

Self-Evaluation / Quality Action Plan Guidance for Modern Apprenticeship Provision

For Contracting Year 2024-25

Version History

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Introduction

In response to your feedback, and efforts to streamline the process, we are asking you to more closely evaluate your provision in relation to what we asked you in the 2024-2025 Invitation to Tender (ITT). Our expectations regarding good quality provision have not changed, it's **how** we ask you to articulate this in Self-Evaluation (SE), which has been aligned to the ITT for ease. In addition, Skills Investment Advisors (SIA) will monitor in relation to the same criteria as the ITT. Finally, our expectations of delivery are also fully aligned to those of Education Scotland (ES).

This guidance has been designed as an aide memoire to support you, as a Skills Development Scotland (SDS) contracted learning provider (LP), to engage with the SE process. This will help you complete your SE on the mesma system and think about the effectiveness of your approach to planning and delivering your skills provision.

The guidance will help you focus on the key processes relevant to your provision, and to illustrate, at a high level, practices that a 'good' provider and an 'excellent' provider may adopt. The examples given are not exhaustive. You are encouraged to complete the SE using real examples of current practice and what you do, as set out in your ITT for 2024-2025.

SDS has several resources which may help you with your SE process, through illustrations of other providers' effective practice, and providing national data that will allow you to benchmark and evaluate your own performance. These can be found at our [Quality Assurance and Improvement Hub](#).

In addition, there are a range of e-learning modules which **we strongly recommend new learning providers** undertake. It may also be helpful for your staff to undertake these modules prior to completing the SE process. There are two dedicated modules covering [Self-Evaluation and Quality Action Planning](#) (SE/QAP).

Further information to support you with the SE process is included in the appendices at the end of this guidance.

Focus for Self-Evaluation

Standard	Topic
<p>Service Delivery</p> <p>This section is about the delivery of work-based learning.</p> <p>Within this you need to consider not only how you do this but how effective it is and why.</p>	Initial Assessment and Recruitment
	Learning and Assessment Planning/Learner Goal Setting and Progress
	Employer Involvement
	Equality
<p>Leadership and Quality Culture</p> <p>This section is about how your leadership team manage and plan your delivery. It often (but not always) relates to the wider leadership and management of an organisation where work-based learning is not the only thing that happens in that organisation.</p> <p>The important point is that you consider how leadership and management is applied to SDS funded work-based learning provision.</p>	Continuous Improvement in Delivery & Performance
	Fair Work First (FWF)

Updating your SE/QAP in the SDS mesma system

A new template is available within the mesma system. **However, this does not mean that you must start from scratch with this exercise. The content from your ITT has already been mapped across as part of the streamlining of this process, which you can build on by using this guidance.**

The content of your ITT will inform the SE activities and support completion of the SE template in mesma and help you to agree what actions will appear in your QAP. The points below may help you with that activity:

- Spend time discussing what works, and what you could enhance, and come to a consensus judgement on this rather than simply describing what you do. Ask yourselves repeatedly what the evidence is that you have for your judgement.
- Don't forget to consider feedback from your SIA, formal SDS quality reviews and ES quality reviews etc.
- Don't forget you are evaluating your current delivery, which may have developed since you submitted your ITT.
- Honestly evaluate each question and give yourself a RAG rating (Red, Amber, Green) using the following definitions. Note that this should be agreed by all those involved.
 - **Red** - there is a clear need to make improvements in this area, that will lead to improvements in the delivery of your SDS funded provision. This should be reflected as an Area For Improvement (AFI) in your QAP.
 - **Amber** - although this is an area for improvement, it is done quite well and meets required standards.
 - **Green** - this is working well for your organisation, and you will continue to maintain that high standard.
- In the mesma template, include evaluative statements in the column titled '**Evaluate What You Do**'. This is **your team's** judgement of how well you think you are doing – it will not be used by SDS to judge how well you perform against each title.
- Identify areas that could be improved in the column titled '**What Do You Want to Enhance**'. Set out the evidence of the problem or area that could be enhanced, and what the impact of the problem is.
- Review actions in your current QAP and agree whether these need to be carried forward as part of continuous improvement. Any actions not completed may still be relevant and should be carried over. Actions should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timebound (SMART).
- **Any quality related actions identified by SDS and/or ES Reviews should ALWAYS be included in your QAP (SDS requirement).**

