Training Quality Standard
Higher Education Institutions: Further Guidance

Version 1.0
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TRAINING
QUALITY
STANDARD

The Training Quality Standard is an assessment framework and a process for assessing organisations using that framework, to recognise their strengths and areas for improvement, and to celebrate the best organisations delivering training and development to employers.

The Standard is open to all providers regardless of their ownership, governance or strategy; and this includes higher education institutions. In 2008 and 2009, six higher education institutions took part in a pilot, working through the Training Quality Standard; this Guidance has been developed from their experience.

Development of the Standard took place during 2006 and 2007, with assessments beginning in 2007 and the launch event for the first certifications in May 2008. This Guidance is a complement to the *Applicant Guide,* which remains the primary guidance source for all organisations seeking the Standard. This Guidance was compiled by Tristram Hughes, Thomas Fletcher, and Lindsey Bowes, CFE.

Contents

Strategy	A.0.1	Define aims	The strategy for working with employers defines aims and approaches which are communicated to appropriate stakeholders.
	A.0.2	Define market	The strategy for working with employers includes an analysis of the market, key customer groups and sectors.
	A.0.3	Define results	The strategy for working with employers defines specific, measurable and time-bound objectives, which are communicated to appropriate stakeholders.
Fundamentals	A.1.1	Manage people	The people arranging and delivering training solutions are reviewed regularly for performance and capability.
	A.1.2	Manage resources	The resources used to deliver training solutions are reviewed regularly for availability and quality.
	A.1.3	Manage information	Employers are made aware, through appropriate information channels, of the range of training solutions available.
Respond	A.2.1	Manage enquiries	An employer's enquiry is handled promptly and flexibly, and is reviewed regularly against standards of customer service.
	A.2.2	Understand needs	An employer's wants are established and underlying business needs identified to shape solutions tailored to its requirements.
	A.2.3	Manage referrals	An employer is referred to appropriate alternatives when an appropriate training solution cannot be provided.
	A.2.4	Propose solutions	Proposals for the delivery of a solution are based on specific and realistic outcome targets reflecting the employer's business needs.
	A.2.5	Present proposals	Proposals are presented in ways which recognise the employer's preferences and circumstances.
Deliver	A.3.1	Prepare delivery team	The people delivering training solutions are briefed fully on the requirements and background of the employer before they begin working with them.
	A.3.2	Prepare customers	The employer and its employees are given appropriate briefing before delivery of a training solution begins.
	A.3.3	Manage progress	Training solution delivery is reviewed regularly for quality and customer service, and the employer is informed of progress made.
	A.3.4	Manage feedback	The employer's feedback on training solution delivery is sought and acted upon promptly where appropriate.
Relate	A.4.1	Review outcomes	The outcome targets agreed at the proposal stage are reviewed upon delivery to identify and address the employer's unmet business needs.
	A.4.2	Manage relationships	The relationship with an employer is managed and developed, with contact maintained at appropriate intervals.
Perform	A.5.0	Achieve results	Indicators and outcomes of performance against strategic objectives show an improving trend or a sustained high level of performance.
	A.5.1	Satisfy employers	Employers' satisfaction with services shows an improving trend or a sustained high level of performance.
	A.5.2	Impact employers	Employers' assessment of impact on business needs shows an improving trend or a sustained high level of performance.
Improve	A.6.1	Review performance	Performance against strategy and in satisfying and impacting employers is reviewed at an appropriate level, and as a result improvements are implemented.
	A.6.2	Develop services	The range and content of training solutions offered continues to evolve and improve.

The Training Quality Standard

These statements make up the assessment framework of the Training Quality Standard, with 32 Indicators across two Parts, A for Responsiveness and B for Expertise.

Strategy	B.0.1	Define aims	The strategy for working with the sector defines aims and approaches which are communicated to appropriate stakeholders.
	B.0.2	Define market	The strategy for working with the sector includes an analysis of the market and key customer groups.
	B.0.3	Define results	The strategy for working with the sector defines specific, measurable and time-based performance objectives, which are communicated to appropriate stakeholders.
Understand	B.1.1	Understand employers	Input is sought from sector employers on their expectations for training solutions and common business needs.
	B.1.2	Understand stakeholders	Input is sought from appropriate stakeholders to share good practice and understand the sector's common business needs.
Deploy	B.2.1	Deploy prods. and services	Products and services are developed and delivered to sector expectations and employers' business needs.
	B.2.2	Deploy people	The people arranging and delivering products and services have the knowledge and skills to meet sector expectations.
	B.2.3	Deploy resources	The resources used to arrange and deliver products and services meet sector expectations.
Perform	B.3.0	Achieve results	Indicators of performance against strategic objectives show an improving trend or a sustained high level of performance.
	B.3.1	Achieve impact	Impact on the sector shows an improving trend or sustained high level of performance.

1 Introduction

Making learning more responsive to, and more valued by employers, is a priority concern for many Higher Education institutions. The Training Quality Standard offers a proven framework to test institutions' progress in this field. The Standard's framework has been designed to not prescribe or prefer a particular business model, and has been developed on the basis of extensive research about what employers want. During 2008 and 2009, six universities took part in a pilot to work through parts of the Standard; from their experiences, this Guidance offers up lessons of when and how the Standard can help, and how to make the most of it.

