

Introducing the New Standard

developed by CFE for the
Learning and Skills Council

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web version

New Standard

The New Standard is an assessment framework designed to recognise and celebrate the best organisations delivering training and development solutions to employers. The Standard allows organisations to explain their strategy, the approaches they deploy, and the results they achieve, and to submit this for robust assessment with the potential of accreditation for those meeting the high standards set for capability and performance.

The New Standard is a working title for the Learning and Skills Council's project to develop a 'new higher standard' for accreditation of training providers, including those previously recognised as Centres of Vocational Excellence.

CFE is working with the LSC to manage assessment operations to grow a network of Standard-accredited providers, which will then be promoted to employers under a new name, some time from Autumn 2007.

Starting out

The New Standard is an assessment framework and an assessment and accreditation process which has been designed to recognise and celebrate the best organisations delivering training and development solutions to employers.

The outcome of a year-long process of research, development and testing, the Standard has been designed to reflect employers' priorities and expectations in sourcing training and development solutions, and the practices of the organisations proven to be the best at delivering them.

The Standard has been developed to help employers by

- creating a quality mark which will highlight the best public and private organisations from which to access training and development solutions; and
- setting a high bar for accreditation, to trigger a cultural shift among training and development providers, encouraging them to aspire to greater flexibility, relevance and commitment to continuous improvement.

The Standard has been developed to help organisations delivering training and development solutions by

- offering a comprehensive framework through which to evaluate current strategies, approaches and results in delivery of training and development;
- delivering a rigorous, independent assessment against that framework, with feedback given, to inform innovation, learning and improvement; and
- creating an opportunity for accreditation, allowing the best organisations to stand out in the market, winning new business on the basis of their proven capability.

Accreditation against the Standard is tough to achieve, so we can be confident in endorsing organisations to employers. Consequently, it is something which organisations can aspire to, and be proud of when they achieve it. For all organisations though, the experience of assessment should be positive and give some powerful insights for developing and improving the way employers are served.

The Standard

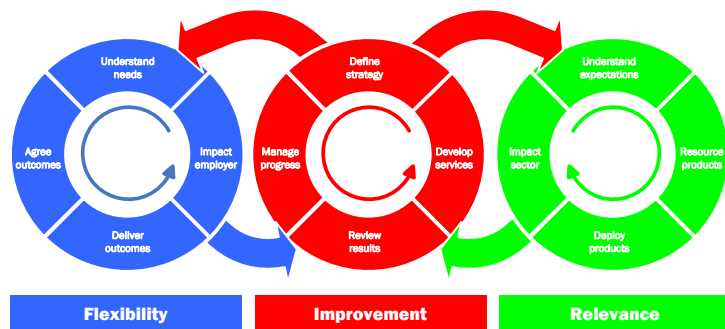
The New Standard's framework is built on an evidence base of employer needs and provider practice, deployed through established industry methods for the assessment of quality, capability and improvement.

The Standard was developed with the intention of driving through a cultural change in the delivery of training and development. This starts with the assessment framework's focuses on two linked but ultimately very different delivery competencies:

- **Responding to the needs of employers as individual customers.** This is covered in Part A of the Standard, assessing organisations for their responsiveness.
- **Developing and deploying products to address particular sector needs.** This is covered in Part B of the Standard, assessing organisations for their expertise.

Part A is for all organisations delivering training and development solutions; Part B focuses on those areas where organisations have expertise, having already demonstrated their ability to serve employers through Part A.

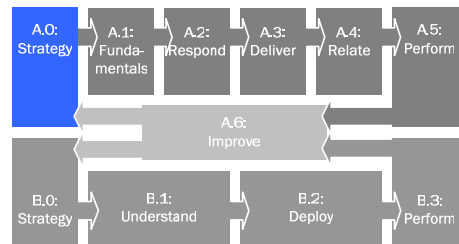
These two emphases reflect the origins of the framework in a set of key concepts defining the essentials of delivering high quality, high impact training and development solutions. These key concepts set out three linked, critical process loops: **flexibility, relevance and improvement.**



What the Standard's assessment framework does is create a common language through which organisations can tell their stories of how they achieve against the tasks defined by the key concepts. The framework isn't prescriptive; it defines *what* a provider should be doing rather than *how*, and asks organisations applying for assessment to tell their story from strategy, through approaches, to achievements.

