



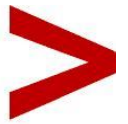
Learning+Skills Council

Evaluating providers' self-assessment reports and development plans:

A report on the current practices of local Learning and Skills Councils

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PREFACE

Over the summer of 2002, the national office of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) commissioned the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) to undertake research into how local LSCs evaluate providers' self-assessment reports and development plans. Local LSCs were invited to offer examples of good practice and twenty-two local LSCs responded in one or more of the following ways: answering a postal questionnaire; sending documentation; participating in interviews. This report presents the research findings.

It was originally intended that the project would lead to the production of a guide to good practice on the part of local LSCs in evaluating self-assessment reports and development plans. These plans were overtaken by events when *Success for All* (DfES 2002) was published in November 2002.

This report, therefore, gives examples of local LSCs' current practices in evaluating providers' self-assessment reports and development plans.

SUMMARY

Background

1. Under arrangements introduced in April 2001, all providers funded by the LSC are required to carry out an annual self-assessment. Providers are also required to agree a development plan with their local LSC which clearly identifies action for improvement, specifies realistic targets for learners' retention, achievement and progression and explains how these targets will be met. Local LSC staff assess the adequacy of providers' self-assessment processes and self-assessment reports and decide any follow-up action to make these more effective. They also agree providers' development plans, ensuring they specify clear action to build on the strengths, rectify the weaknesses and bring about the required improvements identified in providers' self-assessment reports. They also decide what allocations providers will receive from the Standards Fund.
2. Local LSC staff who provided evidence for this project said that their role in carrying out constructive assessment of providers' self-assessment reports and development plans involved them in:
 - making rigorous evaluations
 - ensuring consistency in making judgements
 - working in partnership
 - building capacity
 - producing effective documentation, and
 - monitoring development plans.

These tasks serve as the section headings for this report. Examples of current practice in evaluation were offered by 22 local LSCs in the second-half of 2002.

Current practices in evaluation

3. Local LSCs have adopted a variety of methods for the rigorous evaluation of providers' self-assessment reports and development plans. LSC staff involved with evaluation have included contract managers, and members of quality teams and specialist teams. Several LSCs acknowledged the importance of monitoring the effectiveness of their evaluation processes, but few provided examples of how they did so.
4. Local LSCs have sought ways of ensuring consistency in making judgements on providers' self-assessment reports and development plans. These include:
 - following national guidance on initial assessment of self-assessment reports and development plans
 - setting up moderation panels

- working with colleagues from other local LSCs to standardise procedures.
5. Many local LSCs offered examples of how they are working in partnership with the providers themselves and other organisations, such as JobCentre Plus, Connexions, and the inspectorates, to bring about the continuous improvement of education and training. For example, local LSCs arrange:
 - visits of their staff to providers
 - consultancy support
 - training sessions
 - meetings of providers.
 6. Local LSCs acknowledged that their staff needed training and continuous support to help them carry out the evaluation of self-assessment reports, fairly and effectively.
 7. Several local LSCs are producing documentation based on the national guidance. Both minor and substantial modifications have been made, sometimes in consultation with providers. Local LSCs have also produced operational documents for tracking evaluation and for giving information to providers.

