully understand the expectations of the SDS contract, and programmes they are delivering as part of the contract.
- Have an appropriate and well-planned workload for each staff member to allow them to deliver good quality work-based learning.
- Have an effective way of monitoring the work of staff that is proportionate to the size and nature of the provider.



An Excellent Provider may also:

- Demonstrate proactive and innovative measures in staff induction to showcase good practice in delivery of work-based learning including; preparing delivery, delivering to a high standard and embedding equality outcomes.
- Ensure that staff are empowered, and time set aside for them to inform future innovation in delivery.

Examples of Effective Practice



Staff feel informed, engaged and well supported in their roles with strong teamworking in evidence. Management demonstrate a collaborative approach to employee engagement, in particular for their family friendly policies which enable staff to work flexibly while also meeting business needs.



Effective induction arrangements for staff, including time spent shadowing colleagues, means they are clear and capable in relation to their objectives.



Caseloads are manageable, and staff are empowered to deliver training according to individual apprentice/learner need.

Areas for Improvement

- Staff have little understanding of the company's strategic direction
- High staff workload and/or lack of workload monitoring, impacts the quality of delivery for apprentices/learners
- Staff inductions are ineffective due to a lack of preparation or support
- Assessors do not have the flexibility to plan their own diaries (either due to resources or management processes) which means they do not have control of their caseload
- Staff appraisals are ineffective in supporting personal development needs

Staff Development

Theme Information



A Good Provider may:

- Ensure that all staff undertake mandatory CPD and develop their staff in accordance with each individual's development needs.
- Provide examples of how staff CPD has improved their work-based learning provision.



An Excellent Provider may also:

- Have a methodical and proportionate approach to identifying staff CPD needs, and to cascading and measuring the impact of staff CPD.
- Ensure all relevant staff have undertaken equality and other mandatory CPD that informs how they deliver work-based learning provision.

Examples of Effective Practice



The provider has commissioned a specialist and worked with them to design and develop a module around how to support neurodiversity. This supports staffs' knowledge and understanding, enabling them to remove barriers for apprentices/learners with specific needs and harness the positive aspects of neurodiversity in the workplace



Assessors are given the opportunity to complete a work placement. For example, assessors and internal verifiers can complete placements in nurseries, where they gain recent experience at all levels of the job role that they assess. They are then able to use this up to date experience to good effect to inform the work that they do with apprentices.



Staff are encouraged to undertake regular training and development activities that meet their individual needs. Regular one to one discussion with line managers supports staff to identify their strengths and areas of focus for future learning opportunities.

Areas for Improvement

- Staff do not receive adequate training on equality and diversity
- There is a lack of a structured approach to utilise resources and engage with external partners to facilitate upskilling in relevant areas
- There is a missed opportunity for staff to work-shadow colleagues to build confidence and teamwork
- Staff do not cascade learning and knowledge from external events (e.g. equality and diversity training) to all staff

Effective Self-assessment

Theme Information



A Good Provider may:

- Ensure that the views of all interested parties (staff, learners, partners, employers) that are involved in the SDS contract contribute to the self-assessment process.
- Ensure their approach to self-assessment captures the views of all those with a vested interest in the delivery.



An Excellent Provider may also:

- Dedicate time to self-assessment on a regular and routine basis.
- Clearly identify the additional value of undertaking self-assessment and show how it contributes to improvement of their provision.
- Demonstrate the value of all staff being involved in regular self-assessment activity.

Examples of Effective Practice



The provider demonstrates a clear commitment to the self-assessment process and understands the benefits that this activity brings to the programme and the wider business.



Stakeholders from the various business units and sub-contractors are invited to contribute to the completion of the self-assessment document. The self-assessment document is shared electronically with stakeholders and feedback is then gathered at face to face meetings. This provides a wide range of views and opinions from a broad spectrum of individuals involved in programme delivery.