The assessment framework

A.0: Strategy



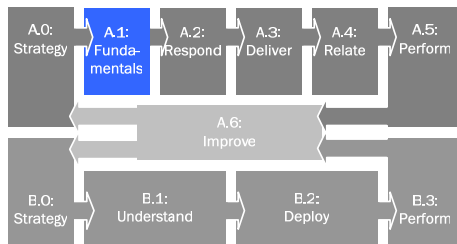
Responsive providers **have a strategy for working with employers based on the market** including clearly defined objectives. They take actions to ensure that their aims and approaches are communicated to appropriate stakeholders.

A.0.1 The strategy for working with employers defines aims and approaches which are communicated to appropriate stakeholders.

A.0.2 The strategy for working with employers includes an analysis of the market, key customer groups and sectors.

A.0.3 The strategy for working with employers defines specific, measurable and time-bound objectives, which are communicated to appropriate stakeholders.

A.1: Fundamentals



Responsive providers **manage their people and resources** to ensure they have the scale and quality they need to meet employers' expectations.

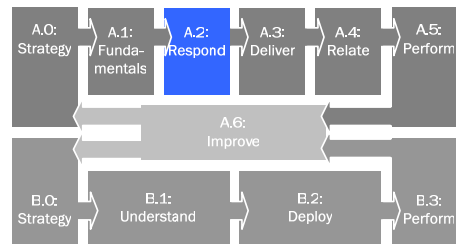
They also take action to ensure that employers know what products and services they can offer.

A.1.1 The people arranging and delivering training solutions are reviewed regularly for performance and capability.

A.1.2 The resources used to deliver training solutions are reviewed regularly for availability and quality.

A.1.3 Employers are made aware, through appropriate information channels, of the range of training solutions available.

A.2: Respond



Responsive providers **manage employers' enquiries** to understand their needs and identify the right solutions.

A.2.1 An employer's enquiry is handled promptly and flexibly, and is reviewed regularly against standards of customer service.

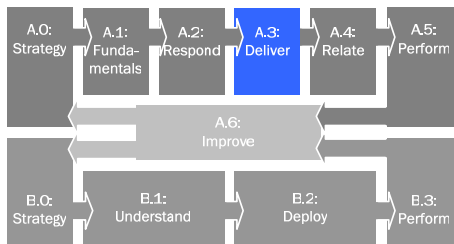
A.2.2 An employer's wants are established and underlying business needs identified to shape solutions tailored to its requirements.

A.2.3 An employer is referred to appropriate alternatives when an appropriate training solution cannot be provided.

A.2.4 Proposals for the delivery of a solution are based on specific and realistic outcome targets reflecting the employer's business needs.

A.2.5 Proposals are presented in ways which recognise the employer's preferences and circumstances.

A.3: Deliver



Responsive providers **deliver training solutions** through clear communication and adaptive management of progress and emerging issues.

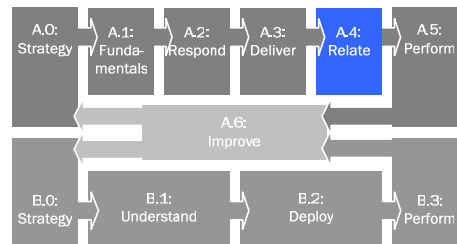
A.3.1 The people delivering training solutions are briefed fully on the requirements and background of the employer before they begin working with them.

A.3.2 The employer and its employees are given appropriate briefing before delivery of a training solution begins.

