

4.5 Periodic reviews of occupation, the consortium and the programme

4.5.1 Purposes of periodic reviews

Periodic reviews are a standard form of long term quality assurance and quality enhancement processes. Periodic reviews are general reviews of the whole project and can be the precursor for major changes in the programme.

Apprenticeship programmes have three elements which require this thorough overhaul. These are the agreed **occupational profile**, the functioning of the **consortium**, and the efficiency and effectiveness of the **programme** itself.

The timing of the reviews can depend on a number of factors. Awarding bodies normally require five year reviews of programmes. Funding bodies may require reviews at the end of funding periods. The pace of changes in the occupation may also determine the need for changes. The maximum review period should be set when the programme is initially validated.

Characteristics of periodic reviews:

- They are thorough reviews that can justify major changes in the programme.
- They consist of a self-evaluation process and an external independent review.
- All three elements can affect each other and therefore reviews are best carried out at the same time.

The three reviews can be carried out separately, but it should be recognised that each report can influence the outcomes of the others.

The programme review report for revalidation by QQI (where applicable) should incorporate the relevant outcomes of the other reports. To avoid unnecessary duplication, the three reports could be presented as one report with three distinct elements.

4.5.2 Reviewing the occupational profile

The purpose of any apprenticeship is to prepare apprentices for the occupation. Ultimately, the quality of the apprenticeship depends on how the qualified apprentice performs in the occupation. As occupations change, the knowledge, skills and competences required, also change. A thorough review of the requirements of the occupational profile is necessary before any review of the programme is carried out. Revised occupational profiles will be subject to approval by the relevant national apprenticeship body or bodies, prior to the revision and revalidation of a programme. A review of an occupation would have the following characteristics:

- Involvement of employers' associations or of significant employers;
- Engagement with human resource personnel from across the industry to assess functioning of qualified apprentices;

- A survey of any literature, conference proceedings, or regulatory material pertaining to the occupation, including economic and labour market forecasts and analyses;
- Involvement of significant occupational professionals;
- A review of technological changes that might impact on the occupation;
- A survey of past graduates to identify strengths and weakness of the programme and level of preparation for career advancement.

This review might, for example, be accomplished through the involvement of a Consortium Steering Group with the functions set out in Appendix 2.

The outcome of the occupational profile review should indicate necessary and desirable changes to the programme. It is the process through which employers and occupational members can have influential input into the apprenticeship. It is a vital input into the review of the programme. It should be circulated to stakeholders and form the context for a programmatic review.

4.5.3 Reviewing the partnerships

The Programme Board and agreements with collaborating providers and employers (the consortium) are among the mechanisms by which the Coordinating Provider ensures the delivery of the programmes.

The Coordinating Provider may also be the conduit by which funds are dispersed. Alternatively, this conduit might, for example, be a Consortium Steering Group with the functions set out in Appendix 2.

The review of the consortium should deal with the following issues:

- The responsibilities of individual providers including the Coordinating Provider.
- The relationships between providers, employers, the statutory regulator and its authorised officers.
- The effectiveness of the reporting procedures.
- The communication links between the partners.
- Corporate governance arrangements (this would include a Consortium Steering Group (Appendix 2) should there be one).
- Operation of safeguards against academic/financial impropriety, recklessness or negligence.
- Any necessary changes to the consortium agreement.

4.5.4 Reviewing the programme

Programmatic reviews are a normal part of academic quality assurance. The format of programmatic reviews should comply with the requirements of the awarding body.

Reviews of apprenticeship programmes will have necessary input from the review of the Occupational Profile and partnership reviews. In reviewing the effectiveness of the programme the review should:

- take into account the input from the Occupational Profile review to ensure continued relevance of all aspects of the programme;
- use input from mentors, trainers, graduates and current apprentices to modify the curriculum, modules and assessment processes;
- review reports from external assessors to ensure suggested changes are implemented;
- establish the levels of mentoring, training and assessment skills available to the programme and the currency of physical facilities;
- assess whether or not the entry requirements remain appropriate.

The efficiency of the programme can be assessed by:

- taking into account the input from the partnership review to modify delivery arrangements;
- looking at retention, withdrawal and graduation rates and causes across the full period of the review;
- ensuring that there are no persistent anomalies at particular sites or with particular modules or other elements of the programme;
- using input from mentors, trainers, graduates and current apprentices, to modify the delivery process and the operational management procedures.

The output from this review should be a programme proposal with updated intended programme learning outcomes suitable for the changing occupational profile, changed partnerships, changed module outcomes and changed content, to reflect updated occupational concerns and a more efficient delivery of the programme. The review should be carried out in a way that affirms the positive roles of participants and re-energises the consortium.

4.5.5 Other reviews

A Coordinating Provider delivering apprenticeship programmes may be required to report, periodically, to the statutory regulator, the Apprenticeship Council, occupational bodies and/or funding bodies. The partnership agreements should facilitate any such reports.