West Midlands Combined Authority:

Quality Review Visit: Guidance Document

This document sets out the approach to Quality review for employment and skills-funded programmes.

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Purpose

This process aims to support continuous quality improvement and ensure a positive learning experience and outcome for learners.

Aim

WMCA expects leaders to have a clear and ambitious vision for providing high-quality, inclusive education and training to all. Leaders should raise quality standards to benefit the residents and meet the outcomes framework. Providers should use all reasonable endeavours to:

- Use national benchmarks to support quality improvement.
- Meet the minimum quality standards published by the DfE, Ofsted and/or WMCA, that apply to the services delivered.
- Ensure competent and appropriately qualified staff deliver and assess learning. The provider shall be responsible for the continuing professional development and training of its staff.
- Offer equality of access to learning and close equality gaps in learning and outcomes
- Provide a safe, healthy, and supportive environment, which meets the needs of the residents.
- Have sufficient oversight of delivery to stretch and challenge and plan interventions when performance drops; delivering value for money and financial probity.
- Ensure all supply chain delivering services under the contract on behalf of the provider, comply with the requirements set out above.

Overview

This handbook provides providers with an overview of the Quality Visit process aligned with the Quality and Standards Framework. It involves observing teaching and learning, holding discussions with key staff, learners, and stakeholders including employers, as well as reviewing learner work and pertinent policies.

It's important to note that no formal judgments will be given. The process aims to support providers in their quality assurance practices.

Providers will have the primary responsibility for improving standards and will need to demonstrate to the WMCA satisfaction, that it has an effective quality assurance system based on the implementation of its quality improvement process.

Visit Types

WMCA will undertake a range of activities to identify and minimise risk.

Quality reviews will fall into the following areas:

- Quality schedule
- Support & challenge.
- Enhanced

Quality schedule reviews will be conducted by the Quality and Standards team and follow an audit schedule as selected by the Quality and Standards Panel.

Additional reviews outside of the agreed schedule will be selected on a case-by-case basis by the Quality and Standards Panel. These reviews will be linked to high-risk emerging factors, such as data quality/performance, tiered review grading, whistleblowing, and supportive reviews for newly onboarded providers.

Quality Areas

The Quality and Standards team will review six quality areas, these can be found in the Quality Areas and Elements for Providers section, which identifies the elements which make up the six areas.

This document should assist providers in understanding what will be reviewed; the elements and different aspects of each quality area and, describe what will be looked at during a quality assurance visit. The first column includes the quality areas, the second includes the elements, and the third describes what this looks like. This document will be sent before a quality assurance visit takes place.

Quality Visit Overview

Whilst most visits, will be conducted as full visits against the six Quality areas of focus, sometimes it may be beneficial for partial visits to take place that focus on certain Quality Areas or be conducted in parts over time. Completing revisits will allow you to focus on specific Quality Areas or Elements within those Quality Areas to see if progress has been made since the previous visit where one has taken place.

At the end of the visit, you may be provided with verbal feedback on the Quality Areas conducted, however, in some cases, such as if activity is conducted after the visit or WMCA seeks additional evidence, we may arrange a follow-up call to provide feedback. In all cases, providers will be issued a Quality Report on the findings, this may include areas of improvement, in some cases.

Learner and Employer interviews

Learner and Employer Interviews could be conducted as part of the visit, this can sometimes be before, during or after a visit depending on the learner/employer's availability. Extracting this key information will help build a full picture of your provision.

Quality Areas and Elements

Quality Areas	Elements	What are we looking for?
QA1 - Is the curriculum fit for purpose?	**Curriculum Planning**	The curriculum is planned with or consulted by, employer, local labour market needs and at an appropriate level, this could be mapped to an accredited qualification or industry standards; there is evidence the teacher/team have at least a structure of the sequence of what will happen in each session/week. The design of the curriculum should have clear aims and objectives which clearly explain what learners should be able to do at the end of learning. The curriculum should include opportunities for learners to acquire new skills, knowledge, and behaviours. This could be adaptive to suit the learners needs, allowing different learners to progress to different positive outcomes with the employers the provider is engaging with. Evidence of planning for assessments and feedback throughout to ensure the learner is progressing.
QA2 - Is the quality of teaching and learning effective?	**Aims and Objectives**	There should be evidence that the teacher/team have an overall purpose for each session which is identified by the aim and objective/s. The aims and objectives should be clear and known by learners, these could be differentiated where needed and build on previous learning.
	Teaching	Teachers should be suitably qualified with industry/subject knowledge which is current and have opportunities for Continuous Professional Development. Teaching contributes to the learners' development of knowledge, skills, and behaviours through well planned sessions. Teaching should contain clear explanations which allow learners to

