

Revised arrangements for evaluating the effectiveness of quality improvement planning in the context of the COVID-19 public health pandemic

Work-based Learning Supplier Organisations and European Social Fund projects

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Providing Inspection services for:
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Introduction

This document sets out how the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) will evaluate the effectiveness of quality improvement planning in the work-based learning training supplier organisations and European Social Fund (ESF) projects in 2021. Revised arrangements replaced the previous scrutiny evaluation process on an interim basis, effective from the start of August 2020.

The Department for the Economy (Department) and ETI recognise the need for a flexible and pragmatic approach to quality improvement planning, in response to any specific challenges and priorities arising from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic during the coming year, and this should be clearly identified and reflected in the documentation submitted. It is important to ensure that the approach taken to quality improvement planning is useful in supporting the work of the organisation and its learners, and that it is manageable.

Guidance for work-based supplier organisations and European Social Fund projects

While an organisation¹ can implement internal self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes that meet its individual needs, the following requirements will be common across the sectors:

- the use of robust, evidence-based self-evaluation to inform curriculum planning at strategic and operational levels;
- the development of a whole-organisation quality improvement plan informed by the self-evaluation process that prioritises appropriate actions to address effectively the key areas for improvement identified, where recovery actions are still in place, a clear rationale and appropriate recovery targets should be included; and
- the implementation of monitoring and review processes that evaluate the impact of the actions taken to sustain improvement in the quality of the learning, teaching and training. This should include the outworking of any systems or processes implemented/embedded as a direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Organisations may wish to access [ETI guidance on effective action planning](#).

Some priority areas that organisations may have included in the quality improvement plan/recovery plan 2020-21 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;

¹ Organisation refers to work-based learning supplier organisations and ESF projects.

- 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;
- 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;
- 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.

Submission requirements

The Department's Quality Improvement Team (QIT) informs work-based learning supplier organisations providers and ESF projects of the respective submission dates that will apply during 2022/22⁴.

In order to support the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning process in the current circumstances, ETI has provided in Appendix 1 some adapted self-evaluation questions based upon the relevant sections of ETI's [Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework \(ISEF\)](#).

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

1. a statement of assurance⁵ that the organisation has appropriate quality improvement planning arrangements in place to ensure good quality of provision and continuity in learning and assessment;

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.

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 Department's QIT has written to the work-based learning supplier organisations and ESF projects to inform them that their quality improvement planning documentation should be submitted by 28 October 2021 and 5 November 2021 respectively.

⁵ The Department's QIT provides 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 quality improvement plan in place.

2. a whole-organisation quality improvement plan, informed effectively by self-evaluation, that prioritises appropriate actions to address the identified key challenges, key areas for improvement and priorities for action;
3. a review of the organisation's previously submitted quality improvement plan/recovery plan, including evidence of the impact (both the expected and actual impact) of the actions taken to improve/sustain quality and outcomes;
4. 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;
5. a summary of strengths and areas for improvement, where appropriate, in each professional and technical area⁶ and in the essential skills; and
6. a summary of the organisation's key performance data⁷.

The Department's QIT will share the information submitted by organisations, as listed above, with ETI.

Response to the submission

During the four-week period after the submission of the quality improvement plan, 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 to discuss the quality improvement plan and also to provide some evaluative feedback.

Depending on the outcome from this initial scrutiny process, ETI and the Department's QIT will take the relevant actions as outlined below. ETI will advise the Department's QIT of the relevant outcome and QIT will issue the response letter to the organisation with 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 continuity in learning and quality improvement. The organisation may be included in the current year's sample of ETI quality improvement planning inspections⁸.

⁶ 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 is provided in Appendix 3.

⁷ For work-based learning supplier organisations this could be provided in the inspection data tables which are available on the ETI website or for ESF projects by using the 'Summary of Outcomes' table.

⁸ As a result of the pandemic, and the ongoing pause to inspections, ETI are currently undertaking monitoring visits, for which there is [associated guidance](#).

Outcome B

On the basis of the information provided, there is insufficient evidence that the organisation is planning effectively for continuity in learning or quality improvement. In order to demonstrate more fully that there is effective quality improvement planning for 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 continuity in learning and quality improvement. The organisation will be included in the current year's sample of ETI quality improvement planning inspections⁹.

ETI follow-up inspection process

A number of organisations are involved in the ETI follow-up inspection process¹⁰. For the 2021/22 academic year¹¹, the organisations in the follow-up process will be subject to the same scrutiny process as all other organisations and their quality improvement plan will be evaluated according to Outcomes A, B or C.

ETI quality improvement planning inspections

Each year, ETI selects a sample of organisations for a quality improvement planning inspection¹². The key reasons an organisation would be selected typically include:

1. the scrutiny of the quality improvement plan and associated documentation¹³ 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 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.

⁹ As a result of the pandemic, and the ongoing pause to inspections, ETI are currently undertaking monitoring visits, for which there is [associated guidance](#).

