

Twenty things to do
BEFORE
you apply for assessment
against the Training Quality Standard
- plus another five!

**Twenty things to do before you apply
for assessment against the Training Quality Standard – plus another five**

2

Look before you leap!

It's all very well to be thinking about the Training Quality Standard and how to gain certification, but there are lots of things to consider before starting on the journey. As with most new ventures, time taken with the planning and organisation of your project is rarely wasted.

Therefore, think long and hard about the points I am making in this report. They are based on our experience of working with colleges and learning providers and with a variety of assessment frameworks – including the Training Quality Standard. Some of the guidance here *will* be relevant to you. Please use it when you are planning your TQS development journey.

If you think other people in your organisation, or elsewhere, would find this document useful then please pass it on, but make sure you forward it in its entirety.

**Margaret Adams MA Chartered FCIPD
Director**

This is how our famous **Twenty things to do before you apply for assessment against the Training Quality Standard** began its life.

I say “famous” because that’s just what the original report is. An awful lot of people have read the report in the last year. Every one I have spoken to has told me that it’s a good report.

The advice in the report is still sound, so there’s not need to change it.

I have, however, added five more things to do before you apply for TQS certification because the world has moved on.

As with the original report, you may pass it on to other people provided that you keep the document intact.

Margaret Adams

THE ADAMS CONSULTANCY LTD, CHILTERN, BELLINGDON, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE. HP5 2XL
T: 01494 791045; E: ENGAGE@THEADAMSCONSULTANCY.CO.UK
WWW.ATTRACTMOREBUSINESS.CO.UK

REGISTERED IN WALES NUMBER 2969988 REGISTERED OFFICE: CHILTERN, BELLINGDON, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE. HP5 2XL

**Twenty things to do before you apply
for assessment against the Training Quality Standard – plus another five**

3

Thinking about assessment? . . . Be sure you know it's worth the effort.

1. Make sure you are clear about why you want to gain certification. Have you worked out the benefits you want to achieve? Do you know why your organisation will be a better organisation for having gone through the assessment and certification process? How will your employers gain? How will your learners gain? How will you gain? How will your staff gain?
2. Be aware of the costs of assessment both in terms of the time you will have to “spend” on the process and in terms of any financial outlay you will need to make.

Even if your LSC is footing the financial bill, you should think about the opportunity costs you will incur by applying for assessment. What could you be doing if you weren't thinking about the Training Quality Standard? Have you made the right choice? How will you know? Check out all these things before you go ahead with your application.

3. Do you have a timetable and strategy for gaining certification? Will you try to achieve certification for Part A first, and then move on to Part B? If so, over how long a period do you intend to be working towards certification? Have a plan in mind before you apply for assessment.

Where should you start? . . . Make sure you do your homework.

4. Make sure you read up on everything to do about the assessments to date and anything else you can lay your hands on that is relevant. The chances are that some of the problems encountered by those who have gone before you will have relevance to your own organisation's situation. – Take advice; learn from others. It makes sense to do so.
5. Be clear about what the TQS journey entails. It is divided into seven parts: registration, application, assessment, verification, validation, panel review and feedback. Make sure you know what you will be expected to contribute to each stage of the process.
6. Don't try to reshape an existing self-assessment, a tender document, a submission to OFSTED or a report to your LSC into a submission to support your application for certification. This assessment process is something new. Treat it as such.

Twenty things to do before you apply
for assessment against the Training Quality Standard – plus another five

4

7. Think carefully about what the different parts of the Training Quality Standard deal with, and make sure you are confident you can make a good showing in these specific contexts. Note that:
- **Part A** of the Training Quality Standard is all about how well you respond to the needs of employers as individual customers – meaning the focus is different from previous assessments you may have taken part in. You will need to assess your readiness to go forward from first principles.
 - **Part B** of the Training Quality Standard is about how you develop and deploy products to address particular sector needs – meaning you need to look in-depth at your sector specific work. You will need to consider the robustness of what you do in the context of the Training Quality Standard.

What should you do next? . . . Try writing a draft submission.

If you have got this far and are still thinking about proceeding to assessment, consider what the submission you will be putting forward at the application stage will cover and how it should be framed. Then compose a draft to help you to decide just how near to achieving certification you are.

8. First, think carefully about the audience for your submission. In this case your primary reader will be your lead assessor. Use the assessment guidance to work out exactly what this person will want of you.

Ask yourself, why will your lead assessor read your submission? The answer is easy: to help him or her to conduct your assessment. Are you making this job as straightforward as possible? To do this you will need to write with the assessment team's needs in mind and to review your prose with this requirement uppermost in your thoughts.

9. Think about your narrative. You will have seen references to narratives and telling your story in the guidance relating to assessment. This is all about writing with the reader in mind and producing a coherent and complete statement, or story, about how effectively you support employers. Telling your story is a strong feature of the guidance, so don't ignore it.

