



Skills Funding
Agency

The matrix Standard: guidance notes

Update 2

May 2014

Of interest to providers and employers

The matrix Standard guidance notes: update 2

The following guidance responds to queries from providers about the contract variation below which referred to the matrix Standard. This is the second guidance document issued by the Agency on this topic. This document updates and replaces the earlier guidance document that was dated 18 October 2013, reference Mxfaqs1.

*Contract for Services

18.15 As part of the delivery of the services, **the contractor** must provide high-quality and easily accessible information and advice to help learners to understand the opportunities and support available to them about education, training or connected matters (including employment).

18.15.1 Where one of the main objectives of the services to be provided under this contract is to deliver information and advice, **the contractor** will have to have or attain the matrix Standard accreditation within 6 months of the contract being awarded; and

18.15.2 If the information and advice is embedded as part of the delivery of the services, **the contractor** should work towards achieving the matrix Standard Accreditation within 12 months of the start of the contract.

18.15.3 Where the services are delivered by a subcontractor on behalf of **the contractor**, the requirements set out in clauses 18.15.1 and 18.15.2 must be applied to the subcontractor. This does not apply where **the contractor** retains responsibility for the delivery of information and advice to the learners.

18.15.4 Once achieved, matrix Standard accreditation is valid for 3 years. As part of their accreditation, **the contractor** is required to successfully demonstrate their continuous improvement activities to their matrix Assessor through the use of the online self-reflection tool on an annual basis.

*(Note: the above clauses also appear in clauses 10.14.1 to 10.14.4 of the Financial Memorandum and clauses 8.15.1 to 8.15.4 of the Conditions of Funding (Grant))

1. Correction: The self-reflection 'tool' is a paper-based process. It is not an online tool.

2. Clarification regarding use of the self-reflection tool: assessment and monitoring of continuous quality improvement through the use of the self-reflection tool is a relatively recent innovation in the matrix Standard. The requirement to demonstrate continuous improvement through the use of the self-reflection tool will apply to all providers who booked their matrix assessment after 1 October 2012.

Providers who booked their matrix assessment before the self-reflection assessment process was introduced on 1 October 2012 will be expected to continue to measure and evidence continuous quality improvement through their existing in-house quality/organisational development arrangements.

Core Principles – explanatory notes

A) Requirements around the matrix Standard only apply to training, learning or work experience programmes and activities that are partly or wholly-funded by the Skills Funding Agency.

B) Where a requirement to have or attain the matrix Standard applies it will apply to all Skills Funding Agency funding streams, including Apprenticeships, classroom based learning, work based learning and community learning.

C) If the main activity of a contractor or subcontractor includes the provision of training, education and/or work experience then there will be a presumption that embedded information and advice will form part of that activity.

In this case, the organisation will need to have the matrix Standard or attain it within 12 months.

D) If after consulting the Agency there remains a lack of clarity about whether a contractor is providing embedded or discrete advice the presumption will be that embedded advice is being offered.

E) If, as part of its training or learning offer an organisation has a student services function, customer, trainee or employee advice service or helpline then it shall be assumed that the main objective of this service is to deliver information and advice. This will be regarded as a discrete or dedicated information and advice function.

In this case, the organisation will need to have the matrix Standard or attain it within 6 months.

F) Re 18.15.3 above: as a minimum, when a contractor retains responsibility for the delivery of information and advice but subcontracts the delivery of services, the contractor must provide the following to **all** subcontractors:

1. Information about the matrix Standard and links to the [emqc website](#).

2. Clear, written guidance and procedures setting out how learners can access quality assured careers information and advice.

3. Guidance and procedures that will enable subcontractors to deliver appropriate embedded advice and information to their learners.

4. Information about how the lead contractor will quality assure, monitor and support information and advice provided by subcontractors to learners.