Quality Areas	Elements	What are we looking for?
		acquire new skills and knowledge which are appropriate for employment. There should be continuous opportunities for feedback, teachers should monitor learners progress and check their understanding. Teaching and learning should show clear evidence of collaborative working, including with employers so that learners are able to develop personal, social and employability skills to prepare them for positive outcomes; employer engagement in the classroom may also take place. Teachers should encourage learners to use technical, professional, and subject-specific language clearly aimed at the intended job role.
	Assessment	An Initial Assessment (IA) should be conducted to determine learners' starting points. These starting points can be used for interventions or adaptive tasks within the programme. This helps focus learners on their programme and mitigates learners at risk from achieving. There are formative and summative assessments which provide a valid indication of knowledge, skills, and behaviours against national or industrial standards. This could include but is not limited to accredited assessments and/or RARPA/SFIA. Results from assessment inform teaching practice. There should be a variety of assessment opportunities available which are planned and/or naturally occurring throughout the programme and are clearly understood by learners and practitioners.

Quality Areas	Elements	What are we looking for?
	Feedback	There is an effective and robust process in place to provide constructive and supportive feedback at all stages of the programme, which identifies strengths and areas for development. There should be regular feedback provided to all learners, ensuring learners improve and progress through their programme. This could include peer, verbal or written
	Activities	There should be a range of engaging activities embedded within sessions. Sessions could include blended learning/face to face/ lectures/seminars or other timetabled activities that add value to the programme and contribute to the learner's development, e.g., employer engagement activities such as mock interviews, roleplays, presentations.
	Resources	There should be a sufficient range of engaging resources (e.g., licences, software, tools, etc.) which can be made available to all learners throughout the programme. These resources should be appropriate, in line with national and industry standards and fit for purpose allowing learners to be fully supported to overcome any barriers to achieving challenging goals.
QA3 - Are positive outcomes being met?	**Learner destinations**	There should be evidence of the provider of supporting designation progression, including, where applicable engaging with the employer by identifying the relevant skills, knowledge, and behaviours to prepare learners towards their positive outcome.

Quality Areas	Elements	What are we looking for?
		The provider should be aware of the learners' starting point and there should be evidence of learners making sustained progress against this. Learners should be acquiring new knowledge and skills they did not have prior to joining the course and they should be able to demonstrate and apply this knowledge and skills. The provider should prepare learners towards their positive outcome relevant to their objectives including; a new role, a new job, increased pay/responsibilities, new opportunities for those who are self-employed or an apprenticeship.
QA4 - Are learners being fully engaged in the learning process?	**Learner engagement**	There should be high levels of learner engagement which could be evidenced by high levels of attendance and punctuality; engagement within the classroom setting, contributing to class and wider discussions, and timely completion of work. Learners should show respect for others and be motivated and enthusiastic about their programme and arrive prepared to learn, which should result in learners who are ready to move on to the next stage of their journey or employment.
	Target Setting	There should be target setting for learners, which should be aspirational and reviewed regularly. Targets should be personalised and challenging, include possible positive outcomes of learners and include any new skills, knowledge or behaviours learned during the course which they can then transfer into the next stage of their journey.

Quality Areas	Elements	What are we looking for?
QA5 - Are learners being supported to progress?	**Support**	Robust Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) process should be the starting point for all learners, to ensure that learners are aware of what is expected of them, and that the information gathered is acted upon to provide support to learners. Learners' motivation for completing should be explored to ensure that this is the most appropriate route for them. There should be an Initial Assessment (IA) to determine learners' starting points and any additional learning needs. Where the course is not appropriate for the learner they should be signposted to other provision or other providers.

The provider should have in place support at the appropriate level of study that the learner requires, including tracking and monitoring processes which includes individual progress, achievement, and progression, and could include planned tutorial opportunities to review this.

There should be wraparound support provided to all learners which is accessible when needed. This should include pastoral support, academic support, and signposting to wider/external agencies where appropriate. Learners should know how and where to access this support. Support should be in place for learners with identified additional learning needs or disability.

