

Quality improvement and quality assurance

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Quality improvement

Quality improvement is about having systems in place to continuously monitor and improve the products and services an organisation offers. There are quality improvement models such as Lean and Six sigma.

The lean process looks at value from the learners' point of view, and delivers what they need. It often applies to healthcare, but can be applied to education.

<https://quality-one.com/lean/>

Six sigma uses data and statistical methods to improve systems. The aim is to identify and eliminate any defects which are causing variations in quality and to minimise the impact. This is done by defining a sequence of steps around a certain objective. <https://www.businessballs.com/performance-management/six-sigma-definitions-history-overview/>

Quality management systems (QMS)

QMS is about having a set of policies, procedures and processes in place to ensure the products and services of an organisation meet customer requirements. A QMS system structures the quality improvement process.

Examples are:

ISO - International Organisation for Standardisation

ISO is the International Organisation for Standardisation. You might have heard of ISO 9001 – this sets out the criteria for a quality management system and can be certified. It is based on a number of quality management principles including a strong customer focus, the motivation and implication of top management, the process approach and continual improvement. Using ISO 9001 helps ensure that customers get consistent, good-quality products and services, which in turn brings many business benefits. <https://www.iso.org/home.html>

TQM describes a management approach to long-term success through customer satisfaction. All members of an organisation participate in improving the processes, products, services, and the culture in which they work. <https://asq.org/quality-resources/total-quality-management>

To contribute to a good quality system, an educational organisation could:

- have a quality policy which all staff are familiar with
- have pro-active managers and leaders
- regularly review and update all policies and procedures
- have an effective appraisal system for staff
- gain feedback from learners about their experiences i.e. using surveys and questionnaires
- carry out audits, observations and inspections
- implement staff training, development and support
- evaluate products (i.e. courses) and services (i.e. learner support)
- analyse data, benchmarking and targets
- create realistic action plans and monitor progress
- follow all relevant regulations and external requirements.

Quality assurance

Quality assurance can be defined as a system which guarantees the quality of the products or services offered. The product is the programme, qualification or set of standards that the learner is working towards. The service is everything which underpins the product and supports the learner. If quality assurance does not take place, there could be risks to the accuracy, consistency and fairness of training and assessment practice.

The quality assurance process should seek to avoid problems, and stabilise and improve the products and services offered to learners. It can be thought of as a proactive system to resolve any issues as they occur. This is in contrast to quality control which seeks to find problems and is usually reactive after the event. A good quality system will have structures in place to enable situations to be dealt with as they happen, rather than afterwards when it might be too late.

Quality assurance cycle

The cycle can be used for both internal and external quality assurance activities and consists of the following five aspects:

Identify the product or service – ascertain what is to be taught, assessed and internally quality assured and why. For example, are learners working towards a qualification or a programme of learning, or are staff being observed performing their job roles? The criteria will need to be clear, i.e. units from a qualification (product) or the support the learner receives (service). Learners should be allocated to assessors in a fair way perhaps according to their location or workload.

Planning – devise a sample plan to arrange what will be monitored, from whom and when. Plan the dates to observe trainer and assessor performance, hold team meetings and standardisation activities. Information will need to be obtained from assessors/IQAs to assist the planning process, and risks taken into account such as assessor knowledge, qualifications and experience.



Activity – carry out the IQA/EQA activities such as sampling learners’ work, talking to learners, staff, supervisors and witnesses, observing trainer and assessor performance, sampling assessment records and decisions and preparing for external visits. Activities also include holding meetings and standardisation events, supporting and training relevant staff and communicating with others involved in the assessment and quality assurance process.

Decision and feedback – make a judgement as to whether the trainer/assessor/IQA has performed satisfactorily and made valid and reliable decisions. Provide developmental feedback as to what was good or what could be improved. Agree action points if necessary and follow them up.

Evaluation – carry out a review of the assessment and quality process to determine what could be improved or done differently. Agree action plans if necessary; implement and follow up. Follow any action plans from external quality assurers or inspectors. Write self-assessment reports as necessary to link in with the organisation’s quality cycle.