The Training Quality Standard has been open for application since 2007 and publicly promoted since 2008. At the time of writing, already over 100 organisations delivering training to employers carry the Standard's mark. The Standard has also been taken up by a number of our leading employers' own internal training delivery departments. Developed explicitly to test the aspects of capability and performance which impact on the employer's experience, the Standard has been designed to be as applicable to a university as it is to a Further Education college or a commercial provider.

Why this Guidance has been written

Improving the way the organisation engages and responds to employers is a priority for many universities,[1] adapting to the changing market but also the demands of policymakers. The Training Quality Standard's non-prescriptive approach and its track record of identifying and challenging training delivery marks it out as an opportunity for these universities to test the way they operate, and seek public recognition for their expertise.

This Guidance serves a number of purposes. First, we want to explain how the Training Quality Standard can help universities. In doing so, we look at how the Standard is relevant and value-adding as a development tool or as an opportunity for external assessment. Second, we want to help higher education institutions considering applying for assessment, to know what to expect and how to make the most of it.

Who this Guidance is for

This Guidance has been developed to offer additional information for those working in universities to improve their responsiveness and expertise in working with employers. The Guidance should only be read **after** the *Applicant Guide*, which remains the definitive explanation of the Standard's framework and assessment process.

Within a university, the Guidance may be of interest to senior management, quality managers, employer engagement staff, or staff within individual departments. Where this Guidance touches on the policy context, it focuses on England – but the wider messages and the hints and tips should all be relevant regardless of geography.

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[1] Throughout this Guidance, the term 'university' is used inclusively and covers all bodies known as 'higher education institutions'.

What this Guidance contains

After this introduction, the Guidance proceeds by tackling the 'why' and 'what' questions about the Standard first, and then moving into some of the more practical territory about how to make the most of the Standard as an opportunity to learn and improve universities' employer delivery.

- Chapter 2 looks at the potential the Standard offers for universities, going on to explore the time and resource investment that universities will need to make to realise the return.

- Chapter 3 highlights the way the Standard can directly inform development and improvement work, outside of the formal assessment process. The Standard can be used by universities to consider their employer engagement strategy and how they specify and deploy it – and to evaluate its effectiveness.

- Chapter 4 puts the Standard in context for higher education today; it considers the Standard within the wider fabric of quality measures in the sector, as well as the fit between the work of universities and the Standard's focus on employers.

- Chapter 5 explores the different factors a university should consider before committing to apply and be assessed for the Standard – and then looks at what can be expected, including specific issues around developing an application and hosting a Verification Visit.

How this Guidance has been compiled

The hints and tips contained within come not just from the authors of the Standard, but from the universities that worked through the processes and the Licensed Assessors who supported them.

2 What value does the Standard offer our university?

Working with the Training Quality Standard will challenge thinking and ways of working with employers. Combined with a university committing to improvement, the Standard can help to develop and enhance the responsiveness of an institution's delivery to employers and its expertise in working with particular industry sectors. Certification is the height of achievement – but the experience can equally be a development tool, to test assumptions and review current practice.

What the Standard offers

Improving employer-facing delivery is at once a high priority and a big challenge for many universities. The Standard has been developed to offer providers, including universities, a robust mechanism with which to understand, formalise and streamline their employer-facing delivery.

The Standard's assessment framework offers a consistent and comprehensive language with which to describe your operating model for delivering to employers. The framework forces you to specify your strategy, and then explain how you put this into action, by developing and deploying approaches, and then measuring the outcomes against your strategic aims.

At the heart of the Standard's framework is a very clear understanding of what quality training looks like to an employer. Scoring highly against the Standard means demonstrating that you explore employers' needs, develop solutions to fit the employers' needs, and measure how well your delivery impacts upon those needs and benefits the employers' business goals. By evaluating your operations as a whole, and by looking at how well the aspirations of strategy translate into deliverable results, the Standard helps you to think about how the different aspects work together (or not) to achieve a high quality, high impact employer experience.

The exercise of challenging and testing operations against the Standard helps to see what works but also to identify where and how there are areas for improvement, where you can improve. Because it is scored, and because of its emphasis on continuous improvement (there is no ideal organisation – just different ways of getting better), the Standard can help you to refine your employer offer regardless of how well developed your work with employers is at present.

The policy context

In England, more than three quarters of 2020's working age population is already at work and we have a declining proportion of 18-21 year olds. To make further progress and gain a larger degree-qualified workforce, universities are increasingly looking beyond traditional full-time degree students towards those already in work, who require flexible, part-time provision.

To succeed in this market, universities have to engage with employers, building business relationships with them where their offer of higher level skills can contribute to achievement of the employers' business strategy.

Employer responsiveness

Although universities have been successfully engaging with employers through activities such as research and development and knowledge transfer for a number of years, recent developments have called for a more strategic and coordinated approach; employer engagement is now emerging as a core element in the mission of many universities.

Recent policy discussion has increasingly emphasised the need for a 'responsive' education and training system, better able to adapt to meet changing labour market needs. The recent *HE for the Workforce* statement explained that the existing higher education operating environment *"is not an appropriate model for the workforce market which requires a culture of flexibility and responsiveness."[2]*

The Standard is built around an idea of responsiveness – but it's important to explain what that means. Responsiveness isn't just reacting rapidly – it's about being alert to employers' needs, flexible in meeting them, and focused on realising tangible gains for their business. Responsiveness runs from initial engagement all the way through to ensuring a successful outcome from delivery.

