Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework

For Modern Apprenticeships

Quality standards and formal quality review guidance

2023-24

Making skills work for Scotland

Contents

Introduction

This Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework document (hereinafter referred to as 'the Framework') sets out Skills Development Scotland's (SDS) quality assurance and improvement arrangements to enhance delivery, which are effective from 1 April 2023. The Framework applies to all Learning Providers (hereinafter referred to as 'providers') directly contracted to deliver SDS funded work-based learning programmes. Sub-contracted provision that is part of the direct contract holder's responsibility will also be reviewed.

The arrangements described in the document, detail:

- the principles and purpose of the Framework;
- the quality standards and indicators used to assess providers;
- our approach to formal quality review; and
- our approach to ongoing monitoring of providers' quality assurance and continuous improvement activity.

Appendices 1 and 2 provide details and an overview of the Framework.

Principles and purpose of the Framework

The Framework is designed to demonstrate how well providers **support apprentices** in relation to SDS funded provision by ensuring they:

- receive appropriate support and guidance to enable them to become successful learners and confident individuals;
- receive quality training and develop their skills to achieve their learning goals;
- are treated with dignity and respect in a way that promotes equality and inclusion; and
- work towards successful outcomes, leading to future employment or further appropriate career progression in:
    - employment;
    - Further/Higher Education; or
    - other learning pathways.

The Framework considers the extent to which **employers' skills needs** are met by:

- ensuring providers take account of employer and wider industry needs when offering training and development options; and
- encouraging providers to continuously enhance and improve, enabling them to offer more flexible and relevant training tailored to individual employers' needs.

The Framework is designed to support and enable providers to demonstrate how well they design, deliver, evaluate and improve their services using the principle of self-assessment to:

- evaluate the quality of provision and services and assess the results and impact of delivery for apprentices, employers and other key stakeholders;

- identify what aspects of delivery is working well and what needs to improve, by answering the key questions and covering the themes identified in the self-assessment guidance;
- develop a quality action plan (QAP) so that it is focussed on the delivery areas identified as high priority for improvement and which will deliver a meaningful impact; and
- understand the key processes and timescales that must be followed to ensure compliance with SDS' contract requirements.

The Framework is built on three high level Standards:
- Service Delivery (Work Based Learning);
- Leadership and Quality Culture; and
- Outcomes and Impact.

The importance of self-assessment to support continuous improvement

The Framework promotes the use of self-assessment as a business tool which you should use on an ongoing basis to review and identify improvements to your organisation's delivery of apprenticeships and employability activity. You are required by SDS to complete at least one self-assessment by the end of April each year to demonstrate your commitment to maintaining high standards of delivery and continuous improvement of SDS funded provision.

Self-assessment should be an evidence based **collaborative** approach to evaluate how well you are delivering your SDS funded services. To get the most value from the process you should involve a representative sample of your staff and external stakeholders who contribute to the learning experience. Typically, self-assessment should include input and feedback from apprentices, employers and other stakeholders, sub-contractors delivering on your behalf, and any other delivery partners.

The starting point for your self-assessment is to read through the guidance, which you can access via the link in the yellow text box, so that you and your staff are clear on the key questions and themes that need to be considered. **It is essential that you keep referring to the guidance and exemplars as you go through the self-assessment process to make sure you are covering all of SDS' requirements - i.e., addressing all of the themes within each key question.**

Your self-assessment should record your evaluation for each Quality Indicator, Key Question and Theme detailing:

- a full but concise description of what you do;
- your collaborative **opinion** on how well you are doing each activity, based on reflection on the evidence of your performance, and providing the evidence and results that support this opinion; and
- your collaborative opinion on what and where you need to improve, providing the evidence you have gathered to support this.

Use the Red, Amber or Green criteria to decide which are the most important areas for improvement to take forward into your QAP.