Throughout the cycle, standardisation of practice between assessors, and internal quality assurers should take place; this will help ensure the consistency and fairness of all decisions. Feedback should also be obtained from learners and others. Records must be maintained of all activities for audit requirements.

The cycle is from: Gravells A (2016) *Principles and Practices of Quality Assurance* London Learning Matters SAGE

Internal quality assurance

Internal quality assurance (IQA) relates to the monitoring of all the teaching, learning and assessment activities which learners will undertake. The activities should form part of an organisation’s overall quality assurance system. They can be for all

courses and programmes, not just those which are accredited via an awarding organisation.

As a minimum, an internal quality assurer should:

- plan what will be monitored, from whom and when
- observe trainer and assessor performance and provide developmental feedback
- sample assessment records, learners' work and assessment decisions
- meet with learners and others, for example, witnesses from the workplace
- facilitate the standardisation of practice
- support trainers and assessors.

External quality assurance

External quality assurance seeks to ensure that assessment and internal quality assurance activities have been conducted in a consistent, safe and fair manner. The process must take place on behalf of an awarding organisation (AO) for each accredited centre which offers their qualifications. This is to ensure the learners who have been registered with them have received a quality service, and that the assessment and IQA decisions are valid and reliable.

If you deliver and assess qualifications which are certificated via an AO, an external quality assurer (EQA) will visit or carry out a remote verification to sample learners' work and assessment records. They will maintain their own records as proof of what they have done, and also complete the AOs report.

Quality cycle

A quality cycle will often cover activities which are in addition to, or which complement those which might occur as a part of the quality assurance process. All aspects of the quality cycle are relevant to the way an organisation which offers education and training should operate. It's usually based on the concepts of *planning, doing, checking* and *acting* on various aspects.

Handout Ref H9040 is a visual image of the aspects of the quality cycle, which differs from the quality assurance cycle.

Self-assessment

Self-assessment helps to identify strengths and limitations – for staff and for the organisation. It relies on being honest, admitting what needs to be improved, and setting action plans to achieve it. This should result in an improvement in practice of the staff, and an improvement of the products and services offered.

There is an online activity where you can self-assess against the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) Standards here:

https://www.foundationonline.org.uk/course_files/sat-single-page/

Organisations often create self-assessment reports (SARs) which should be generated for all aspects of the quality cycle. They should analyse how well the organisation is performing, and how it is meeting the needs of the learners, the staff and relevant stakeholders. It is usually managers who compile the SAR, but it should be in conjunction with all staff.

Self-evaluation

Self-evaluation is a process of thinking about how you have performed, and asking yourself questions to identify how you could improve. It also includes obtaining feedback from others to inform your questioning. When evaluating your practice, you will need to consider how your own behaviour has impacted upon others, what you could do to improve, and then put this into practice.

Self-evaluation is a way of continually thinking about your own practice to ensure you are carrying out your role effectively. The word self would make you think that you need to do it on your own. However, what you think and what others think might be quite different. If you self-evaluate that you have delivered a fantastic session as none of your learners fell asleep, this might be very different to what they actually experienced.

When you carry out the self-evaluation process, you could consider the perspectives of other people besides your learners. This will help you become more objective with your judgements of yourself, rather than being subjective i.e. only taking your point of view into consideration.

To help you improve in your job role, self-evaluation could take place after each session you deliver. This will enable you to consider your strengths, areas for development and any action required.

Programme evaluation

Whichever type of programme, qualification or set of standards you teach, it's important to evaluate everything you have been involved with. This is to not only help make improvements to the programme, but for yourself, and your current and future learners. Your self-evaluation and other information and data you obtain will help you to formulate a report for your managers – which will link into their quality system

Evaluation can be formative (ongoing) or at the end (final) of your programme. If it's formative, any issues can be dealt with immediately. If it's summative, they can only be put right for the next group of learners. You could obtain information, data and statistics such as: retention, achievement, destination and progression. This information might be compiled by another department or it might be from a record you have maintained yourself.

If you start a programme with 15 learners and only nine achieved at the end, then you need to find out why. It could be that the learners' needs were not met, they were on the wrong programme, or they left by personal choice.

