

Arrangements for the external review of Modern Apprenticeships

February, 2023

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1 Background

1.1 Introduction

Education Scotland HM Inspectors of Education (HMIE) have developed the following arrangements for assuring and enhancing the quality of Modern Apprenticeship (MA) provision in Scotland.

An enthusiastic and trained workforce underpins Scotland's ambition for economic success and work-based learning is important to delivering this. MAs are designed to support this goal by providing individuals with the opportunity to secure industry-recognised qualifications whilst in employment. Every apprentice should receive training to match their personal requirements and their employer's business needs.

1.2 Context

The previous cycle of external review of MA provision was completed in 2020. A [summary](#) of inspection findings 2015-2020 was published in October 2020. The report highlighted a number of strengths and aspects for improvement in MA delivery. The Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on work-based learning providers and apprenticeship numbers. Given the increase in apprenticeship activity in 2022, and the planned further increase in the coming years, it is now time to resume external evaluation of MA provision.

These arrangements for external evaluation are predicated on the requirement that MA providers continuously improve the quality of their provision through a cycle of self-evaluation and enhancement planning. Providers should engage with staff, apprentices and employers to ensure that they are contributing meaningfully and productively to the continuous improvement of MA provision.

2 External review methodology

2.1 Aims and objectives of external review

In line with the [principles of inspection and review](#) and building on previous MA quality arrangements, HM Inspectors will work with providers and key stakeholders to:

- provide assurance to Scottish Ministers, the public and other stakeholders of the quality of MA provision;
- support providers in using effective quality improvement and enhancement approaches to deliver the highest quality of provision and improve outcomes for apprentices;
- draw on the impact of each provider's own quality assurance and enhancement approaches to evidence improvement;
- involve Associate Assessors (AAs) as peers in contributing to external review;
- apply productive engagement approaches that are responsive to the needs of apprentices, staff and key stakeholders;
- minimise requirements for providers to produce additional documentation;
- take account of the views of apprentices, staff, and key stakeholders to assess performance;
- apply proportionate and differentiated approaches to allocate time and resources to where they are most needed;
- provide constructive and appropriately detailed feedback;
- promote capacity building within and between institutions and their key stakeholders, and
- complement internal review, self-assessment procedures, and any Skills Development Scotland (SDS) contract monitoring arrangements.

In realising the above aims, external reviews of MA provision will sample breadth and depth of provision that is proportionate to the scale and scope of delivery across Scotland.

2.2 Key features of external review

The scope of MA external reviews will be determined by intelligence gathered through evaluative activities and liaison with key agencies, such as SDS.

External reviews will consist of a programme of core activities including:

- review of key documentation and performance data;
- the observation of training activities;
- professional dialogue with provider managers and staff, and
- professional dialogue with employers and apprentices.

Outcomes of external reviews will include aspects of positive practice and areas for development. Grades will be agreed for each of the following three elements:

- Leadership and Quality Culture.
- Service Delivery.
- Safeguarding and meeting the needs of apprentices.

At the end of each review, the team will provide verbal feedback to the provider. A written report summarising the review outcomes will be published within six weeks of the completion of the review. The report will also be shared with Scottish Government ministers and SDS.

2.3 Sampling of MA providers

The annual programme of MA review will sample providers including Independent Training Providers (ITPs), Scottish colleges, industry employers and Local Authorities (LAs).

The criteria for selecting the sample will include:

- Those organisations which have not been involved in MA reviews in recent years.
- An appropriate distribution of providers in line with volume of MA provision.
- Organisations from locations across Scotland.
- Provider performance and use of data, including key performance indicators and quality assurance reports.
- Providers offering MAs in key employment sectors.
- An appropriate volume by subject area.

HM Inspectors leading the MA review will use the above criteria to achieve an appropriate and proportionate sample in any given annual programme of reviews.

3. The external review framework

3.1 The quality framework

The quality framework for external evaluation of MA provision has three elements and 24 quality indicators. For the purpose of this review, HMIE will use the six core QIs, arranged using under the elements. Details of the can be found in [Annex 1](#).

3.2 Quality indicators for external review of MAs

HM Inspectors will use six core quality indicators as follows:

Element 1: Leadership and Quality Culture

- 9.5 How well do leaders secure improvement of quality and impact of training?

Element 2: Service Delivery and quality of training

- 5.4 How well is training delivered?
- 5.5 How well do staff reflect on provision to improve training?