Your quality action plan (QAP) and how it will be used by SDS to monitor progress

Your QAP is a key management tool which you should use to capture SMART[1] actions to support successful implementation of the improvement areas you have prioritised in your self-assessment.

It is good practice to review and update your QAP on a regular basis, involving your managers and staff in the review process

Your QAP demonstrates to SDS that you are committed to continuous improvement and the actions you are implementing are having the desired effect. SDS staff may ask you for updates and evidence to show how well you are progressing with improvement actions identified in your QAP. It is important therefore that the QAP is used as a working document to reflect progress and your current position.

To meet SDS contract requirements it is mandatory that your QAP should have at least one equality related action.

Key Information

Submission of your SA/QAP

SDS offer providers access to a cloud-based web platform called mesma to complete the SA/QAP process. Providers are required to update the system by 30 April 2023.

Your SA/QAP will then be reviewed by your Quality Assessor, and you will usually be informed within three weeks if it is acceptable. If there are any gaps, or if information you have provided is not clear, you are likely to be asked to revise and update. Your Quality Assessor will advise you on what specific action is needed and can offer additional support if required.

Your QAP will be monitored throughout the year by SDS staff, and you may be asked to update it at any time to reflect progress made.

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[1] Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timebound

SDS approach to quality review[2]

In 2023-24 SDS will utilise two methods of formal quality assurance review – full and thematic.

SDS are not responsible for completing formal quality assurance reviews of apprenticeship delivery for college contracts. This is undertaken by Education Scotland within scope of the *How Good Is Our College?* arrangements. Provider types in scope for an SDS review are independent training providers, councils, employer providers and third sector organisations.

Full reviews

A full review focuses on the entire Framework, covering all Standards, Quality Indicators and Themes in relation to all of your SDS Modern Apprenticeship contracted provision. The main output of a full review is a graded evaluative report which will be published on the SDS website.

SDS will prioritise full quality review activity using a risk-based approach in relation to several factors including previous performance, internal and external intelligence.

You will be advised at the start of each financial year whether your organisation will be scheduled for a full quality review, and a visit date will be agreed. You should be aware that we may plan a full review visit for your organisation at any time should there be concerns about the quality of your provision.

Thematic reviews

SDS may also undertake thematic reviews which will typically be shorter research-based reviews which are not graded. Typically, these aim to gain insight into either a specific theme within our Framework or a more general theme relating to work-based learning.

Further details on our approach to thematic reviews is contained in Appendix 3

Format

All formal quality assurance visits, whether full or thematic, may be conducted face to face on your premises, remotely by Microsoft Teams, or a hybrid of both depending on the circumstances at the time.

Planning for a full quality review

The Quality Assessor's pre-visit planning will involve gathering information from a range of sources, and analysis of that information, to decide the areas of focus for the visit, including the number of interviews and observations to be undertaken. Information will include, but will not be restricted to:
- your current self-assessment and the underlying evidence that informed this, including notes of meetings, analysis of surveys etc;
- your QAP, including any plans for sub-contractors;

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[2] Education Scotland undertake external scrutiny of Modern Apprenticeship provision on behalf of Scottish Government. More information can be found on their **website**

- performance data for previous years, where available, including achievement rates and equality data;
- findings from SDS quality monitoring and compliance activities, including feedback gathered from learners and employers;
- reports from any previous quality review visits carried out by SDS or any other quality body that has reviewed SDS funded provision;
- reports from any Education Scotland reviews in which your organisation has been involved;
- any legal letters issued by SDS where your organisation is placed on a formal improvement plan; and
- additional background information about the local economic and labour market context relevant to your organisation.

The lead Quality Assessor will liaise with your main contact to agree the agenda and programme for the visit. This will be agreed within a minimum of four weeks of the visit start date. You will be asked to arrange interviews and observations in advance so that the review team have maximum opportunity to assess the quality of delivery during the visit. You will be asked to upload evidence in advance of the visit using mesma, or to have the information available on the first day of the visit.