Stepping Higher with the Training Quality Standard

In October 2008 the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), Universities UK (UUK), and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) published '*Stepping Higher: Workforce development through employer-higher education partnership'*. They asserted that, "*we need more people already in the workforce to develop higher level skills."[3]*

To achieve this, the report provided further advocacy of employer-higher education partnerships and presented 12 key themes for effective workforce development. Most of these themes are directly addressed in the Standard's assessment framework, and on the next page we identify how the framework's different criteria and indicator contribute to achieving against 9 of the 12 *Stepping Higher key* themes.

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[2] Wedgwood, *Higher Education for the Workforce: Barriers and Facilitators to Employer Engagement,* DIUS Research Report 08 04 (London, 2008)

[3] CBI, *Stepping higher: Workforce development through employer-higher education partnership*, CBI, HEFCE and Universities UK, (London, October 2008).

CBI / UUK / HEFCE *Stepping Higher* Key Theme		Training Quality Standard Criteria / Indicator
1	Action by universities to generate demand for higher level skills.	A.0.2 Define market A.1.3 Manage information
2	Having the right infrastructure to respond to employers.	A.1 Fundamentals
3	The right people to deliver the programmes.	A.1.1 Manage people A.3.1 Prepare delivery team
5	Better mutual understanding – between universities and employers and between teaching staff and potential participants.	A.1.3 Manage information A.2.2 Understand needs A.3.1 Prepare delivery team A.3.2 Prepare customers
6	Agreement on objectives and measures of success for programmes.	A.2.2 Understand needs A.2.4 Propose solution A.4.1 Review outcomes A.5.2 Impact employers
7	Recognising both the employer and learners as clients in different ways.	A.2.2 Understand needs A.3.2 Prepare customers
9	Adapting teaching style to learners.	A.0 Strategy A.1 Fundamentals A.3.1 Prepare delivery team
10	Delivering programmes in ways that suit employers and participants.	A.1 Fundamentals A.3 Deliver
11	Considering what happens after the programme finishes.	A.4 Relate A.6 Improve

The drivers of employer engagement

Universities are looking to enhance their capability for employer delivery in response to a number of key drivers. These include: the changing demographic profile of the population; the potential of the employer market for education and training; funding; and increased competition from further education colleges and private providers on the higher level skills landscape.

Demographic changes

Demographic projections show a 12 per cent decline in universities' core market of 18-20 year-olds between 2010 and 2020.[4] Consequently, increased competition between universities for traditional students and provides an impetus for universities to diversify into other markets, such as training provision for employers and their employees. The Standard offers a framework for universities to assess their capacity and capability to deliver employer responsive provision and helps to ensure they are positioned to respond effectively to this demographic shift.

The potential of the employer market

There is a large existing and potential market for higher level skills from employers. Employer demand studies across three English regions showed that 33 per cent of private sector businesses with 25 or more workers undertook higher level skills training over a twelve month period, and that 46 per cent of those used higher education institutions.[5]

Universities currently dominate the market, but some institutions are seeking to increase their share in order to reduce their reliance on public funding. Much research suggests that employers are willing to meet the costs of higher level skills training if they see the benefit to their business.

In 2007-08, 69 per cent of universities indicated that they had more engagement with commercial organisations than in the previous 12 months; 29 per cent stated that their levels of engagement were about the same. CPD, or Training, is the fastest growing employer-related activity in HE: between 2003/04 and 2007/08 there was a 73 per cent growth in income

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[4] Bailey and Bekhradnia, *Demand for Higher Education to 2029*, Higher Education Policy Institute, (December 2009).

[5] Kewin and Casey, *Using demand to shape supply: An assessment of the higher level skills needs of employers in England*, by CFE for HEFCE, (July 2009).

from CPD activities for employers, compared to around 50 per cent growth in consultancy and 30 per cent growth in contract research[6].

The Standard is specifically designed to help develop and improve institutional approaches and processes, ensuring they are better placed to exploit the current and potential future employer training and education market.

Funding changes

In England, HEFCE, through its employer engagement programme and other related initiatives, has released considerable resources to support universities to develop their infrastructure and strengthen their offer to employers. The Standard can support institutions to develop and embed the underpinning strategies, systems and processes that will help to ensure the long-term sustainability of these activities.

Competition between providers

The further education sector has been successfully engaging with employers for a number of years. As the role of FE providers in delivering HE outcomes expands, competition between providers across the sectors is likely to increase, particularly in the market for higher level skills provision. Already there is evidence that some colleges are in receipt of more funding for their HE provision than a minority of universities.

At the time of writing, six of the top ten colleges delivering higher education have either achieved the Standard or have registered for assessment.[7] The evidence suggests that employers recognise the value of the Standard and it is a factor in the decision about which provider to use. Universities will, therefore, find themselves competing with providers that already have the Standard and are benefiting from its framework.

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[6] HEFCE, *Higher education-business and community interaction survey 2007-08, (July 2009)*

[7] A list of all certificated providers is available at www.trainingqualitystandard.co.uk

Employer's Guide to Training Providers

In March 2009 the LSC re-launched the **Employer's Guide to Training Providers**.

The guide is the easiest way for employers to find good training provision from colleges, universities and private providers. It steers them towards Train to Gain providers and those that have achieved the Training Quality Standard.