Element 3: Safeguarding and meeting the needs of apprentices

- 1.1 How well are training providers achieving and maintaining high levels of service delivery?
- 1.2 How well do providers adhere to statutory principles and guidance?
- 2.1 How well do apprentices make progress and achieve individual outcomes?

These indicators will be used by external review teams to inform their professional judgements regarding the quality of apprenticeship delivery and for the grades awarded for the three elements of the quality framework.

3.3 Using core quality indicators and sources of evidence

The gathering of evidence on which to base evaluations will be carefully planned using sampling and cross-referencing of all evidence sources. The key sources of evidence during external review are professional dialogue, observation of practice, data and evidence provided by SDS, and the views of stakeholders such as apprentices themselves and their employers, and training providers.

All reviewers will be appropriately trained in gathering evidence and using the quality indicators to arrive at evaluations.

4. The external review process

4.1 The role of the Lead Inspector

MA reviews will be planned and organised by a lead inspector (LI) who will organise all aspects of the review process in conjunction with the MA provider. The LI will notify the provider of the proposed review date six weeks prior to the review commencing.

HM Inspectors will brief the provider about the external review process in advance and confirm the scope of the review, based on available intelligence and engagement with SDS. The LI will be responsible for planning and organising the review. This will be completed in conjunction with a named co-ordinator from the provider.

4.2 Review planning

Reviews will typically last 1 to 2 days. However, the duration of each review may be adjusted based on the scale and scope of training activities delivered by the provider.

The LI will ensure that reviews are planned at a time suitable to the business and operational needs of providers. In some cases, the training environment might require reviews to be spread over a longer period than others. This flexibility is required to ensure the review team can evaluate training activities by engaging with trainers, employers and apprentices.

Before the review, the LI will liaise with the review co-ordinator from the provider to discuss the scope of the review. Each provider will be invited to submit any relevant and current information to the review team in advance. The LI will then plan an appropriate programme of activities for each review.

4.3 Composition and deployment of review teams

Review teams will comprise a minimum of three team members. Team size may be adjusted for larger providers. Teams will include HM Inspectors and Associate Assessors (AA). AAs will be selected from colleges, ITPs and employers involved in the provision of apprenticeship training.

4.4 Expressing the outcomes of external review

HM Inspectors will express the overall outcomes of external review using a six-point grading scale.

These are:

- Excellent - Outstanding and sector leading;
- Very good - Major strengths;
- Good - Important strengths with some areas for improvement;
- Satisfactory - Strengths outweigh weaknesses;
- Weak - Important weaknesses; and

- Unsatisfactory - Major weaknesses.

Where a provider receives a grade of *Unsatisfactory* in one of the three elements, the review team will require to undertake a follow-up review within an agreed timeframe to review progress made in addressing aspects for improvement from the original review.

An exemplification for each of the grades can be found in Annex 2.

4.5 After the review

On completion of the review, the LI will produce a written report summarising the review findings and outcomes within an agreed timeframe. The report will contain the grades awarded for each of the three elements and areas of positive practice and areas for development and may include details of any main points for action and required next steps, including the possibility of a return visit by HM Inspectors if required.

The report will be issued to the provider, shared with Scottish Government and SDS, and will be published on the Education Scotland website.

Following publication of the report, all providers are required to address any areas for development or main points for action. For colleges delivering MA programmes, the college link HM Inspector will review progress made by the college during planned Annual Engagement or Progress Reviews.

For ITPs and employers, SDS will incorporate the outcomes from the review into their quarterly meetings with providers.

6 Conduct of review teams

All discussions during external review should focus on the best interests of apprentices and promote an open and honest exchange built on mutual respect and equity of status. The principles of engagement are outlined in the [PRAISE](#) framework.

Participants should understand clearly the purpose of meetings and the intended outcomes from the discussions.

During meetings, all participants should be encouraged to contribute their views. Requests for participants to provide documents to support evidence should only be by exception, as additional documentation must be kept to a minimum.

7 Concerns

If a provider believes that the review team has arrived at a judgment or a grade without considering of all of the relevant information or evidence, they should submit any additional evidence in writing to the LI within two working days of the verbal feedback. This material must consist of evidence which is new in nature and is not a further submission of evidence of the type already considered by the team. HM Inspectors will consider additional, new evidence and convey the decision to the delivery provider in writing, after full consideration by the review team.

