

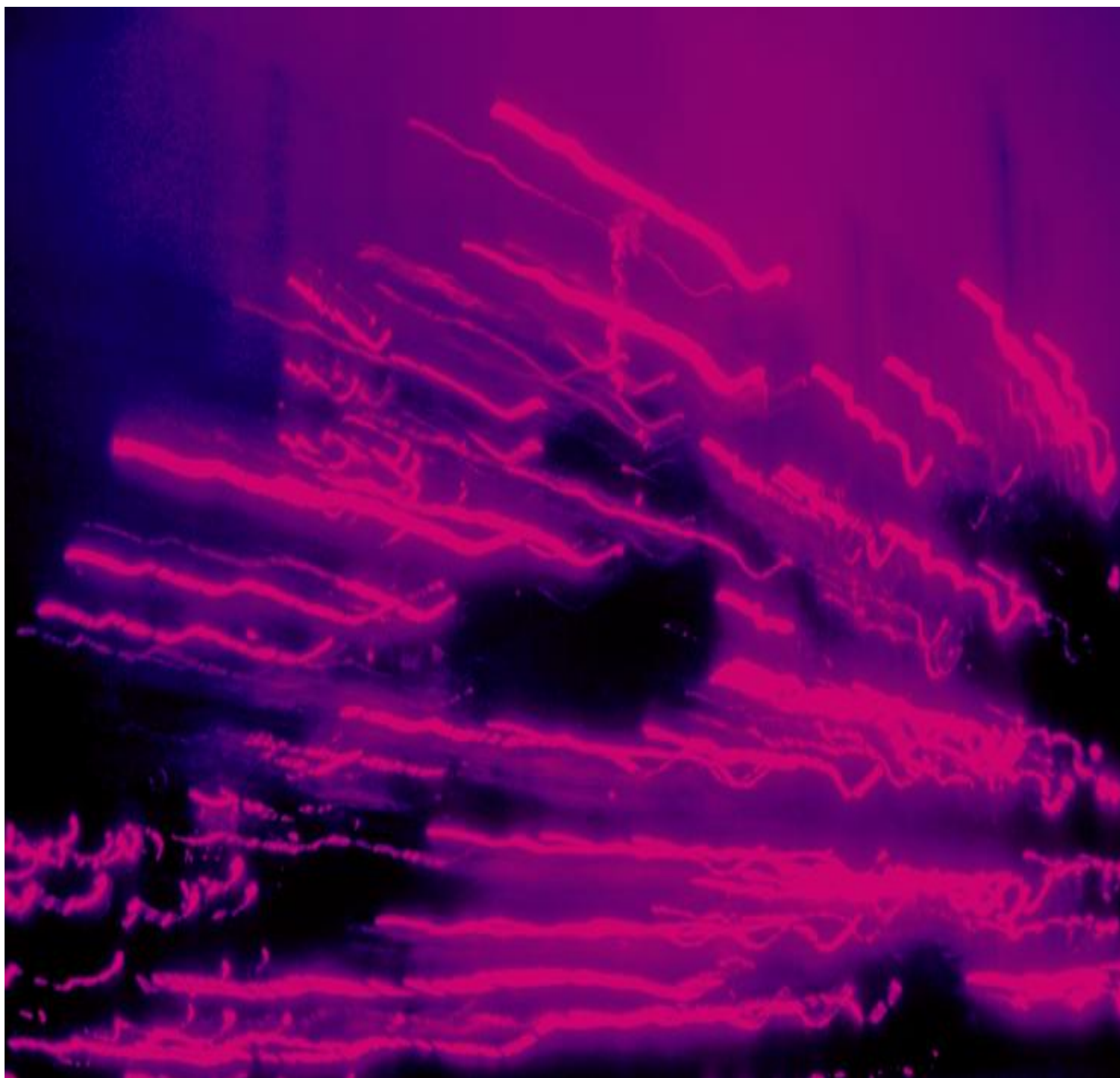
Self-assessment and Improvement Planning

A User Guide for Learning and Skills Providers

Updated November 2010



Support for Excellence





Self-assessment and Improvement Planning

A User Guide for Learning and Skills Providers

www.excellencegateway.co.uk/self-assessment-guide

Contents

1.	Introduction to the Guide	3
2.	Self-assessment	5
3.	Improvement planning and action - key processes	8
4.	Impact	18
5.	A self-assessment cycle which includes different levels and groups in the organisation	19
6.	The self-assessment report (SAR)	19
7.	The importance of data	28
8.	Risk	31
9.	Capacity to improve	31
10.	Involving stakeholders in self-assessment and improvement planning	32
11.	Partnerships	35
12.	Specialised tools and techniques	40
13.	Changes in self-assessment and improvement planning since 2009	41
14.	Policies and frameworks – what they mean for self-assessment and improvement planning	44
15.	How to stay in touch and get alerts	46
16.	Appendix 1:- tools, checklists and case studies	47
17.	Appendix 2:- international comparisons	50
18.	Appendix 3: improvement standards mapped to the Common Inspection framework	52
19.	Appendix 4: list of useful web addresses	53

1. Introduction to the Guide

1.1 About the Guide

This is a practical user guide to help experienced and new providers carry out self-assessment and improvement planning effectively. Research into the need for the Guide was carried out in early 2009. It was written between April and August 2009, and edited in May, June and November 2010, taking account of feedback from practitioners and policy changes. This Guide is a manual with action points and links to tools, policy documents and case studies. It is also available on line: [a user guide to self-assessment and improvement planning](#).

1.2 Providers new to self-assessment and improvement planning

You will find advice and links to help you begin and continue effective self-assessment and improvement planning. You should start self-assessment and improvement planning straight away, judging your performance regularly against targets, although you are unlikely to be inspected until you have 12 months of performance data. However please remember, **there is no inspection cycle**. Ofsted's review of your data, performance and risk factors is continuous.

1.3 Providers experienced in self-assessment and improvement planning

The Guide recognises your experience and expertise. However, there are tools which you may not have used, and information on changes which affect self-assessment and improvement planning in all organisations. You may want to start with these [policy updates](#), and then consider how the Guide can help you fine-tune what you do already.

LINKS

[A user guide to self-assessment and improvement planning](#)

[Policy updates](#)

[How to stay in touch and get alerts](#)

[CIF](#)

[Inspection Handbook](#)

ACTION

Keep up-to-date with Ofsted and other guidance on self-assessment and improvement planning; register for alerts at: [How to stay in touch and get alerts](#).

The full web page addresses for useful links are given at the end in Appendix 4. The [CIF](#) and the [Inspection Handbook](#) from September 2010 are available by clicking on the links.

1.4 Using the Guide

You can work through the processes as you implement them, using the Guide for information and ideas. Self-assessment, improvement planning and the monitoring of improvements are continuous. The Guide is, therefore, useful to you throughout the year.

It provides you with tools to carry out self-assessment and improvement planning so that you raise quality and improve provision for learners, employers and other stakeholders. It should also help you to be fully aware of policy requirements, and will save you time. Alerts will tell you about changes to policy, indicating what you need to be aware of in your self-assessment. Policy is flagged up and links given; at these links you will find more details of the policy and often tools to help you apply them to your provision.

There are ideas, useful tools and up-to-date information for people who manage or are accountable for self-assessment and improvement planning, and for those who are putting it into practice, such as delivery teams of teachers, trainers, assessors and support staff. Providers have told us that the most experienced of them can still have teams or individuals who are new to the concepts and processes of self-assessment and improvement planning.

2. Self-assessment

2.1 Why self-assess and plan improvements?

The primary purpose of self-assessment and improvement planning is to improve the learning experience and the outcomes for all learners, by supporting your organisation's priorities, and by focusing everyone in it on the day-to-day task of raising quality. Self-assessment and improvement planning are proven ways of achieving these goals, and can be combined with other approaches and external standards.

2.2 What are self-assessment and improvement planning?

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) describes self-assessment as:

- an essential critical improvement tool
- a key feature in the inspection and regulation of providers
- leading to improvements or to the maintenance of exceptional standards.

Self-assessment and improvement planning are continuous and begin with a review of previous improvement actions. They should focus on actions which improve outcomes for learners and stakeholders. For this reason, it is essential to start self-assessment with a review of the impact of the previous improvement actions.

Whereas you might previously have started with the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) and asked 'how did we get here?', you would now start with the process of quality improvement through the year and write a SAR when necessary.

In summary, self-assessment and improvement planning should be:

- an essential part of a continuous review and improvement process
- led by the needs of your organisation rather than external requirements, but also consistent with those requirements
- rigorous, based on reliable, valid and up-to-date evidence – you must use data and evidence to monitor improvements and their impact and also to make summative judgements

- inclusive, with all members of the organisation contributing to the process and owning the actions for improvement, and monitoring those actions continuously
- the basis of effective and continuous action plans which, when implemented, lead to improvements or maintain exceptionally high standards; see [Improvement planning](#).

ACTIONS

When thinking about self-assessment and improvement processes, consider what are the essentials for your organisation. Here is a checklist to help you review your self-assessment systems/processes; see [Reviewing organisational self-assessment systems](#).

Ensure that everyone in your organisation who is involved in self-assessment and improvement planning is aware of the tools and the policy links in this Guide.

2.3 When do you self-assess and plan improvements?

- Evaluate and seek to improve your provision continuously. It is essential, with short notice inspections, that your improvement plan is up-to-date and that your quality assurance and improvement processes are carried out regularly and effectively. Inspectors will expect you to produce an up-to-date position statement based on the regular monitoring of your improvement plan.
- Continuous and regular self-evaluation and quality improvement are also the best way to improve your organisation's performance: problems can be nipped in the bud, strengths identified and good practice transferred to other areas of work.

