

The New Deal in Wales

The Management Of Quality And The Continuous Improvement Agenda

A report for Employment Services Wales

**by Estyn (Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training
In Wales)**



**Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi Dros Addysg
A Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru**

**Her Majesty's Inspectorate
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The purpose of Estyn is to improve quality and standards in education and training in Wales.

Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

- ▲ nursery schools and settings maintained or used by local education authorities (LEAs);
- ▲ primary schools;
- ▲ secondary schools;
- ▲ special schools;
- ▲ pupil referral units;
- ▲ independent schools;
- ▲ LEA-maintained community provision, both adult and youth work;
- ▲ voluntary youth agencies;
- ▲ LEAs;
- ▲ teacher education and training;
- ▲ further education;
- ▲ assembly-funded training;
- ▲ the careers service;
- ▲ the education, careers and training elements of New Deal.

Estyn also:

- ▲ provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others;
- ▲ makes public good practice based on inspection evidence.

This report is one of a series on the quality and standards of education and training in Wales.

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Summary

Main Findings

- There are clear improvements in the management of quality in 70% of providers re-inspected for this survey;
- almost all of those providers previously graded as unsatisfactory are now at, or above, the quality threshold;
- in those providers showing most improvement, formal quality mechanisms have been introduced, or extended, to encompass their New Deal provision;
- many providers have appropriately identified a manager who has specific responsibility for the development of quality across their New Deal provision;
- in many providers where there has been little or no improvement in the management of quality, there has been a significant drop in the number of New Deal clients accessing training;
- monitoring of outcomes and completion rates is now a standard feature in most providers and good use is made of the Employment Services' "traffic lights" of comparative performance in client progression into jobs, although a few providers still do not systematically analyse data;
- the use of target setting is well developed in a few providers, but it is poor in most others;
- a lack of suitable national comparators for percentage of clients completing their individual training plans or obtaining qualifications means some providers are accepting poor performance as being satisfactory;

- mechanisms to obtain feedback from clients and other customers are still poor in many providers;
- the monitoring of the quality of subcontractors has improved significantly and most providers are aware of, and meeting, their responsibilities for this;
- almost all providers find the regular meetings and quality reviews with Employment Services helpful in driving forward quality improvement; and
- regular meetings with other providers are generally seen as useful in raising common problems and discussing potential solutions, although not all providers have had the opportunity to participate in such meetings.

INTRODUCTION

Background

- 1 In 1999 Employment Services invited Estyn to inspect the quality and standards of provision of the New Deal in Wales under the terms of a memorandum of understanding. The current programme of inspections consists of short visits to individual providers to assess quality and standards and a series of wider thematic and regional surveys, leading to published reports.
- 2 Clients starting on New Deal are entitled to up to four months of special help, advice and activity in finding a job. This is called the “Gateway”. At some point in the Gateway programme, if a client has been unable to find a job, they are asked to choose one of the four New Deal options. These options are:
 - a subsidised job with an employer;
 - work with the Environmental Task Force;
 - work in the Voluntary Sector; and
 - Full-Time Education and Training to gain a recognised qualification.
- 3 Each of the options carries with it an entitlement to 26 days off-the-job training, or its equivalent.
- 4 Estyn inspection visits focused on the New Deal for 18-24 year olds, looking at the Gateway and each of the four options. A team of inspectors with expertise in a wide range of vocational areas undertook the visits. They were working to a framework, agreed with the Employment Services, similar to that used in the inspection of Assembly funded training. The framework sets out criteria for the quality of education and training under six elements. These are:

Element 1	Training, learning and assessment
Element 2	Standards achieved by clients
Element 3	Planning and management of education and training
Element 4	Support for clients
Element 5	Resources for education and training
Element 6	Management of quality

5 After each visit, a report was written on the findings of the inspection and each of the elements graded, using the Estyn grades:

Good with some outstanding features	Grade 1
Good features and no important shortcomings	Grade 2
Good features outweigh shortcomings	Grade 3
Important shortcomings outweigh good features	Grade 4
Many important shortcomings	Grade 5

6 A Grade 3 or above indicates that threshold of acceptable quality has been met. Grades 4 and 5 indicate that provision has fallen below an acceptable quality and that significant improvements need to be made.

