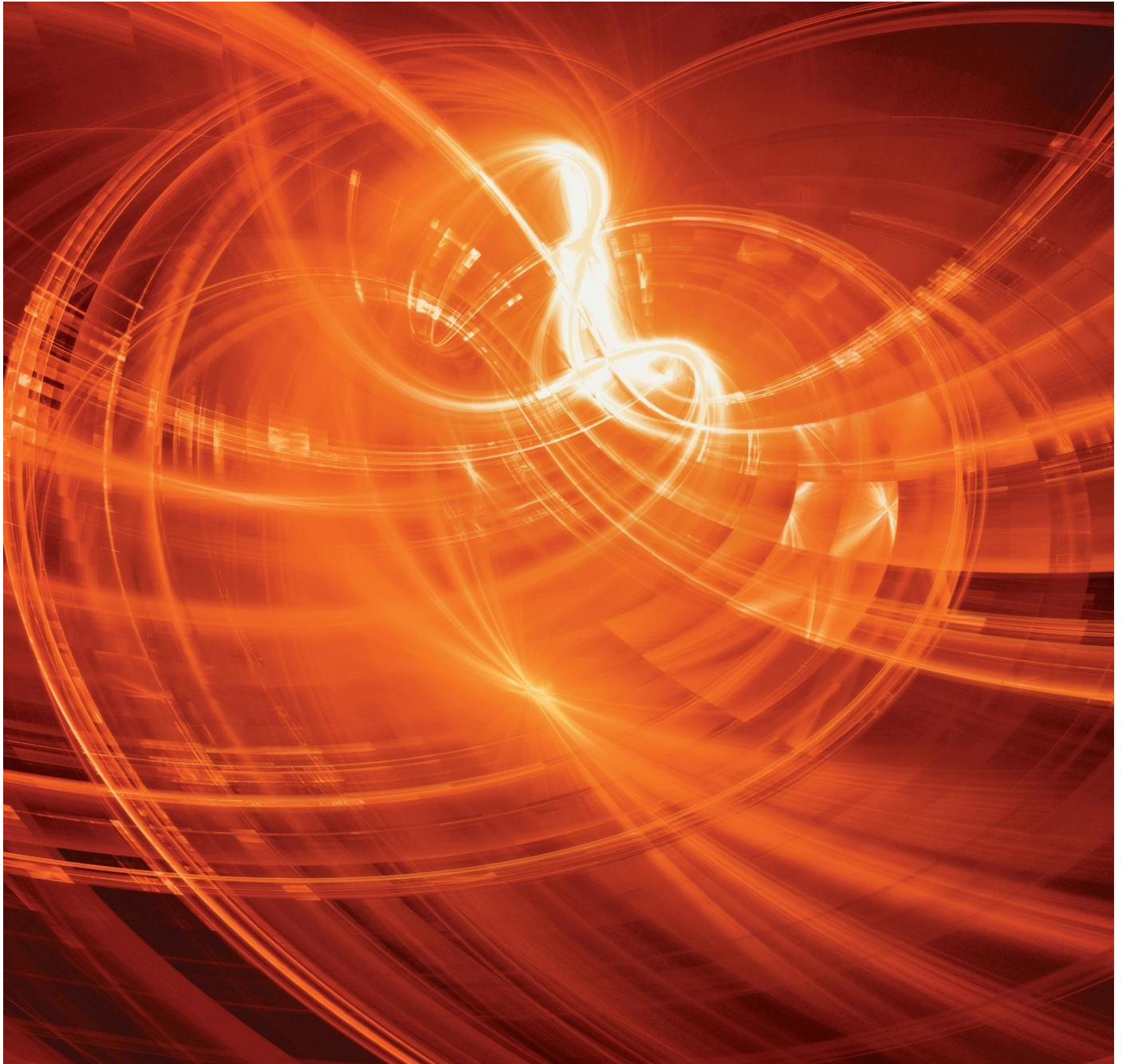


Developing criteria and approaches to quality assure RARPA in provision for learners with learning difficulties



Working in partnership with-



The Association of National Specialist College

Content

Executive summary	3
Introduction and background	5
Methodology	5
Findings.....	6
Developing the approach to quality assurance	6
Factors considered in developing quality assured RARPA.....	7
A model for the quality assurance approach	7
Developing the criteria	8
Internal reviews of provision	8
Evaluation of the external moderation and peer review processes	10
Process	10
Evidence.....	11
Preparation and documentation	12
External moderation / peer review	12
General comments	13
Recommendations for future implementation and sustainability.....	14
Conclusions.....	19
Where we are now.....	19
Next steps	19
Implementation options.....	20
References.....	21
Project participants	21

Executive summary

This research and development project was undertaken by Natspec (The Association of National Specialist Colleges) and funded by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS). The National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) was involved as a member of the project advisory group and through a BIS funded project looking at the teaching and learning of English and “*effective strategies for engaging and supporting entry level learners to progress.*” The Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA) project focused on improving the quality of non-accredited teaching and learning for learners with learning difficulties. The project developed and tested approaches to quality assuring the RARPA process in a range of settings.

Nine providers, three each from Adult Community Learning (ACL), General Further Education (GFE) and Independent Specialist Colleges (ISC), were selected on the basis that they had good provision and used RARPA effectively. The project utilised action research and case study methods. The providers, supported by an advisory group, devised a set of RARPA quality standards, criteria and evidence indicators applicable in a range of settings. They developed and tested a process for internal review and external moderation of RARPA against these criteria. Providers conducted an internal review of their provision against the standards, criteria and evidence indicators. They then received external moderation visits by a consultant and by a peer reviewer. Each provider also conducted a peer review of another participant organisation.

Summary of project findings, outcomes and outputs:

The project has been remarkably successful in developing and testing out two different approaches for externally quality assuring RARPA, especially given the timescale and resources. The findings indicate that effective internal review of practice in implementing RARPA is valuable in improving practice and is an essential pre-requisite for external quality assurance. There is clear evidence that external moderation by consultants and peer review can both be used successfully to quality assure RARPA in organisations that are experienced in using RARPA. External moderation and peer review fulfil different purposes. External moderation is fundamentally a quality assurance process that would be credible in the face of external scrutiny and suitable for ‘kitemarking.’ Peer review is strongly developmental, preferred by practitioners and primarily concerned with quality improvement.

Standards, criteria and evidence indicators have been developed, tested and revised for provision using RARPA for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities and are now fit for purpose. A process for internal and external moderation has been established. A single process can work equally well for both contexts. One crucial area that all participants struggled with was the ‘level of proof’ and evidence required to affirm that the standards had been met in different contexts. This has implications for guidance, training and standardisation processes. The knowledge, understanding, experience and expertise of those conducting external moderation and peer review underpins the effectiveness of the process and this has implications for recruitment, selection, briefing and training.

The project has established the need for guidance and generated useful material for it. Illustrative examples are available in moderation and review reports, providers’ internal reviews and case studies for populating guidance. The advisory group suggested potential content for guidance.

There have been expressions of interest about the potential level of demand for either peer review or external moderation by consultant, but no robust evidence (this was outside the scope of the project). This is an important consideration in the current financial climate. Practitioners naturally preferred the developmental aspects of peer review but also thought that managers would prefer and be much more likely to support external moderation. It is possible that for some providers a model where both approaches are complementary might be used, with peer review concerned with improving practice and external moderation providing external credibility.

There is also interest in the wider application of the approach(es) to quality assuring RARPA beyond this learner group.

Next steps:

- Disseminate the approach, documentation and guidance through 3 sub-national events hosted by participant providers.
- Produce a project bulletin that summarises the project outcomes and includes information about the dissemination events
- Develop guidance for using the approach to quality assure RARPA.
- Conduct a policy seminar to promote the approach with appropriate government agencies/departments and provider bodies.
- Decide on other priority activity for Phase 2 and beyond, for the future implementation and sustainability of the approach(es).

Options for implementation:

Three options are presented below and as they are not mutually exclusive, they may also be considered as steps towards full implementation of a national system to quality assure RARPA.

