

Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework

For Modern Apprenticeships and Employability
Fund

Quality Standards and formal quality review
guidance

2019-20

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Introduction

This Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework document (hereinafter referred to as ‘the Framework’) sets out Skills Development Scotland’s (SDS) quality assurance and improvement arrangements to enhance delivery, which are effective from 1 April 2019. The Framework applies to all Training Providers (hereinafter referred to as ‘Providers’) directly contracted to deliver SDS funded work-based learning programmes; Employability Fund, and Modern Apprenticeships. Subcontracted provision that is part of the direct contract holder’s responsibility will also be reviewed.

The arrangements described in the document, detail:

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

Principles and purpose of the Framework

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

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

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

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

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

- evaluate the quality of provision and services and assess the results and impact of delivery for learners, employers and other key stakeholders;
- identify what aspects of delivery is working well and what needs to improve, by answering the key questions and covering the themes identified in the self-assessment guidance;
- develop a quality action plan (QAP) so that it is focussed on the delivery areas identified as high priority for improvement; and

- understand the key processes and timescales that must be followed to ensure compliance with SDS' contract requirements.

The Framework is built on three high level Standards:

- Service Delivery (Work Based Learning);
- Leadership and Quality Culture; and
- Outcomes and Impact.

The importance of self assessment to support continuous improvement

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

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

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

The Self Assessment/Quality Action Plan (SA/QAP) Workbook provided by SDS should be completed to record your results for each Quality Indicator, Key Question and Theme detailing:

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

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

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

Your QAP is a key document that you should treat as a management tool to capture SMART¹ actions to support successful implementation of the improvement areas you have prioritised in your self assessment. You should also include any actions arising from areas for improvement identified

¹ Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timebound

through quality monitoring activity undertaken by SDS Skills Investment Advisers or Education Scotland thematic reviews. To meet SDS contract requirements it is mandatory that your QAP should have at least one equality related action.

We have provided an Excel spreadsheet template (the SA/QAP Workbook) to ensure that you are meeting SDS' requirements. The workbook is available to download via the link in the yellow text box below.

*Here is the **LINK** to the Self Assessment and Quality Action Plan workbook.*

TIP: Remember to use the Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework Guidance 2019-20

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

Your QAP demonstrates to SDS that you are committed to continuous improvement and the actions you are implementing are having the desired effect. Your Skills Investment Adviser (SIA) will regularly ask you for updates and for evidence to show how well you are progressing with improvement actions identified in your QAP. It is important therefore that the QAP is used as a working document and is available to be shared with SDS at any time.

Main contents

This document includes key information relating to the quality assurance and improvement process as follows:

- submission of your self assessment and quality action plan;
- notification of formal quality review visit;
- planning the formal quality review;
- how long the visit will take;
- the Quality Review Team;
- what will happen during and after the quality review;
- how we score and grade your quality review;
- Equality and Diversity Performance;
- the quality review report and publication;
- concerns;
- complaints; and
- what happens after the formal quality review.

Submission of your self assessment and QAP

Providers are required to submit to SDS their self assessment and QAP by the end of April each year. The documents should be sent to the following email address: SDSQualityAssurance@sds.co.uk. New Providers who are awarded a contract for the first time will have until the end of June to submit their first self assessment and QAP.

Both documents will be reviewed by your Quality Assessor and your Skills Investment Adviser. You will be informed if the documents are acceptable within 3 weeks of sending your submission. If there are any gaps, or if information you have provided is not clear, you are likely to be asked to

revise and resubmit. Your Quality Assessor will advise you on what specific action is needed and can offer additional support if required.

Your QAP will be monitored throughout the year by your SDS Skills Investment Adviser as part of their contract management activity. Your SIA will check and report on progress of the QAP regularly. Your SIA may ask you to update your QAP at any time to reflect progress made and adding more actions if they identify areas for improvement from their monitoring activity.

Notification of a formal quality review

SDS will prioritise formal quality review activity using a risk-based approach in relation to a number of factors.