Service Delivery

Topic	Points of Consideration	A good provider will be able to evidence that they:	An excellent provider may also:
<p>Initial Assessment and Recruitment</p> <p>How effective is your approach and methodology to appropriately match individuals to Modern Apprenticeship pathways, ensuring that prior learning and tailored support needs are met?</p> <p>(See Appendices 4 and 5 for sub-contracted provision and employer-only contracts)</p>	<p>How well do you find out about your apprentices to ensure that you can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • plan for their individual needs, e.g., through diagnostic assessments; understand their motivations for being on the programme; • understand their ability to complete the qualification; • understand any additional support needs they may have; • identify any recognised prior learning they may have - including core skills; • identify information that needs to be shared with colleagues e.g., requirement for a dedicated room for religious observance; or that an individual has specific caring responsibilities; • plan for their meta-skills development; • reduce barriers for those with protected characteristics and/or care experienced? <p>How well do you ensure employers are involved in the initial assessment (IA) process and that workplace requirements can be matched to the correct programme?</p>	<p>Have in place appropriate IA and recruitment processes and be able to demonstrate how IA activity links to an individualised learning plan for apprentices.</p> <p>Can provide examples of how IA and recruitment processes are effective for apprentices.</p>	<p>Demonstrate how the implementation of IA and recruitment processes ensures that learning is tailored for every apprentice.</p> <p>Measure and review the impact of their IA processes for all apprentices.</p>

Topic	Points of Consideration	A good provider will be able to evidence that they:	An excellent provider may also:
<p>Learning and Assessment Planning/Learner Goal Setting and Progress</p> <p>How effective are your approaches to learning and assessment planning; induction; learner goal setting and progress?</p> <p>(See Appendices 4 and 5 for sub-contracted provision and employer-only contracts)</p>	<p>Learning and Assessment Planning:</p> <p>How well do you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that learning and assessment planning integrates with the employer led activity in the workplace; involve/coordinate with employers/supervisors to co-design/deliver apprenticeships; fill gaps in training that will not be covered by the apprentice's normal job role; tailor learning and assessment to each individual apprentice to meet their needs (including any additional support needs) and their employer's needs, including each apprentice's work patterns and shifts? <p>Induction:</p> <p>How well do you familiarise new apprentices with:</p>	<p>Learning and Assessment Planning:</p> <p>Effectively develop, prepare, and schedule where and how learning, teaching and assessment will take place.</p> <p>Have considered the practicalities of delivery for the apprentices.</p> <p>Have a good relationship with the employers they work with and both parties are clear what their expectations are in relation to learning, teaching and assessment.</p> <p>Induction:</p> <p>Implement induction activities that clearly benefit all apprentices, giving them the best chance of success.</p>	<p>Learning and Assessment Planning:</p> <p>Clearly tailor and adapt their planned arrangements for learning, teaching and assessment for each individual. Fully engage apprentices and employers (where relevant) in this planning.</p> <p>Provide each apprentice with a tailored individual learning plan which the apprentice understands and adds value to their learning experience.</p> <p>Make clear and reasonable adjustments to planning and assessment to meet the needs of individuals from specific equality groups.</p> <p>Induction:</p> <p>Provide a thorough introduction for apprentices and employers or workplace partners.</p> <p>Provide support to the</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the qualification and expectations for vocational, core skills and meta-skills requirements; • workplace and off-the-job (where applicable) expectations for delivery and assessment including roles and responsibilities for all parties involved and expected behaviours; • adherence with equality duty/policy such as consideration of bullying or harassment and health and safety; • key contacts such as tutors, mentors, fellow apprentices, and methods of intended communication? 	<p>Have in place an induction that clearly explains the programme/training to be undertaken and provides clarity on the expectations, requirements and responsibilities of apprentices, employers, and provider.</p>	<p>supervisor in relation to coaching the apprentices.</p> <p>Demonstrate employer involvement in design and delivery of induction.</p> <p>Use their knowledge of under-represented groups to ensure the induction is inclusive for all apprentices.</p>
	<p>Goal Setting and Progress:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How much do apprentices value your progress review meetings? • How well do you reflect on apprentice progress and achievements, identify and implement support where they need it and agree clear plans and goals? • How well do progress reviews reflect the meta-skills development of the apprentice? • How actively are employers (or supervisors) contributing to the progress review activity to allow the apprentice to develop their skills and to have the best chance of success? • How good is your pastoral support of apprentices? 	<p>Goal Setting and Progress:</p> <p>Demonstrate that, for almost all:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Apprentice reviews are happening at least at the frequency required by SDS rules. - Apprentices and employers value the process. - Apprentice reviews are contributing to progression and achievement of the apprentices. 	<p>Goal Setting and Progress:</p> <p>Demonstrate they have effective/innovative approaches for meeting individuals' goals and monitoring and reviewing progress that go beyond SDS basic requirements.</p>