1 SELF-ASSESSMENT AND DEVELOPMENT PLANS

8. Self-assessment and development planning should be an integral part of providers' quality assurance arrangements. The focus of self-assessment and development planning is on the quality of teaching, the effectiveness of learning, and the level of learners' attainments.
9. Primary responsibility for continuous improvement rests with the provider. Under arrangements introduced in April 2001, local LSCs play an important role in helping providers to conduct rigorous self-assessments and produce effective development plans. All providers funded by the LSC are required to carry out an annual self-assessment in line with published LSC requirements. They must assess and grade all aspects of their provision, identifying strengths and weaknesses and making judgements against the quality statements in the *Common Inspection Framework*. Providers are also required to agree a development plan with their local LSC. This development plan must show how improvements identified through self-assessment will be carried out. In addition, the plan must specify realistic targets for learners' retention, achievement and progression rates and demonstrate how the provider plans to meet these.
10. Providers are responsible for determining the timing and methods of their self-assessment. Local LSCs must assess the effectiveness of providers' self-assessment processes and the quality of their development plans. In doing so, they should take into account relevant indicators of quality and performance, such as recent inspection grades and any external awards for quality or standards providers may have achieved, or be working towards. Once local LSC staff have agreed a development plan with a provider, they also monitor and assess the effectiveness of its implementation.
11. The core functions for local LSC staff who evaluate providers' self-assessment and development planning processes may be summarised as follows:
 - making judgements about the rigour of providers' self-assessment processes
 - making judgements about the adequacy of providers' self-assessment reports
 - seeking additional information about providers' self-assessment as necessary
 - agreeing development plans, targets and milestones with providers
 - deciding allocations from the Standards Fund to help providers implement their development plans
 - rewarding providers who achieve excellence
 - helping providers who need support
 - requiring specific improvements when necessary
 - monitoring providers' progress towards achieving agreed targets and reaching milestones
 - monitoring providers' use of Standards Fund allocations.

12. When making initial assessments of providers' self-assessment reports and development plans, local LSC staff have followed guidance in the Quality and Standards manual (Annex C) published by the national office of the LSC in 2001.
13. In their self-assessment reports, providers must describe their self-assessment process, indicating who was involved in it, how it was carried out and how the self-assessment report was validated. Local LSC staff then judge to what extent the self-assessment process has:
 - helped staff at all levels of the organisation to evaluate their performance
 - involved learners and employers
 - been an integral part of strategic planning and quality assurance arrangements.

Local LSC staff also check that the self-assessment report has been approved by the organisation's chief executive, principal or director and endorsed by the governors or other relevant body.

14. Local LSC staff evaluate the self-assessment report against key criteria. They ascertain whether the report
 - meets LSC requirements
 - covers all areas of learning provided and all aspects of the provider's activity
 - focuses on the quality of teaching and learners' experience and learners' attainment
 - answers all the seven key questions in the *Common Inspection Framework*
 - establishes the provider's financial probity
 - demonstrates the provider's commitment to learner health and safety
 - contains clear and adequate evidence to substantiate judgements.

2 CURRENT PRACTICES IN EVALUATION

Making rigorous evaluations

15. The examples of current practices in evaluating self-assessment reports and development plans relate to:
- help given by local LSC staff to providers with self-assessment and development-planning
 - involvement of a wide range of local LSC staff in the evaluation of self-assessment reports and development plans
 - assessment of the evaluation processes of the local LSC.
16. Local LSCs offer support to providers undertaking self-assessment and development planning. They aim to ensure that providers' self-assessment reports identify strengths and weaknesses clearly and so provide a sound basis for development planning. Many local LSC's considered that the provision of such support to be of key importance.
17. Some local LSCs considered that their responsibility to evaluate and approve a provider's development plan was of paramount importance. Development plans serve as the basis upon which the allocations to providers from the Standards Fund are determined. Several local LSCs provided examples illustrating the importance they ascribe to helping providers draw up their self-assessment reports and development plans. These examples suggest that some local LSCs help providers to produce good self-assessment reports and then concentrate on what they regard as their key tasks of agreeing development plans, deciding Standards Fund allocations and monitoring the implementation of development plans.

At Greater Manchester LSC, feedback on evaluation of self-assessment reports and development plans is sent to providers in a standard letter with a Standards Fund funding profile. This is followed up by a feedback meeting with the provider. The provider may then make changes to the development plan and return it immediately for reassessment and agreement.

Leicestershire LSC runs an extensive programme of support for providers who are carrying out self-assessment, with the aim of enabling them to get self-assessment reports 'right first time' and avoid resubmissions. Such support is regarded as an integral part of the evaluation process.