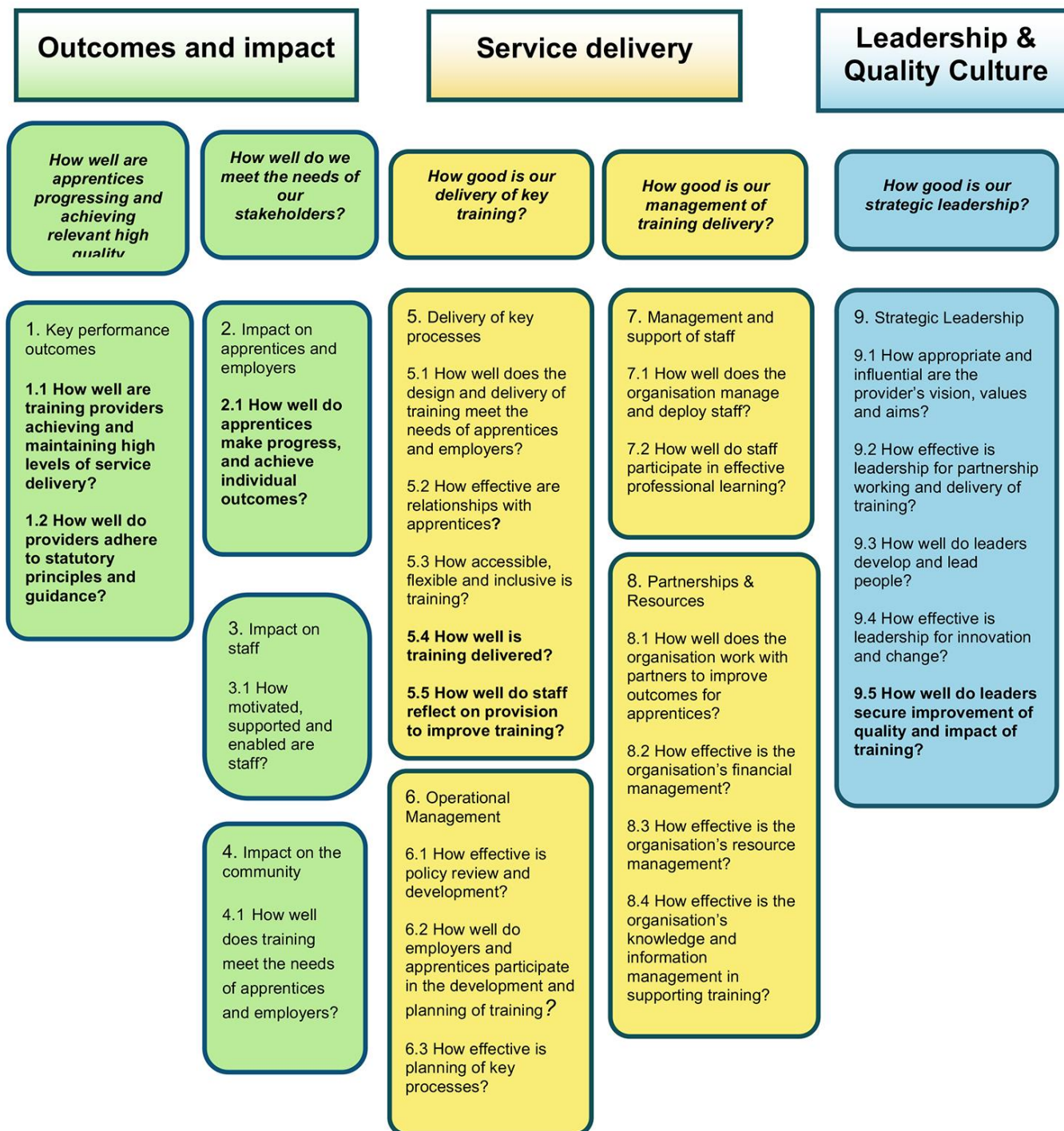
Any other concerns should be raised in the first instance with the LI by the provider during the course of the review visit. If the matter is not resolved to the satisfaction of the senior managers involved, it should be raised with the Head of Scrutiny responsible for the external review programme, who will seek to resolve the issue.

8 Complaints

If concerns are not satisfactorily resolved through the processes outlined above, the provider should pursue the matter through Education Scotland's published [complaints procedure](#).

Appendix 1: The quality framework

Core QIs are highlighted in bold.