LINKS

[Improvement planning](#)

[Reviewing organisational self-assessment systems](#)

2.4 How do you self-assess and plan improvements?

- Choose and implement the improvement processes which best meet your organisation's needs.
- Consider using the learner journey as a structure for your SAR and improvement plan, whilst covering all the requirements and key questions of the latest CIF. It is best to refer to the CIF **after** you have carried out your self-assessment, and to make sure that you cover all key questions in it.
- Keep the progress of the improvement plan and details of the supporting evidence continuously up-to-date (mapping the evidence to the CIF), so that you can demonstrate the progress you are making.
- Ensure that self-assessment and improvement planning are part of your organisational culture, with staff at all levels clear about their contribution; see [encouraging participation](#).
- Ensure that all interested individuals and groups (stakeholders) are involved or consulted about the SAR and improvement plan.
- Ensure that subcontracted provision is included in your self-assessment and improvement planning.
- Carry out self-assessment in a climate of openness where frank and honest views can be expressed; see [capacity to improve](#).
- Evaluate self-assessment and improvement planning processes regularly to take account of [policy changes](#) and to evaluate your [capacity to improve](#).
- Ensure self-assessment includes concise details of how you engage with stakeholders and importantly, the actions taken as a result and their impact; see [involving stakeholders](#).
- The LSIS/Ofsted good practice [database](#) identifies common strengths and areas for improvement that have been taken from recent inspection reports. They offer particularly effective practice identified in inspections and include health check questions.

LINKS

[Encouraging participation](#)

[Capacity to improve](#)

[Policy changes](#)

[Involving stakeholders](#)

[LSIS Good practice database](#)

- Keep an eye on external changes; for example, in 2009 a number of providers recognised that the economic downturn affected their provision and its quality assurance; keep an eye on these sorts of changes in the environment, and adjust your SAR and improvement plan if you need to.

ACTION

Follow good practice and include all provision in your self-assessment and improvement planning, whether government funded or not. Self-assessment is a process about your whole organisation's drive towards continuous improvement.

Be fully aware of the current government policies and safeguarding requirements that should be part of your self-assessment processes; see [policy changes](#).

Review and evaluate sections of your self-assessment processes and report. The two checklists on [Leadership and management](#) and [Subject sector areas](#) provide some useful questions to help you think about your processes.

3. Improvement planning and action – key processes

There is no prescribed approach to improvement planning; however, there are many examples of good practice. First and foremost, it is essential to engage the entire staff, so that the improvement plan becomes a regular agenda item and is reported on at team and staff meetings. This sets the stage for a culture of quality improvement in which all staff expect and maintain exceptionally high standards. Secondly, it is important that the impact of actions are evaluated and assessed continuously and promptly so that you are making changes all the time, and are ready for inspection.

As you self-assess and identify areas for improvement, you will measure against externally defined standards. Additionally, you may measure yourself against grade one organisations, internal key performance areas and your own 'stretch' targets for continuous improvement. You can also use the improvement plan to show how the organisation will build on its overall key strengths, maintaining them and using them to plan future provision, thus indicating your Capacity to Improve.

LINKS

[Policy changes](#)

[Leadership and management](#)

[Subject sector areas](#)

Effective quality improvement plans have arrangements for monitoring progress towards intended outcomes and impacts, and evaluating success. If this is done on a regular basis, no less often than fortnightly or monthly, it becomes part of the process of quality improvement rather than a hurried exercise, 'just in time' for inspection. Inspection notice was reduced to approximately 15 days from September 2009, and in reality can be less.

Remember 'inspection' or risk assessment by Ofsted is happening all the time. Its quality assurance analysts will continuously monitor your performance through a review of key data and any significant risk factors such as changes of senior staff (especially chief executive), new provision or buildings, and your ratio of part-time to full-time staff.

It is recommended that all learner-centred high priority strengths and weaknesses be included in your improvement plan. These areas should be referenced from the self-assessment report. In your plan, you might consider at least these headings:

- where you are
- where you want to be
- how you will get there
- over what time-scale.

ACTION – KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

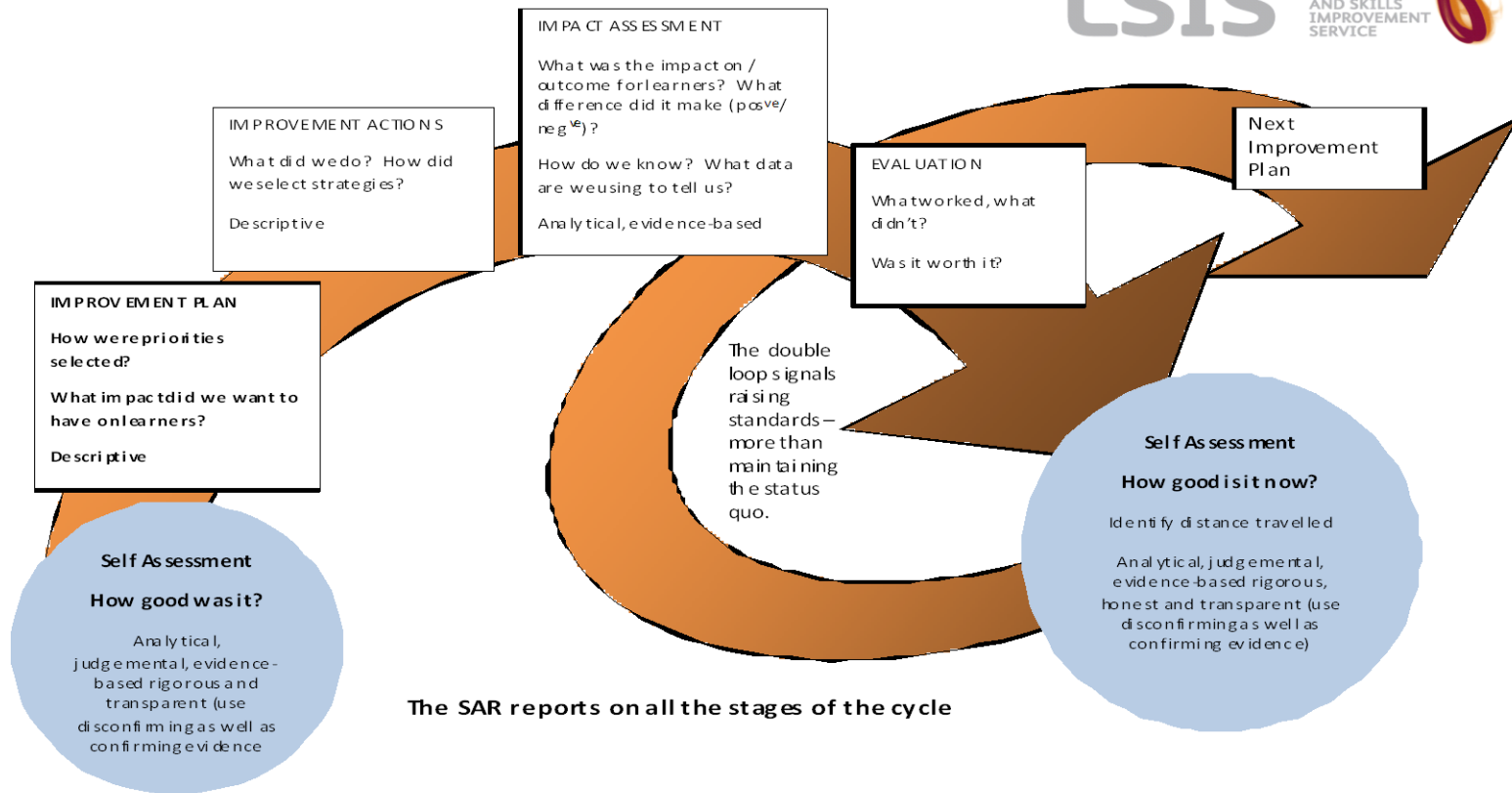
How do you review and improve your action planning?

Ask:

- **do we get our judgements right?**
- **do we identify the right actions?**
- **do we get to the root causes of weaknesses?**
- **do we resource actions adequately?**
- **do we monitor the impacts of our actions?**
- **do we follow through, complete actions, recognise what went well, and praise those responsible?**

The two checklists on [Leadership and management](#) and [Subject sector areas](#) provide some useful questions to help you think about your processes.

A Model for Continuous Live Self-assessment and Improvement Planning



3.1 Why plan for improvements?

Self-assessment is only as good as the actions you take as a result of it. You need to plan, and to implement the plan, resourcing the changes you need to make. The model on the previous page gives an example of continuous evaluation, starting with improvement planning.

3.2 Tools for improvement planning

When planning for improvement, you may benefit from using techniques to identify the root cause of the problem, manage the improvements as a project and continuously assess and evaluate the actions. If you are focused on outcomes using continuous evaluation, you will be ready for inspection at any time.

3.3 Root cause analysis

Root cause analysis can be used by all providers. It is an approach which gets you to the cause of the problem **not** the symptom.

An area for improvement which requires root cause analysis is one that recurs with the greatest frequency, consumes the greatest resource to resolve and has, possibly, failed to respond to previous action. Once an area for improvement is identified, finding the cause of a problem can speed the improvement process and ensure the right issues are addressed. This will prevent you spending time on problem areas that are the result of other problems and will focus you on those that will provide the most improvement and positive change. Changing two or three areas which cause the most problems may improve the entire organisation.

AN EXAMPLE OF ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS

Problem: '*poor learner attendance*'

Stage 1: Define problem more precisely, for example

'19% of learners from course X were late for training sessions on Monday mornings during the period...'