- Option1: Disseminate the documentation and process for quality assuring RARPA for providers to use to conduct internal reviews. This option is potentially high impact for the providers who conduct reviews but will lack national endorsement.
- Option 2: Develop a peer review process for external moderation and quality improvement that might include: promotion through the PRD groups that exist of Independent Specialist Providers and for all other providers, develop a centralised 'matchmaking' system for those who wish to adopt the approach. The impact of this approach would be enhanced by the element of externality introduced peer review.
- Option 3: Develop a working proposal to establish a national framework for a co-ordinated approach to both external moderation and peer review, including an administrative base within the sector and a board or panel to oversee implementation and consider kitemarking. This option with national endorsement has the highest level of credibility and potential impact for the sector as a whole.

Further activity might also include:

- undertaking further rounds of external moderation and/or peer review with new providers;
- developing and implementing a programme of training for external moderators and peer reviewers;
- developing and implementing a standardisation process for peer reviewers and external moderators;
- exploring the potential for the introduction of a kitemark and/or incorporating the RARPA criteria within the proposals for Chartered Status.

Introduction and background

This project, undertaken by Natspec and funded by LSIS, was designed to focus on improving the quality of non-accredited teaching and learning. It took place against a background of an increased inspection focus on teaching, learning and assessment and the introduction of study programmes. There was also concern that provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was being inappropriately accredited (Ofsted Aug 2011). RARPA has been used as a process to support teaching and learning in many post-16 settings, but its use has been challenged because it has sometimes been perceived to be too subjective. The risk was that teachers could set easy targets, not monitor them effectively and that learners consequently would not make sufficient or well measured progress.

The purpose of the project was to test out approaches to quality assuring the RARPA process in a range of settings for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, so that stakeholders can be confident it is robust and rigorous and learners are enabled to maximise their potential and achieve their aspirations.

To achieve this aim, the project:

- devised a set of RARPA quality criteria applicable in a range of settings;
- developed a process for internal review and external moderation of RARPA against these criteria;
- demonstrated that providers are meeting these criteria to:
 - undertake comprehensive assessment of learning and support needs that is relevant to the learner and their aspirations
 - develop challenging learning targets/goals
 - use targets effectively to inform learning programmes and activities
 - offer teaching that enables learners to achieve their targets
 - monitor and review progress towards targets using accessible approaches
 - support young people and adults to make good progress towards their learning aims and aspirations
 - ensure that young people and adults' achievements are relevant and meaningful.

The intended outcomes of the project at its inception were:

- consistent understanding and approaches to quality assure RARPA processes across providers involved in project;
- a set of quality criteria for RARPA that is readily shared across the sector;
- an approach to moderation of RARPA that is sustainable and has sector buy in;
- a set of recommendations to LSIS about extending the work.

During the course of the project, the announcement was made that funding for LSIS would cease in August 2013. This had an impact on the project and particularly the outcome of making a set of recommendations to LSIS about extending the work.

Methodology

This research and development project utilised action research and case study methods, involving nine providers, three each from Adult Community Learning (ACL), General Further Education (GFE) and Independent Specialist Colleges (ISC). These providers were selected on the basis that they had good provision and used RARPA effectively. The project was supported by an Advisory Group comprising representatives from across the sector including Ofsted, LSIS and NIACE. Project participants were also advisory committee members. Three consultants were contracted to externally moderate a group of three providers each.

At the first advisory group meeting held in October 2012, the group considered an issues paper, began to draft the standards and criteria for quality assuring RARPA, which were to be mapped against the Common Inspection Framework (CIF) (see Annex A) and defined the terminology to be used in the project. They were placed into three peer groups, based on the providers' geographical location.

A development and training day was held in November 2012 for participant organisations' project lead staff and their quality managers. The draft standards and criteria were critically reviewed and developed. The evidence requirements were considered, ensuring that they could be applied in all contexts. Providers were briefed on conducting reviews of their own RARPA processes using the quality standards and criteria. Providers were encouraged to record information and data collected throughout the project. The intention was that it would be used as case study material to illustrate the different stages of the quality assurance process for RARPA, and effective practice in the teaching and learning of English. Providers were also invited to test the process and quality criteria and provide evaluative feedback. During the session participants began to develop their plans for conducting their reviews. Once the reviews were completed, providers submitted their reports and provided feedback on the standards and criteria, which were revised in response.

In January 2013 the Advisory Group shared the outcomes of providers' RARPA reviews, discussed the issues arising and potential solutions, and shared resources and documents. The group suggested revisions to the standards, criteria and evidence tool in the light of experience, advised on a framework for guidance on RARPA quality assurance approaches and considered initial preparation, including setting dates for the next phase of external moderation. This would be carried out in two ways, through peer review within the group and by consultant external moderators.

A training and development day on external moderation was held at the end of January 2013 for all providers and consultants. A shared understanding of the purpose and principles of external moderation and peer review within the project, protocols and process were developed. Draft documentation was considered providing information about the: project requirements; moderation process; moderation activities; evidence; sampling; planning and preparation and recording and reporting.

An external moderation by a consultant and by a peer reviewer was carried out in each participant provider organisation. The consultant external moderations were conducted by three consultants with considerable experience and expertise who each moderated three providers. Each provider had previously undertaken an internal review of their own provision against Draft 5 of the Standards and Criteria developed to quality assure RARPA during the project. Each provider also conducted a peer review of another participant organisation. Participants were provided with documentation comprising: the Standards and Criteria; an External moderation reporting format (Annex B) and recording template (Annex C – please note that this is the version used by providers and does not match the final set of standards and criteria which were subsequently revised); and guidance on conducting the moderation/review including sampling and evidence sources. At the end of each moderation visit Consultants and Peer reviewers gave verbal feedback. They also completed a written report on the moderation/review outcomes and an overall evaluation reporting their experiences.

The moderation visits took place in February and early March 2013. Once all the External moderation and Peer reviews were completed, each participant completed an overall evaluation report. At the final Advisory Group meeting in March 2013, participant organisations presented their findings and discussed the issues that had arisen. Implementation issues and the options for taking the work forward were considered.

Findings

Developing the approach to quality assurance

The project Advisory Group considered approaches to quality assuring the RARPA process. We recognised that qualifications do not always meet the learning needs of young people with learning difficulties and disabilities, and it has become increasingly important to assure the quality of teaching, learning and assessment that is not accredited through qualifications.

Providers were familiar with the quality assurance arrangements associated with external accreditation and qualifications and the requirements of awarding bodies. The intention was for the RARPA quality assurance process to be seen as a similarly credible process that stands up to external scrutiny. There is however, a fundamental difference between external accreditation and external quality assurance.

Qualifications and externally accredited awards are concerned with the end or outcome of learning: that is, summative assessment of *learning outcomes* against specified criteria, to national standards. In contrast, RARPA is concerned with the quality assurance of the whole *process of learning* defined in five

stages, from initial assessment and setting of learning goals through to end of programme, summative assessment (LSC, 2005). Nevertheless, there are many features of the quality assurance process for both awarding bodies and RARPA that apply equally to both contexts. We drew on the experience of awarding body practice in developing the approach to quality assuring RARPA.

One challenge we faced was that, by definition, learner referenced learning goals and outcomes are not specified to national standards. Another challenge was the perception that this could lead to teachers setting easy targets which were ineffectively monitored and reviewed. The common quality assurance process we developed for RARPA would need to be rigorous, robust, and consistently implemented, to address this perception.

Factors considered in developing quality assured RARPA

- The approach is a sector driven and owned initiative, consistent with greater self-regulation
- Credibility and success depend on the quality and rigour of moderation: it must be challenging and lead to tangible improvement
- The approach must be consistently applied and this requires standardisation against specified criteria
- Responsibility for standardisation and consistency of moderation will need to be co-ordinated at national level
- The approach must be resource efficient, sustainable and un-bureaucratic: it should be effective without diverting unnecessary staff time and resources from teaching learners
- Providers have in place well established quality assurance systems on which to build
- There exists a substantial body of information arising from the development of RARPA and from providers who have been implementing RARPA successfully
- Providers will need to be persuaded of the value of adopting the approach in a climate of financial constraints
- Implementation will need to be supported by a comprehensive programme of briefing and training

A model for the quality assurance approach

To achieve a comprehensive and robust system, the quality assurance process would need to operate at different 'levels' or 'tiers,' with both internal and external components.