Evidence base

7 This report presents the findings of a survey of the management of quality and the continuous improvement agenda of the Government's New Deal programme in Wales. It is based on a series of visits carried out in June and July 2001. Most providers visited had already been inspected and the purpose of the visits was to see what progress they had made in improving their management of quality since the previous inspection. These specific inspection visits were supported by additional information drawn from Estyn's other inspection activities.

8 The findings in this report are based on evidence gathered during inspections and assessments undertaken in the course of:

- specific inspection visits to the New Deal providers as part of this survey;

- previous inspections of New Deal providers;
- evidence derived from inspections of organisations offering Assembly funded training who also offer training to clients on the New Deal;
- evidence derived from assessments and inspections of further education colleges offering training to those on the New Deal;
- inspection activity undertaken by Estyn in other phases of education and training in Wales, such as youth and community provision and inspection of local education authority provision; and
- meetings with employers and staff in Employment Services local offices.

FINDINGS

9 Since June 1999, Estyn has undertaken 40 inspections of New Deal providers. Management of quality (element 6 in the framework) was graded as being good, that is having no important shortcomings (grades 1 and 2), in 23% of providers. Good features outweighed shortcomings (grade 3) in 57% of providers. In 20% of providers, important shortcomings outweighed good features (grade 4). None of the providers inspected was judged to be at grade 5. The table below shows the comparative grades allocated for element 6.

Table 1: Percentage of each grades allocated to providers for the management of quality in New Deal inspections, June 1999-July 2001:

Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
3%	20%	57%	20%	-

10 Findings in the original inspection reports indicate that, in the best instances, appropriate individual targets were set and there was monitoring of achievement at individual and aggregate levels. However, many providers had not developed a system for the management of quality and did not regularly collect and analyse data. There was little formal consideration of client views of training and the quality of sub-contracted training was rarely monitored. Very few providers undertook any formal review of their New Deal provision in order to produce self-assessment reports and action plans for improvement.

11 Following the re-inspections, inspectors found that there were clear improvements in the management of quality in 70% of providers. However, the remaining 30% of providers showed little or no improvement. Inspectors indicated that in almost all cases, those who were previously judged to be unsatisfactory (grade 4) for their management of quality were now at, or above, the quality threshold (grade 3).

12 In those providers showing an improvement, the most notable feature is the introduction of formal quality mechanisms to encompass New Deal provision. These mechanisms frequently represent an extension of the self-assessment activities used

to monitor and evaluate other training offered by the provider. In these providers, New Deal provision is effectively reviewed and there is a clear action plan for further improvement.

Case study on ensuring quality provision

The provider, a further education college offering off-the-job training across number of options and for a number of contractors, has a well-established system for the management of quality across the whole of its provision. Each of the sections within the college undertakes regular twice-yearly self-assessments. The self-assessments make effective use of data analysis and include an action plan to address any identified weaknesses. This self-assessment requirement extends to the section responsible for the management of the New Deal provision offered by the college, where the self-assessment report also has to cover subcontracted training.

The self-assessment reports go to the academic board, where they are fully discussed. The college principal questions the section head presenting the report on any issues he feels are unclear, or with which he disagrees. If the academic board is not satisfied with the report it is referred back to the section to be re-written. Once the academic board accepts the report, it is passed on to the college governors, who may also raise questions if they so desire.

- 13 In several of the providers that do not offer other forms of training, other suitable self-assessment mechanisms have been introduced. Most of these are based on the Estyn inspection framework, although several use the guidelines produced for the New Deal in England by the Adult Learning Inspectorate, particularly when they operate in both countries.
- 14 Many providers have also designated a manager with specific responsibility for the development of the quality of their New Deal provision. These quality managers often have a range of experiences that includes preparation of self-assessment reports in a different context, for example in a further education college or an organisation delivering Assembly funded training. These managers are making a considerable contribution to the improvement of management of quality in their

organisations by developing effective procedures and establishing good management practices.

Case study on improvement in managing quality

One provider, part of a local authority offering the Environmental Task Force option, was initially graded as unsatisfactory. Following the inspection, the provider allocated a specific responsibility for ensuring and improving the management of quality to the job description of one of their managers.