Stage 2: Ask: why are these learners late at this time? Keep asking 'why?' until you get to the root cause or causes

Stage 3: Consider every answer to 'why?', i.e. every cause; ask: '*do we/I have total, partial or no control over this?*';

Stage 4: Decide on actions, asking 'how does this action relate to the problem, and either minimise or eliminate it?'

There are other tools you can use, e.g. the [Five why's](#) tool and [Fishbone analysis](#) tool, which help to get to the root cause or causes of a problem.

3.4 Defining and managing your quality improvement plan

As you identify the strengths for further development and areas for improvement you will need to assess the gaps. Use these steps:

1. where you are now and what do you want to accomplish? What are the related targets, outcomes and success criteria?
2. what is your timeline for the improvement? What are the milestones and completion dates? Once the completion date is set, the tasks can be broken down into fortnightly or monthly chunks; this makes action monitoring and reporting easier than tackling a large project.
3. who is responsible for implementation? What resources are necessary for success? If the action is dependent on previous actions you will want to take this into consideration as you assign resources.

4. how will you monitor the impact, evaluate and report progress? This can be done in a simple Red, Amber, Green (RAG) status report; see [sample status report tool](#). As the staff accountable at each level report upwards, the improvement plan stays on track and becomes part of the daily process.

Two examples of effective improvement action follow. They focus on Every Child Matters:

- Firstly, an example from 'Outcomes for Children'. You may have an action for improvement in 'Staying Safe'. This could require specific changes in the organisational environment or in classroom practice. The people accountable for this improvement action (for example, head of department, teacher) would implement the safe process and report regularly on how it is carried out. The process would become embedded as it is monitored and reported. Status could be reported in scheduled team or staff meetings.
 - Secondly, here is an example for 'Staying Safe' which relates to adult learners, including employed ones. You are a provider with solely adult learners, and you have introduced a new policy to prevent bullying and harassment. However, you have not monitored it. A manager is given responsibility for monitoring the policy and its effectiveness, and reporting to the chief executive and board at regular intervals.
5. what lessons have you learned as a result of your actions for improvement? This is essential information to avoid the same problems in the future.
 6. what have you learnt about your processes for improvement planning? How can you improve them, or make sure that they stay effective?

You may want to consider using a project management approach for larger improvement action projects; it will help you to keep your complex plans on track.

3.5 Project management

If your actions are complex, a project management approach could make them more manageable and speed the solution. Writing a statement of work, identifying appropriate resources and a project team, monitoring and reporting status can ensure a complicated improvement action is progressing according to plan and is kept on track. It also provides lessons learned for future actions. A basic project management approach can be used for managing and monitoring a variety of actions.

There are other specialist tools such as Becta's Generator, which helps you to plan for improvements in your use of technology for learners; see [GENERATOR technology improvement leadership tool](#).

3.6 Continuous evaluation

Ofsted inspectors at inspection or monitoring visits will take a keen interest in the progress of quality improvement plans, especially if they have any indication that a specific area or activity is underperforming.

They will also be seeking evidence that your processes focus on outcomes and on learner-centred improvements. As you identify the cause of the problem and plan and manage the improvement actions, you can continuously evaluate your performance against what you have achieved and are achieving.

Use a cyclical process of observing the action, evaluating the consequences and impact of the action, and making adjustments to do this, see the QI cycle: [model](#) and [blank](#) tools. As you focus on outcomes throughout this process, you apply what you are learning from your actions immediately instead of months or even a year later. As you plan your action, you plan the evaluation. You can also link the actions to staff performance through appraisals, or through setting and agreeing goals with them for improvements in their performance. Doing this will link self-assessment and improvement planning to your performance management processes for staff.

[CIF](#)[Blank template](#)[Example](#)

CONTINUOUS EVALUATION TOOL

There are useful tools for capturing your improvement stories which focus on a continuous improvement model.

The case study approach shows a worked example with the improvement 'story' mapped back to the [CIF](#). There is a [blank template](#) which can be used by staff across your organisation, so they can identify evidence, analysis and plan improvements together with an [example](#).

AN EXAMPLE OF THE CONTINUOUS EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF LEARNER INDUCTION

THE SCENARIO

You have above average numbers of early leavers from some of your autumn programmes. You have interviewed leavers and those who are still on programme, and identified that your induction process is the main cause of learners' leaving the programme. To do this, you started with high-level (historic) data on early leavers which indicated an immediate problem. You then sought lower-level (current) data on the reasons. Interviews with learners still on the programme, and with some of those who left, indicate that the learner induction needs to prepare them much more thoroughly for the assessment requirements of the programme. You have defined the problem and have developed an improved induction process with much greater emphasis on assessment. You have also included regular discussions and feedback during the induction. After all, you expect teachers and trainers to evaluate learning all the time, why not apply the same to induction?

THE RESPONSE

This approach provides you with immediate information you can use to continue your induction programme if it is successful, or to make the changes which your evaluation will have identified. Engaging the learners in the evaluation and in further improvements can contribute further to success. This approach is a simple cycle of observe, evaluate and adjust. If embedded in the system and used by the entire staff, it becomes part of the organisational culture resulting in continuous improvement and readiness for inspection.

ADDITIONAL BENEFITS AND TRANSFERRING THE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

The staff who have planned and implemented the changes to induction can have this recognised in their appraisals or reviews of performance. They can tell others in the organisation about them. They can train others and transfer their knowledge and skills. If they have the skills, they can coach others to help them implement a successful learner induction programme in their areas.

You will have evidence of your Capacity to Improve, as well as improved learner-centred outcomes.

AND WHAT ABOUT THE LEARNERS WHO LEFT EARLY?

You have spoken to a sample and agreed to offer them places on the next intake in January. This time they will receive additional mentoring and support.

3.7 Monitoring improvements**3.7.1 Why monitor?**

Your plan needs to be monitored using current data, such as learner satisfaction, attendance and retention, so that you can take any immediate actions required.

3.7.2 How to monitor?

You need to designate a member of your staff to be accountable for each action in your QI plan, and the associated outcomes. This person needs to analyse appropriate data to check how the improvements are progressing.

ACTION – ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Ask yourself about continuous evaluation and improvement action:

- **how sure are you that your improvement action relates to the weakness or will maintain the strength (*how does this action lead to that outcome?*)?**
- **have you planned improvements, *involving* those who have to implement them?**
- **can those responsible for making them happen do so? Do they have the skill and resources? How motivated are they on a scale of 1 to 10? *Anything less than 8 out of 10 is not enough!***
- **have you decided on the evaluation indicators of success as you plan? How clear and measurable are they?**
- **how will you evaluate the actions? Will you do it soon after they take place?**
- **how can you involve the people who implement the actions in the evaluation?**
- **how ready are you to accept the results of the evaluation? And to make further changes to your plan?**

4. Impact

Think of impact as the results of your actions, especially your improvement actions. The changes you make will have consequences, in particular for learner outcomes, the quality of provision, and for customer and stakeholder satisfaction. You should begin your self-assessment process by reviewing the impact of previous improvement actions. If it is your first SAR, then review the current improvement actions. You can summarise your organisational learning from them in the SAR.

You should also consider the impact which the self-assessment process itself has on learners and staff. How does it enhance their involvement in strategy and their commitment to the organisation's mission, goals and key performance indicators? How does it help them to feel a part of the organisation?

To help you clarify your aims, outcomes and impacts, you can use these [activity](#), [worked example](#) and [PowerPoint](#).

ACTION

Ensure you measure impact, such as improved learner outcomes or satisfaction, not just actions, such as improving the learner's experience.

LINKS

[Activity](#)

[Worked example](#)

[PowerPoint](#)

5. A self-assessment and improvement planning cycle which includes different levels and groups in the organisation

Self-assessment processes should include well-developed performance measures which are embedded at team level and/or have been developed collaboratively by the whole staff.

The LSIS good practice database provides a very detailed self-assessment cycle ([Self assessment cycle - Rutland LEA](#)). It clearly sets out who, when and what is to be done at all stages. It shows clear communication channels and details the tasks that need to be completed and by when. The whole process is backed up by clear guidance and support for the people involved, from learners to part-time tutors.

It is good practice to involve all functions and departments in self-assessment and improvement planning. In small and larger organisations, support staff should be part of the process. Governors and boards have a key role to play, both in overseeing quality improvement strategy and in evaluating their own performance.

An example quality cycle: [model](#); and a blank version for you to use is here: [blank](#).

6. The self-assessment report

You must produce an annual self-assessment report (SAR) which is the written outcome of your continuous review and improvement processes; this is the summary. Along the way, you may produce updates to reflect how much action you have taken, its impact, and any new analyses of strengths and weaknesses.

Self-assessment processes and the written report are primarily for your organisation. The use of the SAR and improvement plan by Ofsted, or by funding organisations, is extremely important. You will need to ensure that you meet at least their minimum expectations when producing them. However, the greatest value of self-assessment and improvement planning is to enhance the performance of your organisation and help you to achieve your own goals, and in particular to raise the quality of provision for learners.

LINKS

[Self assessment cycle - Rutland LEA](#)

QI cycle: [model](#) and [blank](#)

6.1 What must you include in the SAR?

As a minimum, the SAR must include judgements and impact on all provision falling within the remit of Ofsted inspections and government funding. It is also good practice to include work which is not government funded.

- A concise description of your organisation, its mission, its environment, and its learner profile

ACTION

Ensure you include all the key elements: about your organisation, the local and regional environment including demographics, and an overview of your provision. You can include information and judgements about your links with the local community and your impact on it, including your contribution to community cohesion.

- A summary of the grades you have awarded yourselves
- How the self-assessment and improvement process is carried out, and of the impact of this process

ACTION

Consider writing your process as a flowchart or diagram; for an example, see this case study [Self assessment calendar of activity](#) from Eastleigh College, or the [self-assessment and improvement planning flowchart](#).