Activities and opportunities should be provided to learners to prepare them for their positive outcome, e.g., CV writing, Mock interviews, coaching and mentoring etc. This will assist learners in developing the relevant soft skills and behaviours which go beyond the technical/vocational content of the course. |

Quality Areas	Elements	What are we looking for?
QA6 - Is leadership and management effective?	**Leadership and Management**	There should be evidence of effective Quality Assurance processes for teaching and learning across all provisions including sub-contracting (Supply chain) arrangements. Leaders and managers should know the strengths and weaknesses of their provision and act on these accordingly. These could be captured in the form of a Self-Assessment Report and/or a Quality Improvement Plan, or other means. Leaders and managers should consistently engage with employers and the local community to shape the curriculum offer and review as appropriate. Leaders and managers should consider the workload and wellbeing of all staff and encourage Continuous Professional Development for all relevant staff. Leaders and managers should have effective safeguarding and welfare policies and procedures in place.

Quality visits process

An overview of the Quality review process is included below.

Notification

Providers will be given a minimum of 5 working days' notice. There may be instances when the notice period may be shorter, but we will try to keep these to a minimum.

Through communication, providers will be informed of:

- Expected review type.
- Contact details of personnel
- Visit date and times.
- Required documentation.

Providers will be expected to:

- Acknowledge receipt of the review
- Send any requested data in the time provided.
- Ensure all selected documentation is available and ready to view in the required timescale.
- Provide the name of the key contact.

Draft Report

Upon finalisation, a draft report will be sent to providers, giving feedback on:

- Summary of finding
- Identification of areas for development and sharing of best practices.

On receipt of the draft report, providers will be expected to:

- acknowledge receipt of the review
- send any requested data/evidence, within 10 working days.
- respond to our recommendations by outlining the specific actions to be taken, assigning responsibility to the relevant individual, and providing a proposed implementation date.

Final Report

Feedback and additional evidence will be reviewed before issuing the final report, this will normally take place within 14 working days. No opportunity will be given after the final report has been issued to submit additional evidence.

Where high-risk factors emerge, the Quality and Standards team will determine the next steps; this could include but is not limited to:

- A formal provider improvement plan.
- Selection for a tier 3 external audit.
- Increase Quality review schedule.
- Issue a breach of contract, suspension or contract termination.

Glossary of Terms

The following terms are words you may come across during the Visit. The words are common within the quality assurance framework and help offer a definition of how it can be interpreted when reviewing the Quality Assurance and Improvement visits.

Term	Definition
Accredited qualification	A qualification that is accredited by an Awarding Body (AB) and gives access to a certificate to the learner at the end of the programme that can be used as Recognised Prior Learning at a different institution. Qualifications are regulated by Ofqual.
Action/s	Actions are a set of requirements to ensure the desired outcomes are reached. Actions that come from the Quality and Standards team, to enable a provider to address their quality process issues. Actions required from a visit will have an appropriate timescale for completion.
Aims	Refers to the overarching intentions of the course or programme and what learners should leave with once completed. Learning outcomes/objectives are derived from these and articulate clear measures which help to determine if the aims have been met.
Areas for improvement (AFI)	These are areas identified during a Quality Assurance visit that are seen to require a change that makes the learning or delivery more effective. Areas for improvement can be critical to the successful delivery and the positive outcomes for the learner.
Assessment	The term assessment refers to the wide variety of methods or tools that educators use to evaluate, measure, and document the academic readiness, learning progress, skill acquisition, or educational needs of students.

Term	Definition
Awarding Body (AB)	An Awarding Body develops high quality qualifications that meets the needs of employers and learners. A provider will choose an Awarding Body to undertake external verification of the qualifications completed by learners to ensure national standards are met.
Behaviours	Behaviours are what can be seen and demonstrated by learners, these can be learnt and should be transferrable.
Best Practice	Best practice is generally defined as practice that is regarded as making a positive contribution, adding value to the provision, and learning experience and which is worth sharing to providers delivering the same programme or course. Best practice is generally defined as being anything that goes above and beyond standard practice or what is required to be done.
Blended Learning	Blended learning is a hybrid approach to learning that combines face-to-face and online learning experiences. Ideally, each (both online and off) will complement the other to ensure a positive outcome for the learner.
Clear	The evidence presented is unambiguous and demonstrates that the provider clearly understands the requirements within the Quality and Standards Framework.
Comprehensive	Evidence covers all or nearly all elements of the Quality Framework.
Consistent	Refers to the same standard or quality being evidenced across different elements of the provision against the quality framework.
Critical friend	A critical friend is a trusted supportive person/organisation who can ask difficult questions using critical thinking to judge a situation. The support offered is positive and designed to help improve were necessary.