A.3.3 Training solution delivery is reviewed regularly for quality and customer service, and the employer is informed of progress made.

A.3.4 The employer's feedback on training solution delivery is sought and acted upon promptly where appropriate.

A.4: Relate

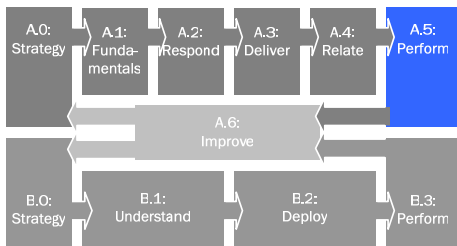


Responsive providers **relate to employers**, by following up after delivery and building lasting relationships.

A.4.1 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 The relationship with an employer is managed and developed, with contact maintained at appropriate intervals.

A.5: Perform



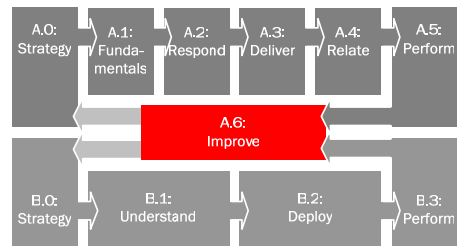
Responsive providers **comprehensively measure and achieve** satisfaction and impact for the employers they work with.

A.5.0. Indicators and outcomes of performance against strategic objectives show an improving trend or a sustained high level of performance.

A.5.1 Employers' satisfaction with services shows an improving trend or a sustained high level of performance.

A.5.2 Employers' assessment of impact on business needs shows an improving trend or a sustained high level of performance.

A.6: Improve

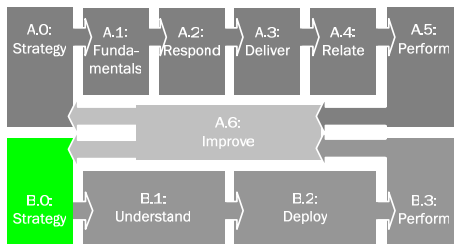


Responsive providers **review their performance** in serving all employers and providing sector expertise to identify and pursue opportunities for improvement, innovation and learning.

A.6.1 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 The range and content of training solutions offered continues to evolve and improve.

B.0: Strategy



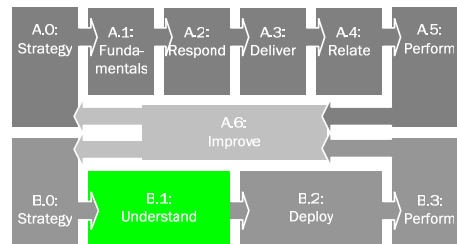
Providers having sectoral expertise have a **strategy for working with the sector based on the market** including clearly defined objectives. They take actions to ensure that their aims and approaches are communicated to appropriate stakeholders.

B.0.1 The strategy for working with the sector defines aims and approaches which are communicated to appropriate stakeholders.

B.0.2 The strategy for working with the sector includes an analysis of the market and key customer groups.

B.0.3 The strategy for working with the sector defines specific, measurable and time-based performance objectives, which are communicated to appropriate stakeholders.

B.1: Understand

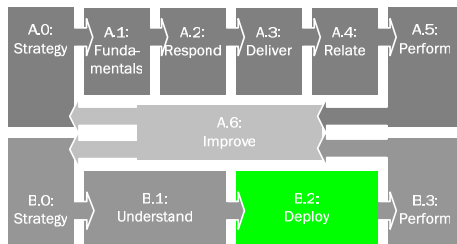


Providers having sectoral expertise **engage in dialogue** with employers and stakeholders in their sectors and look to lead in the adoption and sharing of good practice.

B.1.1 Input is sought from sector employers on their expectations for training solutions and common business needs.

B.1.2 Input is sought from appropriate stakeholders to share good practice and understand the sector's common business needs.