- A summary of improvements since the last SAR, focusing on the outcomes and impact of the actions, and giving reasons why any of your improvement targets have not been met; see [Balancing strengths and weaknesses](#) tool. The SAR should provide clear evaluation and an analysis of the data which supports these conclusions; see [making judgements](#) section.

LINKS

[Self assessment calendar of activity](#)

[Self-assessment and improvement planning flowchart](#)

[Balancing strengths and weaknesses](#)

[Making judgements](#)

- If you choose to follow the grading which Ofsted is using, you should include graded judgements (with supporting evidence) on:
 - a. **overall effectiveness** – overall effectiveness is a judgement about how well you meet the reasonable needs of learners and users, and provide value for money
 - b. your organisation’s **capacity for improvement**; this guide includes more information about [capacity to improve](#)
 - c. **leadership and management**– here you should include the contributory grade for equality and diversity. This includes your strengths and weaknesses in promoting educational and social inclusion. For example, how do you encourage progression for learners, meet the diverse needs of learners, and raise the participation and achievement of learners? For more information see key considerations in [equality and diversity](#)

You should also include your contributory grade for safeguarding. Consider and gather evidence about how safe your learners feel, how well you and your partners ensure their safety and well-being, and how you promote a culture in which all learners and stakeholders, in particular young people and vulnerable adults feel comfortable and safe

You should also make judgements on how well you manage resources to provide [value for money](#), and how well you engage with others to support and promote improvement

ACTION

Be clear on the aspects of provision which will have limiting grades (safeguarding, and equality and diversity). These contribute to and may affect other graded judgements, including overall effectiveness.

- d. **outcomes for learners** – how well your learners achieve, based on targets which should be challenging, and the learners’ own needs and aspirations. This should also relate to learners’ contribution to economic and social developments

LINKS

[Capacity to improve](#)

[Equality and diversity](#)

[Value for money](#)

- judgements about the Every Child Matters indicators, and about your strengths and weaknesses in safeguarding vulnerable adults; see [Every child matters/vulnerable adults](#)

ACTION

Review the toolkit developed on Every Child Matters ([Self-assessment toolkit for Every Child Matters](#)).

- the Framework for Excellence performance indicators; see [Framework measures](#) section and [Framework for Excellence links to the CIF](#)
- your own key performance measures/goals (or 'balanced scorecard'). See the Chesterfield College case study in the action box

ACTION

Consider developing your own performance indicators or balanced scorecard (some of which may use indicators similar to the Framework for Excellence), and which are fit for purpose for your organisation.

There is a case study from Chesterfield College about this approach: [Chesterfield College - approaches to self-assessment](#). Whilst based on the pre-2009 CIF, this case study shows an approach which you can still adapt or adopt, relating it to the current CIF.

- how you engage with learners, employers and communities and, most importantly, the impact of this engagement and the actions you take as a result. Include an appendix in your SAR summarising the views of learners, employers and communities. State your areas of strengths, your areas for improvement and how you intend to address these

ACTION

See the section in this Guide on good practice in [involving stakeholders](#) in self-assessment processes for ideas on how to engage with users.

LINKS

[Every child matters/vulnerable adults](#)

[Self-assessment toolkit for Every Child Matters](#)

[Framework measures](#)

[Framework for Excellence links to the CIF](#)

[Chesterfield College - approaches to self-assessment](#)

- judgements made about how well your provision ensures the health, safety and welfare of learners, with actions taken and improvements needed; see [Balancing strengths and weaknesses](#) tool . You should provide evidence to show that safeguarding outcomes and features are promoted in all aspects of your work whether with unemployed or employed people, or with young people or adults
- where provision is inadequate, (particularly where a Notice to Improve has been issued or where Ofsted has recommended actions), detailed plans should be provided, with an indication of milestones and monitoring procedures. You should act immediately on areas of underperformance
- an appendix which contains an analysis of key performance data used to support the SAR judgements (you don't need all the data, just the conclusions); for example: data derived from Framework for Excellence indicators, current enrolments by sector subject area, type of programme and age; information on learners' success rates and progression, including any differences between groups of learners e.g. between learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those without, or from different ethnic groups. In your improvement plan you should show how you intend to narrow and eliminate achievement gaps; then indicate, when you self-assess again, the impact.
- review the SAR and improvement plan; this should take place throughout the year

ACTION

As well as the minimum expectations outlined above, think about other policies and what they mean for self-assessment and improvement planning; see section on [policies and frameworks updates](#). You must ensure that your SAR covers the current legislative requirements, the latest policy and regulatory requirements, and that it supports and aligns with your own business development strategies.

Consider other external standards and approaches your organisation may use and how these can support or align with self-assessment and improvement planning; see [external standards and approaches](#) and [international models](#).

LINKS

[Policies and frameworks updates](#)

[Balancing strengths and weaknesses](#)

[External standards and approaches](#)

[International models](#)

6.2 The language of the self-assessment report and improvement plan

If you are making judgements, balance carefully the strengths and weaknesses, and ensure your text is evaluative. Evaluative language includes a judgement, based on the analysis of evidence, and states why you have made that judgement. For examples, see balancing strengths and weaknesses. Every sentence in your report should include the judgement and impact on the learner.

You need to consider and decide how to balance ownership of the report and improvement plan against a consistent and succinct writing style. Ownership will be enhanced if teams and departments write their own sections, based on evidence and their own judgements. They will need training and coaching to achieve this, but it is time well invested, as they will develop skills and become involved in the report and in the actions. However, you might consider having one person who edits the entire final report, so that it is written in a consistent style and is evaluative. But remember, the key is to focus on your improvement planning and capture the 'organisational learning' in your SAR.

Funding organisations and Ofsted are two of the audiences for your report. They will use it to inform decisions and discussions with you. It will be read by your board (directors, trustees, governors or elected members) which should [self-assess its own performance](#). LSIS has produced a [Governance self-assessment checklist](#).

The improvement plan will become a working document for teams and individuals, and self-assessment and improvement planning will be part of your culture. Therefore, you should write the self-assessment report and improvement plan as succinctly as possible, making sure you cover all the relevant points which are explained in the Guide. Short sentences, good numbering of sections with headings and the use of charts and diagrams (such as graphs to show trends) will help make the report more readable. But, importantly, does the SAR and QI plan help you as an organisation learn?

The improvement plan should be as simple as possible, cover all strengths and weaknesses, and be continuously monitored and updated. The evidence of impact from the plan should be mapped to the CIF and referred to in the subsequent SAR.

LINKS

[Self-assess its own performance](#)

[Governance self-assessment checklist](#)

TIPS ON WRITING JUDGEMENTS

Avoid vague words (like 'some' or 'most') and replace with specific details, e.g.:

'Some courses do not have robust IV systems' becomes 'NVQ level 1 craft in xxx has inadequate IV systems' or

'Most tutors are appropriately qualified' becomes '95% of tutors have both a teaching qualification and a professional qualification at or above level 3

Show the impact on the learner, e.g.:

'NVQ level 1 craft course in xxxx has inadequate IV systems, which led to 18% of learners not completing their course within a year' or

'After a significant programme of in-house training, 95% of tutors now have both a teaching qualification and a professional qualification at or above level 3 ensuring a high quality of provision. As a result, 98% of learners said they were very satisfied with the standard of teaching, an increase of 20%.'

6.3 Moderating and validating your improvement plan and SAR

Moderating and validating your improvements, their impact and your self-assessment are essential. You need robust 'critical friend' contributions before you finalise your judgements on strengths, weaknesses, how well you have implemented improvements and the impact of those improvements.

You can set up internal validation, involving board members or governors. This is often a small panel which questions managers about their judgements and actions. You might also invite someone from outside your organisation to question you and your staff. This could be a manager from another provider as part of a peer review and development programme, or a consultant.

ACTION

Make sure you have a critical friend or friends to challenge your judgements; this can be someone in a peer review and development group, a manager from another provider, or a consultant. They should ask these key questions about your report and plan:

- **how open were you when you made judgements? Did you start by saying “we think we are grade...” and then seek to prove it. Or, better, did you put aside all the preconceptions and really ask yourself: “what does the evidence tell us about our performance?”**
- **how do you know that your judgements are valid and reliable? (i.e. where is the evidence, and how good is it?)**
- **how do you know that an action is likely to improve provision where there is a weakness, or maintain a strength (i.e. have you planned action and is it the right action?)**
- **how well did you monitor, review and implement the improvement actions?**
- **to what extent did the actions lead to the intended impact?**
- **to what extent was the impact focused on learners and their experience?**
- **what does your organisation learn and change (or keep doing well) as a result of answering the questions above?**

6.4 Peer review and development

Peer review and development (PRD) enables you to undertake an in-depth and collaborative exploration of the self-assessment process and improvement process. The more rigorous and transparent you are, the more you can be confident that the self-assessment process is robust and the judgements accurate. PRD will help you to judge if the improvement plan is fit for purpose and that you have both the capacity and the will to improve. You will find PRD an important way of taking a whole organisation approach to self-assessment. This link explains how: [Understanding a whole organisation approach](#).

Put simply, the peer review and development process or [cycle](#) is one where a group of providers formally join together to review aspects of each other's provision in order to bring about collaborative improvement. The reviewers usually start by reviewing the current improvement plan, as a critical friend, to help the host provider (the one being reviewed) understand how well and how comprehensively it has been implemented.

The process is cyclical and is demonstrated diagrammatically in this diagram.

In order for a peer review to be rigorous and effective, a peer review group needs to undertake all the following key activities:

- prepare for the reviews, including logistics, training reviewers, briefing host providers and agreeing benchmarks for performance
- carry out the reviews
- offer professional challenge to the host provider – including a challenging review of improvement actions
- undertake feedback and reporting
- support developments after the reviews, such as staff training or good practice transfer
- undertake monitoring and evaluation of both the impact of PRD and the process of PRD itself.