Term	Definition
Curriculum	A curriculum is a collection of lessons and assessments that will be taught within a training provider, college, or other institution by a teacher.
Description	To tell or depict in written or spoken words. It gives an account of something without making any conclusions or judgements.
Destinations (Outcomes)	Destinations or Outcomes data is the information that is collected when a learner finishes their training. This would look at what the learner does next in the learning journey such as further learning or getting into employment post course. This information will be collected through self-reporting by students, follow-up surveys, or by linking together administrative data on the same individuals at different points in time.
Adaptive	In education, this refers to the process of distinguishing different expectations for individuals or groups of learners based on their starting points; adaptation can be based on learning outcome, the activity a learner completes or participates in, or the expected level of achievement. For example, all learners might be expected to describe, whilst some learners may be expected to evaluate, which stretches and challenges them. We would be looking to see a variety of teaching techniques and lesson adaptations to assist learners where diverse needs exist.
Direct Claim Status (DCS)	Direct Claim Status (DCS) is a status that is awarded to a trusted provider for an individual qualification and is based on quality criteria that are measured and reported on through the external quality assurance reviews. The provider attains this status following verification by the Awarding Body. This means that the provider can use their own quality assurance process to claim certificates for a learner upon completion of the qualification.
Effective	Being effective in the delivery means to demonstrate consistent quality that produces good outcomes or meet the best outcomes for the delivery.

Term	Definition
Elements	Elements refer to the themes that make up the areas of the quality framework. For example, within the area of Quality of Teaching the Quality Assurance and Improvement Manager may look at the following elements within this: Aims, Assessment and Feedback in lessons.
Engagement	Learner engagement is a measure that reflects the quantity and quality of a learner's participation in their courses and every other aspect of their educational program. It reflects a learner's interaction and cooperation with co-learners and instructors. At a wider level it includes governance, feedback, quality assurance, peer support, mentoring or any other activities beyond the immediate scope of a student's studies.
Engaging	Here we are looking at the curriculum/lesson content and delivery. It should hold a measure of attention, interest and attraction to hold the interest and maintain the progress of a learner when they are being taught or when they are learning.
Evaluation	This is about using evidence to support a judgement or to justify a statement or claim. An evaluation draws on varied information, themes, or concepts to consider aspects such as strengths and weaknesses, advantages or disadvantages, alternative actions, relevance, or significance of the learning.
Evidence	This is seen as the information given that authenticates and validates the quality of the courses being delivered. Some examples of evidence during a QA visit could be learner attendance records, assessments, feedback and CPD.
Guided Learning Hours (GLH)	Ofqual says Guided Learning Hours, often known as GLH. are important because they are linked to the credit that students receive for some qualifications. Students need to know the actual Guided Learning Hours for any course they take. They can't include unsupervised study or preparation, or the time taken for assessments.

Term	Definition
Impact	Impact is demonstrated by an outcome or result and shows how that is going to make a difference to an event or situation. The impact could be related to job outcomes, high retention and achievement rates, high employer engagement, and raising learner aspirations.
Improvement Plan	An improvement plan means to create a documented strategy for improving or making things better.
Industry Standards	A set of criteria within an industry relating to the standard functioning and carrying out of operations in their respective fields of production. In other words, it is the generally accepted requirements followed by the members of an industry.
Ineffective	Refers to an element or process which does not result in a positive or desired outcome. An example could be where a provider fails to provide an acceptable level of support which prevents learners progressing through their programme.
Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)	Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) is an integral part of the learner journey from the very start of the learner joining, through the training and assessment process, certification and beyond into the learner's career. The key objective of IAG is to promote, encourage and nurture learning as an ongoing process.
Initial Assessment (IA)	This is the assessment used prior to a learner joining a course or training programme by Providers with learners to ascertain the learner's starting points. Initial assessment (IA) usually considers Maths and English levels but can also include IT. Initial Assessments are used by practitioners to plan their teaching.
Intervention	An intervention is an act by the provider (and other bodies such as the WMCA Quality and Standards team or Contract Management Teams or OFSTED) to help improve the quality and possible outcomes of a course where learners are not making progress. For example, intervention can be done by the provider to a learner who is under-performing through one-to-one support.

Term	Definition
	Similarly, other interventions could be, changing teaching strategies, or styles.
Knowledge	This refers to the technical detail and understanding the learners need to achieve and understand to complete their learning. The knowledge gained in the course should improve the learner's success and help achieve positive outcomes.
Leaders	Leaders are seen as people who work with teachers/tutors to influence and improve the quality of the learning delivery.
Learner	This is the individual who has signed up to and started a course. The learner may be employed and needs to upskill, or the learner may be an unemployed person who is seeking to upskill and enter employment, or the learner could be a person who is self-employed.
Learning Outcome/Objective	Learning Outcomes or Learning Objectives articulate the specific knowledge, skills, or expertise that the learner should gain from the course they attend and are used to measure learners' progress against.
Level	Most qualifications have a difficulty level. The higher the level, the more difficult the qualification.
Limited	Where the delivery of the course is restricted in activity and does not offer any opportunity to explore or develop further learning.
Mock Interviews	Mock interviews are a training tool for learners to practice their interview skills for a job. In most cases, the mock interview should be geared to help the learner towards the job interviews offered by employers related to the course the learner is taking.
Non-Accredited learning (programme)	When a programme or piece of learning is unaccredited, it has normally been devised by the provider or employer (or both) and is subject to the provider's own internal quality assurance processes. There will be no Direct Claims Status given