The guide is located at www.employersguide.org.uk

Your journey with the Standard

Universities considering the Standard as a means to improve and gain recognition for their delivery should consider where to start.

Assessment and Certification

Universities already boast a reputation for high quality provision – their knowledge and teaching is not in question. But achieving certification under the Training Quality Standard sends a clear signal to employers about an institution's commitment to making sure that knowledge is imparted in ways tailored to meet their business needs.

Having launched only recently, Certification is growing in recognition among employers as a sign of quality employer delivery. Certification is an achievement to be proud of – in large part because it's difficult to get there. For that reason, universities should review their readiness and think carefully before starting work on an application – considering how advanced they are and how they are likely to fare.

Development tool

Many providers decide not to go for certification, often because they're not yet ready – and they can benefit from the Standard's use as a development tool. At a time when universities are engaging with employers more than ever, working within the principles of the Standard will help universities to streamline their processes and respond more effectively. Chapter 3 discusses the use of the Standard as a development tool.

3 The Standard as development tool

The core of the Training Quality Standard is its assessment framework, a rigorous specification of the different aspects of capability and performance which make for successful employer delivery. Outside of assessment and certification, the Standard can be used to challenge, inform, refine and enhance those processes which deliver for employers.

If you decide that applying for full assessment under the Standard for your whole institution is not (or not yet) appropriate, working with the Standard may still be a useful approach in helping you to review your employer engagement processes. Using the framework in this way offers a universities a means of exploring, evaluating and reflecting, helping you to consider your operating model for engaging with and delivering to employers, and how well it might be improved.

The Training Quality Standard as part of your wider improvement strategy

Using the Training Quality Standard as a development tool for an institution's employer-facing processes chimes with the quality ethos already present in the higher education sector.

Internally, many universities have made a commitment to continuous improvement in curriculum delivery, for example. Externally, The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), "*encourages continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education*"; and the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) are, "*working with the HE sector to embed a culture of continuous improvement in HEIs*", particularly in the area of knowledge transfer and exchange.

Continuous improvement is at the heart of the Standard, and its design and approach owes a lot to the European Foundation for Quality Management's (EFQM) Excellence Model, which many universities already work with to assess their operations. Because of that strong quality heritage, the Standard can easily be applied within an institution as part of a much wider improvement strategy – adding a particular focus on employer delivery.

The Standard can help be a stimulus to development and improvement in two ways. First, the framework can be used as a focus for reflective self-assessment, to test and challenge thinking and practice. Second, applying and being assessed is itself a way of structuring that reflection but also most providers report that the feedback element of the assessment process has been valuable in informing amendments to their strategy and processes, whether or not they achieved certification.

One additional factor which can make assessment a valuable part of the improvement process is that the outcome is always confidential. The Standard celebrates excellence, but it does not highlight those committed to quality but not quite there yet.

Development before assessment: using the framework

The Standard was designed as a tool to drive continuous improvement and good practice for organisations delivering training to employers. By using the Standard's criteria and indicators, universities have available a ready-made framework through which to assess the institution's approach to delivering employer-responsive training or vocational education, and this doesn't have to involve the rigours and costs of full assessment. The framework has been developed on the basis of research with employers and providers, has been field tested and refined, and has been shown to work for all manner of different organisations – public, commercial, voluntary, low skill, high skill.

When working with the Standard in this way, you are able to decide which parts of your institution to assess, and which activities are in scope. The principles can be applied in just one faculty, or for one discipline. Also, there is nothing to stop you from using the framework to assess and review employer-facing activities that are not defined as 'training and development'.

Your university may engage with employers through consultancy, knowledge transfer partnerships, work placements or other areas. Although the development and delivery of these activities will be distinct, many of the principles for approaching and managing relationships with the employer will be similar to those the Standard applies to training. Whether you are delivering a bespoke training programme, organising a placement or setting up a knowledge transfer partnership, the following questions still apply:

- What happens when an employer contacts us?

- How do we design an appropriate solution?

- How do we measure the impact on the employer's business?

- How do we improve based on feedback from our customers?

And so on.

If you are not yet applying for certification, using the Standard in this way may also help to raise awareness of its potential value across your institution, should you wish to attempt full, formal assessment at some point in the future.

Development from assessment: The feedback report

The process of applying for assessment will help you to consider and improve your employer engagement processes. Typically, larger organisations like universities need to take the time to review their processes and map out the journey an employer goes through – this in itself is a great opportunity to identify the gaps in that journey, and to identify where the areas for improvement are most pressing.

After an application is submitted, and after it has been assessed, the Lead Assessor returns with a written Feedback Report, and a visit to present it and discuss what was found. Most assessed organisations tell us that the feedback report is an excellent input, informing improvements to strategy, approaches and results for their employer delivery.

Each feedback report contains:

- a Key Themes summary, drawing out the headlines from across the assessment;

- a summary for each Criterion, setting out high level Strengths and Areas for Improvement;

- detailed findings for each Indicator, setting out Strengths and Areas for Improvement; and

- a report on headline scores, with your overall Part score within a 50-point band and Criterion scores to the nearest 10 per cent.

Scoring data is pooled and shared anonymously, to allow all organisations to identify how well they performed against the average – both across the assessment and in the different Criteria. This is another way that assessment outcomes can help to drive improvement – by offering an opportunity for comparison.