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

Planning for the formal quality review

The Quality Assessor's pre-visit planning will involve gathering information from a range of sources, and analysis of that information, to decide the areas of focus for the visit, including the number of interviews and observations to be undertaken. Information will include, but will not be restricted to:

- your current self-assessment and the underlying evidence that informed this, including notes of meetings, analysis of surveys etc;
- your QAP, including any plans for subcontractors;
- performance data for the previous three years, where available, including: recruitment data; achievement rates; equalities data; destination data and employment rates;
- findings from SDS quality monitoring and compliance activities, including feedback gathered from learners and employers;
- reports from any previous quality review visits carried out by SDS or any other quality body that has reviewed SDS funded provision;
- reports from any Education Scotland thematic reviews in which your organisation has been involved;
- any legal letters issued by SDS where your organisation is placed on a formal improvement plan; and
- additional background information about the local economic and labour market context relevant to your organisation.

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

How long will the visit take?

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

The Quality Review Team

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

- geographical coverage of delivery;
- number of sites used in delivery;
- type of provision delivered;
- number of subcontractors; and
- the age profile of learners.

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

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

What will happen during the quality review?

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

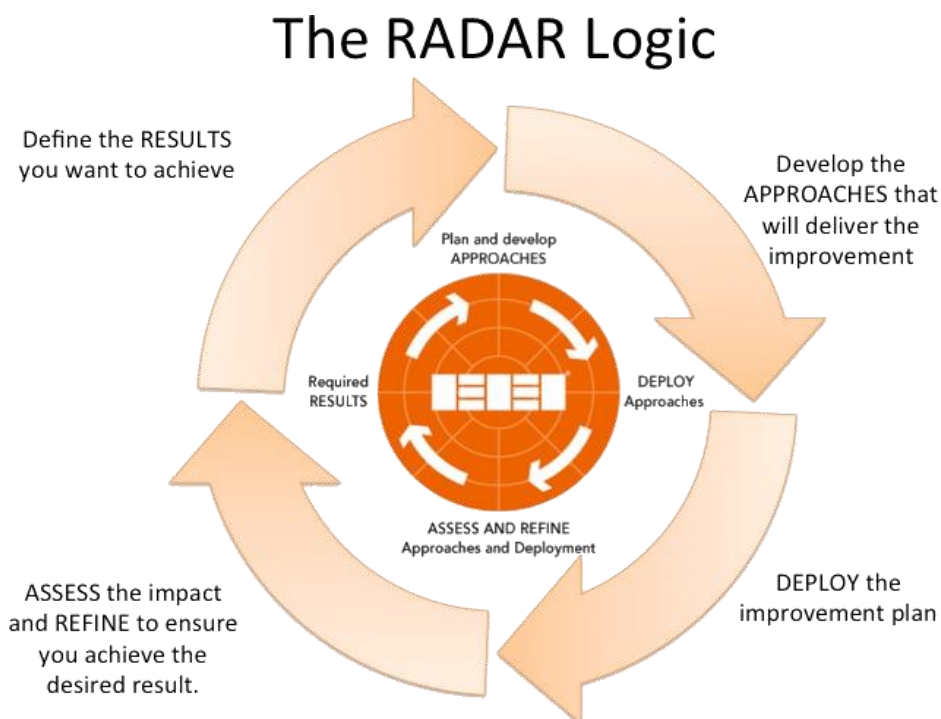
Domestic and logistical details will be agreed before the team start the programme of interviews, meetings and observations. If possible, we will ask you to provide a room for the review team to use while on your premises.

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

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

How we score and grade your quality review

Findings from the review will be collated by the lead Quality Assessor and used to inform the scores allocated against each Quality Standard using **EFQM RADAR² methodology** – see diagram below:



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

The score is based on our assessment of the evidence for the twelve quality indicators against the three Quality Standards – see Appendix 1, which is weighted as follows:

Quality Standard	Score Weighting
Service Delivery (Work Based Learning)	35%
Leadership and Quality Culture	15%
Outcomes and Impact	50%

Your overall score is converted to a grade. There are six grades. Please see Appendix 4 for the grade descriptions.