Twenty things to do before you apply
for assessment against the Training Quality Standard – plus another five

5

10. Avoid FE jargon when producing your draft submission – and when the assessors eventually come on site, for that matter.
11. Aim for clarity. Try to avoid ambiguity. Assume you are preparing a case for someone who is not part of the FE world, and who is unfamiliar with the alphabet soup of acronyms and short-form statements that people working in the sector use when they speak and write.
12. Beware of producing a draft application which has been completed by a range of people. It's fine to involve lots of people in working on the application. That's consultation, but somewhere along the line someone needs to draw the whole document together into a coherent whole. Why? Because it will help the reader if you do. It will also make your whole submission look more professional.
13. Remember when writing your draft application to organise what you say in terms of strategy, approaches and results.

You must show you have a **strategy** for working with employers and being responsive to their needs and wants.

For your work with Part A you must show how you turn the strategy into action. That is dealing with your **approaches**. Then you must show how successful your strategy is. You must deal with the **results** you achieve – by showing how successfully you implement your approaches.

For your work with Part B you need to show how you have developed a good **understanding** of employers and stakeholders in your sectors and then how you meet employers' needs.

With Part A and Part B you also need to show how you are **improving** your service to employers or **sustaining** an already high standard of support.

14. Review your draft document in terms of strategy – approaches – results. Is there a progression in your document or is each statement separate and unrelated to the rest of what you have written?

Twenty things to do before you apply
for assessment against the Training Quality Standard – plus another five

6

15. Check out the scoring attributes. You know the submission you eventually send off to the assessment body will be used to help your lead assessor to undertake an initial scoring activity.

Make sure you are signalling the right messages about your work. Help your assessor to do that initial scoring by covering the points that will help him or her. Remember the scoring attributes are:

- **Attributes – soundness and deployment**
- **Results – targets, trends, comparisons, scope.**

16. Think carefully about the evidence you intend to nominate to help you to substantiate your submission. It must back up what you are saying about your strategy and about your approaches. The relationship between your case and your evidence must be clear. Remember that evidence which does not back up your case has little value.

17. Beware of omissions. Don't expect your assessor to make a case about your evidence for you when it comes to assessment.

You may have been used to assessors and inspectors helping you by taking the time to tease out the relevance of evidence you have submitted. This time you need to do that task for yourself. You must make the case and use the evidence to back up what you say. It's no use saying: "Yes, we are responsive to employers . . . and here's the evidence to prove it." You need to make a case to prove your point.

18. Remember verification is what the on-site component of the assessment is all about. Verification is about confirming – or not confirming – what you have claimed in your application. It's not about finding new evidence. It's not about digging into what your organisation does and starting again with the process of judging whether or not you meet the requirements of the Training Quality Standard.

Just think about how long the assessment team will be on-site. It won't be long, so they won't have time to read reams of documents about your organisation or interview lots of people.

Twenty things to do before you apply
for assessment against the Training Quality Standard – plus another five

7

Still unsure about assessment? . . . Think about these questions.

Make sure you can deal with questions like the ones below before you decide to go forward for assessment.

19. Do you really understand your employer marketplace? Before you say you do, remember that many organisations have already struggled with this concept. So think about how big a market share you have in your chosen areas of specialisation or which markets you really target.

Do you have a joined up approach to working with employers? Are those who deliver programmes fully aware of the commitments your organisation makes to employers when they agree to work with you? Are regular checks made about whether or not you deliver what you have promised, or about how happy employers are with the service they receive?

Do you measure your performance in working with employers and do you really focus on ways of improving your work with this group? Do you gather statistics about those who move from showing an interest in your organisation to working with you? Do you review why people who have worked with you once do not work with you again? Do you know how much repeat business you get, and why you get it? Do you know how much of your employer business comes from referrals? . . . And so on.

Need some good advice?

20. Leave your decision about applying for assessment for a few days once you have worked through this document and produced a draft submission.

And now the additional things to do . . .

21. A lot of organisations have gained certification now. Talk to them. Find out about their experience. Learn from them. As a result of what you hear, avoid their mistakes.
22. Use the assessment guidance and write what it asks you to write. I've now seen lots of applications that don't follow the guidance and which are difficult to read as a result. Remember that the guidance gives you a clear indication of what you should be writing about. Be ruthless. Follow the guidance and

Twenty things to do before you apply
for assessment against the Training Quality Standard – plus another five

8

remove everything else from your application, however important you think that additional information is.

23. Remember you are writing about your business not about teaching and learning. Your readers are not educationalists. The standard is not about teaching and learning. You need to be prepared to step out of your comfort zone and write about how your business supports employers. It's a hard job for people who are used to dealing with learners and learner benefits, so don't underestimate how difficult this will be.
24. Learn more about your Sector Skills Councils. Whenever you are thinking about any Part B make sure you know about your SSC's footprint and what it is trying to achieve. Make sure, also, that you know how you are helping your SSC to achieve its objectives.

Get some on-going support.

25. Finally, read our blog. Visit <http://achievingthetqs.blogspot.com> regularly. There's a lot of good advice there and the blog is updated every week.

And one final point:

If you would like to talk to us about:

- workshops to help you to develop your ability to meet the requirements of the Training Quality Standard
- consultancy to help you with all aspects of your work with employers
- business coaching – by telephone – a cost-effective alternative to face-to-face consultancy
- our programmes to help you to become more entrepreneurial
- progress reviews with employer engagement issues

then *do* get in touch.