4 The Standard in higher education

Universities are large and complex organisations, serving a wide range of aims, with employer-facing delivery typically being a specialist part. Working with the Standard therefore requires some effort to put it in context and understand how it applies to universities' operations. All universities have ongoing work to assure, measure and improve quality. The Standard needs to be used in a way which complements this work rather than competes with it, if it is to result in a valuable experience for the institution.

During its development, the Training Quality Standard's design was selected to be non-prescriptive – to define the 'what' of high quality, high impact training but not the 'how'. In this way, the Standard would be able to recognise the best employer-facing delivery regardless of its organisational setting – its ownership, governance or funding. But that doesn't mean that different organisations don't present their own complexities - and it's the specific questions raised by universities we are concerned with here.

Is the Standard different for universities?

The short answer is 'no'. The Standard has been designed to be as universally applicable as possible for all providers that deliver training and development to employers. A major concern during the design of the Standard was that the creation of different 'versions' of the Standard for different types of providers would devalue the badge.

Many universities where employer engagement is a key strategic concern are already striving to work within principles similar to those of the Standard. In fact, the Standard's assessment framework – which looks at the employer journey in its entirety – is just as applicable to universities as it is to other large, complex providers; during the higher education pilot, Assessors found that they were able to assess against all aspects of the framework.

This does not mean that every provider is treated in a 'one size fits all' way when assessed against the Standard, regardless of size and set-up. Every training provider is different, and has its own story to tell and the Standard recognises this by not being prescriptive. The way the Standard works is to ask an organisation to specify its strategy and then evaluate its approaches and results against its own operating model. The Standard looks for applicants to explain what it is they do, why they do it in the way they do and to demonstrate that it works.

Assessors are trained to understand the unique context of higher education and adapt their approach and requirements for individual cases. For example, some universities may demonstrate the impact of training solutions in a different way from other providers, owing to the longer-term nature of the benefits associated with higher level skills.

There's another aspect to the Standard covering all different types of providers. If they are to be successful in engaging employers, universities should be willing to achieve against the same standards that their competitors submit to. This makes the training landscape easier for employers to navigate, but also helps universities to demonstrate that they provide excellent training services to employers.

How does the Standard fit alongside existing quality measures?

The Training Quality Standard has a very specific role in complementing existing quality assurance processes in universities.

Quality assurance in higher education

Universities are subject to rigorous quality assurance procedures, focusing particularly on academic standards and the learner experience. These are prescribed by:

- **Internal quality assurance**. Institutional processes are designed to assure the quality of: learning and teaching; programme development, approval and reviews; research; student support; complaints and appeals; and collaboration with other institutions. These are frequently documented in an *Academic Quality Handbook*, and published on university websites.

- **The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).** The QAA provides an independent assessment of how higher education institutions in the UK maintain their academic standards and quality. This is done through institutional audits, which form part of the Quality Assurance Framework.

- **HEFCE**. The funding council has a statutory duty to ensure that publicly-funded teaching provision is of good quality. It contracts the QAA to devise and implement quality assurance methods.

Where the Training Quality Standard fits

The Standard is specifically concerned with ensuring the quality of the delivery of training solutions to employers. It examines an institution's infrastructure for employer engagement and the extent to which this is responsive.

The Standard does not directly assess qualifications, teaching, or the experience of the learner. However, the means by which institutions do this may provide valuable evidence against certain criteria of the Standard, in particular, A.1 Fundamentals, A.3 Deliver, and A.6 Improve.

Employer responsiveness as one form of quality

Providers achieving the Training Quality Standard typically perform well on quality across-the-board; therefore, you might consider these other factors:

- **Quality for learners and quality for employers:** the Training Quality Standard assesses the quality and responsiveness of training provision for employers. Much of the other existing quality assurance processes are predominantly concerned with the learner. For example, feedback is commonly collected from learners following a course, but, when an employer has funded the learning, do you also collect feedback from them?

- **Quality of qualifications and quality of processes:** the Training Quality Standard is concerned with the processes that accompany the employer journey through an institution. Existing quality assurance focuses on the qualifications themselves and the delivery of training.

- **The role of the QAA in employer engagement:** The QAA has an important role in employer provision, focusing on the training itself and the qualifications achieved: *"The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA) interests in these areas [employer provision] centre on the quality assurance of work-based and work-related learning and how higher education institutions (HEIs) assess, accredit, and certificate such learning."*[8]

Because the Standard has a different emphasis from the existing quality procedures, it can be used in a complementary way, without duplicating or conflicting with existing quality measures.

Links to other assessment frameworks

It is likely that the Training Quality Standard will be one part of an approach to continuous quality improvement. To ensure that it complements other work, it has been mapped to five other quality assessment frameworks that institutions might be using. These are:

- Customer First Standard

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[8] QAA, *A QAA Statement: Quality assurance and the HEFCE priority for higher education learning linked to employer engagement and workforce development,* available here: http://www.qaa.ac.uk/employers/QAAstatement.asp [Accessed August 2009].

- Customer Service Excellence Standard

- EFQM Excellence Model

- Investors in People Standard

- matrix Standard

The Training Quality Standard is different in its purpose, construction, and underlying thinking from each of the other frameworks. However, universities may have considered aspects of it with other quality frameworks. That prior learning and supporting evidence can be used as a starting point when working with the Training Quality Standard. For institutions working with any of these frameworks, it is advisable to read the *Mapping Guide* which is available to download at www.trainingqualitystandard.co.uk.