SDS uses standardisation of practice and a moderation process which ensures our scoring process is being applied fairly and consistently.

² <http://www.efqm.org/index.php/efqm-model-2013/>

Equality and Diversity Performance

In addition to your overall score and grade, you will be given a Red, Amber or Green Rating to indicate your progress in supporting SDS' Equality and Diversity action plan targets. This RAG rating is intended to highlight the extent to which you need to take action to effect improvement in performance.

The quality review report and publication

You will be sent a draft of the report to check for factual accuracy within 3 weeks of the formal quality review visit. You must reply to us with any factual inaccuracies highlighted and give reasons why it is inaccurate, within five working days of receipt of the draft. Your score and grade will not be changed.

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

The final report will be issued following any amendments based on the accuracy check. You will normally receive the final report within 4-6 weeks of the visit completion date.

You will be expected to use the report to make any required changes to your QAP reflecting any recommendations and areas for improvement that have been identified.

Your report will be published quarterly on the SDS website in line with our timetable for publishing national statistics.

Concerns

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

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

Complaints

If it is not possible to resolve concerns, you may wish to lodge a formal complaint. The lead Quality Assessor will ensure that you are informed of SDS' procedures for making a formal complaint, however information about how to complain is available on the SDS website³.

What happens after the formal quality review?

You will be asked to update your QAP to reflect the improvement activities identified following the quality review visit. You should send this to your SDS Quality Assessor within two weeks of receiving

³ [SDS complaints](#)

your visit report. If there are any high priority actions required, for example, as a result of a breach of your SDS contract conditions, then you will be expected to take immediate action to resolve the issue.

Your SDS Skills Investment Adviser will meet with you on an ongoing basis to discuss what progress you have made on your planned actions. This will include a review of progress of any areas added to the plan following any further quality monitoring visits by SDS, or from Education Scotland or other external reviews, if relevant.

Information collated from these monitoring visits will inform future formal review activity.

Support from SDS

SDS Quality Assessors will work with you as required:

- to offer guidance on the Quality Standards and Framework;
- to provide advice on how to complete your self assessment and QAP;
- to provide advice on the types of evidence required to support your self assessment; and
- to help identify areas for improvement and offer guidance on what can be done to develop improvement actions to meet quality standards.

Skills Investment Advisers will offer ongoing support and monitor your activity to ensure that:

- priority areas for improvement, as identified in your QAP, are progressing as planned and are delivering the required outcome(s)/improvement(s);
- you are continually reviewing your QAP with a view to improving the training you provide for apprentices and learners; and
- all additional areas for improvement recommended, during a formal quality review or other quality monitoring visits, are included in your QAP.

Education Scotland - External Quality Review of Modern Apprenticeships

SDS also work in partnership with Education Scotland to deliver externally managed quality reviews. These are led by Her Majesty's Inspectors with support from a team of Associate Assessors which include staff from SDS, independent training providers and colleges. These reviews are thematically based on Modern Apprenticeship industry sectors and may involve a number of SDS providers who deliver in that sector. Education Scotland identify the Providers involved in these reviews using SDS data and information. You will be contacted by SDS if you are selected for inclusion in any of the Education Scotland thematic reviews. The latest version of Education Scotland's arrangements for external quality review of MAs can be accessed from the link below.

<https://education.gov.scot/Documents/MA-quality-arrangements-09-17.pdf>

Quality Scotland links

SDS is a member of Quality Scotland. The Framework is based on the EFQM approach which is a widely used and recognised model. Ongoing engagement will continue with Quality Scotland to ensure our staff maintain their EFQM accreditation and to inform our own improvement agenda.

