

The **Good**
Training Provider's
Guide

Monitoring and review

Simon Shaw



First edition

Section 1

How does the guide work?

This guide will help your organisation to monitor and review the process of continuous quality improvement. It gives advice and guidance on:

- monitoring the actions in your development plan – the progress you are making with your plan and the impact of the actions
- reviewing development plans and your self-assessment report – during the year as well as at the start of a new cycle
- monitoring and reviewing your performance – your role, and that of the LSC/ES.

Who's it for?

In the first place, whoever is responsible for managing the quality improvement process in your organisation. You, maybe? If it isn't you, give the guide to the person who is responsible. It needs to be in the right hands.

Who are 'you'?

You could be the person responsible for self-assessment and development planning. Or the person who will be most closely involved with your inspection. Or someone else altogether.

But you are certainly in charge of how your organisation plans and carries out actions to improve performance. And it's likely that you will report on these actions both to others in your organisation and to your LSC/ES contract manager.

A lot of what's in this guide will also help other people in the organisation fulfil their role in continuous quality improvement. So don't necessarily keep it to yourself.

What's good about it?

A good continuous improvement process is one which is clearly specified, well managed and regularly evaluated.

In the common inspection framework, leadership and management are evaluated partly by:

'... how effectively, through quality assurance and self assessment, performance is monitored and evaluated and steps taken to secure improvement.'

Common inspection framework page 13

So it's worth spending time getting your monitoring and review procedures right.

How does the guide work?

There are seven sections including this one. Each section starts with a few sentences explaining what's in it. Then you may get:

- essential information about this aspect of monitoring or review
- tips to help you improve how you do it
- relevant quotations from key publications – see below
- examples to help you see how it should be done.

Some of the sections refer you to checklists. You can find them towards the end of the guide.

→ *Tip*

Don't forget that you can photocopy all the checklists for use in your organisation as you go through the development planning process. Alternatively you can download them in Word format from the Mindset website and print them out. You can even customise them before printing.

Key publications

Common inspection framework

Sets out the principles applicable to the inspections of post-16 non-higher education and training and the specific evaluation requirements that apply to the inspection of providers. Also provides the framework for self-assessment, along with the quality and financial probity requirements of the Learning and Skills Council and the Employment Service (see below). Can be downloaded from the Adult Learning Inspectorate website: www.ali.gov.uk

Guidance on Inspection for Providers

Prepared by the ALI to help providers interpret the common inspection framework. Also contains general guidance on inspection. Can be downloaded from the Adult Learning Inspectorate website.

Self Assessment and Development Plans

Describes the post-16 quality improvement arrangements, including the quality requirements of the LSC and ES mentioned above. Also explains how the processes of self-assessment and development planning link with each other, and with inspections. Can be downloaded from the DfES website: www.dfes.gov.uk.

Reaching New Standards 1998–1999, 1999–2000 and 2000–2001

The three annual reports of the Training Standards Council Chief Inspector. They contain a great deal of valuable information about the findings of inspections. The findings are divided into occupational areas and generic aspects, and the two later reports also summarise findings from re-inspections and inspections of training in the New Deal. Can be downloaded from the TSC website: www.tsc.gov.uk.

→ *Tip*

Make sure you have a copy of these key publications to refer to when you use this guide and when you monitor and review performance. New publications may come out at any time. Relevant ones will be signposted on the Mindset website: www.mindset2000.com.

How should the guide be used?

It's up to you how to use the guide. You may want to look through it all quickly to get an idea of what's in it and how you want to use it. Or you may already know what you need help with, so you can identify the relevant section and go straight to it.

Over to you. Good luck.

Section 2

Overview of the cycle

Quality improvement is a continuous process.

'Providers of post-16 learning will be expected to establish and sustain a culture of continuous improvement.'

Self Assessment and Development Plans page 2, paragraph 2

But you should also see it as an annual cycle with some fixed points and things to do in between.

'Providers must . . . ensure that effective and systematic cycles of planning, implementation and evaluation are in place.'

Self Assessment and Development Plans page 15, paragraph 39

Self-assessment and development planning

The cycle starts with self-assessment and development planning. The date on which you start the cycle is up to you.

