

Arrangements for evaluating the effectiveness of quality improvement planning in the context of the Covid-19 public health pandemic

Further Education, Work-based Learning and European Social Fund projects

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eti
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Promoting Improvement

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Introduction

In light of the current circumstances and the many challenges the COVID-19 public health pandemic has posed for the further education colleges, training supplier organisations and European Social Fund (ESF) projects, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) and the Department for the Economy (Department) have reviewed the existing arrangements for the collation, submission and evaluation of the effectiveness of the quality improvement planning process.

The Department and the ETI recognise the need for a flexible and pragmatic approach to quality improvement planning in the coming year which addresses the specific challenges and priorities resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. It is acknowledged that further education colleges, training supplier organisations and ESF projects are at different points in their quality improvement cycles, and face differing challenges in the recommencement delivery of training and learning. It is important to ensure that the approach taken to quality improvement planning aligns with their restart, transition and recovery planning and is useful in supporting the work of the organisation and its learners, and that it is manageable.

This document sets out how the ETI will evaluate the effectiveness of recovery-focused quality improvement planning in the further education colleges, training supplier organisations and ESF projects in these changed circumstances. It is not expected that organisations will submit extensive documentation; the plan should attempt to bring together in a clear manner the organisation's priorities along with the actions it will take to meet these and the key outcomes it intends to achieve as a result.

These revised arrangements replace the previous scrutiny evaluation process on an interim basis and are effective from the start of August 2020.

Guidance for further education colleges, supplier organisations and European Social Fund projects

Based upon feedback received by District Inspectors from senior and middle leaders across a range of organisations¹, some priority areas that organisations may wish to consider for inclusion in the recovery-focused quality improvement plan include:

- prioritising the physical, mental, emotional health and well-being and safeguarding of learners coming out of lockdown and into physical and remote/blended learning and training environments;
- identifying and addressing the potential gaps in learners' knowledge, understanding and prior attainment as a result of low levels of engagement with, and participation in, learning and training, in particular remote/blended learning, since the closure of organisations in March 2020;
- developing inclusive, effective approaches to learning, teaching and assessment, with a particular focus on approaches to facilitate and support where possible impactful online/remote learning and blended/alternating² learning;

¹ Organisation refers to further education colleges, training supplier organisations and European Social Fund projects.

² 'Alternating model' – This model makes use of a combination of both 'face to face' and 'online' delivery models. Very often this is referred to as blended learning but in this context the use of the term alternating signifies the need to combine face-to-face and online delivery. This will result in learner groups being split, with one proportion coming on site for limited periods of lecturer/tutor led engagement in classrooms/workshops and the other proportion of the group engaging in planned and

- a programme of capacity-building for lecturing/tutoring and support staff, particularly in planning, preparing and delivering effective learning, including remote and blended/alternating learning;
- ensuring continuity in learning³, training and assessment, within and beyond the physical boundaries of the organisation; and
- developing effective approaches to delivering consistent and good quality learning and training to the more vulnerable learners who experience barriers to engagement in remote and blended/alternating learning, including arrangements to deal with the ‘digital strain’ of poor or no access to equipment and connectivity.

It is anticipated that organisations will continue to use robust, evidence-based self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes to develop and submit a whole-organisation recovery-focused quality improvement plan that prioritises appropriate actions to address the key areas of focus in the restart, transition and recovery process. For many organisations this will also represent their short-term recovery plan, covering the next year. It is also anticipated that organisations will implement monitoring and review processes that evaluate the impact of the actions taken to ensure continuity of learning, training and assessment for all learners.

Revised submission requirements

The QIT informs work-based learning providers, ESF projects and the further education colleges of the respective submission dates that will apply during 2020/21.

Shortly after organisations closed in March 2020, the Quality Improvement Team (QIT) in the Department moved the submission date⁴ for the quality improvement plans from work-based learning supplier organisations and ESF projects to the end of August 2020.

The ETI is also aware that some organisations had already submitted their quality improvement plans and other documents to QIT, in advance of the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

After careful consideration of the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the much changed learning and training environment which now exists, the QIT⁵ has decided to ask those organisations who had already submitted their quality improvement plans to submit an Addendum reflecting an updated review of the original quality improvement plan. In light of the challenges and changed priorities as a result of the pandemic, the reviewed plans should become focused largely on transition and recovery planning going forward.