The scope of the Standard for universities

Scoping is a critical question to consider for universities hoping to apply for assessment against the Standard. It's important to identify all operations which are involved in delivering to employers, as this will be the basis of assessment. The question arises because of the complexity of universities, both in their activities with employers and in their internal structure.

Employer engagement activities: what is in and out of scope?

What constitutes 'training'? Some universities may not consider that their work with employers constitutes 'training', and feel that it is better described as education, consultancy, and/or knowledge transfer. Some universities may not differentiate between training and other activities, packaging all of these together as 'services to business'.

The Standard is available to all organisations that deliver 'training solutions' to employers. Much of the professional and vocational education delivered by universities would come under this definition. It might also be argued that certain other employer engagement activities, such as particular forms of knowledge transfer partnership, could fall within the remit of the Standard. However, activities such as consultancy would not be included in the scope of the Standard. The range of activities that will be included will depend on how these are implemented at your institution. The decision regarding their inclusion will be reached through discussions between you and the Certification Body you are working with.

If your strategy or results measures are broader than just 'training' then this is fine; providing that you can explain the context, and identify how the information is still relevant and useful, Assessors will understand the complicated nature of HE-employer relationships. Wherever and howver possible, you should be able to isolate the elements that are just 'training' for the purpose of the application.

The difference between the 'employer' and the 'learner': The Standard is concerned with responsiveness to employers, and not necessarily individual learners. For example, when looking to understand needs, it is the business needs rather than the needs of the individual; when demonstrating impact, it is the impact upon the business rather than the impact upon the individual.

Who is the employer? This may seem like a simple question, but it is not always straightforward to answer it. For example, for some large-scale, particularly public sector contracts, the client may be a national body such as the National Health Service (NHS) or the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA). The Standard requires providers to demonstrate impact on the employer and this may sometimes be difficult to achieve at this level. One quick rule of thumb is to look at which specific body or organisation is actually paying for the training – this may not be the same as the organisation which then employs the trainees. When assessing impact, try to look for the impacts on the funder of the training. If you are in any doubt a discussion with your Certification Body may be worthwhile.

The Standard uses the word 'employer' to describe all organisations buying training for people they employ, to contribute to organisations' business aims; this encompasses both private and public sector businesses and organisations. To avoid confusion, training and development delivered to sole traders and the self-employed are only included under the remit of the Standard if this training is for business purposes.

Schools, Departments and Faculties: what is in and out of scope?

Employer training activities may be widely dispersed between departments across your institution. Although some universities have a central employer engagement unit which coordinates much of the employer-facing activities, it is also common for individual departments and/or members of staff to establish relationships with employers independently of the central employer engagement unit. The way in which individual departments and staff members interface with the central employer engagement unit is critical as it could have a significant impact on responsiveness.

Can we certificate only our university's employer engagement unit under the Standard? The Standard as a badge applies to an organisation's 'brand' as it is presented to employers. If your employer-facing delivery is in a unit constituted as a separate entity not working under your university's name, then it can legitimately be certificated in its own right under the Standard.

However, if the employer engagement unit is branded as a part of the university, then the Standard assumes the whole institution should be working under the appropriate processes. We would recommend starting with the assumption that all activities and departments are within the scope of the Standard; should you wish to remove any activity or department from scope, you will be required to justify why it should legitimately be excluded. Those departments not engaged in training for employers but which might occasionally field an employer enquiry must be able to demonstrate that they are able to deal with the enquiry appropriately and in accordance with the institution's procedure.

Can we certificate an individual campus under the Standard? Universities are often physically dispersed across a region, with different campuses and sites – which may have distinct remits – in different areas. Although they may physically be separate entities, they are likely to carry the university's brand and therefore would not be able to pursue certification independently of the institution as a whole.

Our faculties are highly autonomous and use different processes to work with employers – how can we ensure these meet the requirements of the Standard? This is a key challenge for universities and may present some difficulties, particularly in larger institutions. It is perfectly acceptable to have different systems and processes in place across different departments, as long as it can be shown they are appropriate, fit together where necessary and, crucially, that they work for the employer. It may be that you find it easier to appoint a lead in each school or faculty who can coordinate a response for the Standard for their own systems.

Achieving buy-in across a large and diverse institution with many semi-autonomous faculties may be a real challenge for some universities seeking to work with the Standard. Similar issues also arose for some of first further education colleges that worked with the Standard. Although achieving the necessary levels of awareness and buy-in to the Standard may take time, doing so can have big dividends for improving responsiveness and could be overcome in part by using the principles of the Standard as a development tool in the first instance.

5 Deciding to apply for Assessment

If you're thinking about taking the plunge and applying for assessment, there are some things you should consider. Application is a big commitment, and the outcomes of assessment can be challenging. How ready are you for the rigours of the assessment experience? What should you expect from the process? What happens after assessment is complete – whether successful or not?

Before you commit to being assessed against the Standard – a journey that will require a significant investment in time and effort by your institution – you need to decide whether you are ready, and if the Standard is right for your university.