How long will the visit take?

The duration of the quality review visit will normally be between two and five days. The number of days will vary but will be proportionate to the scale of your organisation's SDS contract and will be informed by information gathered at the planning stage.

The Quality Review Team

A full quality review will be undertaken by a quality review team. The size of the team will be proportionate to the size and scale of your SDS contract, taking into account:

- geographical coverage of delivery;
- number of sites used in delivery;
- type of provision delivered;
- number of sub-contractors; and
- the age profile of apprentices.

The quality review team will be drawn from SDS staff who have experience in managing provider contracts and monitoring quality of training. The lead Quality Assessor will work with the team to plan and conduct the visit programme and will allocate roles and responsibilities across the team.

The lead Quality Assessor will be the main point of contact for providers before, during and after the review visit.

What will happen during the full quality review?

On the first day of the visit the lead Quality Assessor, and members of the review team, will meet with your main contact to go over the schedule for the visit and agree any changes if necessary.

Domestic and logistical details will be agreed before the team start the programme of interviews, meetings and observations. If possible, we will ask you to provide a room for the review team to use while on your premises.

The lead Quality Assessor will have regular touch points with your main contact so that everyone is kept informed about the progress of the visit and to agree any further actions. Usually this will be a quick meeting or telephone call at the beginning and end of each day.

On the final day, the lead Quality Assessor will provide verbal feedback to give you a summary of the main visit findings. The meeting may include some of the review team, depending on logistics. You will be advised of the main strengths and areas for improvement identified during the review and of any immediate/priority actions that need to be addressed should any evidence deem to be not meeting the minimum quality standards for any of the criteria. You will not be given your quality grade at this meeting. The lead Quality Assessor will gather all the evidence from the review and will work with the review team afterwards to determine your grades for each quality standard.

How we grade your full quality review

Findings from the review will be collated by the lead Quality Assessor and used to inform the grades allocated against each Quality Standard.

A grade is awarded for each of the three Quality Standards that represents the quality of training delivery at the time of the formal quality review. This will be subject to discussion and agreement by the review team after which the lead Quality Assessor will prepare a written report for issue.

The grades are based on our assessment of the evidence for the twelve Quality Indicators against the three Quality Standards. There are five grade descriptors which can be awarded:

- Excellent
- Very Good
- Good
- Satisfactory
- Unsatisfactory

Full details of the grade descriptors are included in Appendix 4.

SDS uses standardisation of practice and a moderation process which ensures grades are applied fairly and consistently.

What happens after the full quality review?

You will be sent a draft of the report to check for factual accuracy within four weeks of the formal quality review visit. You must reply to us with any factual inaccuracies highlighted and give reasons why it is inaccurate, within five working days of receipt of the draft. Your grades will not be changed.

The report will reflect the verbal feedback you were given at the end of the review visit and will provide more detailed findings in relation to the strengths, effective practice, feedback gathered and areas for improvement or enhancement against each Quality Standard.

The final report will be issued following any amendments based on the accuracy check. You will normally receive the final report within four to six weeks of the visit completion date.

The report will be written evaluatively and use quantifying statements based on the proportions outlined in the table below:

Description of Numbers and Proportions	%
All	100%
Almost all	91-99%
Most	75-90%
Majority	50-74%
Minority/Less than half	16%-49%
Few	Up to 15%

You will be expected to use the report to update your QAP in mesma with any required changes, reflecting any recommendations and areas for improvement that have been identified. If there are any high priority actions required, for example, as a result of a breach of your SDS contract conditions, then you will be expected to take immediate action to resolve the issue.

If you fail to achieve a grade of at least satisfactory for any of the three Quality Standards during a formal quality assurance review, we will require you to take immediate action to address weaknesses in the quality of your delivery. This will mean adding appropriate Areas for Improvement (AFIs) to your quality action plan which will be discussed with your QA and monitored by SDS on an ongoing basis.