In terms of evaluation, it is recognised that the unprecedented and sudden closure of organisations will have had an adverse impact on the planned improvement actions outlined in previous quality improvement plans. It is also accepted that course teams, co-ordinators and senior and middle leaders will not have access to the same quantity or quality of self-evaluation data and other evidence used to inform evaluations as in previous years.

structured online activity. The learner groups then ‘alternate’. The period of ‘alternating’ activities across each group will vary. (Taken from the Department’s Framework for Recommencing On-site Educational Delivery in FE Colleges and NSCs)

³ By this is meant the arrangements for engaging and retaining the participation (balance of face to face and blended learning) of learners in the much-changed operating context, including any adaptations to the curriculum offer, timetabling, workplace experiences and assessment

⁴ The work-based learning suppliers were due to submit in April 2020 and the ESF projects in June 2020.

⁵ The QIT wrote to WBL organisations (28 July 2020) and ESF projects (31 July 2020) regarding quality improvement planning submissions to the Department for 2020

The Department and the ETI also recognise that a major priority for organisations during the crisis has been to remain engaged with learners and, where possible, maintain some continuity of learning, while at the same time provide a wide range of awarding bodies with calculated assessment data on learners, undertake adapted assessments and also to plan for an orderly, planned and safe resumption of provision.

Bearing in mind the difficult and uncertain context in which organisations find themselves, it is suggested that they take a flexible and pragmatic approach to the process this year. In order to support the recovery-focused self-evaluation and quality improvement planning process, the ETI has provided in Appendix 1 some adapted self-evaluation questions based upon the relevant sections of the Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework (ISEF).

Based upon the submission dates communicated, all organisations are required to submit to the QIT in the Department the following documentation:

1. a statement of assurance⁶ that the organisation has appropriate recovery-focused quality improvement planning arrangements in place to ensure good quality of provision and continuity in learning and assessment;
2. a whole-organisation recovery-focused quality improvement plan, informed effectively by self-evaluation, that prioritises appropriate actions to address the identified key challenges and priorities for action;
3. a summary of the organisation's overall key strengths and any areas for improvement, including the effectiveness and impact of arrangements for continuity of learning and assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic; and
4. a summary of strengths and areas for improvement, where appropriate, in each professional and technical area⁷ and in the essential skills.

The QIT will share all information submitted by organisations, as listed above, with the ETI for evaluation.

⁶ The Department will provide a template statement that should be signed by the chair of the governing body/board/management committee/managing director/owner. The organisation will be assuring the Department that they have a fit-for-purpose recovery-focused quality improvement plan in place, which aligns with the Department's Framework for Re-commencing On-site Educational Delivery in Further Education Colleges and Non-Statutory Contractors.

⁷ The internally evaluated summary of key strengths/areas for improvement for each main professional and technical area or ESF project strand and, where appropriate, the essential skills including reference to outcomes at level 2 in literacy and numeracy. A suggested template and guidance is provided in Appendix 3.

ETI scrutiny and response to the submission

During the four-week period after the submission of the recovery-focused quality improvement plan, the ETI will scrutinise each organisation's submission. This will normally be undertaken by the District Inspector for the organisation. It is anticipated that the District Inspector will make contact with the organisation during this period, either virtually or face to face (depending on existing circumstances and the prevailing Public Health Agency (PHA) guidance) to discuss the quality improvement plan and also to provide some evaluative feedback.

Depending on the outcome from this initial scrutiny process, the ETI and QIT will take the relevant actions as outlined below. QIT will advise the organisation of one of the following outcome(s) and any associated actions.

Outcome A

On the basis of the information provided, there is sufficient evidence that the organisation is planning effectively for recovery, continuity in learning and quality improvement. The organisation may be included in the current year's sample of ETI quality improvement planning visits⁸.

Outcome B

On the basis of the information provided, there is insufficient evidence that the organisation is planning effectively for recovery, continuity in learning or quality improvement. In order to demonstrate more fully that there is effective quality improvement planning for recovery and the continuity in learning, the organisation will be requested to submit additional information within four weeks for further scrutiny. Outcome A or C will then apply.