The Quality Indicators:

Indicative themes for the external review of modern apprenticeship training

Element 1: Leadership & quality culture

This element is concerned with the provider's progress in achieving key aims, objectives and targets and the extent to which action taken leads to improvement and the raising of the standard of training delivery. It considers progress against targets and performance indicators, particularly against identifiable trends. It also evaluates how well the provider has responded to legislation and national directives.

Quality Indicators (Core)	Themes
9.5 How well do leaders secure improvement of quality and impact of training?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Involvement of apprentices, employers and delivery staff in enhancing experiences and outcomes.• Impact of self-evaluation and action planning for improvement.• Improvement and enhancement in programmes, including key outcomes and impact on delivery, users, staff and the community.

Element 2: Service delivery and quality of training

This element is concerned with the delivery of apprenticeship programmes. It evaluates how well provision meets the needs of all current and potential apprentices. It explores the effectiveness of arrangements to provide accessible, flexible and inclusive provision and considers how well provision is delivered. It evaluates how well staff reflect on the delivery of programmes to inform improvement.

Quality Indicators (Core)	Themes
5.4 How well is training delivered?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Planning and preparation of high-quality delivery and use of resources.• Application of professional knowledge and skills to deliver high-quality training sessions.• Promotion of independence and confidence and the development of skills.• Links between training, employers and sectoral needs.• Quality of relationships between staff and apprentices and employers.• Apprentice and employer feedback and satisfaction with programme.
5.5 How well do staff reflect on provision to improve training?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Arrangements for quality assurance and improvement.• Reflective practice leading to improvement and enhancement of training.• Employer and apprentice participation in the design of the programme.• Sharing and adoption of effective practice.• Effectiveness of action taken.

Element 3: Safeguarding and meeting the needs of apprentices

This element is concerned with the provider’s progress in achieving key aims, objectives and targets and the extent to which action taken leads to improvement. It considers progress against targets and performance indicators, particularly against identifiable trends. It also evaluates how well the provider has responded to legislation and national directives.

Quality Indicators (Core)	Themes
<p>1.1 How effective are training providers at achieving and maintaining high levels of service delivery?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievement of aims, objectives, targets and key performance indicators. • Progress on key aims and objectives. • Delivery of high-quality training activities. • Performance data and measures showing success rates on programmes. • Apprentice progress on working towards achieving individual goals.
<p>1.2 How well do providers adhere to statutory principles and guidance?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant legislation, directives and regulations. • Requirements of statutory and regulatory bodies. • Equalities, Safeguarding and Wellbeing policies and processes.
<p>2.1 How well do apprentices make progress and achieve individual outcomes?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility and flexibility of programmes. • Achievement of aims, objectives, targets and key performance indicators. • Relevance and range of programmes to apprentice and employer needs and goals. • Apprentice achievement of meta and essential skills. • Progression to employment or further learning. • Value added to employers and society.

Appendix 2: Grades used in reporting

Grades will be awarded for the three high level elements questions.

A common grading six point scale will be used:

Excellent	Outstanding and sector leading
Very Good	Major strengths
Good	Important strengths with some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	Strengths just outweigh weaknesses
Weak	Important weaknesses
Unsatisfactory	Major weaknesses

- An evaluation of **excellent** applies to training which is of a very high quality. An evaluation of *excellent* represents an outstanding standard of training which exemplifies very best practice and is worth disseminating beyond the current provision. It implies that very high-levels of performance are sustainable and will be maintained.
- An evaluation of **very good** applies to training characterised by major strengths. There are very few areas for improvement and any that do exist do not significantly diminish apprentices' experiences. While an evaluation of *very good* represents a high standard of training, it is a standard that should be achievable by all. It implies that it is fully appropriate to continue to provide training without significant adjustment. However, there is an expectation that the provider will take opportunities to improve and strive to raise performance to excellent.
- An evaluation of **good** applies to training characterised by important strengths which, taken together, clearly outweigh any areas for improvement. An evaluation of *good* represents a standard of training in which the strengths have a significant positive impact. However, the quality of apprentices' experiences is diminished in some way by aspects in which improvement is required. It implies that the provider should seek to improve further the areas of important strength but take action to address the areas for improvement.
- An evaluation of **satisfactory** applies to training characterised by strengths which just outweigh weaknesses. An evaluation of *satisfactory* indicates that apprentices' have access to a basic level of training. It represents a standard where the strengths have a positive impact on apprentices' experiences. However, while the weaknesses will not be important enough to have a substantially adverse impact, they do constrain the overall quality of apprentices' experiences. It implies that the provider should take action to address areas of weakness while building on its strengths.
- An evaluation of **weak** applies to training which has some strengths, but where there are important weaknesses. In general, an evaluation of *weak* may be arrived at in a number of circumstances. While there may be some strengths, the important weaknesses will, either individually or collectively, be sufficient to diminish apprentices' experiences in substantial ways. It implies the need for prompt, structured and planned action on the part of the provider.
- An evaluation of **unsatisfactory** applies when there are major weaknesses in training, requiring immediate remedial action. The training experience for apprentices is at risk in significant respects. In almost all cases, staff responsible for training evaluated as unsatisfactory will require support from senior managers in planning and carrying out the