You should update mesma within two weeks of receiving your final visit report and your SDS Quality Assessor will review the updates.

We also recommend you include any quality related actions arising from areas for improvement identified through monitoring activity undertaken by SDS Skills Investment Advisers.

SDS staff will liaise with you on an ongoing basis to discuss what progress you have made on your planned actions. This may include a review of progress of any areas added to the plan following any further quality monitoring visits by SDS, or other external reviews, if relevant.

Appendix 5 provides an overview of the visit cycle, and Appendix 6 summarises the Key Principles for Assessment visits, including our Code of Conduct for SDS staff, and our expectations of providers during quality reviews.

A full Glossary of Terms is included in Appendix 7.

The full quality review report and publication

Your report will be published on the SDS website in line with our timetable for publishing national Q4 statistics, usually in June each year.

Concerns

If concerns arise during a formal quality review visit, they should be raised with the lead Quality Assessor as soon as possible to resolve issues before the review is completed.

If you believe that the quality review team has arrived at a judgement in the absence of all relevant information or evidence, you should submit any additional evidence in writing within five working days of the verbal feedback given by the lead Quality Assessor. If the matter is not resolved to your satisfaction it should be raised with the Quality Assurance Team Leader or Manager (contact details can be found here) who will seek to resolve the issue.

Complaints

If it is not possible to resolve concerns, you may wish to lodge a formal complaint. The lead Quality Assessor will ensure that you are informed of SDS' procedures for making a formal complaint, however information about how to complain is available on the SDS website[3].

Support from SDS

SDS Quality Assessors will work with you as required:

- to offer guidance on the Quality Standards and Framework;
- to provide advice and guidance on how to complete your SA/QAP and answer technical queries regarding mesma;
- to provide advice on the types of evidence required to support your self-assessment and how to upload these into mesma; and
- to help identify areas for improvement and offer guidance on what can be done to develop improvement actions to meet quality standards.

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[3] SDS complaints

Appendix 1 – Quality Standards and Individual Quality Indicators Overview

1. Service Delivery (Work Based Learning)

1.1 Providers develop and prepare effective work based learning provision

1.2 Providers plan resources for effective delivery of work based learning provision

1.3 Providers effectively deliver and manage work based learning provision and ensure quality of delivery

1.4 Providers manage partners and stakeholders to deliver outcomes for learners and employers

2. Leadership and Quality Culture

2.1 The provider's work based learning strategy is based on the current and future needs and expectations of stakeholders, employers and learners

2.2 Leaders ensure appropriate staffing resources are in place to deliver the work based learning strategy

2.3 Leaders ensure staff are appropriately skilled and motivated to deliver work based learning provision

2.4 Leaders take ownership for the continuous improvement of quality and performance of work based learning provision

3. Outcomes and Impact

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

3.2 Work based learning provision meets the needs of learners, employers and stakeholders

Appendix 2 – SDS Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework

1. Service Delivery (Work Based Learning)		
Quality Indicator	**Theme**	**Question(s)**
1.1 Providers develop and prepare effective work-based learning provision	Initial Assessment and Recruitment	1.1.1 How effective are our processes for recruitment and initial assessment of learners?
	Induction	1.1.2 How effective are our processes for each learner's Induction?
	Learning and Assessment Planning	1.1.3 How effective is our learning and assessment planning?
	Equality groups	1.1.4 How well have we designed and prepared our provision specifically to meet the needs of different equality groups?
	Transferable skills (core, meta and career management skills)	1.1.5 How well have we designed and prepared to deliver transferable skills?
	Employer involvement	1.1.6 How effectively have we utilised the employer voice to inform the design and preparation of delivery?
1.2 Providers plan resources for effective delivery of work-based learning provision	Resources (delivery environment, learning materials and technology)	1.2.1 How well do we plan resources to support effective delivery of work-based learning?
1.3 Providers effectively deliver and manage work-based learning provision and ensure quality of delivery	Learner goal setting and progress	1.3.1 How effective are our approaches to setting learner goals and monitoring learner progress?
	Quality assurance of practice leading to improvement and enhancement of services	1.3.2 How well do we review our delivery to ensure its standard and quality?