Outcome C

On the basis of the information submitted, and including any additional information submitted within four weeks, there is still insufficient evidence that the organisation is planning effectively for recovery, continuity in learning and quality improvement. The organisation will be included in the current year's sample of ETI quality improvement planning visits.

A number of organisations are involved in the ETI follow-up inspection process. The scheduling of any follow-up inspection visits will be included in the review of the nature and extent of inspection activity after the re-commencement of training and learning, in line with PHA and Departmental guidance. For the 2020/21 academic year⁹, the organisations in the follow-up process will be subject to the same scrutiny process as all other organisations and their quality recovery-focused quality improvement plan will be evaluated according to Outcomes A, B or C.

⁸ When organisations closed in March 2020, the ETI paused all formal inspection activity. As learning and training re-commence, the nature, extent and timing of inspection activity will be reviewed. Ahead of any resumption of inspection activities, such as a quality improvement planning inspection, the ETI will engage with a range of stakeholders, including organisational senior leaders and the Department, according to the guiding principles published on the ETI website: <https://www.etini.gov.uk/news/update-schools-regarding-inspection-during-recovery-period>. In terms of inspection, the ETI will remain responsive to changing circumstances as a result of COVID-19 and will carry out its work with flexibility in order to respond to the circumstances of each organisation.

⁹ The academic year runs from September 2020 to June 2021

ETI quality improvement planning visits

When the time is right in terms of transitioning to the resumption of inspection, a sample of organisations will be included in the ETI quality improvement planning visits. The key reasons for the decision to carry out a visit in an organisation typically include:

1. the scrutiny of the quality improvement plan and associated documentation¹⁰ identifies that the organisation is not submitting sufficient evidence to demonstrate that they are planning effectively to ensure continuity in learning, training and assessment;
2. the organisation has evaluated itself as having significant weaknesses in recovery-focused quality improvement planning and ensuring continuity of learning and training to meet the needs of the learners;
3. the statement of assurance governance letter identifies only 'partial assurance' for the organisation's quality improvement planning processes; or
4. a request from the Department or an evidence-based risk is identified by the District Inspector.

The short quality improvement planning visit will be arranged by the organisation's District Inspector, normally via a telephone call. The duration of the visit will be proportionate to the size and scope of the organisation's provision, and will normally last one or two days. The focus will be on the organisation's current recovery-focused quality improvement plan and is likely to include some of the following themes, agreed in advance with the organisation:

- the continuity of learning, teaching and assessment, including a focus on the approaches to, and effectiveness of, blended/alternating learning, teaching and training, including the capacity and confidence-building of staff;
- the care, welfare and support for learners (including safeguarding arrangements in changed circumstances), in particular those identified with barriers to learning, but also those harder to reach learners who have been dis-engaged with learning and training for some time;
- extent of identification of learners' needs and strategies for re-engagement and to support 'catch-up' where required;
- the revised curriculum planning process and the fitness-for-purpose of the curriculum offer to best meet learning, assessment and progression needs of all learners; and
- monitoring and evaluation of learner progress by senior and middle leaders, including appropriate strategies for intervention.

At the end of the quality improvement planning visit, the organisation will be provided with oral feedback¹¹ on the main findings. A short report letter will be published with the key findings and a summary of any areas that the organisation needs to focus on.

¹⁰ This decision would be made after the scrutiny of any re-submitted evidence, as requested by the Department for the Economy

¹¹ Which will be normally attended by a Departmental representative(s), face to face or remotely.

The organisation will be required, if necessary, to submit a revised quality improvement plan to the QIT within four weeks of the quality improvement planning visit.

A more detailed document outlining the arrangements for the quality improvement planning visit to an organisation is available in the organisation's InsPIRE portal¹² and on the ETI website.

Interim Arrangements

¹² When inspections restart post Covid-19, all work-based learning inspections will be largely paperless through the InsPIRE system. Each organisation will have access to an InsPIRE portal, which is always available. Upon notification of an inspection the organisation portal will link to a live inspection area specific to the inspection activity, which will provide access to all relevant guidance and materials, a repository for uploaded materials, along with communication access to the Reporting Inspector. The inspection team can access the live inspection area through a Virtual Inspection Room in InsPIRE.