necessary actions to effect improvement. This may involve working alongside other staff or agencies in or beyond the immediate support given by the provider.

Appendix 4: The PRAISE framework

The following principles have been identified as underpinning best practice:

Purpose – being clear about the overall purpose of the engagement with an establishment and retaining this throughout. Creating a shared agenda with staff in the establishment and amongst other Education Scotland colleagues who may be involved in initial or ongoing engagement.

Relationships – building and maintaining constructive relationships throughout the process as the basis of a high-quality engagement, providing support and challenge.

Awareness – maintaining a high level of awareness of the context in which staff are operating, of their feelings and reactions to the engagement process and of Education Scotland staff's own approach and its impact.

Information gathering – careful inquiry to gather and understand information. Retaining an objective stance, testing assumptions and assimilating data before identifying what is working well, and where support would be beneficial.

Sharing information – communicating thoroughly throughout the engagement process to prepare and inform staff. Encouraging staff to be open in providing their perspective and providing appropriate feedback as the engagement process progresses.

Enabling – treating people with respect, engaging them in professional dialogue, recognising their efforts and providing conclusions in a constructive way to encourage ownership and learning to take place.

Purpose – being clear about the overall purpose of the engagement and retaining this throughout. Creating a shared agenda with staff in an establishment and amongst other Education Scotland colleagues who may be involved in initial or ongoing engagement.

What works well?

Before the engagement activity

- be prepared well in advance;
- ensure you know as much as possible about the establishment's context and bear this in mind throughout the conversation;
- have an open mind to others' ideas and perspectives; and
- create a shared understanding of purpose of the engagement.

During the engagement activity

- build a shared agenda – establish common ground and a commitment to working together;
- refer back to purpose of the engagement activity to confirm type and range of information required;
- retain focus on priorities in managing own and others' time;
- use a coaching approach to the discussion to enable the participants to fully explain their thinking and support them to self-identify and overcome obstacles;

- focus on quality of recovery planning; and aim to support improvements, minimising negative impact to those involved;
- manage staff/stakeholder expectations of the process; and
- demonstrate that the discussion has your full attention.

End of the engagement activity

- keep in mind the desired outcomes – use to inform **how** to deliver conclusions from the engagement;
- offer suggestions from effective practice perspective; and
- agree a timeline for further contact if required.

Relationships – building and maintaining constructive relationships throughout the process as the basis of a high-quality engagement, providing support and challenge.

What works well?

Before the engagement activity

- make a friendly first contact early, to set a positive tone and good first impression;
- be accessible to respond to queries in a timely manner; and
- provide information to explain and reassure the supportive nature of the meeting.

During the engagement activity

- aim to develop an equal relationship to reduce the barrier your job role can create;
- establish an appropriate tone;
- treat others with respect;
- demonstrate empathy with their experience;
- retain a good-humoured manner;
- model an open communication style;
- provide reassurance to staff about the integrity of the process to maximise value and accuracy of conclusions; and
- choose an appropriate time and manner of sharing tricky messages.

End of the engagement activity

- use humour carefully – or not at all;
- be mindful of style and tone of delivery;
- allow the person to hear and accept the messages;
- seek acknowledgement of the message, adjusting pace;
- acknowledge emotional response in others - e.g. long silence, allow space, then move on;
- monitor response to the sharing of messages; and
- agree a timeline for further contact if required.

Awareness – maintaining a high level of awareness of the context in which staff are operating, of their feelings and reactions to the engagement process and of Education Scotland staff's own approach and its impact.

What works well?

Before the engagement activity

- recognise the context and previous experience of the establishment to anticipate concerns or difficulties;
- ensure that unnecessary disruption is not created in planning contact and activity;
- contextualise the briefing for staff – make it personal;
- seek to understand any issues that might be affecting staff morale or ability; and
- seek to understand any issues which may be affecting a learning situation - e.g. behavioural difficulties/turnover of staff.