Topic	Points of Consideration	A good provider will be able to evidence that they:	An excellent provider may also:
<p>Employer Involvement</p> <p>How well do you involve employers and their staff (or your own staff if you have an “employer” contract) in the planning, delivery, and evaluation of your apprenticeship provision?</p> <p>(See Appendix 5 for employer-only contracts)</p>	<p>Delivery:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How well do you support employers to play their part in the design and delivery of Modern Apprentice (MA) programmes ensuring they meet the needs of the employer’s business? • How well do you tailor your provision to meet individual business needs including practicalities like timetables and off-the-job learning? <p>Pathways and progression:</p> <p>How well do you work with employers to support individual apprentices on the next steps in their career journey?</p>	<p>Delivery:</p> <p>Demonstrate that they have involved employers and the employer voice in the design of their work-based learning provision and employers are actively aware and involved in the delivery of on-the-job skills development and pastoral support for career progression.</p>	<p>Delivery:</p> <p>Demonstrate that the employer voice is integral to the design and delivery of all provision and clearly adds value to the delivery.</p>
<p>Topic</p>	<p>Points of Consideration</p>	<p>A good provider will be able to evidence that they:</p>	<p>An excellent provider may also:</p>
<p>Equality</p> <p>How effective are you at working with employers to raise awareness of those with protected characteristics and/or care experienced backgrounds to influence recruitment and engagement of a diverse workforce?</p>	<p>How well do you work with your employers to encourage them to recruit diversely on to the MA programme?</p> <p>How effective are your processes and approaches in relation to influencing engagement and supporting participation and achievement? How will they positively impact on apprentices and potential apprentices with protected characteristics and/or care experienced?</p>	<p>Support their partner employers to use targeted marketing to promote opportunities to underrepresented groups, or proactively ask their employer partners to consider recruiting a more diverse selection of people onto apprenticeships.</p> <p>Make clear and reasonable adjustments to</p>	<p>Have embedded approaches across all their provision that demonstrates a commitment to improving the success of under-represented groups in apprenticeships.</p> <p>Be able to exemplify/demonstrate/produce evidence of instances where they have actively planned clear and</p>

<p>(See Appendix 5 for employer-only contracts)</p>	<p>What specific activities have you identified that could make a positive impact on the representation/success of under-represented groups and/or care experienced individuals in apprenticeships?</p> <p>Have you worked with other agencies to promote apprenticeships to under-represented groups and/or care experienced individuals?</p>	<p>their planning and assessment processes to meet the needs of individuals from specific, equality groups to optimise their chances of success.</p> <p>Have specific activity that is clearly designed to improve their impact and success regarding one or more protected group (and/or care experienced).</p>	<p>reasonable adjustments to support apprentices to progress.</p> <p>Have approaches in place to measure the impact of the success of the activities.</p>
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Leadership and Quality Culture