The levels identified might include:

	Levels		By whom
internal	class/level	learner/teacher assessment, feedback and evaluation	teacher
	* course/ curriculum/ programme area level	monitoring and moderation of the RARPA process at course, curriculum/programme area level, including observations, identifies actions for improvement and best practice examples	course, curriculum/ programme area manager/moderator
	* whole organisation level	monitoring and moderation at organisational (systems) level, across curriculum/programme areas, a SAR for provision using the RARPA process with plans for improvement (QIPs)	manager(s) of quality systems for whole organisation
external		external moderation through approaches to be trialled: external moderation through external consultants and PRD by peer reviewers	external moderators
		Inspection	Inspectors

* In some organisations the internal course/programme and whole organisation levels might be a single level.

The Advisory Group considered what evidence should be scrutinised at each stage and which of the standards and criteria apply at each level and to different contexts.

This approach to quality assuring RARPA necessarily included both internal and external moderation of the RARPA process, using a range of techniques including sampling.

The project was primarily concerned with developing and testing the process for external moderation. However, providers needed to ensure that the other components were in place and had been implemented effectively. The process of external moderation was required to validate the outcomes of the internal review and moderation process.

Developing the criteria

One of the initial tasks the group undertook was to develop the draft standards and criteria for quality assuring RARPA, against which provider performance was to be evaluated.

The criteria needed to:

- Be easily understood and transparent
- Be rigorous yet achievable
- Be consistent with the Common Inspection Framework
- Be capable of providing evidence of performance
- Have evidence that may be derived from existing information and practice, without imposing unnecessary additional bureaucracy.

There were two aspects to the task: developing criteria for each of the **five elements of the RARPA process** and developing criteria for the **organisational systems** used to quality assure the RARPA process.

In developing the criteria it became evident that a common set of terminology would need to be used and definitions agreed to ensure shared understanding. After discussion, the term moderation was chosen rather than verification as moderation is the term that has been used for RARPA associated activity. Other terms discussed included: initial assessment, initial, baseline, pre-college and diagnostic assessment, aims/objectives/targets/goals and what constitutes short and long term goals and/or programmes. A glossary of terms would be provided in guidance.

The difference between different learners, programmes and provider types also had considerable implications for the relevance and application of the standards and criteria. For example, what might be appropriate in initial assessment to establish the learner's starting point (RARPA Stage 2), would necessarily be completely different for a part-time short course compared to a 3 year full-time residential programme. To address this potential problem, the guidance would include a list and examples of evidence that would be appropriate to different types and lengths of provision.

It was necessary throughout the course of the project to revisit and progressively refine the standards and criteria. The final revisions were undertaken at the end of the project based on the findings from the external moderations undertaken by peer reviewers and consultants. These included changes to the structure to streamline the second section on organisational systems to quality assure RARPA and the addition of evidence indicators for all standards. (The revised version of the standards, criteria and evidence is in Annex D).

Internal reviews of provision

Having conducted an internal review of provision, each organisation submitted an evaluation of the process and outcomes. The evaluations were overwhelmingly positive and indicated that the process had been valuable and effective. Providers were asked to identify what had worked well. They found that the process of working systematically through the standards and criteria was '*challenging, productive and informative*.' Having standardised criteria against which to compare and identify best practice was identified as important. The documentation including the standards and criteria and the approach with the model of levels documents were useful. Providers adopted different approaches to the review, involving different staff, depending on their circumstances. They reported that,

“Having a team approach and especially the involvement of quality managers led to collective ownership and involvement and ensured it was seen as mainstream and of equal value to externally accredited provision,” and

“the breadth & rigour of the review were equal to an awarding body IV/EV process.”

The process enabled providers to identify gaps and areas for improvement and development quickly and easily. Although the project organisations had been selected on the basis of their effective practice, the rigour of the process enabled them to identify areas for improvement and/or confirmed the areas they had already identified. The following list indicates the improvement areas identified:

- Most providers need to develop their external moderation processes for non-accredited learning
- Initial assessment leading to challenging, SMART target setting and greater learner involvement in negotiating learning goals
- Evaluating and recording learning (rather than describing task/activity)
- Tracking of learners experiences, gathering feedback from learners and informing them of the resulting changes
- CPD in a range of areas including peer observations to spread effective practice and effective recording of the positive impact
- Monitoring and identifying where insufficient progress is being made to ensure that action is taken
- Improve feedback and action planning from moderation.

Providers were also asked to identify what had not worked well and what could be improved. They reported that the timetable for the project and the deadlines were too short to allow the depth of activity they would have preferred. They also indicated that it was not the optimum time to conduct some of the review activities, which would normally be undertaken within the existing annual quality cycle. For example, data on learners' summative achievements were not available at this time, so they had needed to refer back to previous years' data. Suggestions included:

- *Moderation of Assessment – Spring Term, Moderation of Targets – Summer Term, Moderation of Attainment – Autumn term; and*
- *Late autumn or early spring term would be an effective time to hold an internal moderation. The external moderation could take place in the summer term. This will ensure that the information can feed into the Self Assessment Review and Quality Improvement Plan.*

Providers recognised that the timing was determined by the funding and contract for the project and would not normally apply in practice. They recommended that the optimum timing for internal review, internal moderation and external moderation should be identified. The process itself was thought to be lengthy and time consuming. Providers commented that it had been difficult to know exactly which evidence sources to gather and also to have sufficient sources available to review. This would need to be addressed in guidance. The reviews confirmed that, as previously reported, some criteria were repetitive when matched against evidence sources. These were identified and amended.

The following issues, suggestions and questions were also raised:

- Develop guidance on the moderation process, including sampling.
- Some concerns about the quality and usage of qualitative evidence for moderation - using RARPA criteria to assess learning outcomes requires considerable detailed information, especially when learners are at basic levels of learning and all assessments are based on observations rather than learning outputs e.g. assignments. This makes internal moderation a particularly complex, skilled and time consuming task
- Professional development issues
 - limited number of people who have understanding and experience of RARPA to lead internal moderation and they may be staff who are also involved as managers and teachers which can reduce transparency and objective assessment
 - staff require training to be able to undertake moderation effectively
 - some organisations have no training but rely on staff knowledge and experience
- External moderation – explore the use of peer review and existing PRD networks of Independent Specialist Providers. Would it be more useful in the short term for the Advisory Group colleges to act as critical friends rather than reviewers first time round?

- The status of the RARPA external review process
 - Will all providers need to provide evidence of internal and external moderation processes for non-accredited learning?
 - What would happen if shortcomings identified through external moderation were not addressed?
 - What proposals should the project make about the status of the external review process?
- The need for illustrative examples to populate the guidance was identified and providers submitted case studies.

Evaluation of the external moderation and peer review processes

This section of the findings evaluates the project reports received from providers and external moderators, together with moderation and peer reviews for each provider, email dialogue following up specific issues and the outcomes of the discussions and presentations at the project Advisory Group. The research question that this part of the project sought to address was, *“Do you consider that the External moderation and/or Peer review approaches to quality assuring RARPA are adequate, so that stakeholders can be confident it is robust and rigorous, and learners are enabled to maximise their potential and achieve their aspirations?”*

Participants reported on the following areas: process; evidence; preparation and documentation; External moderation and Peer review; general comments and recommendations for future implementation and sustainability.

Process

The External moderation/Peer review processes were generally found to be ‘fit for purpose’. Providers considered that they:

- *“both felt supportive - affirming that in general appropriate practice is in place*
- *identified weaknesses already known to the centre, improvement actions in place and progress towards these*
- *allowed the moderator/peer reviewer to ‘triangulate’ paper records with actual practice by talking to staff and students.”*

In practice, Consultants and Peer reviewers found that the two distinct aspects to the process corresponding to the two sections of the Standards and Criteria document involved different documentation and staff. This had implications for preparation and organising the moderation visit. The quality assurance section was generally thought to require some amendment to remove ambiguity and duplication to be entirely fit for purpose.

The processes were not thought to be unnecessarily bureaucratic. One consultant considered there was a risk that it could become bureaucratic if moderators were to go through each criterion. An FE provider considered that:

“The process does not need to be bureaucratic if the moderator/reviewer has copies of key documents in advance, the key one being the provider’s own RARPA self assessment review. The moderator is then able to pursue pathways of evidence during the visit (e.g. follow a student) to check how systems work in real life, rather than ploughing through paperwork. In other words, sampling from the range of evidence within each of the RARPA criteria rather than attempting to examine everything.”