1. Service Delivery (Work Based Learning)

1.1 Providers develop and prepare work based learning provision

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

1.3 Providers deliver and manage work based learning provision and ensure quality of delivery (including sub contracted provision)

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

2. Leadership and Quality Culture

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

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

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

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

3. Outcomes and Impact

3.1 Providers achieve and maintain high levels of service delivery and outcomes for all work based learning provision

3.2 Work based learning provision meets the needs of employers

3.3 Work based learning meets the needs of learners

3.4 Providers meet all statutory, equality and funding body requirements

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

	Quality Assurance of delivery	1.3.3: How well do we review our delivery to ensure its standard and quality?
1.4 Providers manage partners and stakeholders to deliver outcomes for learners and employers	Effectiveness of partnerships to support transitions and/or progression	1.4.1 How well do we work with partners to support progression of learners?
	Management of sub-contractors	1.4.2 How effective are we at managing our sub-contracted delivery?





2. Leadership and Quality Culture		
Quality Indicator	Theme	Question(s)
2.1 The provider's work-based learning strategy is based on the needs and expectations of stakeholders, employers and learners	Developing the Young Workforce recommendations	2.1.1: How well does our SDS contracted provision support the Scottish government's Youth Employment Strategy (Developing the Young Workforce)?
	Use of Labour Market Intelligence to inform service delivery	2.1.2: How well do we use labour market and economic data to plan what provision we are going to offer?
	Strategic Engagement	2.1.3 How well do we engage with strategic partners to inform the delivery of our SDS funded work-based learning?
2.2 Leaders ensure appropriate resources are in place to deliver the work-based learning strategy	Staff	2.2.1: How well have we planned staffing of our work-based learning provision?
2.3 Leaders ensure staff are appropriately skilled and motivated to deliver work-based learning provision	Management and support of staff	2.3.1 How effective are we at managing our staff to deliver SDS funded provision?
	Staff Development	2.3.2: How effective is our staff development to support successful delivery of SDS funded provision?

2.4 Leaders take ownership for the continuous improvement of quality and performance of work-based learning provision	Effective self assessment and continuous improvement	2.4.1: How effective are our approaches towards self assessment and continuous improvement?
	Innovation and Change	2.4.2 How well do we seek innovation and ideas to enhance our provision?

3. Outcomes and Impact (Your results)		
Quality Indicator	Theme	Question(s)
3.1 Providers achieve and maintain high levels of service delivery and outcomes for all WBL provision	Achievement and analysis of SDS Key Performance Indicators	3.1.1 How well are we performing and analysing our performance in relation to SDS key requirements?
3.2 Work based learning provision meets the needs of employers	Employer satisfaction	3. 2. 1 How satisfied are our employers with our service and relationship?
3.3 Work based learning meets the needs of learners	Learner satisfaction	3. 3. 1 How satisfied are learners with our provision?
3.4 Providers meet all statutory, equality and funding body requirements	SDS Equality requirements	3.4.1: How well are we improving the representation of specific equality groups in our SDS funded provision?
	Awarding Body and Industry Body requirements	3.4.2: How well are we meeting the requirements of Awarding Bodies and Industry Bodies?



Overall Provider BRAG Rating, Score and Grades Issued

					
Grade 6 Score rating not awarded (Unsatisfactory)	Grade 5 Score below 300 (Weak)	Grade 4 Score between 301 and 400 (Satisfactory)	Grade 3 Score between 401 and 500 (Good)	Grade 2 Score between 501 and 600 (Very Good)	Grade 1 Score over 601 (Excellent)
Provider is unable to demonstrate how they meet the Standards – immediate remedial action required	Provider has been unable to meet the Standards at an acceptable level – important areas for improvement identified	Provider has demonstrated how they have met all Standards at the minimum level -with specific areas for improvement or further development highlighted	Provider has fully demonstrated meeting the Standards with strong strengths and minor areas for improvement noted	Provider has fully demonstrated meeting the Standards at a high level with major strengths and a few areas of enhancement to demonstrate ongoing continuous improvement	Provider has fully demonstrated meeting all Standards providing a very high level of assurance - exemplifies best practice including delivery of ongoing continuous improvement.
Formal Improvement Plan. Suspension of starts and payments until satisfactory improvement.	Visit within a year to demonstrate improvement.	Visit will take place within 1 to 2 years dependent on number of AFIs.	Visit will take place after 3 years.		