Topic	Points of Consideration	A good provider will be able to evidence that they:	An excellent provider may also:
<p>Continuous Improvement in Delivery & Performance</p> <p>How good is your performance and how good are you at monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of your delivery of Modern Apprenticeships?</p> <p>(See Appendices 4 and 5 for sub-contracted provision and employer-only contracts)</p>	<p>Approach to Continuous Improvement:</p> <p>How well do you plan your approach to SE that allows evidence to be reviewed and evaluated, using feedback and considering the views of your own organisation, your apprentices, partners, and employers?</p> <p>How well is apprentice and employer feedback used to measure quality of delivery and highlight areas for improvement?</p> <p>How well are findings from internal and external inspections and monitoring (including those from ES, SDS and awarding bodies) acted on to inform improvements?</p> <p>How is best practice used to inform improvements in service delivery?</p>	<p>Approach to Continuous Improvement:</p> <p>Ensure the views of all interested parties (staff, apprentices, partners, employers) that are involved in the SDS contract contribute to the SE process.</p> <p>Ensure their approach to SE captures the views of all those with a vested interest in the delivery.</p> <p>Will proactively use the feedback received from</p>	<p>Approach to Continuous Improvement:</p> <p>Dedicate time to SE on a regular and routine basis.</p> <p>Demonstrate the value of all staff being involved in regular SE activity.</p> <p>Allocate improvement actions to appropriate staff members to drive improvement.</p> <p>Regularly monitor and update progress on QAP.</p>

	<p>How well do you set yourself appropriate targets or Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for improvement actions?</p> <p>How often do you provide regular opportunities for staff to talk about the progress of your QAP?</p> <p>How well is your QAP used to drive and measure improvement and achievement of expected outcomes?</p> <p>Using KPI Data ¹</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does your performance for each apprenticeship framework compare to the achievement rate benchmark, taking account of previous performance? Is there a positive or negative trend? • How do you use the results to address declining or poor performance? • How do your achievement rates for apprentices from equality groups compare to your own overall performance? Are they better or worse? How do they compare to framework averages? • How does your performance for the three age categories compare to national performance? • How do you probe into all your results to understand what the exact areas for improvement might be? 	<p>apprentices and employers to improve their delivery.</p> <p>Using KPI Data:</p> <p>Meet the benchmark level of SDS KPIs for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overall MA Achievement (16-19 age group – 70%; 20+ age group – 75%) - National Framework Achievement Rate for the frameworks that they offer. 	<p>Able to demonstrate enhancements made as a result of SE.</p> <p>Communicate to stakeholders the enhancements made as a result of SE.</p> <p>Using KPI Data:</p> <p>Exceed the benchmark level of SDS KPIs for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overall MA Achievement (16-19 age group – 70%; 20+ age group – 75%) - National Framework Achievement Rate for the frameworks that they offer.
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¹ Please refer to your three-year trend of MA achievement rates, available via the documents section on mesma. National average data is included in the Quarter 4 statistics report and can be accessed [here](#).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where you sub-contract provision, how well do you monitor sub-contractors' performance? <p>Using perception (feedback) data:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are your results and external recognition (for example quality or diversity awards), telling you about your strengths and areas for enhancement according to your analysis, comparison of previous results and against targets you may have set? Have you set yourself improvement targets for employer/apprentice satisfaction levels? Where you sub-contract provision, how do you ensure sub-contractors have processes in place to gather feedback? 	<p>Using perception (feedback) data:</p> <p>Have feedback which demonstrates employers, apprentices and other stakeholders are largely satisfied with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> their relationship with the provider; delivery of training/assessment; the additional value added to their business by the provider's activity. 	<p>Using perception (feedback) data:</p> <p>Have feedback from employers, apprentices and other stakeholders which demonstrates that all, or almost all, are satisfied with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the delivery of training and assessment by the provider the additional value added to their business by the provider's activity. <p>Have feedback which demonstrates that employer, apprentice, and other stakeholder views contribute to training improvement.</p>
Topic	Points of Consideration	A good provider will be able to evidence that they:	An excellent provider may also:
<p>Fair Work First</p> <p>How effective are you at committing to Fair Work First Practices (FWF) for all employees whether</p>	<p>How well does your organisation commit to FWF Practices for all employees, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective Voice, where workers have scope to say what they feel, are 	<p>Are committed to adopting FWF and to progressing towards wider fair work practices set out in Fair Work Framework, especially relating to allowing staff time</p>	<p>Have a proactive approach towards investment in their workforce that clearly impacts positively upon employee experience.</p>