Throughout the peer review and development process, the host and reviewers need to be honest and open about all aspects of the self-assessment and improvement process; however, the reviewers are not inspectors. The reviewers' task is to test out the host's quality systems and processes and help the host make a judgement on the sufficiency, validity, objectivity and

LINKS

[Understanding a whole organisation approach](#)

[Cycle](#)

the reliability of the data and evidence used for self-assessment and improvement planning. They encourage and help the host provider to be rigorous and self-critical. A set of useful questions has been produced by LSIS.

The reviewers also test the fitness-for-purpose of the improvement plan which has resulted from the self-assessment process; see the [PRD checklist](#).

6.5 When you have completed your SAR

You need to upload your report to the provider gateway at least annually, so that it is available to funding organisations and to Ofsted. You should update your improvement plan regularly, for your own use and as an additional benefit, means that you are ready for inspection at any time. Putting the plan into action becomes part of your routine; see [improvement planning](#) section.

You must also keep your summary details up-to-date on the Gateway: make sure you upload information about changes to contracts, subcontracting or areas of learning.

7. The importance of data

Any judgement made by any individual, department or team as part of your improvement plan and/or self-assessment report must be backed up by data. This data has to be reliable, up-to-date and relevant to the judgement. For example, if you are making judgements about your responsiveness to community needs, you need to define what you mean by 'community', what indicators of responsiveness or success you are using, and how you measure them. The data you use must relate to the indicators.

Some of your data will be annual outcomes for learners (self-assessment report data), whereas other data (live data) will be gathered during the year (improvement planning data) to provide specific information for analysis and fast action.

You should use both historic and current data.

LINKS

[Improvement planning](#)

[PRD checklist](#)

7.1 Historic data

For example, use historic (high level) data in your SAR to report on learner success rates, e.g. as well as analysing outcomes for the year, you should indicate trends, for example in learner success rates and learner and employer satisfaction.

To analyse trends, ask yourself:

- what is improving?
- which areas are maintaining outstanding outcomes?
- what is satisfactory, and needs to aim for good and outstanding?
- what is declining, and needs urgent action to improve?

7.2 Current data

Use current (low level) data which focuses on learners who are on-programme. Low level data should be used on a regular basis as part of your organisation's strategy and improvement planning. Low level data is 'immediate', and leads you to appropriate action to improve and to mitigate against risk. For example, you can use current data such as attendance to identify learners who are disengaged and may drop out of their course. This potential dropout will reduce the number of learner outcomes, which will in turn affect your high level data – your organisation's success rates.

7.3 Making judgements using qualitative and quantitative data

Your data can be quantitative – for example, learner success rates or numbers of employers engaged, or qualitative – for example feedback from learners throughout their learner journey, from employers, and from other interested people (stakeholders) on their satisfaction with your provision and service. The checklist, [sources of evidence](#), will help you to identify the sources which you should use.

It is important to compare the data against your targets, and to ensure that it is validated. Learner outcomes (including destinations and progression) are key sources of information for you in making judgements and monitoring improvement; so are the results of your observations of teaching, training and learning. Your processes and judgements for observation

should be based on clear criteria. You need trained observers who can stand back and take an objective view of learning – whether they are from inside or outside of your organisation.

If you subcontract provision, you must ensure that your subcontractors have reliable data to inform their and your judgements. You may want to sample their observations or learner outcome data.

A summary of good practice in using data is here: [good practice in using data](#).

7.4 Determining grades

When you grade, use the scale:

- 1 – outstanding
- 2 – good
- 3 – satisfactory
- 4 – inadequate.

It is up to you, in consultation with colleagues, to decide on the grades you award yourselves. You need to review your decision before you finalise it; moderation and validation are essential. Peer Review and Development (PRD) can be used effectively to validate your judgements and your review of actions and impact. You can read more about PRD at the [Excellence Gateway](#), Support for Excellence pages.

You should balance strengths and weaknesses in your decision. Remember that strengths should be more than the expected and the ordinary (these are norms). Further guidance on balancing strengths and weaknesses is here: [Balancing strengths and weaknesses](#).

The full grading structure used by Ofsted is in the [CIF](#).

ACTION

Do not confuse a strength with a norm. A norm is a feature which, if absent, would be a weakness.

Norms and strengths change, as expectations and the bar on performance rise. Keep an eye on the grading characteristics in the current version of the Inspection Handbook. There are clear indicators of the criteria which Ofsted uses to award grades.

LINKS

[Good practice in using data](#)

[Excellence Gateway](#)

[Balancing strengths and weaknesses](#)

[CIF](#)

8. Risk

When you write your report, and your improvement plan, use evidence of risk which you have gathered elsewhere. For more information, see the guidance on [managing risk](#). Different levels and types of risk; risk indicators; edit risk tool to focus on SA and IP risks; add not getting to root cause; add Ofsted risk assessment; do your systems pick up risks, deal with them, limit or eliminate them?

9. Capacity to improve

Your capacity to improve is a judgement about how well you carry out your self-assessment and improvement planning, as these are your key processes to assure and raise quality. It is fundamentally about the impact of your actions, and whether they achieve the goals you set, which should be stretching. You and Ofsted should be able to identify a 'trajectory of improvement'.

Capacity to Improve is partly about the resources which you devote to improving quality, and how all staff see it as fundamental to their roles, and also about your skills in gathering and analysing data, taking the right action, and monitoring improvements. Individuals have a role to play, as does the organisation.

Ofsted defines capacity to improve as "the ability of a provider to continue improving standards, based on what has been accomplished so far, or to maintain exceptionally high standards". It puts a great deal of emphasis on capacity to improve in inspection and in any review of your self-assessment and improvement planning. To assess your capacity to improve, you need to consider these questions:

- do you know your weaknesses, and take the right actions to correct them?
- do you know where you are just satisfactory? If yes, what are you doing to raise the bar on these areas?
- do you know your strengths, and maintain them?
- do you set and monitor stretching targets which are based on improvements and on maintaining exceptionally high standards?

- do you have a good track record of recognising what you need to do, and doing it?

LINKS

[Peer review checklist](#)

ACTION

Review your capacity to improve; ask yourself and colleagues the questions above; include this review as part of your self-assessment and improvement planning processes

Use external validation, such as that offered by Peer Review and Development, to review your improvement plan and its impact; see [Peer review checklist](#).

10. Involving stakeholders in self-assessment and improvement planning

It is important that your self-assessment actively involves everyone who works in or with your organisation, in order to get a realistic and accurate set of views and judgements, and to involve them in your improvement actions. Inspectors will check whether and how you have done this, and how you have made use of the feedback you have collected.

ACTION

Make sure staff, learners and partner organisations understand:

- **the self-assessment process and their role in it, including the monitoring of improvements resulting from actions in the improvement plan**
- **what happens to their views, and the evidence and data they provide**
- **how these inform judgements and subsequent planned improvements.**

The evaluation of the impact and effectiveness of your Learner Involvement Strategy should form an integral part of your self-assessment and report. Within the Framework for Excellence, learner responsiveness measures provide key information which should be used in self-assessment to check the effectiveness of your Learner Involvement Strategy (or User Engagement Strategy).

Learner and employer responsiveness should be part of your self-assessment processes; see [Framework measures](#). It is good practice to include additional indicators of stakeholder satisfaction such as feedback from staff.

ACTION

Ask: do you have a learner involvement policy for your organisation? Does it work in practice, and if yes, what are the outcomes for learners? If not, what will you change to ensure it does have a positive impact on the learner's experience?

The LSC's guidance, [Developing a learner involvement strategy \(February 2007\)](#) provides examples, case studies and checklists on ways of involving learners. The strategy was evaluated in 2009; see [Evaluation of the impact of the learner involvement strategy](#).

There is no single right way to achieve staff, learner and stakeholder involvement. Inspectors ask staff how they are involved in the self-assessment and improvement process and what they know about the final report. They will focus on the learner journey, and are likely to interview individual learners and groups to hear their views and their experiences. You need to carry out similar activities regularly and consistently across your provision.

The approach below, from the good practice database, has worked well for a number of providers of all sizes. The resources available can be customised by you to meet your needs. If you are a large organisation you may need to hold separate events and bring the findings together.

10.1 Tips on the day to day

The Ofsted good practice database provides you with electronic models of documents that will help staff to prioritise strengths and areas for improvement according to their impact on learners. The findings will be very much owned by staff and they will more clearly see their part in the self-assessment process.

LINKS

[Developing a learner involvement strategy \(February 2007\)](#)

[Evaluation of the impact of the learner involvement strategy](#)

10. 2 Examples of good practice in involvement

There are examples of particularly effective practice in self-assessment and reporting here: [Self-assessment process and reporting](#). Suggestions include:

- all staff being aware of the main 'headline' content of the current self-assessment report, of the judgements and actions they have been involved in, and what they have to do now
- staff who are able to say "yes, I recognise us from this report; there I am"
- linking self-assessment to quality improvement procedures so that the two cycles overlap and do not duplicate time and resources. Staff then see how what they are doing in terms of observation, gaining feedback from learners or employers, internal verification and programme review link to the production of the self-assessment report
- having an 'inclusive' self-assessment process that engages learners, staff, employers and other interested parties
- good communication about the process of self-assessment and the final report
- gathering views from those who know about the training and can contribute to its improvement, including learners, employers and training staff, as well as other agencies
- involving staff, and others, from the start of the process, not just to comment on the finished draft report - 'bottom-up' rather than 'top-down'; this approach is fundamental in some other countries; see section on [international models](#)
- using samples of staff, learners and employers where it is not possible to consult every individual for feedback on a particular theme
- using a number of ways to gain learner views: surveys on key issues; focus groups; having the learner voice as a standing agenda item for groups and committees; a learner 'parliament' or forum; site or campus councils; learner members of committees and groups
- linking all survey questions and focus group topics to the learner's journey as well as mapping them to the CIF – one provider invites all learners to rate their course three times a year on the scale 1 to 4, using the three CIF aspects as the basis for their evaluation; results are reviewed by

LINKS

[Self-assessment process and reporting](#)

[International models](#)

managers and by the board and action taken to praise success and tackle areas needing improvement

- ensuring that the outcomes of surveys are fed back to those who took the time to contribute their views.