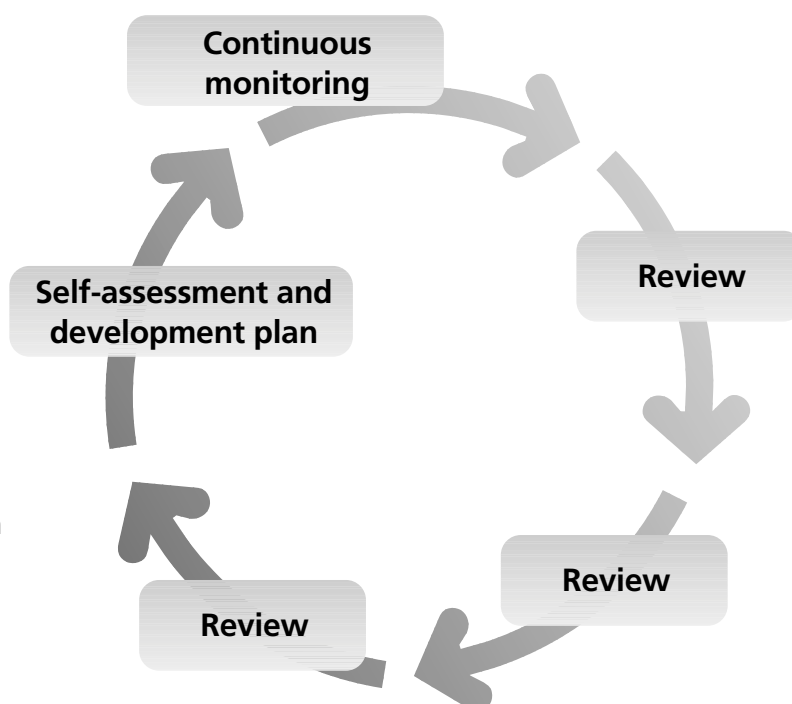
'Providers will be given the discretion to carry out the self-assessment at a point in the year which best fits with their strategic and operational planning cycle.'

Self Assessment and Development Plans page 15, paragraph 40

It could be:

- the start of your financial year
- related to your strategic or business planning cycle
- linked to your main contract cycles.

The outcome should be a self-assessment report identifying your strengths, weaknesses and other improvements, to which is attached a development plan setting out how you intend to improve your performance in the coming year.



→ Tip

The guides in this series entitled 'Self assessment' and 'Development planning' go through these aspects of the improvement cycle in detail.

It's important to see self-assessment as a systematic, comprehensive process which provides the starting point for much of the work you intend to do during the year to improve performance. Inspectors are rightly critical of providers who do not see its value.

'Many providers regarded self-assessment as an activity to be carried out in preparation for inspection, rather than as a fundamental part of their own quality assurance arrangements.'

Reaching New Standards 2000–2001 page 62, paragraph 33

→ Tip

The guide in this series called 'Quality assurance' shows the links between self-assessment and quality assurance systems.

Monitoring

Plans are ideas about the future. To make the ideas in your development plan a reality, you have to make sure that the actions you intend to take:

- are happening
- are having the effects you hoped for.

Monitoring does these two things. You do the first by monitoring progress and the second by monitoring impact.

Inspectors are also critical of providers who fail to monitor their plans.

'Most providers attached an action plan to the self-assessment report . . . but few had systematic procedures for ensuring that action plans were implemented in full.'

Reaching New Standards 2000–2001 page 62, paragraph 33

→ Sections 3 and 4

Reviews

Reviews are an opportunity to look at how you are doing across the board. Whereas monitoring is a continuous process, reviews should be periodic. The LSC/ES will review your performance three times a year. It makes sense for your own reviews to fit in with theirs.

You will want to review:

- your development plan as a whole – the progress you are making, whether your targets are being achieved, what changes should be made
- your self-assessment report – whether the weaknesses are being remedied and your strengths consolidated.

→ Sections 5 and 6

Monitoring and reviewing performance

You have the main interest in your performance – and the main responsibility for it. But the LSC/ES also need to keep an eye on how you are doing. They will do this through:

- monitoring visits
- provider performance reviews.

Contract managers will visit regularly to monitor the implementation of development plans. They will be particularly interested in the progress you are making towards reaching the targets and milestones set out in your plan.