<p>permanent, temporary, or sub-contractors involved in the delivery of this contract? This should include current and planned actions that show how you will embed these practices during the lifetime of this contract.</p> <p>(See Appendix 4 for sub-contracted provision)</p>	<p>listened to and where their voice can make a difference.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investment in Workforce Development, providing CPD opportunities for staff and should be a shared responsibility and shared commitment between the employer and workers. • No Inappropriate Use of Zero Hours Contracts. • Action to tackle the gender pay gap and create a more diverse and inclusive workplace. • Payment of the real living wage, which is distinct from the statutory National Living Wage and National Minimum Wage which are set by the UK Government. • Flexible & Family Friendly Working practices, fitting in with family life and other caring commitments. • Opposing the Use of Fire and Re-hire Practices. 	<p>for workforce development, utilising the employee voice and flexible/family friendly working practices.</p>	<p>Be able to demonstrate tangible and measurable examples and how they will report on this.</p> <p>Demonstrate progress towards wider FWF practices set out in the Scottish Government Fair Work Framework.</p>
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Appendix 1 – 2024/25 Invitation to Tender (ITT) Questions

Service Delivery		
Topic	Why Important	Minimum expectation
Initial Assessment and Recruitment	Robust IA processes ensure that prospective apprentices are suitably matched to apprenticeship frameworks optimising chance of success in their apprenticeship.	<p>Takes place at an appropriate point in apprentice's journey and involves appropriate staff and employer agent.</p> <p>IA should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an appropriate process for review of relevant education and prior learning; • a process to enable matching of apprentice to framework appropriate to their job role; • a process to identify current skills and gaps in skills of recruited apprentices; • a process to identify additional support needs and/or barriers that may reduce the apprentice's chances of success.
Learning and Assessment Planning/Learner Goal Setting and Progress	Robust approaches to learning, assessment and progress review planning for apprentices will optimise their chance of success.	<p>Processes in place to develop, prepare, and schedule where and how learning, teaching and assessment will take place in line with the nature of your provision. This includes appropriate processes for induction, assessment, progress reviews and pastoral care of apprentices.</p> <p>Communication approaches within your organisation and with the apprentices and employers to ensure apprentices are on track to achieve their individual learning plan goals.</p> <p>Processes to be tailored for protected characteristics groups/ care experienced background.</p>
Employer Involvement	Employer involvement from recruitment, through delivery to evaluation of your apprenticeship provision	Approach in place to encourage and/or support employers to recruit from a broad and diverse range of applicants to optimise the business benefits of diversity in the workplace; and/or encourage and influence employers to consider diversity when placing prospective apprentices on the MA

	ensures that apprenticeships are meeting the needs of apprentices and the businesses that they work in.	<p>programme, if not directly involved in the recruitment process.</p> <p>Processes in place to ensure employers and their staff understand their responsibilities and contribute to the development and delivery of the apprentices' learning and contribute to their progress reviews to enhance the quality of the apprenticeship experience.</p> <p>Processes in place to ensure employers communicate future career and progression pathways available to apprentices for successful Modern Apprenticeship completers.</p>
Equality	Undertaking proactive specific equality related actions for protected groups and/or care experience people supports us in meeting Public Sector equality Duty and contributes to a more diverse workforce.	Undertake specific processes and approaches in relation to influencing engagement, and supporting participation and achievement that will positively impact on apprentices and potential apprentices with protected characteristics and/or are care experienced.
Leadership and Quality Culture		
Topic	Why Important	Minimum expectation
Commitment to Continuous Improvement of Delivery and Performance	A provider's commitment to continually improve services to the benefit of apprentices, employers and key stakeholders also helps uphold the quality, value add and reputation of the apprenticeship programme.	<p>Processes to analyse and utilise both quantitative and perception (feedback) data from employers (and/or their staff), apprentices and other stakeholders gathered about their organisation's apprenticeship delivery to inform the continuous improvement of your service delivery.</p> <p>This should include approach to benchmarking performance against others and/or own previous relevant performances.</p> <p>Where you subcontract some or all of service delivery, you should include processes to gather relevant data and feedback as detailed above from sub-contractors to support areas of continuous improvement.</p>