11. Partnerships and collaboration, including subcontracting

11.1 Key factors for partnerships

Partnerships take many forms; they may not all be with subcontractors.

If your organisation works collaboratively with, for example, consortia or partnerships, or sub-contracts provision for which you are the lead provider, you are responsible for the quality of provision, quality of outcomes and overarching self-assessment processes, judgements and improvement plans.

You should also consider reporting on how members of a consortium fulfil their responsibilities as a member of that group. Evidence for this could include attendance of their people at meetings, examples of specific (including innovative) collaboration, and in particular how working together has enhanced the experience for learners and/or employers.

For example, ask: **“has collaboration widened opportunities and improved learner outcomes, including qualifications and destinations? Has it benefited employers or others?”**

If you are not the lead provider, it is still good practice to include such provision within your self-assessment processes, report and improvement plan. Ofsted will expect you to assess your contribution to the overall provision, referenced in your own SAR.

11. 2 Example toolkits about effective practice in partnership working

There are a range of toolkits that can be used to help with effective partnership working and assessment:

EXAMPLE TOOLKITS

[Toolkit for 14-19 partnerships](#)

This LSC toolkit aims to describe what a good 14-19 partnership looks like, identifying resources and demonstrating how collaborative activity benefits learners. It provides a comprehensive series of checklists to support self-assessment across partnerships.

[Ofsted good practice database: good partnership working - working Links 1/2](#)

This link provides an example of how a provider has built the foundations for productive working partnerships. It also includes a checklist of questions which will help you to improve the quality of your partnership working.

[LG - smarter partnerships](#)

This toolkit gives examples of partnership working and includes several interactive questionnaires and quizzes and partnership tools:

partnership health check questionnaire

examples of how to review partnerships and make them more effective

skills for partnership working

case studies, partnership tools, e.g. developing partnership agreements, ground rules for partnerships, developing partnership skills (note: links to the interactive tools are available via this link or by clicking the appropriate links below).

LINKS

[Toolkit for 14-19 partnerships](#)

[Ofsted good practice database: good partnership working - working Links 1/2](#)

[LG - smarter partnerships](#)

[Developing partnership agreements](#)

This link provides a helpful guide on the main elements which you need to get right when setting up partnerships. It enables you to document what you intend to achieve, how you are going to manage and resource the partnership and how you are going to deal with potential conflicts within the partnership.

[Ground rules for partnerships](#)

This link provides a guide on setting the ground rules in partnerships. Ground rules can make a great difference in helping to build robust relationships and smooth partnership working. Ground rules can be built into partnership agreements as guiding principles, while mutually agreed rules for meetings and workshops can help ensure productive outcomes.

[Developing partnership skills](#)

Use this tool to assess your learning needs relating to partnership working.

You can choose to look at (a) your personal or team development needs or (b) those of the partnership against the key themes for effective partnership:

- 1) leadership: skills and knowledge for leadership in partnerships
- 2) trust: skills and knowledge for cultivating trust in partnerships
- 3) learning: skills and knowledge for promoting learning and improvement in partnerships

LINKS

[Developing partnership agreements](#)

[Ground rules for partnerships](#)

[Developing partnership skills](#)

<p>Partner responsibilities in strategic partnerships</p>	<p>4) managing for performance: skills and knowledge for managing effective partnerships.</p> <p>This tool will help you help address a common partnership problem of lack of clarity over the roles that partners need to perform, and who is responsible for what. It does not go into specific requirements in different types of partnership, in health, regeneration, etc, but concentrates on what is common across different types of strategic partnership.</p>
<p>Partnership responsibilities tool</p>	<p>This tool provides a checklist of questions on partnerships considering the partnership environment, developing a strategy and gaining commitment, identifying resources and monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the partnership.</p>

LINKS

[Partner responsibilities in strategic partnerships](#)

[Partnership responsibilities tool](#)

11.3 Your SAR and the inspection of subcontracted provision

The Guide provides key pointers about how your SAR and improvement plan can prepare your organisation and its subcontracted provision for inspection. You need to take account of them when you self-assess and plan for improvements.

11.4 Measuring and improving quality in subcontracted provision

You are responsible to funding organisations for provision which you subcontract to others. Therefore, you need accurate information about the quality of that provision. The Individualised Learner Record (ILR) has a field for recording major subcontractors but, as from 2009/2010, not for multiple subcontracting.

You will require information from subcontractors about QA processes such as their observation of teaching and learning scheme, the grades awarded in it, and the actions taken to maintain the quality of, and improve teaching and learning. Many lead providers carry out their own sampling observations of teaching and learning in subcontractors.

For self-assessment and improvement planning you might also ask:

- what is the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in our subcontractors? How can it be improved or how can excellent standards be maintained?
- how do we know that the subcontractor's scheme for observing teaching and learning is robust and leads to improvements for learners?
- are we absolutely sure that the data supplied by the subcontractor is accurate and up-to-date?
- how do we (and how does the subcontractor) use that data to measure and improve quality - continuously and at all levels in their organisation?
- what are the trends in quality improvement in the subcontracted provision? Do they vary from those in our provision which is not subcontracted? If yes, why? What do we learn from this?
- how effective is the subcontractor in promoting equality and diversity and in safeguarding children and vulnerable adults?

11. 5 Subcontracting and inspection

Ofsted inspectors will inspect at the point of delivery only.

Ofsted will inspect provision that is directly provided by you. If you subcontract to another provider which does not have a direct contract for government funded provision, and is not inspected by Ofsted, inspectors may also visit that provision. However, if you subcontract to another provider which is inspected in its own right, inspectors will not usually visit that provision during your inspection. They will, however, want to know how you assure the quality of that provision. They may want to speak with the provider.

If you act as a subcontractor to another organisation, Ofsted will probably visit the provision which you offer at your inspection and will include it in their judgements about all your provision. In other words, inspectors will inspect the provision subcontracted to you when they inspect the provision for which you hold the lead contract.

12. Specialised tools and techniques

This section has been developed so that it offers you straightforward tools to help you with some of the tougher challenges of self-assessment and improvement planning. The tools will be valuable to experienced and new providers. Here they are:

- key considerations in [equality and diversity](#) – an overview of key issues: see the section on safeguarding for more ideas
- [encouraging participation](#) in self-assessment and improvement planning – for briefing teams and individuals, including those whose participation in the processes you want to enhance
- [self-assessment for support staff](#) – some ideas for measuring performance and linking their work to the learners' experience and the CIF
- [managing risk](#) in self-assessment and improvement planning.

LINKS

[Equality and diversity](#)

[Encouraging participation](#)

[Self-assessment for support staff](#)

[Managing risk](#)

13. Changes in self-assessment and improvement planning since 2009 – an overview including Ofsted, Funding Organisations and the Framework for Excellence

13.1 Ofsted

Ofsted has published revised information on its approach to inspection in the [Inspection Handbook](#). Its key points are:

1. there is a significant and continuing focus on your [capacity to improve](#)
2. rigour is critical. This means:
 - using national and local and other comparative data
 - internally and externally validating judgements and grades
 - systematic use of learner and employer satisfaction data
 - setting of challenging targets for improvement
 - effective internal observation of teaching, training and learning; activities which are observed should include coaching, assessment, feedback and reviews of learning, where possible
 - basing judgements about the quality of teaching, training and assessment on the Lifelong Learning UK [professional standards](#) for teachers, tutors and trainers in the lifelong learning sectors
 - having regular access to and making effective use of robust and accessible management information
 - rigorous performance management of the organisation and of individuals and teams
 - close involvement of staff and of boards or governors in the self-assessment process
 - coverage of all functional areas

LINKS

[Inspection Handbook](#)

[Capacity to improve](#)

[Professional standards](#)

- the honesty to confront weaknesses as well as maintain and where possible improve further on strengths
 - the will to focus on, confront and improve areas which are satisfactory only
 - ensuring weaknesses from the last self-assessment and/or inspection have been tackled and measurable improvements made.
3. quality Improvement action plans must be fit-for-purpose, embedded within the routine operations of teams/departments, and lead to change and improvements (or maintaining strengths). Monitoring has to take place – this might be carried out by the team or department itself, or by a senior manager, or by a colleague from another team or department.
4. the report and the plan are descriptions of the situation at any one point in time. Self-evaluation and improvement are continuous; all parts of the organisation should review quality regularly, and plan to improve it.

13.2 The Framework for Excellence

The Framework for Excellence is an approach to measuring overall provider performance. You can read about the Framework; see [Framework for Excellence](#).

You need to consider all the indicators in the Framework. You can use the checklist in our guidance to cross-reference the Framework to the Common Inspection Framework.

ACTION

Make sure that your self-assessment covers all the Framework for Excellence indicators, as well as the Common Inspection Framework; see [FfE and CIF tool](#).

LINKS

[Framework for Excellence](#)

[FfE and CIF tool](#)

13.3 Funding organisations

The LSC was dissolved on 1 April 2010. In 2010/2011, it is proposed that £7 billion per year is available to the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) for providers and sixth forms. One of the key targets will be the raising of the participation age for training and education to 18 by 2013. £4 billion per year will be directed through the [Skills Funding Agency](#), to provide training and skills for adults.