B.2: Deploy



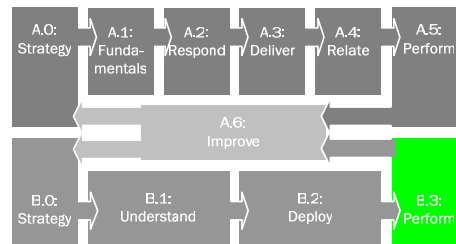
Providers having sectoral expertise **deploy products and services to meet employer needs**, supported by the content, people and resources able to meet industry expectations.

B.2.1 Products and services are developed and delivered to sector expectations and employers' business needs.

B.2.2 The people arranging and delivering products and services have the knowledge and skills to meet sector expectations.

B.2.3 The resources used to arrange and deliver products and services meet sector expectations.

B.3: Perform



Providers having sectoral expertise **cause improving results or sustained good performance** in the areas defined in their strategic objectives.

B.3.0 Indicators of performance against strategic objectives show an improving trend or a sustained high level of performance.

B.3.1 Impact on the sector shows an improving trend or sustained high level of performance.

The Process

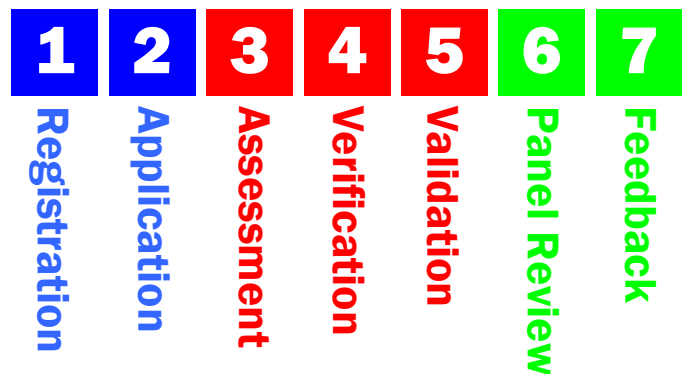
The New Standard was developed from the start as a vehicle to assess and compare organisations delivering training and development solutions to employers. For that reason, to go along with the assessment framework we have created robust assessment process with the power to accredit the best organisations.

The assessment process has been designed to achieve two main purposes:

- First, to provide your organisation with a valuable experience.
- Second, to provide a sound basis for decisions by an Accreditation Panel.

Because we want employers to invest their trust in accreditation, the process is tough. Its focus is an application you will put together to describe, against the assessment framework, how your organisation delivers for employers and develops its expertise.

The application might be for Part A on its own, or for Part A and one or more Part B sector areas, or – if you have already achieved accreditation for Part A – one or more Part B areas on their own.



Once submitted, your application will be subject to assessment, verification and validation, with the Accreditation Panel using the outcomes of these processes to make a decision on whether to

accredit. Most of your contact through the process will be with our Assessor team. They have been selected for their expertise in conducting assessments and have been given in-depth training in reviewing applications for the Standard.

In terms of timescale, we recommend that you spend at least a month, and often more, to pull together your applications. After this point, assessment will typically take around three months to conclude, finishing with a notification of the Panel’s decision and a visit to talk you through what assessment found, with a report detailing the strengths and areas for improvement identified against each of the Standard’s Indicators. There are standard costs of assessment noted on our website, but these can vary according to your organisation’s size – we will work with you at registration to identify what your costs might be.

The assessment process

Step 1: Registration

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Registration	Application	Assessment	Verification	Validation	Panel Review	Feedback

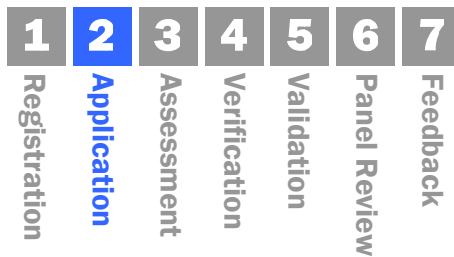
The first step in your journey will be to register your intention to apply for assessment and possible accreditation. You can get a Registration Form from the website, and if you call our enquiries line you can clarify any questions you might have.