Term	Definition
	on this type of learning as the certificate (if there is one) will be created by the provider.
Objectives	Learning objectives are brief statements that describe what students will be expected to learn by the end of their course. The Provider objectives will be different from the learner and is linked to the quality of delivery and ensuring learners have the best possible outcomes.
Practitioners	L&D Practitioners are typically involved with identifying learning/training needs, designing/sourcing training and learning solutions, delivering and evaluating training. The role focus is often on the practical delivery of training. The L&D Practitioner will typically have expertise and competence in their specific field.
Providers	For the purpose of the quality visits, a provider is the organisation responsible for the delivery. Providers will also use other providers to help with the delivery. These are called supply chain partners.
Quality areas	These are the areas that the Quality and Standard Team will focus on during a visit to the Provider or supply chain when speaking to the learner or the employer. The Quality Areas will focus on the impact of the learning delivery and its positive outcomes.
Quality Assurance	This is a program that systematically monitors and evaluates various aspects of delivery such as the quality of learning, leadership and management, design of the curriculum and learner engagement.
Quality Improvement	This is the involvement of all persons involved in the delivery to identify and solve problems that stops the delivery being successful. Simply put it is to improve the processes used to deliver a successful outcome.
Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA)	RARPA is a means of measuring learner progress and demonstrating outcomes, most used in association with **non-accredited** learning.

Term	Definition
Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)	Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a process that allows learners to convert relevant accredited knowledge, skills and experience that can be put towards a new qualification.
Recommendations	Recommendations are advisory only. They enable the Quality Assurance Manager to suggest possible improvements. These will be related to the Quality Framework and linked to Best Practice.
Report	A formal document which contains written evaluative feedback to the provider, supported by evidence following a Quality Assurance and Improvement visit.
Skills Framework for the Information Age (SFIA)	The SFIA is a model for describing the skills and competencies required by professionals in roles involved in information and communication technologies (ICT), software engineering and digital transformation. There are 96 "specific" skills and four components to the framework.
Skills	Skills refers to the application of the knowledge the learner receives when attending the course and is shown through both experience and on the job training. Skills are not a repetition of activities.
Stakeholders	Stakeholders are anyone who has a vested interest in the successful delivery. Examples of such stakeholders are Employers who assist in the design of the course being delivered.
Starting point	Refers to the skills, knowledge and behaviours a learner has at the beginning of delivery. Starting points can be used to plan for and support the learning and development of the learner to help them be successful in achieving a positive outcome.
Strengths	Refers to talents, character traits, knowledge and experiences that allow an individual to thrive in a learning environment.
Stretch and challenge	The value of these two words is to get a feel for how learners who are either under or over-performing given

Term	Definition
	the ability to reach or exceed their goals with creative and well-planned teaching.
Supply Chain	These are businesses or individuals that are contracted to the Main Provider to help. Under this process, Supply chain partners will also be observed and reported on.
Teachers	This includes but is not limited to lecturers, tutors, trainers, facilitators, assessors, instructors, demonstrators, and mentors.
Timescales	Timescale is defined as a period seen in relation to a process. Timescale could be seen as how long the course runs for or for a provider, and how long the provider takes to implement improvements to their delivery to bring about better learning outcomes.
Trend(s)	Trends could be historical, particularly in data, but could also be areas or issues that appear across several providers regularly to cause either concern or contribute to Best Practice.
Triangulation	This is a term used to describe a process whereby evidence is collected and linked between the three primary groups (Learner, Provider and Employer) and a judgement or recommendations are made on that evidence.
You	The word "You" within the documents refers to the lead providers who is responsible for managing the delivery of WMCA-funded provision. It may also, in context, refer to Supply chain delivering a course. These could be the leadership/management team or teacher/tutor.

Useful Links

Name	Link
Ofqual	Ofqual - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
Federation of Awarding Bodies	List of Awarding Bodies

Ofsted – Education Inspection Framework (this handbook changes frequently)	[Education inspection framework - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](www.gov.uk)