| 1.4 Providers manage partners and stakeholders to deliver outcomes for learners and employers | Effectiveness of partnerships to support transitions and/or progression | 1.4.1 How well do we work with partners to support transition and/or progression of learners? |
| | Management of sub-contractors | 1.4.2 How effective are we at managing our sub-contracted delivery? |

2. Leadership and Quality Culture		
Quality Indicator	**Theme**	**Question(s)**
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.	2.1.1 How well does our SDS contracted provision support the Scottish Government's Young Persons Guarantee initiative?
	Future focussed strategy underpinned by Labour Market Information (LMI)	2.1.2 How well do we consider our own ecosystem in developing and delivering our work-based learning strategy?
2.2 Leaders ensure appropriate staffing resources are in place to deliver the work-based learning strategy	Management and support of staff	2.2.1 How effective are we at managing our staff to deliver SDS funded provision?
2.3 Leaders ensure staff are appropriately skilled and motivated to deliver work-based learning provision	Staff development	2.3.1 How effective is our staff development to support successful delivery of SDS funded provision?
2.4 Leaders take ownership for the continuous improvement of quality and performance of work-based learning provision	Effective self-evaluation and continuous improvement	2.4.1 How effective are our approaches towards self-assessment and continuous improvement?
	Innovation and change	2.4.2 How well do we seek innovation and ideas to enhance our provision?

3. Outcomes and Impact (Your results)

Quality Indicator	Theme	Question(s)
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	3.1.1 How well are we performing and analysing our performance in relation to SDS key requirements?
	SDS diverse recruitment	3.1.2 How well are we improving the representation of specific equality groups in our SDS funded provision?
	Awarding Body and Industry Body requirements	3.1.3 How well are we meeting the requirements of Awarding Bodies and Industry Bodies?
3.2 Work-based learning provision meets the needs of learners, employers and stakeholders	Systematic gathering, analysis and use of employer perception data.	3.2.1 How satisfied are employers and stakeholders with our service and relationship?
	Systematic gathering, analysis and use of learner perception data.	3.2.2 How satisfied are learners with our provision?

Appendix 3 – Thematic Reviews

Outline of the Thematic Review Process

Throughout the 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 be of a more generic nature contributing to the Framework e.g., the impact of progress reviews on the apprentice journey.

Selection of Providers

We would 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.

We would inform you of your involvement in a thematic review at least two calendar months before it commences.

The QA will liaise with your main contact to agree the agenda and programme for the visit/event. This will be agreed within a minimum of four weeks of the visit start date. You will be asked to arrange the interviews and observations in advance, so that there is maximum opportunity to assess the quality of activity during the visit.

How will the thematic review take place?

Thematic reviews will be carried out either face-to-face in your premises and/or remotely by video conference using Microsoft Teams, or a combination of both. Remote reviews will be fully planned and hosted by the QA carrying out the event.

How long will the review take?

The duration of the review visit will normally be one day and there will be one QA involved. The QA will be the main point of contact for providers before, during and after the review visit.

What will happen during the thematic review?

On the day of the review the QA will speak with the main contact within the provider to go over the schedule of activity for the visit/event and agree any changes if necessary.

The QA will then carry out the interviews either face to face or by phone with provider staff, apprentices and employers. Observations may be carried out as part of the review either face to face or on Microsoft Teams where appropriate.

At the end of the day the QA will provide verbal feedback to give a summary of the main findings. You will be advised of the main strengths and areas for improvement identified and of any immediate/priority actions that need to be addressed.

Thematic review Provider report

You will be sent a short report (1-2 pages) within four weeks of the review visit. The report will reflect the verbal feedback you were given at the end of the review and will provide more detailed findings in relation to the strengths, effective practice and any areas for improvement or enhancement required. This report will not be published by SDS.