Appendix 1: Self-evaluation questions

The prompt questions outlined here are aligned with ISEF and should be interpreted in light of the changed operating environment due to the COVID-19 public health restrictions.

These should be used as appropriate to the provision offered (further education, work-based learning, ESF); all of the questions will not be relevant to all organisations and we encourage organisations to amend or extend them as they see fit.

It is not envisaged that organisations will use these self-evaluation questions as a rigid checklist, but rather as prompts to inform and prioritise the actions necessary for a meaningful recovery-focused quality improvement plan.

Outcomes for learners

To what extent:

- Have the potential gaps in learners' knowledge, understanding and prior attainment as a result of low levels of engagement by some learners with, and participation in, learning and training since the closure of organisations in March 2020 been identified and plans put in place to address these?
- Does the organisation, through intervention and support, ensure learners make sustained progress in all aspects of their learning and development (including engagement and participation in learning online remotely where necessary)?
- Are learners being supported and enabled to develop to an appropriate level the key wider skills, dispositions and personal capabilities to cope with the new learning environment and employment landscape?
- Is there a well-planned and appropriately timetabled curriculum/programme to ensure that learners incrementally develop the necessary skills and achieve the necessary qualifications in order for them to progress successfully according to their individual plan, their chosen career, employment, or to further education and training?
- Are there sufficient opportunities and adaptations for learners to develop and apply the required practical and technical occupational skills to the required standard?
- Is there sufficient planning to bridge any gaps in learners' development of the essential skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT (digital skills)?
- Have the 2019/20 qualification mitigation arrangements been reviewed, with the outcomes informing recovery-focused quality improvement planning in order to accommodate adapted or delayed assessment residuals from 2019/20?
- Have revised qualifications and associated assessments been considered in delivery planning for 2020/21¹³?

¹³ With regard to qualifications, ETI is aware that organisations will be influenced and guided by the awarding organisations and associated regulatory bodies.

- Have the risks of some learners not achieving to their potential been evaluated and appropriately mitigated?
- Are learners being motivated to engage in all aspects of the learning programme, including impactful participation in the online remote learning aspects of the programme?

Quality of provision

To what extent:

- Has pre-entry advice and guidance process been adapted to meet the changed needs of those progressing to FE or WBL?
- Have the physical, mental and emotional health and well-being needs of learners, coming into physical and remote learning and training environments for the first time after a considerable gap, been planned for and met?
- Is there a revised initial assessment process to inform learners' course/programme choices at the pre-enrolment stage?
- Is there well-thought through communication with learners, parents/carers to support progressive decision-making?
- Is there a revised induction plan to prepare learners adequately for the new learning environment and associated strategies and behaviours, including effective adaption to blended/alternating learning and independent working (where appropriate)?
- Are there inclusive, effective approaches¹⁴ to learning, teaching and assessment, with a particular focus on approaches to impactful online/remote learning and blended/alternating¹⁵ learning (where appropriate) being established?
- Has a programme of capacity-building for lecturing/tutoring and support staff, particularly in planning, preparing and delivering effective learning in this new environment?
- Has effective continuity in learning, training and assessment, within and beyond the physical boundaries of the organisation, been ensured?
- Has the organisation developed effective approaches to delivering consistent and good quality learning and training to the more vulnerable learners who experience barriers to engagement in remote and blended/alternating learning, including arrangements to deal with the 'digital strain' of poor or no access to equipment and connectivity?

¹⁴ Some indicators to guide the self-evaluation of remote/blended/alternating learning will be made available to organisations during August 2020.

¹⁵ 'Alternating model' – This model makes use of a combination of both 'face to face' and 'online' delivery models. Very often referred to as blended learning but the term alternating is being used to signify the need to flip delivery within the group. This could result in student groups being split, with one proportion coming on site for limited periods of lecturer/tutor led engagement in classrooms and the other proportion of the group engaging in planned and structured 'online' activity. The student groups then 'alternate'. The period of 'alternating' activities across each group will vary.

- Has the curriculum offer/programme for 2020/21 been adapted appropriately in order to meet the progression and assessment needs of the learners, along with social inclusion, Government priorities and supporting emerging economic needs?
- Has any consideration been given to adapting learner support services to meet changing personal and social needs arising out of COVID-19?
- Are learners well-informed about progression and a much-changed labour market through effective CEIAG (including the signposting to social inclusion projects for learners who have not been retained on training programmes)?