Provider performance reviews take place in a regular cycle, currently three times a year. The purpose of reviews is to assess your performance as a whole, identify providers whose performance gives cause for concern and share good practice.

→ Sections 5 and 6

Section 3

Monitoring progress

Your development plan should say how you will monitor the progress of actions you intend to take to improve performance.

→ Tip

The guide in this series called 'Development planning' contains a suggested format for development plans, including a column for monitoring, evaluating and reporting on progress.

Monitoring progress is an important part of putting your plan into action. How well actions are monitored will have a big influence on whether they happen or not and how well they are carried out.

Monitoring progress should:

- be against each of your action points
- check that the actions are taking place within the timescale
- be done continuously throughout the year
- be done mainly by you, but the LSC/ES has a role as well.

'The provider will monitor continuously the implementation of its development plan.'

Self Assessment and Development Plans page 3, paragraph 23

Ask yourselves these three questions when you're thinking about monitoring progress:

- How are we going to check that the actions are happening as they should?
- Who should do the checking?
- How often should they check it?

Monitoring methods

You might think that monitoring always has to be against things which have been written down and documented. But it doesn't have to be. In fact, the best evidence that actions are being carried out as they should is what you learn with your own eyes and ears.

There are three ways of checking that actions are happening as they should. You can:

- watch what's going on – observation
- talk to people about what they're doing – discussion
- look at things that have been written down – documentation.

Here's how one provider decided to monitor the actions taken by assessors to improve the quality of assessment:

Internal verifiers will:

- observe a sample of assessment sessions monthly
- review a sample of portfolios monthly.

Team leaders will:

- check individual training plans for assessors
- ask assessors for feedback on the training they have received.

Observation

The most reliable evidence of progress is what you see. Make use of times when the people doing the monitoring would normally be able to watch what's going on. There should be plenty of opportunities for observation, but if not you should build them into people's roles.

Observation can be of:

- training
- assessment
- reviews
- coaching in the workplace
- how learners relate to other people
- resources available to them . . .

. . . and any other activities during the training.

Discussion

Managers spend a good deal of time talking to people, checking how things are going. Make it a part of their job to find out how the actions are progressing from the people supposed to be carrying them out and the people they are supposed to benefit – especially learners.

Discussion can be with:

- learners
- trainers and assessors
- workplace supervisors
- reviewers and placement coordinators
- training managers . . .

. . . and anyone else involved in carrying out the actions.

Documentation

Some actions may involve people writing things down. For example, assessors might be asked to write a note for a learner's file explaining why this learner has been absent from off the job training and what action has been taken to prevent it happening again. Other actions might have a direct effect on learners' portfolios. In these cases, you can check by looking at the written records.

Written records include:

- learners' portfolios
- review procedures
- quality systems
- policies
- minutes and reports
- surveys . . .

. . . and any other places where a written record is made.

→ Tip

The Guidance on Inspection for Providers published by the ALI includes suggested sources of evidence for questions in the common inspection framework. They can give you more idea of what kinds of documentary records you should keep.

*The **checklist** entitled 'Methods of monitoring progress' should help you work out how to monitor each of the actions in your development plan and what to put in the 'Monitoring, evaluating and reporting' column of the plan.*

Who does the monitoring?

Usually it's the people in your organisation who are responsible for making sure that the actions are taking place. They have the management or supervisory role. Monitoring should be part of what they do in their normal, everyday jobs. If it's not, build it in. Remember – monitoring is managing.

The LSC/ES will also carry out some monitoring visits of its own.

'LSC/ES will visit providers regularly to monitor the implementation of development plans and progress towards reaching agreed targets and milestones.'

Self Assessment and Development Plans page 23, paragraph 78

These visits have several purposes:

- to check how you are getting on with your development plan
- to identify any help and support you need
- to monitor the effectiveness and probity of your financial management
- to identify good practice
- to help contract managers get to know your organisation better.

And you can expect contract managers to have a good look around.

'As part of their monitoring activity, LSC/ES staff will meet learners, and the staff of providers and subcontractors. These visits will provide opportunities for LSC/ES staff to familiarise themselves with the provider delivery arrangements.'