Once you register, we'll get in touch to make an Assessment Agreement with you, specifying the cost of assessment and the timescale for its conclusion.

Particular actions here will include:

- Confirming your eligibility for accreditation if successful.
- Setting out your plans for applying – Part A and then what Part Bs?
- Deciding who's going to attend a 2-day Applicant Training Course, and when.
- Proposing your planned timescales for submitting your application – how long do you need to put it together?

Step 2: Application



After making an Assessment Agreement, the next step is for you and your colleagues to pull together your application.

The Applicant Training Course will give you more information on how to construct a good application – but the critical point is to make sure that the claims you make are backed with hard evidence.

Particular actions here will include:

- Being participative in pulling together your application – it should reflect how your organisation runs, as your claims will be rigorously tested.
- If applying for Part A assessment, making sure that you submit the application with full details of your customer contacts to allow for validation.

Step 3: Assessment



Once your application is submitted, we will assign it to an Assessment team, who will get in contact with you early on to plan the process.

We'll first check that the application is fit for purpose, and then the Lead Assessor will subject it to a rigorous review, in anticipation of the verification process.

Particular actions here will include:

- Working through your submission on each Indicator, identifying Strengths and Areas for Improvement.
- Assigning an initial score to the submission, following the Standard's Scoring Framework.

Step 4: Verification

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Registration	Application	Assessment	Verification	Validation	Panel Review	Feedback

Once your Assessment team has reviewed your application, the team will arrange to come to your premises to make a verification visit.

The visit will typically last for a day, and will involve a team of at least two Assessors. Their task for the day will be to verify issues they have identified from your application.

Particular actions here will include:

- Talking to you about the application, and talking to senior management, to understand the organisation.
- Sampling documentary evidence to see how it supports the claims made in your application.
- Talking to operational staff, to check that their experience chimes with the account of your operations given in the application.
- The Assessors revising the assessment score on the basis of their findings, and formulating a recommendation.

Step 5: Validation

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Registration	Application	Assessment	Verification	Validation	Panel Review	Feedback

If you are being assessed for Part A, focusing on responsiveness, and your Assessment team concludes from the visit that you are near the mark for accreditation, we will need to talk to some your customers.

You will have provided a list of your recent customers with your application, and validation will be conducted by calling a representative sample of them. The interview process is very short and simple, so your customers will not be inconvenienced.

Particular actions here will include:

- Checking customers' experiences of working with you – to make sure they're in a position to comment.
- Asking them to rate their willingness to recommend your training and development delivery on a scale of 0 to 10.
- Using this data for an analysis of your customers' backing for possible accreditation.

Step 6: Panel Review



Once the Assessors have concluded their work, they will write up their findings and forward them to the Accreditation Panel for review.

Another Assessor will take on the role of Moderator for the panel, to first ensure that the assessment process has been followed, and then facilitate the Panel review process.

Particular actions here will include:

- Reviewing the Assessor’s draft Feedback Report, including the scores given and issues raised.
- Reviewing the Assessor’s Recommendation, and (for Part A Applications) any validation evidence.
- Arriving at a decision on whether to offer Accreditation.

Step 7: Feedback



After the Accreditation Panel have made their decisions, two things will happen. First, you’ll receive notice of their decision, including any offer of accreditation.

Second, your Lead Assessor will get in touch to set up a visit to deliver full feedback on their assessment.

Particular actions here will include:

- Presenting you with a detailed Feedback Report, with Strengths and Areas for Improvement highlighted for each Indicator.
- Within the Feedback Report, giving you headline scores for your application, to allow you to review your performance.
- At the visit, talking you through the Report, and responding to your questions.

The Outcome

Not every organisation will achieve accreditation on their first attempt – although congratulations will be due to those that do so. Every organisation will, though, benefit from the experience of a rigorous and independent review of their approaches and results.