When analysing data regarding your programme and learners, you may need to compare this to national averages (if available). A good start is to note down relevant details such as: the title of the programme, number of learners who started and finished (and passed), number of hours taught, where it's taught and why, and the expected qualification or outcomes.

Obtaining information and data

Obtaining feedback to help evaluate your programme can include:

- surveys and questionnaires to learners and others involved in the teaching, learning and assessment process
- appraisals, reviews of progress and meetings with your line managers and peers
- discussions, interviews, observations and data analysis.

Obtaining data and gaining feedback regarding learners' progress towards the product, and their satisfaction regarding the services received, is a crucial part of the evaluation process.

Qualitative and quantitative information and data

Qualitative data gives you information, for example; from answers to open questions. Quantitative data gives you numbers, for example; 8 out of 10 learners achieved the qualification. Gathering both types of data can help you to evaluate your programme.

To help you evaluate your programme, you could obtain data and statistics regarding your learners. For example, enrolment, retention, achievement, destination and progression figures. You might have to ask someone to give you this data if you don't have access to it yourself.

Data and feedback from others can help ensure the products and services have been successful (or not) and help inform future planning. If your programme hasn't been successful, i.e. several learners either left or didn't achieve; your organisation might decide not to offer the programme again. Retention and achievement rates could affect the amount of funding received to offer a programme in future.

Data can also be obtained from assessment results. If you assess a programme which requires grades to be given to learners, you could analyse the data regarding their achievements. This could simply be by adding up the numbers of grades given. For example, out of a group of 24 learners, 12 received an A, 8 received a B, and 4 achieved a C.

Areas for improvement

Based on the information and data you have received, you will need to analyse it and write a report, with a suitable action plan and target dates. Actions should be SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timebound. Your organisation might have a format or a template for you to use to ensure a standardised approach.

Reading list

Duckworth V (2014) *How to be a Brilliant FE Teacher* Oxon Routledge

Gravells A (2016) *Principles and Practices of Quality Assurance* London Learning Matters SAGE

Gregson M & Hillier Y (2015) *Reflective Teaching in Further, Adult and Vocational Education* London Bloomsbury

Kirkpatrick (2006) *Evaluating Training Programs* Oakland Berrett-Koehler Publishers

Mansell S (2021) *50 Quality Improvement and Quality Assurance Approaches* London Learning Matters SAGE

Petty G (2014) *Teaching Today: A Practical Guide* Cheltenham Nelson Thornes

Pleasance S (2016) *Wider Professional Practice in Education and Training* London SAGE Publications Ltd

Read H (2012) *The Best Quality Assurer's Guide* Bideford ReadOn Publications Ltd

Stufflebeam (2014) *Evaluation Theory, Models and Applications* San Francisco Jossey Bass

Tripp D (2011) *Critical Incidents in Teaching: Developing Professional Judgement* London Rutledge

Wood J & Dickinson J (2011) *Quality Assurance and Evaluation in the Lifelong Learning Sector* Exeter Learning Matters

Website list

360 degree feedback – <https://tinyurl.com/l8ztkgf>

Education and Training self-assessment tool - https://www.foundationonline.org.uk/course_files/sat-single-page/

Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research - <https://tinyurl.com/muahyn8>

Evaluation theory and practice - <http://infed.org/mobi/evaluation-theory-and-practice/>

ISO - <https://www.iso.org/home.html>

Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Training Evaluation Model -
<https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/kirkpatrick.htm>

Lean process - <https://quality-one.com/lean/>

Online surveys - www.surveymonkey.com and www.smartsurvey.co.uk

Questionnaire design - <https://tinyurl.com/mfqvc23>

Reading lists - <https://www.anngravells.com/reading-lists/index>

Self-assessment - <http://geoffpetty.com/for-teachers/self-assessment/>

Self-evaluation - <https://tinyurl.com/k6stxhb>

Six sigma - <https://www.businessballs.com/performance-management/six-sigma-definitions-history-overview/>

TQM - <https://asq.org/quality-resources/total-quality-management>

Journal articles

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1356389015607712>

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0739456X16675930>

https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/resources/guide/theory-based_approaches_to_evaluation

<https://www.intrac.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Theory-based-evaluation.pdf>