This manager undertook an internal self evaluation, based on the Estyn inspection findings, and prepared an action plan to address the weaknesses identified. Progress in achieving the actions are monitored and fed back to management team meetings.

The quality manager also produces a regular monthly analysis of the New Deal option. The analysis includes data on starters, leavers, initial training plan completers and destinations of clients and shows the month on month trends. The manager circulates colourful, easily understood charts to all staff involved in delivering the training and encourages them to consider how the outcomes can be further improved.

- 15 Several of the providers where there has been no improvement in the management of quality reported a significant drop in the numbers of their New Deal clients. This means that resources to drive forward the continuous improvement agenda have not been available. Other providers have concentrated their efforts on improving other specific aspects of their New Deal delivery that had been identified as unsatisfactory or needing attention, rather than developing a strategic approach to the management of quality.
- 16 Monitoring of outcomes and completion rates is now a standard feature in most providers. Many have established effective databases to collect and analyse quantitative information on clients. They make good use of Employment Services

“traffic lights” data to identify how they are performing in successful job placement compared with other local providers and promptly investigate reasons for under-performance. In the best providers, managers regularly review the number of clients who start, complete or leave early, and discuss these with staff. Clear action plans are devised to address issues in both the short and longer term. However, in a few providers, there is still little systematic analysis of data. These providers often do not take any ownership of the findings of Employment Services reports and explain their underperformance in terms of difficulties with clients or their geographic location.

- 17 Target setting for individuals and groups is well developed in a few providers, but is poor in most others. It is most effective in those providers where a regular self-assessment of New Deal provision is carried out alongside other aspects of training. In such providers, staff have a good understanding of the importance of setting targets and of ways in which realistic targets can be established. In a few other providers, who only offer New Deal, good use is made of comparators for percentages entering employment provided by Employment Services. However, in the majority of providers, target setting is weak. In many providers, where individual targets are set, it is at the level of counting NVQ units to be achieved. No behaviour or developmental objectives are identified, although these would be appropriate and beneficial for the client.
- 18 Employment Services supply data on numbers and percentages of clients entering employment through the “traffic lights” performance tables. Little other comparative data is available to training providers on such issues as numbers completing training or numbers gaining qualifications. A few providers, who also offer other forms of Assembly funded training, are able to make effective internal comparisons across the different schemes. However, the majority of providers can only compare their current performance to that of previous years, identifying any apparent trends. There is also some variation between providers in their expectations of New Deal clients and the qualifications they should be able to complete whilst in their option. Without national data to indicate best practice, some providers are not adequately challenged, set their expectations too low and clients are not able to fulfil their potential and gain maximum benefit from their time on the New Deal.

- 19 The use of questionnaires and other tools to obtain feedback from clients and other customers is still weak in most providers. A few providers, however, have started to gather views on a regular basis. In one of the best instances, the provider holds regular focus groups with clients and also sends questionnaires to employers to ensure the suitability of the training being offered. Another provider has a well-developed client questionnaire, but does not extend this to asking employers or work placement providers for their views.

Case study on establishing client satisfaction

The provider, a further education college, offers a range of New Deal provision including the Gateway, the Full Time Education and Training option and off-the-job training for several other options. It maintains its own contract with Employment Services as well as operating as a subcontractor for a number of other contract holders.

In order to obtain feedback on the quality of their New Deal provision, the college uses a number of techniques. One involves the use of focus groups of learners discussing issues under the direction of the college marketing unit. Some focus groups include a mix of learners from different aspects of the college provision, including representative New Deal clients. Other groups are specific to particular areas of provision, such as the New Deal. The marketing unit also has responsibility for contacting learners who leave early, without completing their training programmes. They do this through a mix of telephone surveys and postal questionnaires.

In addition to obtaining feedback on client satisfaction, the college also sends questionnaires to work placements providers and employers using the college facilities or sending learners to the college. These questionnaires are designed to question perceptions on both the quality of the education and training offered and also the facilities available at the college. The college uses a similar questionnaire with those subcontracting training.

20 The management of the quality of subcontractors has improved significantly since the original inspections were undertaken. Most providers are now aware of their responsibilities to ensure adequate arrangements for monitoring their subcontractors and most have implemented systems to achieve this. Much useful dialogue has occurred, particularly where providers hold their own contracts and act as subcontractors for other organisations. Several providers have benefited from the opportunity to discuss quality issues with another provider and to identify transferable good practice. However, in a few cases, small providers are still unwilling to take issue with larger providers who are undertaking training on their behalf, even when problems such as client dissatisfaction are apparent.