G) Organisations (for example, local authorities) that are **solely** engaged in the commissioning, administration and allocation of Skills Funding Agency funds to community learning organisations and do not directly deliver community learning to learners will not be required to hold the matrix Standard. Organisations that believe that they fall into this category must discuss and agree their status with the Agency at the earliest opportunity.

Guidance notes

Who should I contact if I have any queries about the matrix Standard?

If your query is about whether you require the matrix Standard; or whether you need to attain it within 6 months or 12 months, please speak to your existing contact from the Skills Funding Agency.

If you have questions about registering for an assessment or the matrix Standard process please look at the [matrix Standard website](#), contact emqc Ltd on 0845 304 8600 or email them at matrix@emqc.co.uk.

In view of the 'Securing Independent Careers Guidance' (June 2013) document are sixth-form colleges exempt from the requirement to attain the matrix Standard?

In line with the guidance set out in the document entitled 'Securing Independent Careers Guidance' (June 2013), sixth-form colleges are not required to hold or obtain the matrix Standard in order to provide discrete or embedded information and advice to any student aged 18 or younger; nor do they require the matrix Standard to provide information and advice to 19- to 25-year-olds with a current Learning Difficulty Assessment in place under section 139a of the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

However, sixth-form colleges are required to hold or obtain the matrix Standard in order to provide discrete or embedded information and advice to any student or adult aged 19 years or over without a current Learning Difficulty Assessment in place under section 139a of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 and who is in receipt of education, learning, training or work experience opportunities (partly or wholly funded by the Agency) provided by the college or through a subcontractor of the college.

Where the above guidance presents difficulties or exceptional circumstances exist (for example, very modest Agency funding and/or very few Agency-funded learners) the sixth-form college can make alternative arrangements, in line with the suggested alternatives set out in the guidance following discussion with their current Skills Funding Agency contact person or team.

As recommended in the guidance, providers should seek to obtain an appropriate quality assurance standard to ensure that the quality of information and advice provided to students aged 18 or under and students aged 19 to 25 with learning difficulties is good.

In view of the ‘Securing Independent Careers Guidance’ (June 2013) document are general further education colleges exempt from the requirement to attain the matrix Standard?

In line with the guidance set out in the document entitled ‘Securing Independent Careers Guidance’ (June 2013), general further education colleges are strongly encouraged but not required to hold the matrix Standard in order to provide discrete or embedded information and advice to any student aged 18 or younger; nor do they require the matrix Standard to provide information and advice to 19- to 25-year-olds with a current Learning Difficulty Assessment in place under section 139a of the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

However, general further education colleges are required to hold or obtain the matrix Standard in order to provide discrete or embedded information and advice to any adult aged 19 years or over who is in receipt of education, learning, training or work experience opportunities (partly or wholly-funded by the Agency) provided by the college or through a subcontractor of the college.

Why can’t sixth-form colleges choose how to quality assure their Careers guidance in the same way as schools and HEIs do?

While the guidance in the BIS/DfE document entitled ‘Securing Independent Careers Guidance’ (June 2013) endorses the matrix Standard (para 6, p4) for 16- to 18-year-old students and 19- to 25-year-old students with a learning difficulty, it makes the point that “a range of dedicated quality awards exist if your college wishes to demonstrate the quality of your overall careers education, information, advice and guidance programme.”

The above guidance from BIS and DfE confirms the right of all sixth-form colleges to choose how they quality assure careers guidance for their core cohorts of students that is, 16 to 18-year-olds; and 19- to 25-year-olds with a recognised learning difficulty. Only sixth-form colleges with a significant Adult Skills Budget

(ASB) will be required to comply with the requirements around the matrix Standard that apply to the majority of providers in receipt of ASB funds from the Skills Funding Agency.

We work closely with Emqc Ltd (guardians of the matrix Standard) and have been very encouraged by the adoption of the matrix Standard by so many general further education colleges and training providers. We want this trend to continue and so we take great care to ensure our actions encourage increased commitment to the matrix Standard across the provider community. You will see elsewhere in this guidance that wherever cost is likely to be a significant issue for a provider we have suggested alternative ways forward.