Birmingham and Solihull LSC helps providers with their self-assessment reports and ensure they contain adequate data and sound evaluative judgements. Staff considered it was essential that self-assessment grades were supported by appropriate text and accurate data. They check that the report covers the learners' experiences, reflects the findings from lesson observations, and also that staff, learners and key clients, such as employers, have been involved in the self-assessment process. The provider should also have taken into account other information from key sources, such as external verifiers' reports, feedback from awarding bodies, and recent inspection reports.

18. Local LSCs sought to involve a wide range of local LSC staff in the evaluation process. Most local LSC evaluation processes are led either by the local LSC's contract manager or a member of the quality team, and involve specialists with responsibilities in other areas, such as equality and diversity, and widening participation. Very few local LSCs relied on contract managers or members of the quality team alone to undertake the whole evaluation process, from initial assessment and evaluation through to giving feedback to the provider and monitoring the implementation of the provider's development plan.
19. In most local LSCs, there was close collaboration between the members of the quality team with primary responsibility for evaluating self-assessment reports and development plans, and contract managers, or their equivalent. Contract managers often undertake initial assessments of self-assessment reports and development plans and then monitor the implementation of development plans. Quality team members responsible for evaluating self-assessment reports and development plans often help contract managers when they feed back to providers and monitor the implementation of development plans.
20. Several local LSCs offered examples of quite complex arrangements for collaboration between different staff teams. In many instances members of quality teams take on the role of 'critical friend' when assisting contract managers and specialist staff who are evaluating self-assessment reports and development plans. Members of quality teams sometimes moderated the judgements made on self-assessment reports and development plans. The following examples illustrate the various ways in which local LSCs deploy staff to carry out evaluation of self-assessment reports and development plans.

At Greater Manchester LSC, self-assessment reports and development plans are received by members of the provider performance team. They then forward them to the Contract Manager or account and development manager who assesses each self-assessment report and development plan with the assistance of a provider improvement adviser. If the self-assessment and development plans are approved, the provider's allocation from the Standards Fund is then determined. The provider improvement adviser then sends details of the evaluation of the self-assessment report and development plan to the provider performance team. Feedback is then given to the provider in a standard letter which also sets out a funding profile. The provider then attends a feedback meeting with the local LSC.

At London East LSC, the quality team leads the evaluation process in conjunction with the relevant contract manager. Other members of staff (e.g. equality adviser, health and safety manager) are also involved. The checklist for initial assessment contained in the quality and standards manual issued by the national office is used. Weekly meetings of the quality team are held to discuss a wide range of issues related to improving the quality of provision, including the evaluation of self-assessment reports and development plans. All self-assessment reports and development plans are posted on the intranet. There is no formal process for moderation of evaluation judgements but the local LSC claims that members of the quality team provide some degree of informal moderation throughout the evaluation.

Cambridgeshire LSC has self-assessment report and development plan panels which are convened by contract managers and made up of staff from the quality improvement, health and safety, widening participation and performance and standards teams. The panels record their decisions on an electronic proforma which is made available to all staff on a shared drive. Contract managers and members of the quality improvement team give feedback to providers.

21. Some local LSCs arrange for assessments to be carried out by more than one person. For example, initial assessments of self-assessment reports made by contract managers at Cheshire and Warrington LSC are usually checked by the raising standards adviser. In some problematic cases, two members of staff undertake the initial assessment. At Gloucestershire LSC, all evaluations of self-assessment reports and development plans are moderated by the head of quality improvement. There is a 'buddy system' whereby colleagues review each others' evaluations.
22. Few local LSCs offered examples of how they judge the effectiveness of their evaluation processes. Many described their processes as 'emerging', 'developmental' or even 'immature'. Members of local LSC quality teams, however, often discuss the effectiveness of their evaluation processes amongst themselves. Several local LSCs also seek feedback from providers. Gloucestershire LSC, for example, consulted providers on the best way to evaluate their self-assessment reports and has recorded views. In general, however, many local LSCs have yet to develop comprehensive and robust systems for gathering feedback from providers on evaluation of self-assessment reports and development plans. The following examples illustrate ways in which some local LSCs are gathering feedback on their evaluation processes.