Topic	Why Important	Minimum expectation
Fair Work First	FWF practices lead to more motivated and committed staff which in turn leads to better levels of apprenticeship delivery.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Processes to ensure appropriate channels for effective voice, such as trade union recognition. • Clear investment in workforce development of staff. • No inappropriate use of zero hours contracts. • Action to tackle the gender pay gap and create a more diverse and inclusive workplace. • Providing fair pay for workers (for example, payment of the real Living Wage). • Offer flexible and family friendly working practices for all workers from day one of employment. • Oppose the use of fire and rehire practices.

Appendix 2 – Glossary of Terms

AFI	Area For Improvement
ES	Education Scotland
FWF	Fair Work First
IA	Initial Assessment
ITT	Invitation to Tender
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LP	Learning Provider
MA	Modern Apprentice
PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS	Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion and Belief, Sex, and Sexual Orientation
RAG	Red/Amber/Green
SDS	Skills Development Scotland
SE/QAP	Self-Evaluation and Quality Action Plan
SIA	Skills Investment Adviser
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timebound
UNDER-REPRESENTED GROUPS	Refers to a subset of the population who are under-represented in a particular context when compared to the rest of the population. The SDS Equality and Diversity key target groups are Gender, Disability, Ethnic Minority, and Care Experienced.

Appendix 3 – Links to Useful Resources

Link	Description
SDS Quality Assurance and Improvement Hub	This section of the SDS website is our Hub which contains information and resources to enhance quality in the delivery of apprenticeship programmes.
Quality Assurance Arrangements	Main document which sets out SDS quality assurance and improvement arrangements to enhance delivery of apprenticeships.
MA Employer Guidance	Useful information and guidance for employers which provider staff may also find informative.
SDS Equality Guides and Resources	Guidance on supporting a wide range of customer groups on to apprenticeships, including information about relevant funding and tools which will help you do this.
The Equality Act	UK government legislation which protects people from discrimination in the workplace and wider society.
National MA Performance Statistics	Published quarterly, the MA Official Statistics contain a main report and supplementary tables giving breakdowns by age, framework, local authority, redundancies and various combinations of these.
Scottish Government Fair Work Guidance	Scottish Government Guidance on the implementation of Fair Work First in workplaces across Scotland.
Fair Work Convention	Independent group which advises the government on issues relating to Fair Work First.

Appendix 4 – Notes regarding sub-contracting

SDS holds contracted learning providers responsible for the management of any sub-contracted service delivery.

If a sub-contractor is involved in any part of your delivery e.g., initial assessment/recruitment/induction/planning and review/monitoring of apprentice progress/assessment, this should be done in accordance with the standards SDS ask of you as the contracted learning provider. You are expected to monitor how well sub-contractors deliver and perform.

Therefore, you should:

- Set service standards and Key Performance Levels for sub-contractors;
- Have regular review arrangements in place with sub-contractors to review your activity;
- Keep records of sub-contractors' performance;
- Gather External Verification and any other relevant quality reports about sub-contractors' performance;
- Share training opportunities/staff expertise and resources to support sub-contractors.

Appendix 5 – Notes regarding employer-only contracts

In the case of employer-only contracts for apprenticeships, references to 'employer' are in relation to the internal manager/mentor/supervisor of the apprentice within the workplace environment rather than the employer in context of the strategic leaders e.g., senior management or HR department.

Providers with an employer-only contract should also consider:

- who you need to work with to support the next steps of the apprentice;
- how you support them to move on to another role in your organisation, or work with other employers in your network to support them into another opportunity if a long-term contract does not exist in your organisation;
- whether the individuals undertaking apprenticeships are being prepared for the relevant industry needs.

In relation to gathering feedback (perception) data, providers with employer-only contracts should gather internal feedback from apprentice supervisors/mentors within the workplace.