What level of the matrix Standard is required? Does the whole college/organisation need to be assessed or just the student services section?

The Agency would argue that providers seeking matrix accreditation who take a whole organisation approach will usually reap greater organisational benefits from the assessment process. However, it is for the organisation to discuss and decide the scope of the assessment with their matrix assessor or adviser.

In summary, a college will have met the Agency's requirements for quality assuring its information, advice and guidance arrangements regardless of whether it has attained the matrix Standard for the whole college or solely for its dedicated in-house information, advice and guidance team or service.

Do higher education institutions that hold adult skills budget (ASB) contracts have to have or attain the matrix Standard?

No. Even though the majority of higher education institutions that hold ASB contracts have chosen to attain and maintain their matrix standard accreditation; at

present different regulatory, funding and quality assurance arrangements mean that they are exempt from this requirement.

**Do employer direct grant holders have to hold or attain the matrix Standard?
Are employers exempt?**

Although the Skills Funding Agency would recommend that all employers involved in delivering Agency funded programmes should aspire to attain the matrix Standard the Agency recognises that, in some cases, it may be difficult for employers who have invested heavily in training employees, to provide advice and information which may at times be at odds with the values and ambitions of the organisation.

However, the employer should be able to demonstrate through their in-house arrangements that they are able to provide good-quality information and advice and that their learners have access to information and advice from a matrix accredited external organisation that is supporting the learning of their employees or an organisation that has expertise in delivering high-quality careers information and advice.

Do employers under the Employer Ownership Pilot need to have matrix?

Again, although the Agency would recommend that all employers involved in delivering Agency-funded programmes should aspire to attain the matrix Standard the Agency recognises that, in some cases, it may be difficult for employers who have invested heavily in training employees, to provide advice and information which may at times be at odds with the values and ambitions of the organisation.

However, the employer should be able to demonstrate through their in-house arrangements that they are able to provide good-quality information and advice and that their learners have access to information and advice from a matrix accredited external organisation that is supporting the learning of their employees

or an organisation that has expertise in delivering high-quality careers information and advice.

Can a non-matrix accredited contractor delivering or subcontracting training, learning and/or work experience meet its information and advice obligations by referring students, trainees or employees to a partner organisation or the National Careers Service?

Where there is a body or organisation in receipt of Agency funding with responsibility for providing training, support and/or qualifications to learners that it does not employ, that body should have or attain the matrix Standard as specified above. Only in exceptional circumstances (for example, very modest Agency funding and/or very few Agency-funded learners) and following discussion and agreement with the Skills Funding Agency should responsibility for career-related information and advice:

- be displaced to a partner organisation that holds the matrix Standard or
- to an organisation such as the National Careers Service or
- be quality assured through a QICS-recognised IAG standard

The organisation continues to be responsible for the provision of good quality embedded information and advice and should seek to obtain matrix accreditation as soon as it is practical and sensible to do so.

Can the lead provider provide information, advice and guidance on behalf of the subcontractor?

Yes. Please see 18.15.3 above.

Do providers who deliver adult community learning require the matrix standard?

Yes. However, question 9 above may offer alternative routes to meeting the requirement where exceptional circumstances apply.

Is there any additional funding to help providers achieve the matrix Standard?

No. Information about the costs of a matrix assessment can be obtained from the [matrix Standard website](#), by contacting emqc Ltd by phone on 0845 304 8600 or email: matrix@emqc.co.uk .

How does the revised matrix Standard align with Ofsted requirements around leadership and management?

Even though Ofsted delivers an inspection framework whereas the revised matrix Standard is a quality assurance framework, BIS, the Agency and the developers of the current matrix Standard worked closely with providers and partners from Ofsted to ensure that there was alignment and consistency between the 2 frameworks.



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