With the help of an Ofsted inspector, Lancashire LSC has devised an evaluation process which reflects the checklist in the quality and standards manual issued by the national office of the LSC. Local LSC staff have briefed colleges about the process at a workshop and have collaborated with other local LSCs in the North-West to improve it. At the workshop, providers said that they would welcome more guidance on how to write self-assessment reports and development plans, including advice on how they should make judgements about leadership and management.

Ensuring consistency in making judgements

23. It is essential that local LSC staff are consistent in the way they make judgements on providers' self-assessment reports and development plans.
24. The checklist given in annex C of the quality and standards manual issued by the national office of the LSC in 2001, is often used when making the initial assessment of self-assessment reports and development plans. For example, North Yorkshire LSC uses the checklist when checking the content, accuracy and quality of self-assessment reports and development plans. Unsatisfactory self-assessment reports are returned by the operations manager to the provider with suggestions on how they can be improved.
25. Several local LSCs have convened panels to moderate their evaluations.

Hitherto, Norfolk LSC delivery managers have been responsible for evaluating self-assessment reports and development plans and recommending them to the local LSC's executive director for approval. The local LSC now plans to arrange for a panel to carry out evaluations. It is intended that staff on the panel will ensure there is consistency in the way judgements are made and that they will share good practice and moderate one another's judgements. When devising documentation for recording initial assessments, staff have drawn on the checklist in the quality and standards manual issued by the national office of the LSC, and also the experience of staff in other local LSCs in the Eastern Region Quality Network. It is intended that all panel discussion and decision-making will be formally recorded and noted by the delivery manager. Recommendations of the panel will be submitted to the executive director for endorsement. The delivery manager will then give feedback to the provider.

26. In the case of some local LSCs, panels moderate evaluations. In other local LSCs, the panels only evaluate those self-assessment reports and development plans which have been through an initial assessment. Some panels moderate all evaluations, but others deal mainly with the more problematic self-assessment reports and development plans.
27. There were few examples of formal moderation of evaluation with the aim of achieving consistency.

At Cheshire and Warrington LSC, the formal evaluation of self-assessment reports and development plans is undertaken by a raising standards adviser using the Quality and Standards manual issued by the national office of the LSC. The adviser's judgements are then moderated by contract managers. In some instances, two members of the local LSC's staff evaluate the self-assessment reports and development plans from the start, using the checklist in the quality and standards manual. Feedback is then given to the provider. Case conferences are held regularly and these can involve other interested staff, such as those from health and safety, finance, equal opportunities teams.

At North Yorkshire LSC, a small number of self-assessment reports (maximum of four) are evaluated by a panel made up of operations managers, the quality assurance manager and a senior operations manager (the latter only if required). Comments are invited from others who may have an interest, such as the equality and diversity manager. By involving a range of staff in the evaluation process, the local LSC aims to achieve a balanced view of a provider's self-assessment report. All information about the self-assessment report is fed into the performance review process. The operations manager sends feedback to the provider in the form of a letter and follows this up with a visit. The quality assurance manager monitors the quality of the evaluation process by checking samples of both the self-assessment reports and the feedback given to providers, and also assisting with the latter, if required.

28. Several local LSCs provided detailed examples of how moderation panels operated.

Birmingham and Solihull LSC has developed an evaluation process in which each quality and standards co-ordinator carries out an initial appraisal of providers' development plans, records his/her findings on an assessment form and presents them to a panel made up of the local LSC's quality and standards co-ordinators and quality managers. The panel then considers a sample of work-based learning providers' development plans and all college development plans. Amongst other things, the panel identifies good examples of clear targets, points where further clarification is needed, and assesses the effectiveness of the provider's monitoring and evaluation systems. The quality and standards co-ordinator records comments made by members of the panel on the assessment form. The findings on the assessment form are taken into consideration when determining allocations for providers from the Standards Fund. Feedback from the panel on the evaluations is reviewed by the quality team on a monthly basis. The local LSC expects the panels to remain in operation until staff feel confident that they can achieve consistency in the way they make judgements when working on their own.