Providers indicated that it would be useful to offer guidance with a checklist or examples of what would be expected of provider organisations. This would make the process easier to manage. Important points were raised about providing clear guidance on how to sample and that it would not always be essential to cover every criterion across all provision in each visit, thus greatly enhancing manageability. Some providers also alluded to the fact that in an initial visit the demand made of providers would be necessarily greater than in subsequent visits. If a pattern of consistent and regular visits was established, then the focus would be on following up improvement actions and sampling the evidence on some but not all standards. Over time all standards could be covered in this way. The majority thought the processes were manageable, although some commented that it was time consuming and demanding and one provider questioned whether it would be realistic for all organisations.

“The process that I have experienced so far is clearly informative, rigorous and robust and should be recommended to other providers. However, the actual time needed to prepare, carry out and write up reports may be difficult for all providers to facilitate on a regular basis in the current economic climate.”

Evidence

Most responses indicated that there was sufficient evidence available to External Moderators and Peer reviewers to enable them to make decisions about the quality and consistency of RARPA processes and quality assurance across the organisation. The evidence also enabled examples of good practice and areas for improvement to be identified. One provider commented that the quantity and complexity of evidence required was extensive. Some indicated that the amount of evidence available for the Quality Assurance system Standards was not as great as for the RARPA Stages.

The Quality Assurance system Standards were generally found to be more difficult to assess. Internal moderation evidence was, for example, often patchy or unavailable. Another provider stated that the challenge was that providers' different quality systems utilised different quality documents to reflect different aspects of RARPA quality assurance and moderation. Consequently, it would be necessary for the provider to indicate which documents were most appropriate to provide the required evidence. For example, one provider suggested that the SAR showed most of the evidence required and a separate internal review against the standards and criteria might not be necessary as the SAR was comprehensive. In contrast, the SAR for other providers, particularly FE colleges was sometimes at such a high level of aggregation and predominantly focused on externally accredited provision, that it was largely irrelevant to non-accredited provision. This in turn pointed to another significant issue. Some organisations' QA systems were geared towards quantitative data and outcomes so that incorporating RARPA and qualitative evidence was challenging and it would mean that the colleges QA system would need to change. This was especially the case where organisations wished to roll out RARPA across the organisation, to incorporate elements of 'study programmes' that would be unaccredited. Although not within the scope of this project, it was evident that there could be potential for wider application to any non-accredited provision. A participant commented,

“A model for future evaluations needs to address not just how well RARPA is included in college wide Quality Assurance but also how inclusive college systems are to RARPA approaches.”

Three major sources of evidence were identified: documentation, discussion and information gathered informally through activities such as meetings with learners and staff in class. A consultant external moderator stressed the importance of meeting learners as it was only by 'seeing the kind of learners in college and their level of learning difficulty that I was able to ascertain the relevance of their targets and whether they were too easy or not.' Since RARPA is concerned with process and hence must be embedded in teaching and learning process which can only really be ascertained by seeing it directly in action, not just by examining records. It would be important to spell out in guidance the difference types and the balance between them. A fundamental point would be to make absolutely clear the 'minimum evidence requirements' and the 'level of proof' required so that the standards can be applied consistently by different organisations.

It was evident that before the external moderation visit, a comprehensive review of provision against the standards and criteria and internal moderation reports should have been completed. Participants suggested that it would be helpful to specify to centres participating in the moderation process the suggested documentation to prepare. Guidance should also stress that an internal review of provision using RARPA is a mandatory part of the external moderation process. In revising the standards, the evidence sources should be added to the Standards for the Quality Assurance system and these sources might also include wider documentation such as recent Ofsted reports. In practice, where much of the evidence was on-line, a peer reviewer commented that it had been particularly helpful to have staff available who could demonstrate evidence on-line.

An important point was raised about data protection issues when sharing learner and staff information to provide evidence that the standards had been met. One provider overcame the problem by making available sensitive professional development records that had been anonymised. This is an area that will need to be included in guidance. Providers and external moderators both have a duty to ensure data protection.

Preparation and documentation

Consultant external moderators and peer reviewers said they felt they were sufficiently well briefed and provided with information to enable them to conduct the external moderation/peer review effectively. The project documents and templates were found to be fit for purpose, (subject to revision of the second section of the Standards and Criteria document). The same process and documentation was thought to be equally applicable to both external moderation conducted by consultants and peer reviewers. The documentation was described as 'invaluable'. Key documents included:

- RARPA Standards and Criteria
- reporting template
- checklist on the quality of evidence

Various suggestions were made as to how the documentation might be amended. These were principally concerned with removing overlaps and ambiguity in the quality assurance Section 2 of the Standards and Criteria. Suggestions were made for guidance including clear and sufficient information to allow standardisation of process and outcomes.

External moderation / peer review

There were differing views on whether external moderation conducted by external consultants or through peer review processes was equally rigorous. The majority thought that both processes were rigorous and robust. For example, one participant suggested that they were:

"equally rigorous. Both were conducted by colleagues who had a supportive manner and came across as a 'critical friend' rather than a judge, but at the same time asked searching questions about some aspects of our practice. In both cases the findings were similar, and largely bore out the points we had already listed as improvement actions."

In contrast, other providers reported that external moderation by consultants was more rigorous than peer review. The outcomes from both approaches were similar, although where a difference was noted by some providers, the consultants' wider knowledge and experience was reported to have led to greater rigour. A benefit identified of external moderation by consultants was that it was a more familiar and recognisable process for some senior managers that commanded higher status and was therefore deemed to be more rigorous and beneficial to the organisation, whereas peer review was the practitioners preferred approach to quality improvement.

Although there are many potential reasons, it is possible that the identified differences arise from the underlying purpose of each approach. External moderation is essentially a process that validates providers' internal quality assurance arrangements and passes judgement on whether national standards and criteria have been met. External moderators do also identify areas for improvement and may offer suggestions as to how these may be achieved but the primary task is to ensure that national standards have been met. Peer review on the other hand, is a continuous improvement collaborative methodology. It usually takes place in peer groups of same sector providers who undertake continuous improvement activities. It is designed to be supportive rather than judgemental. Independent Specialist Providers are very familiar with the peer review approach applied to provision for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, unlike GFE and ACL providers. For these providers, peer review and development may have been undertaken, but not for this learner cohort. An important feature of peer review is its reciprocity: providers have a chance to observe, share and learn from each others' practice. The issue of trust was thought to be of great importance to the effectiveness of the process and this was thought to be more easily developed in a peer review context. For a trusting relationship to develop: there needed to be mutual respect between partners. Participants commented that this had been achieved in the project.

In peer review, both gained from the experience and were able to take forward different ideas and solutions into their own delivery.

"One distinct advantage of the peer review process was that it was of considerable benefit to the reviewer (as well as hopefully the reviewed) although this could be countered by the fact that an external moderator has a greater breadth of knowledge and practices from which to draw. However, what was important to staff was the recognition of good practices as well as recommendations about areas where improvements could be made, which were offered in positive and supportive ways."

Another difference between the two approaches in this project was that the consultant external moderators had the opportunity to moderate three providers, gaining experience with each visit, whereas peer reviewers visited only one organisation. In looking to wider implementation, it was suggested that to build capacity, a shadowing process would be more helpful for less experienced peer reviewers or consultant external moderators.

A further marked difference within this project was the speed and responsiveness of the consultant external moderators who set up their moderations and submitted their reports more quickly and to deadlines than the peer reviewers. This may well be explained by the fact that practitioners who conducted the peer reviews were all undertaking project activities in addition to their normal jobs. They faced hugely competing demands and there were many legitimate reasons why delays were inevitable. Whereas consultants were contracted to undertake external moderations so there was a clear expectation on both sides about delivery and reporting. Given the difficulties commented on and experienced by so many highly committed providers, the capacity of providers to undertake peer review on a regular basis does have implications for implementation and sustainability.

In terms of the timing of the project, for some providers, peer review followed very soon after external moderation. As a consequence, the peer review was of limited effectiveness. Also, some providers reported that they had experienced difficulty in arranging for key staff to be available twice in such a short period of time. These factors may have affected the perceptions of the differences in the two approaches.