Leadership and management

To what extent:

- Has the senior leadership team formulated a clear vision and strategic plan for the restart, resumption and recovery of education, training and assessment in the new context and learning environment?
- The physical, mental and emotional health and well-being (including safeguarding) of learners and staff is sufficiently prioritised, and monitored and reviewed by senior and middle leaders?
- Are high expectations of learners and staff communicated effectively and underpin the work of the organisation in challenging circumstances?
- Has the organisation revised and re-organised staff roles and responsibilities to cope better with the challenges, and uncertainty, of the new learning, training and assessment environment?
- Is there a clear communication strategy for staff, learners and other stakeholders in guiding and informing the changes associated with the new learning environment and associated arrangements?
- Are risk-assessments kept under continuous review in light of changing circumstances and any revised PHA guidance?
- Has an ongoing programme of well-targeted capacity-building for lecturing/tutoring and support staff, particularly in planning, preparing and delivering effective remote and blended/alternating learning been established?
- Do senior and middle leaders monitor and evaluate the impact of the range of learning, teaching, training and assessment strategies, including those for blended/alternating learning, in promoting successful progression in learning, for all learners?
- Do senior and middle leaders effectively monitor, track and evaluate the quality and impact of the curriculum offer/programme in their areas of responsibility, in terms of meeting the needs of the learners and other key stakeholders such as employers?

- Are there well-considered budgeting and allocation of finances to underpin the necessary changes in delivery of education and training in the new learning environment?
- Have management information systems been revised to cope with any variance in data inputs/outputs and to meet any potential reporting needs?
- Have data collection and collations systems, particularly around learner progress, been revised in light of lessons learned from the provision of calculated assessment grades/awards and adapted assessments for awarding bodies as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic? How well is this monitored and evaluated by senior and middle leaders?
- Are key stakeholders involved and included in the revised planning to cope with the adaptations of the new learning environment and work-based learning?
- Are learning resources and facilities adapted suitably to support the continuity of learning needs of learners?
- Is mitigation and recovery action planning, at all levels, clear, well-ordered, appropriately targeted, and with key review milestones and success indicators?

Appendix 2: Summary of overall organisation key findings template

Organisation/Project:

Funded programmes internally evaluated:
[Training for Success/ApprenticeshipsNI/European Social Fund]

Key findings¹⁶

The organisation has the following strengths:

- xxxxxxxxxxxx
- xxxxxxxxxxxx
- xxxxxxxxxxxx
- xxxxxxxxxxxx
- xxxxxxxxxxxx
- xxxxxxxxxxxx

To improve further the provision, the organisation needs to:

- xxxxxxxxxxxx
- xxxxxxxxxxxx
- xxxxxxxxxxxx

¹⁶ Succinct, single sentence, evidence-based evaluations of the key strengths and areas for improvements aligned to ISEF and balanced to reflect the internal evaluation findings. Reference should be made to data, where appropriate including key performance indicators. For the overall organisation this should be no more than two A4 pages.

Appendix 3: Summary of subject area/project key findings template¹⁷

Professional and technical area/essential skills/project strand¹⁸:
[e.g. Wood occupations, hair and beauty, engineering, construction, etc]

Programmes internally evaluated:
[Training for Success/ApprenticeshipsNI/European Social Fund]

Key findings¹⁹

The provision has the following strengths:

- xxxxxxxxxxxx
- xxxxxxxxxxxx
- xxxxxxxxxxxx
- xxxxxxxxxxxx
- xxxxxxxxxxxx
- xxxxxxxxxxxx

To improve further the provision, the organisation needs to:

- xxxxxxxxxxxx
- xxxxxxxxxxxx
- xxxxxxxxxxxx

¹⁷ For organisations with only one area/project the overall summary is sufficient. For organisations with multiple subject areas/project strands, complete one template for each main area/project strand.

¹⁸ Delete as appropriate

¹⁹ Succinct, single sentence, evidence-based evaluations of the key strengths and areas for improvements aligned to ISEF and balanced to reflect the internal evaluation findings. Reference should be made to data, where appropriate including key performance indicators. For the professional and technical area/essential skills/project strand this should be no more than one A4 page.