At Suffolk LSC, the contract executive carries out an initial evaluation of self-assessment reports and development plans, using the checklist in the quality and standards manual. These documents are then evaluated by a moderation panel which meets monthly. This panel consists of a director, head of function and two managers. Two contract executives are also invited to participate. After being informed of reasons for approval or non-approval of a self-assessment report or development plan, the contract executive gives feedback to the provider concerned. If the self-assessment report or development plan is not approved, the contract executive also helps the provider concerned to produce a new version for resubmission.

29. Several local LSCs have formed regional consortia to develop common procedures for, and share practice in, evaluating self-assessment reports and development plans. The south-west region quality improvement network plans to introduce a regional system for the moderation of evaluation. Several local LSCs from different parts of the country offered examples of regional collaboration in evaluating self-assessment reports and development plans.

The LSDA north-west quality improvement team has set up a working group on the evaluation of self-assessment reports, with the aim of promoting use of the checklist in the quality and standards manual and achieving consistency in the way the reports are assessed. The group has agreed two matrices for evaluating self-assessment reports and development plans. These have been used by staff at Greater Merseyside LSC since August 2002 and a number of issues have arisen, including the need to ensure:

- staff have the requisite competence to carry out evaluations
- the process is completed efficiently and speedily
- the process is properly co-ordinated to ensure consistency
- the process is evaluated by the north west quality improvement team
- the impact and effectiveness of development plans are monitored
- self-assessment reports and development plans are taken into account during area-wide inspections.

30. Local LSCs have also found regional LSC networks and consortia useful when they have to deal with providers located in more than one local LSC area.

Birmingham and Solihull LSC has several national providers with local branches in its area. These national providers also have branches in other local LSC areas. Birmingham and Solihull LSC agrees with the other local LSCs which one of them will take the lead for evaluating providers' self-assessment reports and development plans. Birmingham and Solihull LSC does not expect providers with a number of local branches to produce a separate self-assessment report and development plan for each. It does, however, expect providers' local branches to ensure that the main self-assessment report and development plan reflect local priorities and their targets, in order that allocations from the Standards Fund can be allocated fairly.

Working in partnership

31. Local LSCs work in close partnership with providers and other organisations concerned with the continuous improvement of education and training. They offer a great deal of support for different types of providers. For example, local LSC staff visit providers, organise consultancy support, and arrange training sessions and meetings. Several local LSCs considered they were effective in identifying those providers which were particularly in need of support.

London East LSC offered a series of workshops to providers on self-assessment and development planning, using the services of external consultants. This proved a good way of helping a large number of providers, particularly those offering work-based learning programmes. Workshops for colleges and providers of adult and community learning have focussed more on problem-solving. This local LSC has also set up two focus groups, one for work-based learning providers and one for colleges and providers of adult and community learning, which meet every six weeks to address issues and share good practice. These have led to the establishment of a number of working groups, including one on self-assessment.

32. Several local LSCs provided examples of how they worked very closely with providers to help them carry out self-assessment and development planning. Staff from Greater Manchester LSC, for example, have worked closely with college principals, seeking their views and agreement on the style and content of self-assessment reports, and producing guidance documents on how these should be written. Several other local LSCs reported working closely with providers during their self-assessment and development planning processes.

Staff at Lincolnshire and Rutland LSC regard the evaluation of self-assessment reports and development plans as an opportunity for in-depth discussion with providers about ways of improving education and training. They work closely with providers at all stages in the production of self-assessment reports, especially those with less experience of self-assessment and development planning.