Where we have made recommendations for improvement relating to the thematic review, we will suggest that you include this in your Quality Action Plan. If there are any high priority actions required, for example, as a result of a breach of your SDS contract conditions, then you will be expected to take immediate action to resolve the issue.

Thematic review national report

At the end of the review activity and when all provider reports have been issued, a national report will be published on the SDS website highlighting key strengths and areas for improvement. The report will also include effective practice and any case studies. Providers will not be named in this national report without express permission of the provider.

Appendix 4 – Grade Descriptors

	Service Delivery	Leadership and Quality Culture	Outcomes and Impact
Excellent	An evaluation of **excellent** applies to the operational planning and delivery of apprenticeships which are of a very high quality. There is an outstanding standard of training which exemplifies very best practice and is worth disseminating across the provider network. Apprenticeship planning and delivery is clearly adapted and tailored to meet the needs of every individual apprentice, including those from under-represented groups. All apprentices and employers are involved in the planning and delivery and all apprentices have ownership of their learner journey, optimising their chances of success and providing them with future-proofed vocational and transferable skills. The provider demonstrates they have effective/innovative approaches for meeting individuals' goals and monitoring and reviewing their progress that go beyond SDS 'compliance' requirements. It implies that the service offer is deemed to be sustainable and that the provider will	An evaluation of **excellent** applies to the leadership and quality culture of the provider resulting in planning and delivery of apprenticeships which are of a very high quality. There is a sustainable culture of continuous improvement, embracing equality and diversity and the management and development of WBL related staff to ensure that training provided is optimal for all apprentices and their employers. The provider is innovative, works with appropriate partners to optimise their service, and thinks strategically about the future of their WBL provision. There are examples of very best practice, worthy of disseminating across the provider network.	An evaluation of **excellent** applies to the recent past relevant results of the provider which reflect extremely high satisfaction with all aspects of their apprenticeship provision by apprentices, employers, and other relevant stakeholders. This includes how well the provider considers their impact on under-represented groups. The provider has a systematic and proactive approach to gathering relevant quantitative and qualitative data and analysing it. There is a strong track record of high rates of apprentice achievement in all of the framework areas they operate in and across different pertinent equality groups which are reflective (i.e., there is a causal relationship) of the service offer and leadership provided. The provider promotes and explicitly celebrates the success of individual apprentices and sets themselves appropriate incremental targets for improvement on areas that they see will enhance their service.

	continually seek ways in which to enhance their delivery.		
Very Good	An evaluation of **very good** applies to the operational planning and delivery of apprenticeships which are of a high quality. The standard of training is very good, and it is characterised by major strengths. There may be areas for improvement which do not significantly diminish apprentices' and employers' experiences. Whilst this represents a high standard of training, it is a standard that should be achievable by all WBL providers. There are obvious examples of apprenticeship planning and delivery being adapted to meet the needs of individual apprentices, including those from under-represented groups. It implies that it is fully appropriate to continue to provide their training without significant adjustment but there is an expectation that the provider will take opportunities to continue to improve and enhance their service delivery.	An evaluation of **very good** applies to the leadership and quality culture of the provider resulting in planning and delivery of apprenticeships which are of a high quality. There are major strengths in relation to continuous improvement that consider the diversity of their WBL contract and there is a well-executed commitment to management and training of WBL related staff. There may be areas for improvement which do not significantly diminish the commitment to delivering high quality training. The provider manages their WBL well now and is looking to their own position in the future of WBL. There may be examples of best practice worthy of dissemination across the provider network.	An evaluation of **very good** applies to the recent past results of the provider which reflect high satisfaction with their apprenticeship provision by apprentices, employers and other relevant stakeholders. This includes how well the provider considers their impact on individuals from under-represented groups. The provider has a systematic approach to gathering relevant quantitative and qualitative data and analysing it. There are very good rates of apprenticeship achievement in almost all of the framework areas delivered and across different pertinent equality groups which are reflective (i.e., there is a causal relationship) of the service offer and leadership provided. There may be examples of individual success of the provider's apprentices.
Good	An evaluation of **good** applies to the operational planning and delivery of apprenticeships characterised by	An evaluation of **good** applies to the leadership and quality culture of the provider resulting in planning and	An evaluation of **good** applies to the recent past results of the provider which reflect satisfaction on the whole