Around three months after your application has been submitted, you will receive notice if you have been offered accreditation and, just as important, a visit from your Lead Assessor to deliver detailed feedback on the findings of assessment. Accreditation decisions will take one of three forms:

- **Successful:** an offer of accreditation, subject to signing an Accreditation Agreement within three months.
- **Deferred:** no offer of accreditation, but the opportunity to resubmit on a limited number of Indicators within the next three months.
- **Not successful:** no offer of accreditation, but the invitation to apply again after six months, and feedback to help improve .

In any case, the outcome of the process will give your organisation:

- A rigorous assessment of the way you deliver and the results you achieve.
- An independent, expert view of quality and capability.
- An in-depth feedback report, which will summarise, and then detail against each Indicator the Assessors' view of your organisation's strengths and areas for improvement.
- If successful, the opportunity to be recognised by employers and other stakeholders as a leading provider of training and development solutions.

The Benefits

Is the New Standard right for your organisation? We hope this quick tour has given you an idea of what the Standard is trying to achieve, what it looks at, and how you can participate. At this point, we would like to reflect on what you've found out and consider how your organisation could gain from developing and submitting an application for assessment.

Application for the New Standard is designed to be of benefit to all organisations, public or private, including universities and other institutions, where:

- there is a commitment to achieving the highest standards in delivery of training and development solutions for employers;
- there is a commitment to demonstrating expertise in meeting the needs of employers through the development and delivery of products; and
- there is a commitment to continuously improve, learn, and innovate.

Application for the New Standard will help your organisation by:

- giving a structure and an opportunity to think about your strategy, approaches, and results in delivering training and development solutions to employers;
- offering a robust, independent view of your achievements in terms of quality, capability and performance.

Where successful, accreditation for the New Standard will help your organisation by:

- demonstrating to new customers your competence in delivering training and development solutions;
- demonstrating your responsiveness and expertise within the training sector; and
- demonstrating your progression, achievement, and commitment to continuous improvement to your staff and other stakeholders.

What's next?

If the New Standard is right for you and your organisation, then we're ready to help you to make the most of the experience. We've developed comprehensive guidance and provide in-depth training for your staff on the focus of the Standard, and how to develop an application.

We are conscious that the New Standard is a complex subject and one that many people will want to be sure that they understand as fully as possible before progressing to registration and application. To help with this, we have invested in a range of routes to inform you as to the Standard's approach, content and assessment methodology:

- A number of documents are available through our website to give you more background, including the briefing on *Frequently Asked Questions about the New Standard*.
- The *Assessment Guide and Evidence Framework* is available by attending a New Standard Awareness Event, which are running regularly. The *Guide* is the core technical document for the New Standard.
- Awareness Events are half-day sessions to understand the 'why', 'what', and 'how' of the New Standard, with an opportunity to ask an Assessor questions about the framework and process.
- Applicant Training Courses last over two days and explore in detail the Standard's different criteria and how to develop an application for assessment. One free place is included in your Part A registration fee.

We should say here that while many organisations have approached us with a view to some sort of coaching support, we are unable to provide this as it might compromise the independence of the assessment process.

If you would like to know more, we would be happy to answer your questions. To explore further, you can talk to us to book an event or find out how to register to begin the application process; in either case:

- speak to our enquiries team on **0845 225 1310** or
- visit our website **www.newstandard.co.uk**

The New Standard's development

The New Standard was researched, developed and tested from April 2006 to May 2007, before becoming available for first applications from June 2007. The Standard started with a mandate from the 2006 FE Reform White Paper, *Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances*, building upon two earlier projects to improve quality assurance for employers using the public FE system.

Many people were involved in, and contributed to that journey. Special mentions go to the members of the Steering Group and the Working Group, as well as the Quality Improvement Agency, the three Sector Skills Councils involved in testing (SEMTA, ConstructionSkills, and e-Skills UK), and the 67 providers who were tested. The project team responsible for developing the Standard included:

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