Staff from Birmingham and Solihull LSC work with providers, particularly colleges, when they draw up their self-assessment reports and development plans. They ask challenging questions about the data and the judgments, and also talk to providers' staff and to learners to 'get under the skin of things'. They aim to find out to what extent all staff are involved in self-assessment and development planning.

33. Local LSCs also reported working in partnership with a wide range of organisations. The West of England LSC, for example, works closely with its ALI and Ofsted link inspectors to produce guidance documentation. Staff from the Black Country LSC hold case meetings with JobCentre Plus colleagues. Another local LSC has arranged training events for providers.

Building capacity

34. Many local LSC staff have had little experience of evaluating self-assessment reports and development plans. Some contract managers with an inspection background, for example, are uncertain whether they should judge a self-assessment report by the extent to which it is comprehensive and identifies all strengths and weaknesses, or whether they should judge it on the quality of the evidence presented. Several local LSCs acknowledged that working with colleges is challenging for some staff who need training to enable them to support providers effectively and also evaluate their self-assessment reports and development plans fairly. Many local LSCs provided examples of how they had helped their staff to work with providers successfully.

Leicestershire LSC provided training for the team of learning development managers (in effect, contract managers) responsible for monitoring implementation of development plans. The local LSC then offered training to staff of colleges, work-based learning and adult and community learning providers on how to prepare self-assessment reports and development plans. Feedback from those who received training was positive.

Shropshire LSC ran workshops for providers and local LSC staff on self-assessment and development planning. Afterwards, one-to-one support was provided for those staff who needed it. Local LSC staff also attend training sessions and receive help at team meetings.

At London East LSC, all staff in the quality team have received training on how to evaluate self-assessment reports and development plans.

London East LSC brought in an outside consultant to help its staff develop a better understanding of further education, and of its history, culture and current issues. They also plan to help staff working with local education authorities gain more understanding of adult and community learning.

35. Several local LSCs claimed that when staff worked together as a panel to carry out evaluation of self-assessment reports and development plans, they were able to standardise their evaluation process, ensure consistency in the way they arrived at judgements, and prepare their feedback to providers well. Staff new to evaluation at Cambridgeshire LSC have found that working with other staff on evaluation panels is a very beneficial form of staff development.
36. Local LSCs, especially the larger ones, have staff from a wide range of different backgrounds including the former Training and Enterprise Councils, the former Further Education and Funding Council, and providers. Some staff have a great deal of experience of evaluating self-assessment reports and development plans but other staff have very little. Some staff found working on their own with the quality and standards manual difficult, and their local LSCs have developed in-house training programmes to bring them up to speed.

In August 2002, West Yorkshire LSC produced its own 'Guidance on the appraisal of self-assessment reports and on the appraisal and approval of development plans and post-inspection action plans', based on the national Quality and Standards manual. The guidance document covers the local LSC's evaluation procedures, and provides a template for a detailed appraisal report. Programme advisers also receive one-to-one support and training on how to evaluate self-assessment reports and development plans and give feedback to providers. After making their first evaluation and giving feedback to the provider on their own, they receive follow-up support. They assess their own performance and identify any further training needs they may have.

Producing effective documentation

37. Most local LSCs which took part in this project are following the guidance given in the quality and standards manual issued by the national office of the LSC, particularly when carrying out initial assessment of self-assessment reports and development plans. Several local LSCs have produced their own written guidance based on that given in the manual, to suit their own local circumstances.

When evaluating self-assessment reports and development plans, quality development managers at Leicestershire LSC use two forms produced in-house called, respectively, 'Self-assessment Report Evaluation' and 'Development Plan Evaluation with Prompts'. The first form aims to ensure that the quality development manager checks that the self-assessment report covers all relevant aspects of provision. The second aims to help the quality development manager check that the development plan addresses all the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and that action proposed in the plan is specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timebound (SMART). Both documents have been used in training workshops for local LSC and provider staff.