Case study on monitoring subcontractors

The provider, a private training company, subcontracts substantial parts of the off-the-job training, particularly in specialist areas such as licensed good vehicle and lift truck driving. Included in the formal contract agreement for this training is a clause explaining the responsibilities of each part for monitoring and maintaining the quality of the provision. Prior to signing the agreement, the provider ensures the subcontractor has read the clause and is aware of what it means in practice.

Once training has started, the provider's quality manager for New Deal carries out regular surveys of client satisfaction. He also monitors the output figures and compares them with other subcontracted providers offering the same training to make sure there are no apparent problems. The quality manager also meets regularly with representatives of the subcontractors, to discuss issues and resolve difficulties.

21 Almost all providers said that they find the regular meetings and quality reviews with Employment Services staff to be useful. Many cited the good working relationships with Employment Services staff as being an important factor in driving forward issues of quality improvement. In several instances, providers reported that their Employment Services quality review officers had an understanding and involvement with New Deal delivery issues that enabled them to make constructive suggestions that would not otherwise have occurred to the provider.

22 Regular meetings with other providers also help drive forward the quality agenda. Providers who had the opportunity to participate in such meetings clearly benefited. They reported discussing common problems and finding out about ways in which other providers had addressed these, some successfully and others unsuccessfully. Several providers who had not been part of such meetings said they would like to see a network of providers established, although their opinion was divided as to whether this should be a regional network of all providers or a national network of specific option providers. A few providers who had participated in meetings involving providers from England as well as Wales, reported how useful these had been, although several agenda items were not directly relevant to their needs.

CONCLUSIONS:

22 Overall, there has been a significant improvement in the management of quality in most providers visited. Almost all of those previously identified as being unsatisfactory now have good features that outweigh any shortcomings. Many providers have effectively introduced quality systems, or extended existing mechanisms, to enable them to regularly review their New Deal provision and to action plan for further improvements. Monitoring of outcomes is now a standard feature of most providers. However, in a few providers, insufficient use is made of the systematic analysis of data. Whilst target setting is well developed in a few providers, it is still underdeveloped in the majority. Mechanisms for obtaining feedback from clients and other customers are also underdeveloped in most providers. Monitoring the quality of subcontractors is much improved. Almost all providers find their contact with Employment Services quality review staff to be useful in driving forward issues of quality improvement. Most providers recognise the importance of opportunities to meet with other providers and those who participate in such meetings derive clear benefits.

KEY ISSUES FOR ATTENTION

23 In order to further improve the management of quality within the New Deal and to maintain the momentum for continuous improvement of provision, providers should:

- ensure that they have a formal mechanism to review the quality of their New Deal provision;
- make effective use of the systematic analysis of data;
- set appropriate targets for individuals and groups, making effective use of comparators from other training schemes or Employment Services data;
- develop suitable mechanisms to obtain feedback from clients and other customers;
- ensure the quality of subcontractors' provision is regularly monitored and that issues identified are addressed; and
- participate in networks of providers, where these are in place, and consider ways of establishing such networks where they are not already available.

Appendix One

Employment Services “traffic lights” data

Employment Services produces a monthly table of providers for each of the New Deal options in Wales. The table ranks providers on the basis of monthly and cumulative percentages of leavers going into jobs. A cumulative average for the region is also calculated. The table then highlights providers in a particular colour, depending on how their performance compares to that of the cumulative average.

Table showing “traffic light” colour on percentage of leavers into jobs

<i>Percentage of leavers into jobs for provider</i>	<i>Highlight colour</i>
5% or more above cumulative average	Green
Les than 5% above or below cumulative average	Yellow
5% or more below cumulative average	Red

The table produced by Employment Services also shows the position of the provider for the previous months in the financial year, each highlighted in the appropriate colour.

For Employment Services, the tables give a clear visual picture of provider performance. They also help Employment Services identify where there are problems that need to be investigated. Providers can use these tables to see their performance in relation to other providers and also to monitor how their relative performance is changing.