First and foremost, you need to be clear on reason why you want to pursue assessment and certification, and the value it will offer for your own institution. You can use the discussion in previous chapters as a starting point, but there are some general questions you can also think about:

- Are you competing with colleges or other training providers who have the badge or who are applying for it?

- Do you want to work through all of your approaches and results and identify how they can be improved?

- Do you want an opportunity to reflect on how you currently operate, aided by independent assessment?

Use the Readiness Check

To help you decide if your organisation is ready for assessment, a Readiness Check tool is available for your use on the Training Quality Standard website.

The Readiness Check isn't a substitute for full assessment – it has been designed to help potential applicants reflect on what they will need to demonstrate and how well they think will be able to do it. Over 10 steps, users are asked to score themselves against a summary set of indicators in sequence so that they can be provided with their own personalised report – with some guidance on where they may want to go next.

Do you have a coherent employer engagement strategy?

The Standard assesses the effectiveness of your processes against achieving the goals set out in your strategy. Therefore, a good application depends on you being able to offer a clear and coherent employer engagement strategy, one that explains who you are offering training or vocational education to, how and why. Your strategy does not necessarily have to sit in a single document – but you must be able to articulate it, and it must reflect the understanding within your operations of what you're trying to achieve.

In 2007-08, over 70 per cent of UK universities stated that their strategic plan for business support is developed and implemented institution wide, or that it was on its way to this stage.[9] Universities on the pilot found that defining and articulating their employer training strategy could be surprisingly difficult. Remember every other indicator is linked to your Strategy – your Strategy is about what you want to achieve, and your approaches are how you go about achieving it.

Do you have systems to deliver your strategy?

The Standard's framework looks closely at how you put your strategy into action. Assessors will be looking for you to explain your methods, but also the rationale linking them back to your strategy. The Assessors will not be looking for reams of documents, but they will be looking for evidence that your processes aren't left to chance – that you have the systems which make sure that you work in coherent, reliable ways.

New systems for employer-responsiveness in universities

The following examples give some ideas on how you can offer evidence against some parts of the Standard's framework.

Business Development Managers (BDMs)

A number of universities have appointed BDMs to drive forward and co-ordinate employer engagement activities on behalf of a faculty or department. The role of the BDM is often to identify new opportunities with employer customers and to manage relationships between the institution and employers. BDMs frequently sit in the faculties, but report to the central employer engagement unit.

BDMs enable universities to respond more effectively to employers, because they understand the needs of the business and the capacity and capability of the institution to deliver. Aspects of their work would be referred to throughout the Standard, but especially in A.1.1 Manage People, A.2 Respond, and A.4 Relate.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Systems

A number of universities have been developing or rolling out CRM systems to improve the service provided to employer customers. When implemented well, CRM systems can enable institutions to be more responsive to employers, especially after the delivery of training.

CRM investment is a big step – moving away from transactional business models and into relationship approaches. Evidence of the use of a CRM system would form a significant part of the response against A.4 Relate of the Standard – but be warned; Assessors will be less impressed with the mere existence of a CRM system than with the evidence that it's embedded within your processes, that staff use it routinely and that in doing so, they help deliver on your strategy.

Are your systems and processes in place across all relevant operations?

When institutions apply for assessment against the Standard, it covers all aspects of the whole institution working with employers, not just particular parts. For this reason, you must be able to show that all your schools, faculties and departments that might receive an employer training query are working within the same process you offer up for assessment – even if this just means they can efficiently forward the query to where it can be best dealt with.

This does not mean that all your departments need to use the same processes; if there are operational or historical reasons for differences, these can be justified in the application. However, where different processes do exist across an institution, all of these must meet the responsiveness and appropriateness requirements of the Standard – the important thing is that processes are clear and are consistently effective for the employer.

Do you identify what your customer's business objectives are and check that you have met them?

The Standard aims to drive a culture shift that upskills the workforce – training should have a business impact. A key element of the Standard therefore is the identification of what the employer (not the individual learner) wants to achieve from the training, and checking that this has been met (and if it has not, taking action to address this).

So, a simple question: do you find out and understand what impact the employer wants (A.2.2: Understand needs) then deliver to achieve that (A.2.4: Propose solutions, A.4.1: Review outcomes) and then ask about impact when surveying your employers (A.5.2: Impact employers)?

Do not underestimate the importance of an effective process for Organisational Needs Analysis (ONA) and Training Needs Analysis (TNA), that capture the employer's needs, to the Standard – they are key elements. Without a robust understanding of needs, your later ability to deliver against them, and measure the impact on them, will be severely limited.

Do you measure your results against your strategy?

The Results criterion within the framework requires you to demonstrate that you are collecting, analysing and using data regarding employer satisfaction (A.5.1: Satisfy employers) and impact (A.5.2: Impact employers) as well as measuring whether you are achieving the goals in your Strategy (A.5.0: Achieve results).

Many organisations struggle on demonstrating their results. Certainly within the publicly funded sector (FE as much as HE) the historic emphasis on measuring satisfaction and impact has been with the learner, not the employer. Because of this historical legacy, even though many organisations now have measurement frameworks in place, they have not yet amassed an evidence base on which to make judgements. For this reason, a Conditional Certification is available (until 30 June 2010) which allows an organisation scoring well on approaches to be certificated, subject to a revisit a year later to show progress on results.

Have you got the right level of commitment?