West Yorkshire LSC has produced a guidance document on the evaluation of self-assessment reports and development plans. This draws on guidance available, including the quality and standards manual issued by the national office of the LSC, and discussions with staff. This guidance stipulates that those who carry out evaluations should check that the self-assessment report covers every aspect of provision thoroughly, including leadership and management. Local LSC staff have received training on evaluation. The local LSC's guidance document will be evaluated and updated every six months in the light of informal feedback from staff.

38. Recently, some local LSCs have produced guidance documents which focus on particular themes, such as leadership and management or equality and diversity. Cheshire and Warrington LSC, for example, has produced a guide to equal opportunities and diversity, and has noticed an improvement in how equal opportunities and diversity are now covered in providers' self-assessment reports.

Tees Valley LSC has produced its own guidance document on evaluation and reviews this continuously. It also records good practice as this is identified. The local LSC has also produced guides on evaluating aspects of provision, such as the promotion of equal opportunities and diversity, and leadership and management.

39. Checklists are widely used when making initial assessments about the adequacy of a provider's self assessment report and development plan. Local LSC staff also use checklists when giving feedback to providers and when they work with providers to help them improve their self-assessment reports and development plans.

East London LSC is using the checklist in the quality and standards manual published by the national office of the LSC but has also developed its own handbook on quality for providers. Providers have attended workshops to discuss the handbook and ways of improving education and training.

40. Several local LSCs have devised documentation for checking that the process for the evaluation of self-assessment reports and development plans goes through swiftly and smoothly.

Shropshire LSC has produced a flowchart for staff outlining the evaluation process. The document is used for monitoring and recording the progress of evaluation. The local LSC aims to circulate self-assessment reports and development plans promptly to those staff who need to see them.

Cheshire and Warrington LSC has compiled a checklist for contract managers to use when making an initial assessment of a self-assessment report, in order that they can check that the self-assessment report covers all aspects of provision. Effective use of the checklist enables staff to give feedback to providers promptly and effectively.

41. Many local LSCs have produced guidance documentation for providers, and in many instances, they have drawn these up in conjunction with them.

Leicestershire LSC has produced 'A Practitioners' Guide to Self-assessment', a 24-page document with examples, which has been used when training its own, and providers' staff. Birmingham and Solihull LSC set up two working groups to help colleges and work-based learning providers with their writing of self-assessment reports and development plans. The groups helped to produce a guide to self-assessment which drew on guidance given in a number of separate documents produced by the DfES, the inspectorates and the national office of the LSC.

42. Guidance documents which some local LSCs have produced for providers contain brief checklists which providers can use to determine whether their self-assessment reports and development plans meet all necessary requirements.

Tees Valley LSC provides comprehensive and succinct written guidance for providers on self-assessment and development planning, including the following practical tips set out in its 'Self-assessment report checklist'.

Good self-assessment should be:

- evaluative
- honest and objective
- able to identify strengths/weaknesses and other improvements needed
- supported by clear evidence
- written in plain English.

Be selective, cut down on the bullet points and have two or three sentences about each strength/weakness/other improvement needed.

At least one of the bullets relating to strengths, weaknesses, and other improvements needed should relate to your data for each occupational/curriculum area.

The evaluative text should substantiate the strengths, weaknesses, and other improvements needed that you have identified and should include supporting evidence.

In September 2002, Lincolnshire and Rutland LSC sent a 'Quality Improvement Update' to providers which included guidance on, and good practice in, producing self-assessment reports and development plans. The following are extracts from that document.

- self-assessment reports should include tables of data on learners' retention and achievement rates for all courses within each curriculum/learning area, and compare these with relevant benchmarks;
- self-assessment reports should be evaluative rather than descriptive and the text should explain in sufficient detail the basis for arriving at judgements on strengths and weaknesses expressed as bullets;
- strengths should only be claimed where there is evidence that the provision is better than the norm.

All development plans should include challenging targets related to retention and achievement rates and the promotion of equal opportunities, and should:

- be in tabular format
- specify detailed actions to show how the objectives will be met
- state what will happen as a result of the action, give a timescale for its completion and specify milestones for measuring progress
- explain how progress in implementing action will be monitored and by whom
- give estimated costs of implementation.