Self Assessment and Development Plans page 23, paragraph 81

Monitoring visits are a good opportunity for you to highlight what you do well. You should also be prepared to talk openly about the progress you are making with your development plan and any problems you are facing. Contract managers should welcome the opportunity to talk to you about:

- your delivery process
- quality assurance issues
- how the working relationship with the LSC/ES could be improved
- any problems over contracts and agreements.

→ Tip

Be aware that the information gained by the LSC/ES on monitoring visits will feed into the provider performance review. See section 7 for more about this.

How often?

It varies. Some actions will need to be checked often, others less so. In your development plan, you should specify how often the monitoring happens – it could be monthly, weekly, even daily in some circumstances. In a plan whose 'horizon' is a year, most actions will be monitored at least monthly.

There is no fixed schedule for monitoring visits by LSC/ES staff. They will make their own decisions based on what they know about you.

'The nature and frequency of the monitoring visits will vary depending on the risk and issues identified . . . As a minimum, LSC/ES staff will usually visit the provider two or three times a year.'

Self Assessment and Development Plans page 23, paragraph 79

Methods of **monitoring progress**

Who is going to check that these actions are happening as they should?

How are they going to check?

- Observation

Which activities will they watch?

- Discussion

Who will they talk to?

- Documentation

What written records will they look at?

How often do they need to check?

Monitoring **impact**

Success criteria

Do the criteria in your development plan:

- allow you to tell which actions have had the result you hoped for?
- include numbers where possible?
- include verifiable measures where numbers are not appropriate?

Impact

What impact have the actions had in the short term?

What impact have they had in the longer term?

What indirect impact have the actions had, on:

- the behaviour and attitude of staff?

- your organisation's quality assurance procedures?

- other?

Reviewing your plan

Dates

When will you review your plan?

Review 1

Review 2

Review 3

Categorising the actions

Have you identified which actions:

- have been completed successfully and have had the desired impact?
- have been completed but have not had the desired impact?
- have started but not yet completed?
- have not started yet?

Actions in category 1

- Have you deleted them from the revised plan?

Actions in category 2

- Have you agreed new actions?

Actions in category 3

- Have you noted down the progress made?

Re-planning

Have you, where necessary:

- changed the timescales of actions?
- reallocated responsibilities?
- other

Quality assurance

Have you:

- identified aspects of existing procedures which need to be strengthened?
- modified the procedures accordingly?
- identified aspects of delivery where you need to establish new procedures?
- put new procedures in place?

Preparing for performance reviews

Make a note of the essential sources of information which you think should be taken into account during performance reviews. Add to the list as you go through the performance review process several times.

| Key area | Sources of information |
|--|------------------------|
| Delivery of the agreed volume of provision | |
| Quality of education and training and the standards achieved by learners | |
| Equality of opportunity | |
| Health and safety | |
| Quality of leadership and management of learning | |
| Continuous improvement | |
| Quality of strategic planning | |
| Financial management and viability | |
| Data management | |
| Other local and national priorities | |

Monitoring and review

Simon Shaw

The emphasis on improving the quality of work-based learning has been given a sharper edge through the advent of the Learning and Skills Council and the Adult Learning Inspectorate in April 2001. New arrangements for monitoring and reviewing performance are now in force – and they present a continuing challenge to training providers and local LSCs.

This guide provides essential support and guidance to help training providers and LSCs get an overview of the new arrangements for monitoring continuous improvement and reviewing performance.

The guide covers:

- An overview of the monitoring and review cycle
- How to monitor progress against development plans
- How to monitor the impact of actions taken to improve quality
- The process of reviewing development plans
- Reviewing self-assessment reports
- Provider performance reviews.

A final section of the guide provides signposts to useful resources and support.

Checklists included

The guide includes checklists to help providers get through the monitoring and review process successfully. The checklists can be downloaded and customised.

Author

Simon Shaw is a training consultant with extensive experience of work-based learning. He has been involved in the work of the Training Standards Council and has trained many inspectors. Over the past four years he has worked with a large number of training providers and TECs to introduce self-assessment and action planning and prepare providers for inspection. He is a director of Mindset and Learning for Work, the managing agency for the DfES Key Skills Support Programme in the work-based route.