All applicants report that having senior-level ownership of the process of applying and preparing for assessment is a key factor in a successful experience. For most of the university pilot participants, a lead author was chosen who was at Director, Deputy Director or Head of school/faculty level. They were felt to be in a position that allowed them a good overview of the institution and what was happening across the departments and faculties – but in any case, universities found that an application team should gain input from:

- **Employer engagement unit:** director, quality manager, administrator, business development managers

- **Faculties**: administrator, academics, business development managers

- **SMT**: Pro-Vice-Chancellor responsible for employer engagement

Generally speaking, the person writing the application should have sufficient influence in the institution to be able to request the information needed from across the institution and potentially to put in place any changes that might be needed as a result of using the Standard as a development tool.

Can you invest the time you will need to apply?

One of the key outcomes for universities participating in the pilot was the recognition of the amount of time that – in particular – needs to be spent on the application form. This is the same for most applicants – and on the Standard website you will find additional guidance and support on planning and managing your time to deliver a good application. But a key question for any potential applicant is to consider whether there is sufficient resource and time available to develop a good application.

Are you ready for the Verification Visit?

The Verification Visit is where the Assessors (at least two of them) come to your university to check on their understanding of how you operate. Much of the Visit will be spent talking to staff at different levels and in different parts of the university, rather than reviewing documents or systems.

Your responsibility will in making sure that staff will be available for the Assessors to talk to. For a university, it is likely that Assessors will need to speak to more people than for other providers in order to test deployment, mainly because of the semi-autonomous nature of the faculties and department. As a university, this is likely to include:

- Pro-Vice-Chancellor (employer engagement)
- Employer Engagement Director
- Business Development Managers
- Administrative staff
- Delivery staff

Also, don't forget associates in your planning if they make a significant contribution to your delivery team.

Are you prepared for the possible outcomes?

Certification is tough to achieve – fewer than two-thirds of those assessed succeed. This is an essential part of its credibility with employers – that the mark is valuable because it is exclusive, and tough to achieve.

The corollary of that toughness is that all applicants should be prepared for the possibility that they won't be successful on their first attempt. Many

organisations considered leaders in their local marketplace have found themselves challenged by aspects of the Standard and haven't been prepared for the possibility that they won't gain certification. As an applicant, you should concentrate on the improvement gain of assessment, and see certification as a real bonus rather than something you expect as a matter of course.

You may wish to speak to…

In considering all of the questions set out above, you may benefit from discussing your intention to apply for assessment with other parties with interests and experience in the Standard:

- **Any relevant Sector Skills Council(s) or Sector Skills Body:** If you intend to apply for assessment under Part B of the Standard, your SSC can potentially be a good source of support and guidance; most of the SSCs already have Part Bs available for application and specific guidance to help you.

- **Other successful providers:** There is a list of certificated providers available at www.trainingqualitystandard.co.uk. You may find that one or more of them would be willing to talk to you about how they found the assessment process and what lessons they have learned. Please bear in mind though that there is only a finite number of successful providers and a much larger number of providers currently seeking to be assessed.

- **Other providers going through assessment:** Through your own provider networks you may be aware of other providers going through the assessment process who would be willing to share their journey with you. Applicant Training Courses are also a good opportunity to network and share information with other providers going for assessment.

Appendix: The Higher Education Institution Pilot

The Higher Education Institution Pilot for TQS was conducted from autumn 2008 to spring 2009 with the aim of demonstrating that the Standard can be achievable by universities and offers real value to them. This section explains the Pilot in a little more detail to put this Guidance into context.

What was the Higher Education Institution Pilot?

The Pilot began in autumn 2009, and generated interest from more than 10 universities.

Six of these committed to undertaking a programme of mentoring and mock submissions against the Standard, up to A.4.

The participating universities and their Assessor mentors met at a pilot evaluation workshop in March 2009, to gather the learning from the mentoring and assessment process.

What were the aims?

The principal aims of the pilot were to:

- demonstrate that the Training Quality Standard is equally appropriate for universities, as well as FE colleges, private providers and employers' in-house training provision;

- produce additional Guidance for universities to assist them in writing their application for the TQS; and

- produce additional Guidance for TQS Assessors so that they know what to expect when assessing a university.

This Guidance represents the collected thoughts and learning from the Assessors, universities and project leads involved.

CFE and the Learning and Skills Council would like to thank all of the participants of the pilot for their time and commitment to the process.

Six universities took part in the pilot:

The University of Cumbria

Leeds Trinity and All Saints

The University of Salford

The University of Sunderland

The University of Teesside

The University of Worcester

Glossary

NB: *A fuller Glossary can be found in the* Applicant Guide.

Application: The written submission a provider develops to allow assessment, providing a narrative of evidence statements against each of the Indicators in the Standard

Application: Though in a general sense you 'apply' for the Standard, the terminology is that you first officially Register and then write an Application form which addresses each of the TQS indicators. This is what we refer to as your Application, or Submission.

Approaches Criteria/ Indicators: The elements of the Standard that focus on what your organisation does.

Processes: Simply refer to everything your organisation does – what are the steps involved?

Registration: The first official step in your assessment journey, this consists of answering a few simple questions about your business.

Results Criteria/ Indicators: The elements of the Standard that focus on data regarding your strategy and employers.

Strategy Criteria/ Indicators: The elements of the Standard that look at what your organisation is all about and what it wants to achieve.

The Training Quality Standard

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