A comment from this provider indicates not only the differences but also identified some of the implications for both implementation and long term sustainability:

"There is support to develop RARPA- peer support appears to work very well and having a network of providers who can share resources/ideas and support each other could work well. This could be self-sustainable by providers (LSIS would have been a good place to site this but not sure now?) We need to ensure all organisations using RARPA can get support and buy into the idea of peer support and external moderation. If it is voluntary then there must be an incentive.

There is external moderation where judgements are made to determine the quality of a provision. In order to be effective I think this requires more consideration e.g. what qualification/experience/training do you need to be an external moderator? Given the current economic situation it is a challenge to think how this can be provided for free. How will organisations respond to external moderation reports unless there is a national requirement to have one? Will only the providers who have already achieved good standards buy into it and smaller, less well supported provision be ignored?"

In practice, both moderation approaches, by consultant and by peer review were highly valued, although for different reasons.

General comments

Participants commented on how beneficial the project has been to their organisations, and potentially, to RARPA and the sector as a whole. The project had provided a rigorous and robust structure within which organisations were able to reflect critically on their RARPA process and enabled them to develop a clearer understanding of the quality assurance systems required for RARPA. The work had raised the profile of RARPA within organisations, provided a sound structure for improvement and for identifying effective practice within organisations. A particular strength was identified as the opportunity to share resources, information and approaches to RARPA between participants. The externality was thought to be very important in raising the profile of work quality assured by RARPA and in giving it credibility.

Most respondents considered that the external moderation by consultants and peer review approaches to quality assuring RARPA were adequate so that stakeholders could be confident it is robust and rigorous and learners are enabled to maximise their potential and achieve their aspirations. The project was reported to have developed a clear structure for both external moderation and Peer review based on clear RARPA Standards and Criteria. The process in both cases involved reviewing provision using the RARPA Standards and Criteria and use of the external moderation report template to produce a clear report. The same template could also be used for internal moderation.

However, providers indicated that prior to implementation there was further work required. Revisions to the second section of the RARPA Standards and Criteria were identified and would need to be revised. The issue of the credibility and capability of external moderators whether consultants or peer reviewers was identified. Further work would be needed to extend the work beyond the project. The recruitment, training, assessment and selection of external moderators and a mechanism for assuring their quality when moderating would be necessary before they were ready to conduct external moderation visits and to ensure consistency and maintain standards once underway. As one provider indicated,

"I am not sure at this stage that the approaches are sufficiently adequate because I think a lot will depend on who is moderating. The external consultants and peer reviewers were involved in the RARPA Advisory Group because of their experience of using RARPA, and I presume, their commitment to good quality provision. I felt that the moderators knew as a baseline what they expected to see-using the standards and criteria- but would this be the same for all moderators?"

Covering the full range of standards and criteria in a single day was widely reported to be challenging. There were some suggestions that the external moderation/peer review processes could be improved by holding two visits, possibly one visit to cover RARPA and the other to cover the quality systems. Alternatively, it was suggested that two external moderators might conduct each visit, one covering each aspect. However, overall these suggestions were thought to be unlikely to be realistic in the current climate.

Project participants reported that it had been, *"an interesting and successful project."* There was strong support for that wider ratification of the RARPA moderation process beyond non-accredited provision for learners with learning difficulties. Some project providers wished to roll the process out across their whole organisations. This has implications for the further development of guidance for a wider audience, which is outside the scope of this project. The project has developed and tested the process, standards and criteria in relation to provision for learners with learning difficulties. Suitability for wider roll-out is predicated on the assumption that what will work for learners with learning difficulties, can be applied to any group of learners. While this is broadly true, there are some criteria which may need clear guidance to ensure that they are applicable more widely. For example, Standard 2 relates to initial assessment. While the approach indicated by some of the criteria is essential for learners with learning difficulties, it may be inappropriate or irrelevant for other groups of learners. It is certainly beyond what the RARPA process requires. This would need to be addressed in any documentation and guidance for a wider audience.

"It would be indicative if following the standards report that stage 2 requires an in-depth screening/initial assessment of learners needs. This is not what RARPA stage 2 requires. Therefore, if the project is to be universally adopted, and I can really see a very strong argument for this to be the case, then there needs to be some guidance notes issued on the use of the process. Not all providers would be able to undertake diagnostic screening as part of stage 2, especially those who deliver short programmes. Similarly the notes would also need to reassure users that not all standards can be applied depending on the nature (mainly on courses of short duration) of their provision."

Recommendations for future implementation and sustainability

Guidance

There were many recommendations for the development of guidance. Some recommendations related to content, for example:

- add to glossary to ensure a common understanding of the language and terms used;
- specify the type of documentation and roles of staff to be seen during external moderation;
- include reference to data protection.

Other recommendations related to guidance on the process for host providers and for moderators, for example:

- agree the scope of the moderation, practicalities such as parking, timing and sending an overview of the organisation's structure;

- the host organisation will need to plan and prepare, to have evidence ready and staff/learners informed and prepared and also to have completed a review prior to moderation, this is a mandatory part of the process;
- providers to consider putting together a file with evidence against the criteria, although time consuming to put together, it was considered invaluable for self assessment and inspection;
- guidance on sampling techniques and minimum sample sizes, fit for purpose in different contexts;
- reassurance that the standards provide a framework and there is no expectation that every criterion will necessarily be covered in every context or visit;
- record documentation on an IPad for later reference, to save time on making notes during the visit being mindful of data protection issues;
- identify good practice examples and actions for improvement as moderators go through rather than waiting to the end;
- the balance between reviewing documentation, discussion and observation during moderation visits;
- use language that will readily be understood by interviewees – the acronym RARPA and some quality assurance terminology (SAR, QIP) may not be widely used and understood in some organisations by every part-time staff member, while the terminology of the standards e.g. 'initial assessment to establish learners' starting points', should be understood by all staff.

Clear and unambiguous guidance on the 'level of proof' would be needed so that providers are clear what is required to meet the criteria. Illustrations of the standards in different contexts and examples of the range of types of evidence would also be helpful. Providing evidence for whether 'appropriately challenging goals were set' could, for example, prove challenging, so moderators could be advised to look for evidence that goals have been revised, added to, achieved and/or updated within the programme. This would give an indication that staff teams were aware of and were meeting this criterion. Participants also suggested that it would be helpful to include examples of moderation reports that exemplified good practice.

Recommendations for revising the documentation

Standards and Criteria

Feedback on the quality assurance systems section, as previously mentioned, indicated that there was some ambiguity and overlap. In response, the section was revised and streamlined. Additional evidence indicators were added and the final draft document was circulated for comment.

Standard 1: Aims appropriate to an individual learner or groups of learners, was also modified to articulate more clearly how the aims of the learning programme would improve the life chances of a learner with a learning difficulty. Although implicit, an addition was made to the first criterion to make this point explicit.

The external moderation report template

The template provided a table within which to record the outcomes of the external moderation. The majority of moderation reports used the template and found that it was helpful. Participants also commented that the project report instructions provided a useful guide to writing up the report. A participant recommended the use of the external moderation report template as it helped to produce a clear report and that the same documentation (and overall approach) could also be used for internal moderation. *"If adopted by all this would form a consistent approach that would have a universal application."*

A minority of reports were written in a narrative style rather than using the template, although they covered the same content. As one participant pointed out, the table format did not suit her particular style. A participant made the following interesting observation about the reporting format used:

"I used the reporting template as part of my peer review report, whereas my external moderator wrote her report entirely in paragraphs. I instinctively prefer her approach, but wonder whether there may be a case for itemising evidence seen against the RARPA criteria (using the template) when moderating a less experienced centre where there may be considerably more small action points. This would make it very clear to the centre what the gaps were, and enable a record to be kept of issues which may not appear in the first action plan, so that they can be revisited at a later date."

One clear advantage of using the template was evident from reviewing all the external moderation reports. Completing the template made it rather more difficult to skip over or miss areas. For this reason, also for less experienced organisations as mentioned above and for consistency the use of the template would on balance, seem to be preferable.