During the engagement activity

- recognise pressures staff may be under in manner and timing of contacts in addition to those related to the engagement activity;
- retain awareness of own style and its impact on others;
- maintain calm and controlled demeanour;
- recognise your own reactions and respect other people's; and
- if in doubt, stop and ask – phone a colleague to talk things through.

End of the engagement activity

- set up arrangements to create an appropriate atmosphere where possible;
- help the listeners get beyond taking conclusions personally;
- ensure efforts to improve are suitably acknowledged;
- focus on own contribution to ensuring conclusions are received constructively; and
- take confidence from thoroughness of own work, evidence and organisation behind you.

Information gathering – careful inquiry to gather and understand information. Retaining an objective stance, testing assumptions and assimilating data before identifying what is working well, and where support would be beneficial.

What works well?

Before the engagement activity

- use ongoing engagement guidelines – plan the order and structure; and
- prioritise and decide what matters, without trying to cover everything at once.

During the engagement activity

- ensure fair and thorough coverage of evidence;
- stay open and objective when gathering the facts;
- keep thinking and reflecting;
- seek first to understand, before reaching conclusions;
- start with open questions, follow up to probe further;
- listen carefully and examine information before making decisions about how to act;
- record and gather information which takes account of freedom of information (FOI) and GDPR requirements;
- ensure evidence base for conclusions is sound and will withstand challenge;
- share findings as you go;
- triangulate information, analyse, then synthesise the information gathered;

- allow flexibility in the timetable/schedule of contacts.

End of the engagement activity

- ensure the information for sharing conclusions is accurate and developmental;
- be as constructive as possible;
- ensure conclusions are thorough and balanced;
- ensure coverage is proportionate;
- anticipate a planned, structured challenge from leaders;
- ask for further information for challenge; remain objective; and
- allow scope for adapting the conclusions in the light of further additional information.

Sharing information – communicating thoroughly throughout the engagement process to prepare and inform staff. Encouraging staff to be open in providing their perspective and providing appropriate conclusions as the engagement progresses.

What works well?

Before the engagement activity

- provide helpful, advance information for all involved, especially if a multi-site provision;
- check briefing has been useful and understood; and
- consult with the establishment to identify possible obstacles during process.

During the engagement activity

- create enough time for conversations and professional dialogue;
- reflect, summarise what you have heard; and
- arrange further contacts as necessary to follow up on specific points as they emerge - allow managers to respond.

End of the engagement activity

- explain process of gathering information as well as conclusions;
- clarify the features that informed the conclusions;
- use recorded notes/text during final sharing of conclusions;
- create opportunities for further dialogue and contacts to aid clarity and understanding;
- share conclusions confidently and objectively; and
- in presenting conclusions, provide well-judged examples to help people to understand.

Enabling – treating people with respect, engaging them in professional dialogue, recognising their efforts and providing conclusions in a constructive way to encourage ownership and learning to take place.

What works well?

Before the engagement activity

- aim to make the experience positive for everyone working alongside;
- encourage staff to ask questions;
- set a supportive, encouraging tone; and
- acknowledge the pressures an engagement activity can create and how you can help to minimise these.

During the engagement activity

- demonstrate genuine desire to learn about the uniqueness of the establishment and to help them to improve;
- invite staff and stakeholders to share what they feel proud of and recognise their efforts to improve;
- encourage them to contribute thoughts about what needs to change or develop;
- reassure staff that your expectations are realistic;
- show interest in their intent as well as their action;
- encourage staff to take ownership in providing additional information;
- involve staff in professional dialogue; peer-to-peer;
- nurture discussion – generate a dynamic that fosters thinking, reflection, openness;
- help staff to self-evaluate; and
- share conclusions that are positive, as well as guidance on ways to improve further.

End of the engagement activity

- share structure of the engagement activity guidelines; encourage people to take ownership;
- build on the positives; give credit wherever possible; convey areas for further development constructively;
- share conclusions in a supportive manner;
- recognise good practice and achievement;
- acknowledge commitment and effort;
- when necessary, explain what is needed to achieve the next level;
- use phrases that are positive and forward looking e.g. 'not yet' and/or 'have begun to';
- provide guidance on strategies to move forward;
- share examples of excellence from others; and
- provide conclusions directly to staff, as much as possible.

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