¹⁰ [ETI Autumn term update \(6 September 2021\)](#): ETI will continue to conduct short formal monitoring visits to schools and organisations which are in the follow-up inspection process.

¹¹ The academic year runs from September 2020 to June 2021.

¹² As a result of the pandemic, and the ongoing pause to inspections, ETI are currently undertaking monitoring visits, for which there is [associated guidance](#).

¹³ This decision would be made after the scrutiny of any re-submitted evidence, as requested by the Department's QIT.

If an organisation is in an inspection follow-up process or has an inspection due within the current reporting period, a quality improvement planning inspection will not normally be required, as the other planned inspection or monitoring visit will report on the effectiveness of the organisation's quality improvement planning process.

The short quality improvement planning inspection will be arranged by the organisation's District Inspector, normally via a telephone call, and a more detailed document outlining the arrangements will be shared.

The duration of the inspection 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 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 inspection, the organisation will be provided with oral feedback¹⁴ 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.

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

¹⁴ Which will be normally attended by a representative(s) from the department, face-to-face or remotely.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Self-evaluation questions

The prompt questions outlined here can be used as an aid to support an organisation's self-evaluation; they are not an exhaustive list. It is not envisaged that organisations will use these questions as a rigid checklist, but rather as prompts to inform and prioritise the actions necessary for a meaningful quality improvement plan.

The questions can be used as appropriate to the provision offered (work-based learning supplier organisations and ESF projects); all of the questions will not be relevant to all organisations and we encourage organisations to amend or extend them as they see fit. The questions are aligned with ETI's [Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework \(ISEF\) document](#).

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 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 and 2020/21 qualification mitigation arrangements been reviewed, with the outcomes informing quality improvement planning in order to accommodate adapted or delayed assessment residuals?
- Have revised qualifications and associated assessments been considered in delivery planning for 2021/22¹⁵?
- 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 the meet the changed needs of those progressing to 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 approaches to learning, teaching and assessment, with a particular focus on approaches to impactful online/remote learning and blended/alternating¹⁶ learning (where appropriate) being established?

¹⁵ With regard to qualifications, ETI is aware that organisations will be influenced and guided by the awarding organisations and associated regulatory bodies.

¹⁶ '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 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?
- Has the curriculum offer/programme for 2021/22 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 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 delivery of learning, 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 Public Health Agency 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 action planning, at all levels, clear, well-ordered, appropriately targeted, and with key review milestones and success indicators?

Appendix 2: Overall findings self-evaluation template

The tables below, the summary of overall organisation key findings template in Appendix 3 and the summary of subject area/project key findings template in Appendix 4 should be completed, informed by robust self-evaluation, and submitted to the Department's QIT. The tables are aligned to ETI's [Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework \(ISEF\)](#).

Overall effectiveness	OE outcome 1 of 4
Outcomes for Learners	PL one of 6
Quality of Provision	PL one of 6
Leadership and Management	PL one of 6
The arrangements for safeguarding young people and adults at risk reflect/reflect broadly current legislation and practice or are unsatisfactory.	
Care and welfare impacts positively on learning, teaching and outcomes, or does not impact positively enough on one or more of learning, teaching and outcomes for learners.	

Overall quality of the programmes evaluated		
Programme/project	Proportion of Registration	Performance level
e.g. Training for Success	%	PL one of 6
e.g. ApprenticeshipsNI	%	PL one of 6
e.g. European Social Fund project	%	PL one of 6

Overall quality of the professional and technical areas evaluated and the provision for the essential skills	
e.g. Essential skills	PL one of 6
e.g. Professional and technical area 1	PL one of 6
e.g. Professional and technical area 2	PL one of 6

Appendix 3: Summary of overall organisation/funded programme key findings template

Organisation/Project:

Funded programmes internally evaluated:

(Training for Success/ApprenticeshipsNI/European Social Fund)

Internally self-evaluated performance levels

Outcomes for Learners	Quality of Provision	Leadership and Management
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PL¹⁷

PL

PL

Key findings¹⁸

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 Use one of the six ETI performance levels from ISEF.

¹⁸ 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 4: Summary of subject area/project key findings template

Professional and technical area/essential skills/project¹⁹:

(e.g. Wood occupations, hair and beauty, engineering, construction, literacy, numeracy, etc)

Funded programmes internally evaluated:

(Training for Success/ApprenticeshipsNI/European Social Fund)

Internally self-evaluated performance levels

Outcomes for Learners	Quality of Provision	Leadership and Management
PL ²⁰	PL	PL

Key findings²¹

The provision has the following strengths:

- XXXXXXXXXXXX
- XXXXXXXXXXXX
- XXXXXXXXXXXX
- XXXXXXXXXXXX
- XXXXXXXXXXXX
- XXXXXXXXXXXX

To improve further the provision, the organisation needs to:

- XXXXXXXXXXXX
- XXXXXXXXXXXX
- XXXXXXXXXXXX

¹⁹ Delete as appropriate.

²⁰ Use one of the six ETI performance levels from ISEF.

²¹ 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.

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