Monitoring the implementation of development plans

43. Some local LSCs 'risk assess' providers on the basis of their self-assessment reports and development plans, and visit the 'high risk' providers more often than others. West Yorkshire LSC, for example, considers risk assessment to be a key factor when monitoring the implementation of providers' development plans. For example, the local LSC will closely monitor any provider considered to be at risk of not carrying out its development plan in full.
44. In effect, the development plan determines how much money a provider will receive from the Standards Fund. If actions proposed in a plan are not being carried out, then the release of Standards Fund money to the provider may be reviewed and the allocation reduced. Birmingham and Solihull LSC, for example, attaches great importance to monitoring the implementation of action financed through the Standards Fund. Local LSC staff have developed a template for quality and standards co-ordinators to use, when determining allocations from the Standards Fund and when monitoring the implementation of action specified in the development plan.
45. Local LSC contract managers are usually responsible for monitoring the implementation of development plans. At both East London LSC and Leicestershire LSC, for example, responsibility for evaluating self-assessment reports and development plans lies with the quality team, whereas responsibility for monitoring implementation of development plans is the responsibility of the relevant contract managers (or learning development managers in the case of Leicestershire LSC).
46. The frequency with which local LSC staff make monitoring visits to providers varies considerably. For example, staff from East London LSC visit work-based learning providers every month but make termly visits to colleges. It is the policy of Leicestershire LSC for staff to make frequent visits to those providers considered to be at risk of failing. The implementation of development plans, however, is reported through the performance review process. LSC staff are now starting to visit providers to gather evidence of improvements, and examples of good practice.

3 CONCLUSION – LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

47. At the time when this report was being written it was not possible to say whether self-assessment will be affected by the changes that will be brought in by *Success for All*. It does seem likely that self-assessment will continue to be seen as a major instrument for continuous improvement but the continuing role of the LSC in considering it is undecided.

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Appendix A Contributions to this report

Twenty-two local LSCs contributed information presented in this report.

Eastern region

- Cambridgeshire LSC
- Norfolk LSC
- Suffolk LSC

East Midlands region

- Derbyshire LSC
- Leicestershire LSC
- Lincolnshire LSC

London region

- East London LSC

Northern region

- Northumberland LSC
- Tees Valley LSC

North West region

- Cheshire and Warrington LSC
- Greater Manchester LSC
- Greater Merseyside LSC
- Lancashire LSC

South East region

- Kent and Medway LSC
- Sussex LSC

South West region

- Devon and Cornwall LSC

- Gloucestershire LSC
- West of England LSC

West Midlands region

- Black Country LSC
- Birmingham and Solihull LSC
- Shropshire LSC

Yorkshire and Humberside region

- North Yorkshire LSC
- West Yorkshire LSC

The project team were as follows:

- Michael Frearson (LSDA)
- Michael Gray (LSDA)
- Alison Morris (LSC National Office)
- Francis Pajak (LSC National Office)

Appendix B Telephone interview questionnaire

How does the local LSC

- work with providers and other partners, such as other local LSCs to help them prepare their self-assessment reports and development plans?
- manage the evaluation process: train its staff and/or providers' staff; allocate resources, including staff time; agree timescales, recognising potential conflicts of interest staff may have for example, over determining Standards Fund allocations?
- provide comprehensible documentation to help its staff and providers? Are checklists, prompts, or national guidance used?
- ensure consistency in methods of evaluation, given the differences between providers and that some providers contract with more than one local LSC? How are judgements moderated?
- self-assess and quality assure its evaluation of self-assessment reports and development plans?
- ensure that evaluation is objective and rigorous and that staff do not take on the role of inspectors?
- help providers with processes such as: evidence gathering, reconciling and interpreting data, making judgements, deciding and costing action?
- monitor the implementation of development plans?
- ensure that development plans are taken into account when considering Standards Fund bids?