Areas for Improvement

- Employers, sub-contractors or other stakeholders have limited or no involvement in the provider's self-assessment process
- Limited or no staff involvement in self-assessment process
- The self-assessment process is ineffective in identifying continuous improvement activities
- Employers and apprentices/learners are not informed about the actions that are being taken to improve the programme

Innovation and Change

Theme Information



A Good Provider may:

- Provide examples of how they seek out innovation and ideas and how these have been incorporated into provision.
- Ensure measures implemented are proportionate to the nature and size of their SDS contract.



An Excellent Provider may also:

- Have a policy of actively seeking out best practice, innovation and new ideas and incorporating them into their provision.
- Provide clear evidence of several examples of where this has been done.

Examples of Strengths



The provider is committed to finding out about innovations and new developments that are related to their SDS funded provision. They regularly attend SQA and SDS events and utilise learning from these events to embed recommendations and innovations into their practice to ensure that the service that they are providing is the best quality for the learners.



The provider actively encourages innovation and change through participation in conferences, industry networking events and provider training workshops. They demonstrate a positive approach to the sharing of best practice in delivery, working collaboratively with partners and sub-contractors to generate and share ideas.

Areas for Improvement

- There were limited examples of how innovation and new ideas are identified and incorporated into delivery

Outcomes and Impact



SDS Key Performance Indicators

Theme Information



A Good Provider may:

- Meet the benchmark (average) level of SDS KPIs in almost all of their SDS funded provision including:
 - outcomes;
 - outputs; and
 - qualifications benchmark levels
- for that programme/ framework as set out in the current year's contracting strategy.



An Excellent Provider may also:

- Exceed the benchmark (average) level of SDS KPIs including:
 - outcomes;
 - outputs; and
 - qualifications benchmark levels
- for that programme/ framework as set out in the current year's contracting strategy.
- Have clearly demonstrated that they analyse and utilise the data to inform continuous improvement.

Example of Effective Practice



The provider has a structured approach to analysing their results which enables them to identify trends and areas for improvement. A comprehensive spreadsheet tracks learner progress, pass rates for the external examination, and achievement rates for the programme. This enables comparison of year on year results.

Areas for Improvement

- Key Performance Indicators have fallen or are lower than national benchmark
- There is no analysis of achievement rates or leaver destinations (e.g. trends are not looked at over a three-year period)

Employer Feedback; Analysis and Use of Results

Theme Information

A Good Provider may:

- Demonstrate regular gathering of evidence of how satisfied employers are with their training provision.
- Ensure measures taken are proportionate to the size and nature of their SDS provision.
- Source feedback which may be explicitly sought through the provider's own formal processes, or it may come from SDS monitoring or other sources, but it has been gathered, quantified and analysed.
- Have feedback which demonstrates employers are largely satisfied with their relationship with, and delivery of training/assessment by, the provider and that they see additional value for their business in the provider's activity.

An Excellent Provider may also:

- Take proactive steps to systematically gather and analyse feedback on satisfaction of provision to inform improvements.
- Set themselves targets which fit with the size and nature of their SDS contract.
- Have feedback from employer(s) which demonstrates that all or almost all are satisfied with the delivery of training and assessment by the provider and employers see additional value for their business in the provider's activity.
- Have feedback which demonstrates that employers' views contribute to training improvement.

Areas for Improvement

- Survey feedback is not used effectively to inform improvements to delivery (including no analysis of trends, benchmarking or disaggregation)
- There is no comprehensive process for surveying employers
- Current methods of distribution of employer surveys have resulted in a low/unrepresentative response rate
- The design and/or timing of employer surveys limits meaningful feedback on all areas of the training provision (e.g. there is a lack of anonymity or breadth of scope)
- Employers are not aware of feedback mechanisms or their purpose
- Attendance is low for employer focus group discussions which limits the available feedback

Example of Strengths



An internal benchmark is set for employer satisfaction which is reviewed annually and increased if the target is being consistently met.

Learner Feedback; Analysis and Use of Results

Theme Information

A Good Provider may:

- Be able to demonstrate regular gathering of evidence of learner satisfaction in their training provision.
- Ensure measures taken are proportionate to the size and nature of their SDS contract.
- Source feedback which may be explicitly sought through the provider's own formal processes, or it may come from SDS monitoring or other sources, but it has been gathered, quantified and analysed.
- Have feedback which demonstrates learners are largely satisfied with their relationship with, and delivery of training/assessment and support from, the provider. Learners believe this has contributed to their skills development beyond the workplace role itself (i.e. that the provider has added value).