The [Young People's Learning Agency](#) (YPLA) commissions education and training for 16 to 19 year olds, and will ensure regions get appropriate funding.

For self-assessment and improvement planning, these changes mean:

- Ofsted will still be responsible for inspection
- Ofsted published the new [Inspection Handbook](#) guidance in July 2009 with an update in January and September 2010 (make sure you have the right version – the Ofsted link still states '2009', but takes you to the September 2010 edition!). There is significant emphasis on continuous evaluation so that you are ready for inspection at any time, and so that self-assessment becomes part of your culture
- if robust self-assessment is part of your culture, and your improvement plan is effective, your capacity to improve will be clearly evidenced
- targets, such as learner outcomes, will be agreed with or set by different bodies and agencies
- it is important to self-assess and plan for the improvement of all provision, however it is funded. Many providers already include all their work in their self-assessment report; for example, they include work which is commercial and not government funded.

ACTION

Keep up-to-date with changes in responsibility for funding and quality assurance.

LINKS

[Skills Funding Agency](#)

[Young People's Learning Agency](#)

[Inspection Handbook](#)

14. Policies and frameworks updates – what they mean for self-assessment and improvement planning

14. 1 Every child matters/vulnerable adults

You can find guidance on safeguarding and examples of what Ofsted considers best practice here on [Safeguarding](#). There is also a health check here so that you can self-assess your own provision and improve practice. NIACE has guidance on developing a framework for safeguarding here: [Safer practice, safer learning](#).

14. 2 Employer responsiveness

You need to evaluate your responsiveness to employers, covering aspects appropriate to your mission and provision. You might find it useful to consider the indicators in the Training Quality Standard which can be found on the TQS site: [Training Quality Standard](#).

14.3 Learner responsiveness

You need to consider the learner journey and how responsive you are to the needs of learners (including those with additional needs) at every stage of the journey. You can read about the impact of learner involvement strategy in this evaluation from the LSC: [Evaluation of the impact of learner involvement strategy](#).

14. 4 Qualification reform and credit success rates

All vocational qualifications in the UK are to be within the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) by 2010. You can read more about the QCF here: [Information on the QCF](#). There are [animations](#) which you can use to introduce the QCF to learners, employers and staff.

LINKS

[Safeguarding](#)

[Safer practice, safer learning](#)

[Training Quality Standard](#)

[Evaluation of the impact of learner involvement strategy](#)

[Information on the QCF](#)

14. 5 Equality and diversity

Evaluating equality and diversity is essential, at both senior strategic and operational level. Teams and departments should self-assess their contribution to promoting diversity and to ensuring equality of opportunity. There is a useful toolkit for gender equality here: [gender equality a toolkit for education staff](#).

ACTION

Review the Good Practice Database on [Equality of opportunity](#) which provides examples of good practice in equal opportunities including community cohesion, complaints, monitoring, policies and procedures.

You can also find a range of useful links and documents on the LSIS diversity and equality pages; see [Diversity and Equality](#).

14. 6 Social and community cohesion

Ofsted will inspect how effectively you promote equality, diversity and social inclusion. LSIS has published [twelve case studies](#) of effective practice which cover a range of provision.

You should focus on:

- recognising the rising importance of locality leadership for many providers in the FE and skills system, where you are key players in the delivery of local priorities expressed in local and multi area agreements; this will require you to relate your outcomes to the priorities of local areas
- ensuring that you meet the needs of all learners through effective promotion of equality, diversity and social inclusion
- focusing on the progress made by different groups of learners, and using data to analyse where you have strengths and where you can improve.

LINKS

[Gender equality a toolkit for education staff](#)

[Equality of opportunity](#)

[Diversity and Equality](#)

[Twelve case studies](#)

14. 7 Health and safety

The LSC produced a guide to self-assessment and health and safety in May 2009: [LSC H&S guidance](#).

ACTION

The [LSC standards for health and safety \(2006\)](#) is a set of core standards required for learners in employment or on placements and is easily turned into a checklist to use when you self-assess. The LSC produced further guidance on [self-assessing health and safety](#).

14.8 Health and well-being of learners

LSIS has [web pages](#) which keep you up-to-date.

14.9 Safeguarding

Guidance on safeguarding policies is available here: [Independent Safeguard Authority - Home](#). Ofsted has FAQs on Safeguarding: [Learning and skills providers \(education and training beyond age 16\) / Safeguarding / FAQs / About us / Ofsted home / Ofsted - Ofsted](#).

ACTION

Check your safeguarding policies and practice against the guidance and keep up-to-date with the Independent Safeguarding Authority.

15. How to stay in touch and get alerts

LSIS will use the LSIS monthly e-newsletter to alert you about the implications of policy for self-assessment and improvement planning, see [Registration for LSIS newsletters](#).

LINKS

[LSC H&S guidance](#)

[LSC Standards for health and safety \(2006\)](#)

[Self-assessing health and safety](#)

[Web pages](#)

[Independent Safeguard Authority - Home](#)

[Learning and skills providers \(education and training beyond age 16\) / Safeguarding / FAQs / About us / Ofsted home / Ofsted - Ofsted](#)

[Registration for LSIS newsletters](#)

16. Appendix 1: Tools, checklists and case studies

The following links will help providers strengthen their self-assessment processes and improve key elements.

16. 1 Generic guidance on self-assessment

EXAMPLE TOOLKITS

[LSC: Self-assessment: updated guidance for the further education system, September 2008](#)

This publication identifies key principles and processes that should inform self-assessment. It also links to case studies as examples of how some providers are seeking to develop their approach to self-assessment in response to policy and regulatory changes.

[LSC: Quality improvement and self-assessment, May 2005](#)

Generic guidance intended for all providers with a particular focus on both self-assessment and quality improvement planning. Highlights features of effective self-assessment and is a useful starting point for those new to self-assessment and improvement planning.

[Ofsted: Learner centred self-assessment, date not given](#)

Ofsted guidance intended to help providers move beyond 'satisfactory' performance and build better practice. The focus is on evaluating current practice and managing the self-assessment process to bring about improvement.

[Welsh Assembly: Quality Handbook 2007](#)

Useful for providers who deliver in Wales and for those wishing to compare the guidance for England with that provided in Wales.

LINKS

[LSC: Self-assessment: updated guidance for the further education system, September 2008](#)

[LSC: Quality improvement and self-assessment, May 2005](#)

[Ofsted: Learner centred self-assessment, date not given](#)

[Welsh Assembly: Quality Handbook 2007](#)

Excellence Gateway: Ofsted, case studies on self-assessment: good practice examples	<p>Focus on effective self-assessment processes and has some suggested formats for self-assessment reports and improvement plans. Has useful guidance on how to write evaluative statements.</p>
	<p>The case studies cover a range of work based learning providers and adult and community learning services. The case studies contain useful information on how individual providers manage their self-assessment processes to ensure quality improvement.</p>

LINKS

[Excellence Gateway: Ofsted, case studies on self-assessment: good practice examples](#)

[LSC: Employer engagement toolkit, 2005](#)

[World class skills, developing responsive provision, 2008](#)

[Ofsted: Good practice database](#)

16.2 Specific aspects of self-assessment

<p>EXAMPLE TOOLKITS</p>	
<p>Employer Engagement</p>	<p>Although aimed at FE colleges, the toolkit provides a comprehensive series of self-assessment checklists covering all aspects of employer engagement. The checklists help providers assess their current activity and plan for improvement.</p>
<p>LSC: Employer engagement toolkit, 2005</p>	
<p>World class skills, developing responsive provision, 2008</p>	<p>Aimed at 14-19 Diploma consortia, but applicable to all providers. Provides a diagnostic tool for all aspects of employer engagement and allows providers to self-assess and plan for improvement.</p>
<p>Equal opportunities</p>	<p>Provides guidance on good practice in equal opportunities including</p>
<p>Ofsted: Good practice</p>	

database	community cohesion, complaints, monitoring and policies and procedures. Each section outlines provider strengths and weaknesses and includes a self-assessment checklist and suggestions for improvement.
LSC: Race equality in employment standard, October 2006	This publication offers a simple coherent framework for embedding race equality into employment and Human Resources across an organisation. It sets out clear performance indicators to support both audit and self-assessment.
Every child matters	Developed by Nelson and Colne College, but available to all providers. The toolkit can be downloaded via a link in this case study publication.
Excellence Gateway: A self-assessment toolkit for Every Child Matters	
Financial management/governance	Has useful guidance on how this area impacts of self-assessment grades for Leadership and Management.
LSC, Guidance for colleges on the self-assessment of their finance management and governance framework, 2006	
Health and safety	Sets core standards required for learners in employment or on placements. Easy to turn into a checklist to self-assess against.
LSC: Standards for health and safety, 2006	
Individual learner record/data analysis	Guidance to help providers assess their current actions and identify ways to

LINKS

[LSC: Race equality in employment standard, October 2006](#)

[Excellence Gateway: A self-assessment toolkit for Every Child Matters](#)

[LSC, Guidance for colleges on the self-assessment of their finance management and governance framework, 2006](#)

[LSC: Standards for health and safety, 2006](#)

[BIS: Prior attainment and individualised learner record \(ILR\), good practice guide](#)

BIS: Prior attainment and individualised learner record (ILR), good practice guide	<p>improve their data. The publication includes case studies of best practice.</p>
<p>Literacy, numeracy and ESOL Work-based learning</p>	<p>This website offers guidance on both self-assessment and preparing for inspection. There are links to the framework for self-assessing Skills for Life and work-based learning.</p>
<p>Skills for life Skills for life</p>	

LINKS

[Work-based learning](#)

[Skills for life](#)

17. Appendix 2: International comparisons - some key messages from other countries' systems

Self-assessment is not unique to the UK and has the following characteristics which are common to self-assessment systems in both Europe and Australasia:

- a focus on the quality of existing provision and how to improve it
- meeting national objectives and government targets
- meeting the needs of the labour market
- meeting the needs of employers and learners.