important strengths which, taken together, clearly outweigh any areas for improvement. There may be a few examples of tailoring the planning and delivery of the apprenticeship to meet individual needs, including those from under-represented groups. However, the quality of some of the apprentices' and/or employers' experiences of delivery may be diminished by aspects in which improvement is required. The provider should seek to enhance the areas that are delivered well whilst taking clear action to address aspects which are identified for improvement.	delivery of apprenticeships which are generally of a high quality. Continuous improvement involves pertinent people and WBL is managed and delivered in line with SDS contract requirements. Any mandatory requirements for staff training are met and the organisation reacts to staffing challenges that occur. However, there may be a few aspects in which the leadership and quality culture of the provider is diminishing their apprenticeship offer now and/or they may not be considering their place well enough in the future of WBL.	with their apprenticeship provision by apprentices, employers and other stakeholders. This includes how well the provider considers their impact on individuals from under-represented groups. The provider has some evidence of gathering data and using it to inform what they do. There are good rates of apprenticeship achievement for most of the frameworks delivered and across different pertinent equality groups in most framework areas that the provider operates.
Satisfactory	An evaluation of **satisfactory** applies to the operational planning and delivery of apprenticeships characterised by strengths which just outweigh areas for improvement indicating that apprentices and their employers have access to a basic standard of service. Overall, the areas for improvement are not having a substantially adverse effect on apprentices' and employers' experiences but they are clearly not optimising the apprentices' chances of success. The provider is expected	An evaluation of **satisfactory** applies to the leadership and quality culture of the provider resulting in planning and delivery of apprenticeships which are of a basic standard. Continuous improvement processes need to be improved in some way and the management of WBL may require to be improved to bring the apprenticeship offer generally to a higher quality standard to meet apprentices' and employers' needs now and in the future. There is limited evidence of relevant, or mandatory,	An evaluation of **satisfactory** applies to recent past results of the provider which reflect mixed satisfaction with their apprenticeship provision by apprentices, employers, and other stakeholders with little evidence of how their impact on under-represented groups is considered. The provider is passive in gathering data and in using it to inform what they do. Achievement rates are at, or below national averages for frameworks delivered and pertinent equality groups in almost all

	to take immediate action to address the areas for improvement.	staff training taking place which meets individual development needs.	framework areas that the provider operates.
Unsatisfactory	An evaluation of **unsatisfactory** applies to the operational planning and delivery of apprenticeships characterised by significant and damaging areas for improvement which clearly outweigh strengths indicating that apprentices and employers do not have access to a basic standard of service as demanded by SDS. This will be considered as a breach in contract as set out in the MA specification and conditions and SDS will treat the matter as such through the appropriate governance process.	An evaluation of **unsatisfactory** applies to the leadership and quality culture of the provider resulting in sub-standard planning and delivery of apprenticeships. There is no evidence that continuous improvement processes are working and the management of WBL is not meeting the needs of apprentices and employers now. There is no evidence of relevant, or mandatory, staff training taking place which meets individual development needs. This will be considered as a breach in contract as set out in the MA specification and conditions and SDS will treat the matter as such through the appropriate governance process.	An evaluation of **unsatisfactory** applies to recent past results of the provider which reflect low levels of satisfaction with their apprenticeship provision by apprentices, employers and other stakeholders with negligible evidence of how their impact on under-represented groups is considered. The provider is passive in gathering data and does not consider intelligence shared with them in relation to their performance. Achievement rates are generally well below national averages for frameworks delivered and pertinent equality groups in almost all framework areas that the provider operates. This will be considered as a breach in contract as set out in the MA specification and conditions and SDS will treat the matter as such through the appropriate governance process.