There were two other suggestions concerning the template and its use. A provider suggested that the 'sufficient' box could also be removed as this judgement is highly subjective since all the organisations are so different, *"the focus should be on good quality feedback to each individual provider – not pass or fail."* While this is true for a peer review process where the prime purpose is quality improvement, external moderation against a set of national standards is judgemental. Should a 'kitemark' or some other form of external recognition be introduced, then the purpose of the external moderation would be to judge whether there was sufficient evidence that the standards had been met to merit the award of the kitemark. A further ambiguity was identified during the discussion on what was deemed to be 'sufficient evidence'. Was it that sufficient evidence had been seen to make a judgement? Or alternatively was it that the standard of performance evident was sufficient to judge that the standard had been met? The guidance would need to clarify that it was the latter.

Another suggestion was that there should be an addition to the template to allow the external moderator to describe the organisational context. Whilst the provider, who is the recipient of the report, knows the context, anyone else reading the report would find it hard to make sense of the content without some indication about the size and nature of the provision. This need not be onerous, as external moderators would need the information to understand the scope of the task and the information would have been made available in providers' internal review or SAR documentation. This could be included in guidance.

Implementation issues and recommendations

Encouraging take up

For implementation to be effective there would need to be a clear and well argued rationale for encouraging the uptake of the successful approaches to quality assuring non-accredited provision for learners with learning difficulties, developed and tested in this project. The main driver may be found in DfE guidance on Study Programmes. Since Study Programmes now explicitly include non-qualification elements for young people, providers will require a rigorous and robust way of quality assuring this provision. The external moderation process could provide a vehicle for bringing about change and raising the level of recording and reporting on non-accredited provision to match that of accredited provision. Another valuable driver is that of helping providers prepare for inspection. An externally moderated process to national standards that had been mapped to the Common Inspection Framework would help prepare for inspection and also offer an interim check and support for providers between inspections.

National recognition/ kitemark

A form of national recognition and endorsement such as a kitemark would have greater credibility, status and weight behind it and efforts should be made to explore how this might be implemented. At the time of writing it is unclear where an appropriate home for such recognition might be located.

However, in seeking a central co-ordinating organisation or group of organisations, it will be important to ensure that the organisation(s) represent and are credible with the full range of providers. A co-ordinated approach could include an administrative base within the sector and a board or panel to oversee implementation and consider kitemarking. One recommendation was that a proposal could be developed to be submitted to the FE Guild. This project has developed and tested a worked up model that could offer the Guild or any other appropriate sector organisation a 'quick win' in the sector. It may also be timely to consider the relationship to the proposals for Chartered Status for FE organisations.

Possible characteristics of a national RARPA Quality Assurance Framework:

- A Board/expert panel of providers, DfE, Ofsted and respected individuals with a wide range of expertise, to review effectiveness nationally, ensure standardisation and to update the framework when necessary in response to national initiatives
- Training programme for peer reviewers/moderators (how these could be delivered and funded would need to be resolved)
- Annual registration fee charged to cover administration costs
- Standard reporting format to be used, to include improvement actions and timescale (improvement actions and timescale would be agreed with the provider during verbal feedback after moderation).
- Report to go to the institution's Quality Improvement (QI) team initially, who would pass it on to the programme team. A 'signing off' would be required by the QI manager or other senior manager to confirm acceptance of responsibility for implementation.

Peer review

Participants noted that if a Peer review approach were to be adopted then both sustainability and standardisation would need to be addressed. Where peer review and development groups exist, they were thought to provide a useful vehicle for external moderation. A Quality Manager suggested that, whilst there could be clear advantages to a peer review process, it would also be useful to have an annual 'get together' of peer reviewers to check understanding, promote rigour in the process and, if necessary, arbitrate where there was misunderstanding or dispute. The operation of peer review and external moderation in tandem was another suggestion offered by a provider. The peer review process could be used at an earlier stage to develop and prepare the organisation for external moderation. An independent specialist provider considered that the RARPA review process could, in time, replace or supplement the current 'Mocksted' system in some areas, but recognised that it would not work for all. At present, peer review and development groups that focus on learners with learning difficulties, appear to be limited to Independent Specialist Colleges, although there was some interest by non-specialist providers in setting up a peer review process with other providers. The potential demand for such an approach might be explored in Phase 2 of the work.

Supporting less experienced providers

The model used to implement the approach would need to accommodate providers with different levels of experience. The approach had been effective with experienced providers with well established systems that had identified areas of concern and produced action plans, such as those involved in the project. However, for less experienced providers and those with many improvement action points identified through external moderation, there might need to be more substantial arrangements for support and monitoring. Who might be responsible for providing the advice and support required and for monitoring progress, is a further consideration.

An approach to implementation

The project has been largely successful based on high performing organisations. Providers with less well established RARPA practice may need more preliminary work on the basics of RARPA first, even good providers have identified gaps in practice and had to work hard to collect evidence for moderation. A suggested approach would be to run a series of RARPA refreshers and workshops where Advisory Group members worked as critical friends to those who wished to adopt the approach. Alternatively, NIACE run regional and in-house sessions on RARPA and there may be scope for working in partnership. This was thought to be effective and productive without being judgemental. It would then be possible to introduce the quality assurance model. However, this would only be as good as the framework that was in place to support it. Another way of achieving implementation could be to ensure that those new to peer reviewing shadowed more experienced external moderators or peer reviewers. In terms of training for internal moderators, peer reviewers and external moderators, it would be appropriate to mirror the qualifications and training required of verifiers by awarding bodies and to reflect the same level of rigour in arrangements for RARPA moderator training.

Inclusive quality assurance systems

An implementation issue was identified in some GFE providers concerning college wide quality assurance systems which focus on qualification outcomes as measures for achievement and quantitative evidence. The issue concerned the extent to which the QA systems have adapted or would

need to adapt to encompass the type of qualitative evidence required for RARPA. There was a clear implication that for the wider roll out of the RARPA quality assurance process across the organisation, college QA systems might need to change. As a participant wrote,

“a model for future evaluations needs to address not just how well RARPA is included in college wide Quality Assurance but also how inclusive college systems are to RARPA approaches.”

The whole institution's quality assurance systems would need to see RARPA as being of equal value to the Internal Verification/External Verification process required by an Awarding Body, and to write it into the annual QI calendar.

The credibility of external moderators

The knowledge, experience and expertise of those conducting external moderation was critical to the credibility of the process. This would have implications for selection, training and cross verification. A process of selection and a programme of training, development and assessment was recommended for external moderators and peer reviewers. For external moderators this could be achieved by an application process based on experience followed by an induction and training programme. The external moderator would then be assessed by conducting a joint moderation with an experienced moderator. In addition, a process for cross moderation of moderators would also need to be developed and applied to ensure that the standards had been correctly applied and maintained.

Sustainability

An important issue that underpins the viability of implementation and sustainability is the level of time, resources and costs that might be involved. For providers in the project, a small amount of funding enabled their participation. They indicated that participation had been demanding and time consuming although they spoke of the benefits received as individuals and for their institutions. For some providers continued participation may not have been realistic in the current economic climate. Although organisations are used to incurring costs for verification from awarding bodies, their capacity and willingness to do so for a 'voluntary' quality assurance process would need to be assessed. Soundings could be taken in Phase 2 of the project to assess the level of demand that might be realistic. However, in terms of the future, the potential was identified to extend the approach beyond education and training, for example, into health, day care and employment settings.

In summary, the project has identified and recommends that to be successful, both external moderation by consultants and peer review, require certain pre-requisites to be in place. These included the following:

Pre-requisites for effective RARPA quality assurance

- Agreed national standards and criteria against which to assess practice and outcomes
- An explicit statement of evidence sources and the level of evidence necessary to say that the standards and criteria have been met
- A process that matches providers with external moderators/peer reviewers
- Pre-visit communication to discuss and agree the appropriate documentation, which documents should be sent in advance and which made available on the day, also which staff and learners would need to be available.
- Pre-visit preparation and planning by providers. Providers need to have conducted an internal assessment or review of their provision and practice against the standards and criteria. They must also ensure that relevant evidence is ready to review and accessible.
- Trained external moderators and peer reviewers, with the expertise and capability to apply the standards rigorously and consistently.

In addition, to have the same credibility and status of externally accredited provision, there is a need for a central organisation, body or group to oversee and co-ordinate the process and ensure that the infrastructure is in place to support implementation, maintenance of standards and ongoing review and evaluation.