Principles of Formal Quality Review

Assessors will:

- ensure that the quality review is of high quality and responsive to the needs of all learners;
- ensure that judgements are secure, reliable, valid and based on first-hand evidence;
- involve providers fully in the quality review process;
- use the provider's self-assessment as the starting point for the quality review to identify key areas for review, along with other intelligence gathered as part of the pre-visit planning arrangements;
- keep to a minimum any requirements for documentation and preparation by the provider;
- gain the learners' perspective and that of employers and other stakeholders; and
- be constructive in identifying and supporting providers with important areas for improvement.

Code of conduct for the Quality Review Team

Assessors should uphold the highest possible standards in their work. All assessors follow the EFQM approach. When conducting the quality review, assessors will:

- clearly identify themselves explaining their role and approach;
- carry out their work with integrity, courtesy and due sensitivity;
- evaluate the work of the provider objectively;
- report honestly, fairly and impartially;
- communicate clearly and openly;
- act in the best interests of learners and employers; and
- respect the confidentiality of all information received during their work.

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

Expectations of providers

To ensure that reviews are constructive and beneficial, it is important that assessors and providers establish and maintain a professional working relationship based on mutual courtesy, respect and professional behaviour. Assessors are expected to uphold the SDS code of conduct, but we also expect providers to:

- apply their own codes of conduct in their dealings with assessors;
- enable assessors to conduct their assessment in an open and honest way;
- enable assessors to evaluate provision objectively against the SDS Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework;
- provide evidence that will enable assessors to report honestly, fairly and reliably about their provision;
- maintain a purposeful dialogue with the lead assessor and the quality review team;
- recognise that assessors need to observe practice and talk to staff, learners and other stakeholders without the presence of a manager or a senior leader;
- draw any concerns about the quality review to the attention of assessors in a timely and suitable manner through the nominee or lead assessor;
- work with assessors to minimise disruption and stress throughout the quality review; and
- ensure the health and safety of assessors while on their premises.

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

Term	Definition
Areas for improvement (Afl)	Areas where actions are required to improve activity where potential gaps have been identified
Associate Assessor	SDS staff with knowledge and experience in monitoring or reviewing quality of delivery in SDS funded work-based learning programmes
EFQM	European Foundation for Quality Management
Employers	Employers where learners are employed or placed to gain work experience
Enhancement	Build on existing processes and delivery working towards continuous improvement
Key Target Groups	Equality and Diversity key target groups - Gender, Disability, Ethnic Minority, Care Experienced
Lead Assessor	SDS Quality Assessor who holds the EFQM accredited qualification
Learners	Individuals undergoing training or learning; Apprentices, Employability Fund participants
Partners	Schools, Colleges, Awarding Bodies, Sector Skills bodies, third sector, local authorities, local or national groups, other Training Providers
Protected Characteristics	Age, Disability, Gender reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion and Belief, Sex and Sexual Orientation.
Providers	Training Providers or other organisations (including direct Employer contracts and Local Authorities) in receipt of SDS funding for delivery of training
Quality Action Plan (QAP)	Document to capture actions to improve, develop and enhance activity and results
RADAR	Results, Approach, Deploy, Assess, Refine
Self Assessment (SA)	A business tool Providers use on an ongoing basis to review and identify improvements to their organisation's delivery of apprenticeships and employability activity
Self Assessment and Quality Action Plan Workbook (SA/QAP)	Excel spreadsheet provided by SDS to enable providers to record delivery activity, list supporting evidence and record any areas for improvement
Service Level Agreement	Written agreement between two or more parties, signed and dated
Stakeholders	Skills Development Scotland, Scottish Government, Local Employability Partners, Employers, Parents