Appendix 5 – Full Quality Review Timetable

Full Quality Assurance Review

- Review and update Self Assessment (SA) and Quality Action Plan (QAP) Anually in April
- Provider notified at start of financial year if on visit plan and visit dates agreed
- Agree visit plan 1mth or more in advance including visit schedule and logistics, access to employers and learners
- Organise interviews in advance of the start date
- Gather and organise evidence - cross reference to Quality Standards
- Visit takes place over 2-5 days including verbal feedback
- Draft report for accuracy check and final report issued within 4 weeks of visit. Report will be published on SDS website
- Post visit - update QAP on the mesma system within 2 weeks

Appendix 6 – Key Principles of Assessment Visits

Principles of Formal Quality Review

Assessors will:

- ensure that the review 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 process;
- use the provider's self-assessment as the starting point for the quality review to identify key areas for review, along with other intelligence gathered as part of the pre-visit 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; and
- be constructive in identifying and supporting providers with important areas for improvement.

Code of conduct for the Quality Review Team

Assessors should uphold the highest possible standards in their work. When conducting the quality review, assessors 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 learners and employers; and
- respect the confidentiality of all information received during their work.

It is important that assessors judge the effectiveness of provision and leadership on their contribution to outcomes and not based on any preferences for methods. The key to the judgement is whether the methods and organisation are fit to achieve high standards of work for all learners.

Expectations of Providers

To ensure that reviews are 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. Assessors 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 assessors;
- enable assessors to conduct their assessment in an open and honest way;
- enable assessors to evaluate provision objectively against the SDS Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework;
- provide evidence that will enable assessors to report honestly, fairly and reliably about their provision;
- maintain a purposeful dialogue with the lead assessor and the quality review team;
- recognise that assessors 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 assessors in a timely and suitable manner through the lead assessor;
- work with assessors to minimise disruption and stress throughout the quality review; and
- ensure the health and safety of assessors while on their premises.

At the point of the quality review notification, providers should review the composition of the quality review team. It is the responsibility of providers to highlight any perceived or actual conflicts of interest prior to the start of their quality review.

Appendix 7 – Glossary

Term	Definition
Areas for improvement (AfI)	Areas where actions are required to improve activity where potential gaps have been identified
Associate Assessor	SDS staff with knowledge and experience in monitoring or reviewing quality of delivery in SDS funded work-based learning programmes
Employers	Employers where learners are employed or placed to gain work experience
Enhancement	Build on existing processes and delivery working towards continuous improvement
mesma	Web / cloud-based platform used by providers to complete self-assessment and quality action plan and upload documentary evidence
Key Target Groups	Equality and Diversity key target groups - Gender, Disability, Ethnic Minority, Care Experienced
Lead Assessor	SDS Quality Assessor
Learners	Individuals undergoing training or learning and/or apprentices
LMI	Labour Market Information
Partners	Schools, Colleges, Awarding Bodies, Sector Skills bodies, third sector, local authorities, local or national groups, other Learning Providers
Protected Characteristics	Age, Disability, Gender reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion and Belief, Sex and Sexual Orientation.
Providers	Learning Providers or other organisations (including direct Employer contracts and Local Authorities) in receipt of SDS funding for delivery of training
Quality Action Plan (QAP)	Captures actions to improve, develop and enhance activity and results
Self-Assessment (SA)	A business tool providers use on an ongoing basis to review and identify improvements to their organisation's delivery of apprenticeships activity
Service Level Agreement	Written agreement between two or more parties, signed and dated
Stakeholders	Skills Development Scotland, Scottish Government, Employers, Parents