An Excellent Provider may also:

- Take proactive steps to systematically gather and analyse feedback on satisfaction in provision to inform improvements.
- Set themselves appropriate targets which are proportionate to the size and nature of their SDS contract.
- Have feedback from learners which demonstrates that all or almost all are satisfied with the provider's service and they recognise that the provider has added value to their skills development in the workplace.
- Have feedback which demonstrates that learners are listened to and their input contributes to the continuous improvement of the provider's service.

Areas for Improvement

- Survey feedback is not used effectively to inform improvements to delivery (including no analysis of trends, benchmarking or disaggregation)
- There is no comprehensive process for surveying apprentices/learners
- The design and/or timing of apprentice/learner surveys limits meaningful feedback on all areas of the training provision (e.g. there is a lack of anonymity or breadth of scope)
- Current methods of distribution of apprentice/learner surveys have resulted in a low/unrepresentative response rate
- Apprentices/Learners are unaware of feedback mechanisms or their purpose

Examples of Strengths



The provider has set an internal benchmark for apprentice/learner satisfaction.



Questionnaires used to gather and analyse feedback are comprehensive, giving the respondent the opportunity to give both quantitative and qualitative feedback.

SDS Equality Requirements

Theme Information

A Good Provider may:

- Demonstrate that they have reviewed their performance relating to recruitment and retention of key equality groups and can demonstrate some improvement for at least one equality group as a result of action that they have taken.
- Analyse their performance in relation to equality groups and use that intelligence to inform improvements for the future.

An Excellent Provider may also:

- Set appropriate equality recruitment targets and demonstrate a clear commitment to recruiting a more diverse range of learners.
- Demonstrate clear improvements in representation of equality groups through targeted action.
- Demonstrate improvements in success rates for these groups on their programmes.

Example of Strengths



Clear internal benchmarks are set in relation to representation of the key SDS target groups. This enables the tracking of performance and allows rich insights to be made.

Areas for Improvement

- Limited/declining progress in the recruitment/participation of one or more key equality group
- Provider does not analyse/benchmark equality performance or set targets for improvement

Awarding and Industry Body Requirements

Theme Information



A Good Provider may:

- Have few or only minor awarding body compliance breaches requiring action.
- Demonstrate that they are considering external verification visit reports and their required actions/recommendations to inform improvements in their provision.



An Excellent Provider may also:

- Have no actions required by awarding bodies in their reports and few or no recommendations to be acted upon from reviews undertaken. They may also have areas where good practice has been identified.

Examples of Strengths



External verification reports are used to good effect to inform assessor standardisation activities and make improvements to their practice.



Feedback and recommendations from Awarding Body reports are disseminated to staff via standardisation meetings and discussion logs.

Areas for Improvement

- There is limited evidence confirming checks are carried out on Awarding Body accreditation and EV results of sub-contractors

Comparison with 2018/19 Analysis

Areas for Improvement

Number of Areas for Improvement in each Quality Theme

The number of areas for improvement identified under each quality theme is similarly distributed to the number of providers with areas for improvement under the themes.

Significant increases in the number of areas for improvement can be seen in the following themes:

- 'Learner Goal Setting and Progress'; and
- 'SDS Key Performance Indicators'.

Significant decreases in the number of areas for improvement can be seen in the following themes:

- 'Transferable Skills';
- 'Resources';
- 'Effectiveness of Partnerships';
- 'Staff Development'; and
- 'SDS Equality Requirements'.

However, for 'SDS Equality Requirements' it should be noted that the areas for improvement under this theme have been counted differently this year, compared with 2018/19. Previously, where providers had not met the targets for multiple key equality groups, these may have counted as separate areas for improvement for each group. This year, these have been merged into one area for improvement per provider:

"Limited/declining progress in the recruitment/participation of **one or more key equality group**."