International comparisons indicate that there are there are two distinct 'models' of self-assessment that have developed outside the UK:

- a centralised model used in countries like Australia and Ireland
- a decentralised model used in countries like Sweden and Finland.

17. 1 Features of the Australian centralised model

The Australian Government sets key performance measures for states and territories. States and territories then set their key aims, objectives and targets that providers have to self-assess and report against on an annual basis. The targets are not numerical.

All registered training organisations in Australia (public and private) have to achieve the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) standard and the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) before they are allowed to deliver provision. Training providers audit themselves against the standards. Providers also carry out regular surveys of employers and learners in order to improve provision.

The following link will take you to the training standards:
[National Training System](#).

17.2 Features of Ireland's centralised model

Further education and training in Ireland is regulated by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) which monitors and assures the quality of programmes and determines standards. Providers have to have their [quality assurance systems](#) approved by FETAC (including self-assessment) although FETAC does provide pro-formas to support the self-assessment process; see [Self-evaluation of programmes and services](#).

17.3 Features of decentralised models in Sweden and Finland

Although both countries have national objectives for education and training, there is more focus on providers self-evaluating their own provision and its effectiveness. This means providers have to make strong links between their provision and the labour market. The chief focus of a decentralised model is full and rigorous consultation with local employers and other stakeholders.

In Finland providers are expected to pay for an external evaluation of their individual self-assessment processes and apply for an external quality award if they so wish. The Finnish government also undertakes a national evaluation of learning outcomes and an impact evaluation of major education and training initiatives.

LINKS

[National Training System](#)

[Quality assurance systems](#)

[Self-evaluation of programmes and services](#)

For more information on comparisons between all the above countries please go to: [International comparisons in further education](#).

18. Appendix 3: Commonly Used Improvement Standards Mapped to the Common Inspection Framework

[Mapping standards linked to the CIF](#)

LINKS

[International comparisons in further education](#)

[Mapping standards linked to the CIF](#)

19. Appendix 4: list of useful web addresses

WEB SITE	WEB ADDRESS
A user guide to self-assessment and improvement planning	www.excellencegateway.co.uk/self-assessment-guide
Balancing strengths and weaknesses	
BIS: skills for life	http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/readwriteplus/raisingstandards/fec2/fecollegecontext/shouldinclude
Castle College, Nottingham - Case Study	http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/pdf/24839%20Castle%20SA%20bd3.pdf
Checklist for the introduction to the SAR	
Chesterfield College - approaches to self-assessment	http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/pdf/24839%20Chesterfield%20bd3.pdf
Developing a Learner Involvement Strategy (February 2007)	http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/tutors/documents/nat-developingalearnerinvolvementstrategy-pu-feb2007.pdf
Developing partnership agreements	http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=207683
Developing partnership skills	http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=207686

BIS: Further Education	http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100202101002/http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/furthereducation/
BIS: Prior Attainment and Individualised Learner Record (ILR), Good Practice Guide	http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/further-education-skills/guidance/prior-attainment
Encouraging participation in self-assessment and improvement planning	
Equality of opportunity	http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=E0F00FA7-1751-4740-83D5-2ED78134BF34
Evaluation of the Impact of Learner Involvement Strategy	http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/national_year_two_final_report-june2009-v1-1.pdf
Evaluative words	
Excellence Gateway: Ofsted, case studies on self-assessment: good practice examples	http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/GPD/gpe_browse.aspx?topic=2697
External standards and approaches	
Framework for Excellence	http://ffe.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/
Gender equality a toolkit for education staff	http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/196713/0052704.pdf

GENERATOR Technology Improvement Leadership Tool	http://www.generatorfeandskills.com/
Good practice in using data	
Governance Self-Assessment Checklist	
Ground rules for partnerships	http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=207701
Independent Safeguard Authority	http://www.isa.gov.org.uk/
International Comparisons in Further Education	http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/RRP/u014603/index.shtml
Introducing the QCF	http://www.qcda.gov.uk/qualifications/60.aspx
Key considerations in equality and diversity	
Leadership and Management checklist	
LG - Smarter Partnerships	http://www.lgpartnerships.com/default.asp
LSC H&S Guidance	http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=207708
LSC Standards for Health and Safety (2006)	http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/2006/quality/goodpractice/nat-standardsforhealthandsafety-re-feb2006.pdf

LSC User Gateway <https://gateway.lsc.gov.uk/UMA/Logon.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2fprovidergateway%2fsecured%2fdefault.aspx>

LSC, Guidance for Colleges on the Self-Assessment of their Finance Management and Governance Framework, 2006 <http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/guidanceforcolleges.pdf>

LSC: Employer engagement toolkit, 2005 <http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/YorkshireandtheHumber/yhrempengtktjan06.pdf>

LSC: Quality improvement and self-assessment, May 2005 <http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/2005/quality/goodpractice/quality-improvement-self-assessment.pdf>

LSC: Race equality in employment standard, October 2006 http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/Race_Equality_in_Employment.pdf

LSC: Self-assessment: Updated Guidance for the Further Education System, September 2008 <http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/nat-selfassessmentguidancefeoct08.pdf>

LSC: Standards for Health and Safety, 2006 <http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/2006/quality/goodpractice/nat-standardsforhealthandsafety-re-feb2006.pdf>

LSC's Self Assessment of health, safety and welfare guidance <http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=207708>

Managing risk in self-assessment and improvement planning

Mapping Standards linked to the CIF

National Training System

http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training_skills/policy_issues_reviews/key_issues/nts/aqtf

Ofsted: Beyond satisfactory

<http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=167426>

Ofsted Consultation 'A focus on improvement; proposals for further education and skills inspections from September 2009'

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Documents-by-type/Consultations/A-focus-on-improvement-proposals-for-further-education-and-skills-system-inspections-from-September-2009>

Ofsted: Good practice database

<http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=E0F00FA7-1751-4740-83D5-2ED78134BF34>

Ofsted: Good practice database - involving staff in self-assessment

<http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=167940>

Ofsted: Good practice database: good partnership working - working links

<http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=157360>

Ofsted: How colleges improve

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/News/Press-and-media/2008/September/Good-Better-Best-Ofsted-reports-how-colleges-can-improve-and-why-some-don-t>

Ofsted inspects	http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Forms-and-guidance/Browse-all-by/Other/General/Ofsted-inspects
Ofsted inspects (March 2009)	http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Forms-and-guidance/Browse-all-by/Other/General/Ofsted-inspects
Ofsted: Learner centred self-assessment, date not given	http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=5B15F99E-74B4-41FD-8305-47B5BF95034A
Ofsted: Proposals	http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/News/Press-and-media/2008/November/Proposals-would-focus-inspections-where-they-have-the-greatest-impact-says-Ofsted-consultation
Ofsted: Safeguarding	http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=167931
Ofsted: Safeguarding FAQs	http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/About-us/FAQs/Safeguarding/Learning-and-skills-providers-education-and-training-beyond-age-16
Partner responsibilities in strategic partnerships	http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=207723
Partnership responsibilities tool	http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=207727

Professional standards for teachers, tutors and trainers in the lifelong learning sectors	http://www.lluk.org/documents/professional_standards_for_itts_020107.pdf
QCA information on the QCF	http://www.qcda.gov.uk/qualifications/60.aspx
Quality Assurance in Further Education and Training	http://www.fetac.ie/fetac/aboutfetac/policies/qa_registration.htm
Quality cycle tool	
Quality cycle tool (blank)	
Quality improvement of subcontractors	http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=291DA2E7-05B7-4C6F-B453-130A3D8DF540
Reviewing organisational self-assessment systems checklist	
Safer Practice, Safer Learning	http://shop.niace.org.uk/safer-practice.html
Sample status report tool	
Self assessment calendar of activity	http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/pdf/Eastleigh%20Self%20Assessment%20Case%20Study%20-%20Appendix%20A.pdf
Self assessment cycle - Rutland LEA	http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=BC6063AB-0DD4-43F9-94D2-5CB5D3B2A49D

Self-assessment and improvement planning – a continuous process

Self-assessment and the Framework for Excellence

Self-assessment for support staff

Self-assessment process and reporting

<http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=EE3B1097-ED4A-4B7C-9C9D-4EC0533C72CE>

Self-assessment toolkit for Every Child Matters

<http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%20Nelson%20%20Colne%20College%20Final%2020071220.pdf>

Self-Evaluation of Programmes and Services

<http://www.fetac.ie/fetac/providers/tools/selfevaluation/faq.htm>

Sources of evidence

Subject sector area tool

The PRD Cycle

<http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=207733>

Toolkit for 14-19 partnerships

<http://www.lsc.gov.uk/LSCGOVUK/Scripts/PublicationDownload.aspx?id=582b3a90-bd98-4770-8d5e-9bd7f9cc8e34>

Training Quality Standard	http://www.trainingqualitystandard.co.uk
Twelve case studies of effective practice in community cohesion	http://excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=161441
Understanding a whole organisation approach	http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/pdf/2-1-2-Understanding-a-whole-organisation-approach-to-PRD-V1.pdf
Welsh Assembly: Quality Handbook 2007	http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=207736
Work-based learning	http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100315121400/http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/readwriteplus/raisingstandards/
World Class Skills, Developing responsive provision, 2008	http://wcs.excellencegateway.org.uk/webfm_send/226
Young People's Learning Agency Blueprint	http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/documents/YPLA%20Blueprint.pdf