Conclusions

Where we are now

1. The project has been remarkably successful in developing and testing out two different approaches for externally quality assuring RARPA, especially given the timescale and resources.
2. Effective internal review of practice in implementing RARPA is valuable in improving practice and is an essential pre-requisite for external quality assurance.
3. We have clear evidence that external moderation by consultants and peer review can both be used successfully to quality assure RARPA in organisations that are experienced in using RARPA
4. External moderation and peer review fulfil different purposes. External moderation is fundamentally a quality assurance process that would be credible in the face of external scrutiny and suitable for 'kitemarking.' Peer review is strongly developmental, preferred by practitioners and primarily concerned with quality improvement.
5. There have been expressions of interest about the potential level of demand for either process but no robust evidence (this was outside the scope of the project). This is an important consideration in the current financial climate. Practitioners naturally preferred the developmental aspects of peer review but also thought that managers would prefer and be much more likely to support external moderation. It is possible that for some providers a model where both approaches are complementary might be used, with peer review concerned with improving practice and external moderation providing external credibility.
6. There is also interest in the wider application of the approach(es) to quality assuring RARPA beyond this learner group.
7. Standards, criteria and evidence indicators have been developed, tested and revised for provision using RARPA for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities and are now fit for purpose.
8. A process for internal and external moderation has been established. A single process can work equally well for both contexts.
9. One crucial area that all participants struggled with was the 'level of proof' and evidence required to affirm that the standards had been met in different contexts. This has implications for guidance, training and standardisation processes.
10. The knowledge, understanding, experience and expertise of those conducting external moderation and peer review underpins the effectiveness of the process and this has implications for recruitment, selection, briefing and training.
11. The project has established the need for guidance and generated useful material for it. Illustrative examples are available in moderation and review reports, providers' internal reviews and case studies for populating guidance. The advisory group suggested potential content for guidance.

Next steps

12. Disseminate the approach, documentation and guidance through 3 sub-national events hosted by participant providers.
13. Produce a project bulletin that summarises the project outcomes and includes information about the dissemination events
14. Develop guidance for using the approach to quality assure RARPA.
15. Conduct a policy seminar to promote the approach with appropriate government agencies/departments and provider bodies.

16. Decide on other priority activity for Phase 2 and beyond, for the future implementation and sustainability of the approach(es).

Implementation options

Three options are presented below and as they are not mutually exclusive, they may also be considered as steps towards full implementation of a national system to quality assure RARPA.

17. **Option1:** Disseminate the documentation and process for quality assuring RARPA for providers to use to conduct internal reviews. This option is potentially high impact for the providers who conduct reviews but will lack national endorsement.
18. **Option 2:** Develop a peer review process for external moderation and quality improvement that might include promotion through the existing PRD groups of Independent Specialist Providers and, for all other providers, develop a centralised 'matchmaking' system for those who wish to adopt the approach. The impact of this approach would be enhanced by the element of externality introduced by peer review.
19. **Option 3:** Develop a working proposal to establish a national framework for a co-ordinated approach to both external moderation and peer review, including an administrative base within the sector and a board or panel to oversee implementation and consider kitemarking. This option with national endorsement has the highest level of credibility and potential impact for the sector as a whole.
20. Undertake further activity which might include:
 - a. undertaking further rounds of external moderation and/or peer review with new providers;
 - b. developing and implementing a programme of training for external moderators and peer reviewers;
 - c. developing and implementing a standardisation process for peer reviewers and external moderators;
 - d. exploring the potential for the introduction of a kitemark and/or incorporating the RARPA criteria within the proposals for Chartered Status.

References

Learning and Skills Council (2005) *Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement – RARPA* Learning and Skills Council: Coventry.
http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/national/10._RARPA.pdf (accessed 23.09.12)

Ofsted (August 2011) *Progression post-16 for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities*
Reference no: 100232. Ofsted

Project participants

- Sally Faraday (Project Manager)
- Pauline Bayliss-Jones (National Star College)
- Viv Berkeley (LSIS)
- Alison Boulton (Natspec)
- Cecilia Brindle (Essex Adult and Community Learning)
- Roger Dill-Russell (Abingdon and Witney College)
- Phil Eaton (Consultant, External Moderator)
- Meryl Green (Derwen College)
- Aileen Horsfield (Vine, Leeds City College)
- Yola Jacobsen (NIACE)
- Allie O'Brien (Consultant, External Moderator)
- Julia Park (Beaumont College)
- Liz Maudslay (Consultant, External Moderator)
- Mary Moore (City of Bristol College)
- Cora Mullenger (Adult Education Norfolk)
- Franki Williams (Leicester College)

List of Annexes:

[Annex A: RARPA standards and evidence mapped to the Common Inspection Framework](#).....23

[Annex B: External Moderators/Peer Reviewers Reporting Guidelines](#)..... 25

[Annex C: External moderation Template \(original\)](#)27

[Annex D: Standards, Criteria and Evidence to Quality Assure RARPA \(revised\)](#)31

Annex A:

RARPA standards and evidence mapped to the Common Inspection Framework

RARPA elements	Evidence	Common Inspection Framework
1. Aims appropriate to an individual learner or groups of learners (clearly stated learning aims)	Clearly stated aim(s) for all programmes <i>[Could include aims which do not specifically mention a learning aspiration, for example, in some informal and community based non-accredited learning]</i>	learners develop personal, social and employability skills staff use their skills and expertise to plan and deliver teaching, learning and support to meet each learner's needs
2. Initial assessment to establish the learner's starting point	Record of outcomes of process of establishing learners' starting points <i>[Process and level of detail will vary according to the nature and duration of the learning programme. Records may include learners' self-assessment of prior learning and/or learning and support needs]</i>	staff initially assess learners' starting points and monitor their progress, set challenging tasks, and build on and extend learning for all learners staff use their skills and expertise to plan and deliver teaching, learning and support to meet each learner's needs
3. Identification of appropriately challenging learning objectives: initial, renegotiated and revised	Clearly stated suitably challenging objectives for all programmes and, wherever feasible, for each learner <i>[The level of challenge which is appropriate will vary according to initial assessment of learners' needs, aspirations and starting points. Learning objectives may be amended during the learning programme, for example, as a result of formative assessment]</i>	staff initially assess learners' starting points and monitor their progress, set challenging tasks, and build on and extend learning for all learners staff use their skills and expertise to plan and deliver teaching, learning and support to meet each learner's needs teaching and learning develop English, mathematics and functional skills, and support the achievement of learning goals and career aims learners benefit from high expectations, engagement, care, support and motivation from staff

<p>4. Recognition and recording of progress and achievement during programme (formative assessment): tutor feedback to learners, learner reflection, progress reviews</p>	<p>Records of learner self-assessment, group and peer assessment; tutor records of assessment activities and individual/group progress and achievement. Learners' files, journals, diaries, portfolios, artwork; videos, audiotapes, performances, exhibitions and displays; individual or group learner testimony; artefacts, photographs and other forms of evidence</p> <p><i>[Research indicates that learners prefer the term 'feedback' and that learners' capacity for reflection and informed self-assessment would be enhanced by more dialogue with tutors and the sharing of criteria and norms used to evaluate progress and achievement]</i></p>	<p>all learners achieve and make progress relative to their starting points and learning goals</p> <p>learners understand how to improve as a result of frequent, detailed and accurate feedback from staff following assessment of their learning</p> <p>learners benefit from high expectations, engagement, care, support and motivation from staff</p> <p>staff use their skills and expertise to plan and deliver teaching, learning and support to meet each learner's needs</p>
<p>5. End-of-programme learner self- assessment; tutor summative assessment; review of overall progress and achievement</p>	<p>Records of learner self-assessment, group and peer assessment; tutor records of assessment activities and individual/group progress and achievement. Learners' files, journals, diaries, portfolios, artwork; videos, audiotapes, performances, exhibitions and displays; individual or group learner testimony; artefacts, photographs and other forms of evidence</p> <p><i>[Evidence is likely to comprise qualitative and quantitative information and to demonstrate planned learning outcomes and learning gains identified subsequently]</i></p>	<p>all learners achieve and make progress relative to their starting points and learning goals</p> <p>learners develop personal, social and employability skills</p> <p>learners progress to courses leading to higher-level qualifications and into jobs that meet local and national needs.</p> <p>achievement gaps are narrowing between different groups of learners</p>

Annex B:

External Moderators/Peer Reviewers Reporting Guidelines

1. Reports to organisations

External moderators/peer reviews will need to provide verbal feedback to at the end of each visit, the follow up with a written report that:

- a. records the date of the visit
- b. details the moderation activities undertaken, including documentation examined, information on samples, any activities/audits undertaken and who was interviewed
- c. provides explicit feedback on the quality and consistency of its RARPA processes and the effectiveness of RARPA quality assurance including internal moderation arrangements
- d. highlights areas of good practice
- e. specifies what actions for improvement the organisation needs to take if its performance is to meet the requirements
- f. confirms whether the organisation has carried out any previously agreed actions for improvement (from previous external moderation/review or self assessment reviews)
- g. records any areas where there was insufficient evidence to form a decision or differing conclusions, where the evidence did not support the providers self assessment

2. Reports and Presentation on the External moderation/Peer Review process

Please draw on all the External moderation and Peer Review processes you experienced in the project to provide a written report that answers the questions below that are relevant to you.

Prepare a 5 minute presentation for the advisory group of any key messages from your report, especially any suggested improvements.

a. Process

- How 'fit for purpose' were the External moderation/Peer Review processes?
- Were the processes unnecessarily bureaucratic? If so, how could the bureaucracy be reduced?

b. Evidence:

- Was there sufficient evidence available to you to enable you to make decisions about:
 - the quality and consistency of RARPA processes across the organisation measured against the standards and criteria
 - the effectiveness of RARPA quality assurance including internal moderation arrangements
 - examples of good practice
 - areas for improvement

If not, what else did you need?

c. Preparation and Documentation:

- Were you sufficiently well briefed and provided with information to enable you to conduct the external moderation/peer review effectively? If not, what else did you require?
- Were the project documents and templates fit for purpose? If not how should they be amended?

d. External moderation / Peer Review

- Were external moderation and peer review processes equally rigorous? If not, how did they differ?
- Were the findings and outcomes from external moderation and peer review similar? If not, how did they differ? Do you consider either approach was more accurate/helpful than the other and if so why?

e. General

- Do you consider that the external moderation and/or peer review approaches to quality assuring RARPA are adequate "*so that stakeholders can be confident it is robust and rigorous and learners are enabled to maximise their potential and achieve their aspirations.*"
- Were there any other ways in which the external moderation/peer review processes could be improved?
- Any other comments?

f. What recommendations would you make for future implementation and sustainability?

Annex C:

External moderation Template (original)

Name of Organisation:		Contact:	
Name of external moderator / peer review		Date of visit:	
Brief overview of the organisational context and scope of the moderation			

What systems does the organisation have in place?

Section 1: RARPA 5 staged process			
RARPA elements	Evidence	Sufficient	Comments Good practice/actions for improvement
1 Aims appropriate to an individual learner or groups of learners (clearly stated learning aims)			
2 Initial assessment to establish the learner's starting point			

3 Identification of appropriately challenging learning objectives: initial, renegotiated and revised			
4 Recognition and recording of progress and achievement during programme (formative assessment): tutor feedback to learners, learner reflection, progress reviews			
5 End-of-programme learner self-assessment; tutor summative assessment; review of overall progress and achievement			

Section 2: Organisational Systems to Quality Assure RARPA

RARPA elements	Evidence	Sufficient	Comments Good practice/actions for improvement
6 Staff implement the RARPA process effectively across provision			
7 There is an effective quality assurance system for the review and improvement of the provision using the RARPA process			
8 Provider self assessment review of the RARPA process is both rigorous and consistent and leads to improvement.			
9 There are internal methods for moderating the effectiveness of the RARPA self assessment and improvement processes			

10 There are external methods for verifying the effectiveness of the RARPA self assessment and improvement processes			
11 RARPA improvement plans are challenging and their implementation and impact are monitored and evaluated			
12 There is effective performance management and professional development in relation to RARPA			
Agreed actions as a result of the moderation			
Signed: (provider)		Dated:	
Signed: (external moderator)		Dated:	

Annex D:

Standards, Criteria and Evidence to Quality Assure RARPA (revised)

Section 1: RARPA 5 staged process		
RARPA elements	Criteria	Evidence
1 Aims appropriate to an individual learner or groups of learners (clearly stated learning aims)	<p>1.1 Information advice and guidance processes support learners to make informed, realistic choices. Learners' own views and aspirations are taken into account in identifying appropriate provision and the aims clearly articulate learners' long term goals and aspirations.</p> <p>1.2 The intended programme is suitably challenging for every learner.</p> <p>1.3 The learning outcomes will enable learners to develop the personal, social and employability skills they have identified to support them to get to their desired destination.</p> <p>1.4 Provision reflects local and national demand, and is responsive to learners' needs.</p>	<p>Clearly stated aim(s) for all programmes</p> <p><i>[Could include aims which do not specifically mention a learning aspiration, for example, personal development and communications skills and some informal and community based non-accredited learning]</i></p> <p>IAG documentation Course outlines</p>
2 Initial assessment to establish the learner's starting point	<p>2.1 Learners' views, aspirations, assessment of their own needs and choices are central, to and clearly identifiable in, the initial assessment process.</p> <p>2.2. Initial assessment is fit for purpose in the context of the learning programme and learners it may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learners' approximate level of knowledge and skills; • achievements, qualifications and accreditation gained; • previous experience; • existing skills and transfer of skills; • learners' additional support needs which may include health, communication and personal care needs; and • learners' preferred ways of learning: teaching and learning strategies and approaches. <p>2.3 Learners are aware of and have access to appropriate information and guidance as required.</p> <p>2.4 The initial assessment process is reviewed and practice improved in</p>	<p>Record of outcomes of process of establishing learners' starting points</p> <p><i>[Process and level of detail will vary according to the nature and duration of the learning programme. Records may include learners' self-assessment of prior learning and/or learning and support needs]</i></p> <p>Learner records Records of initial assessment</p>

	response to learners' needs, achievement and feedback. Consequently, learners' achievements are demonstrably enhanced.	
3 Identification of appropriately challenging learning objectives: initial, renegotiated and revised	<p>3.1 Initial assessment informs programme planning and the setting of challenging objectives.</p> <p>3.2 Objectives are person-centred, expressed in 'learner-friendly' terms, are meaningful and relevant to real life and will help learners move towards their destinations. On longer programmes, they include short-, medium- and long-term targets.</p> <p>3.3. There is a person with clearly defined responsibility and/or clear lines of responsibility for setting, reviewing, re-negotiating and revising learners' objectives and for monitoring progress.</p> <p>3.4 Learners have the opportunity to renegotiate learning objectives and to agree additional personal outcomes reflecting their interests, motivation and needs.</p> <p>3.5 Learners are able to apply knowledge gained or demonstrate the skills they have learnt in different context</p>	<p>Clearly stated suitably challenging objectives for all programmes and, wherever appropriate, for each learner</p> <p><i>[The level of challenge which is appropriate will vary according to initial assessment of learners' needs, aspirations and starting points. Learning objectives may be amended during the learning programme, for example, as a result of formative assessment]</i></p> <p>Learner files including electronic records Teachers' records, including session plans</p>
4 Recognition and recording of progress and achievement during programme (formative assessment): teacher feedback to learners, learner reflection, progress reviews	<p>4.1 There is a robust process across the organisation to gather and use data effectively to support the learner, throughout the learner journey.</p> <p>4.2 Evidence of learning is clearly recorded, referenced to learning targets and shows progress. It is meaningful to the learner and other stakeholders.</p> <p>4.3 Creative ways are used to listen to the learner voice, including, where appropriate, circles of support.</p> <p>4.4. Additional or unplanned learning and achievement is also captured and recorded effectively.</p> <p>4.5 Learners are given feedback on how well they are achieving their learning outcomes and what they need to do to make progress.</p> <p>4.6 Regular progress reviews take place throughout the programme and in</p>	<p>Records of learner self-assessment, group and peer assessment; teacher records of assessment activities and individual/group progress and achievement. Learners' files, records of achievement, journals, diaries, portfolios, artwork; videos, audiotapes, performances, exhibitions and displays; individual or group learner testimony; artefacts, photographs and other forms of evidence</p> <p><i>[Research indicates that learners prefer the term 'feedback' and that learners' capacity for reflection and informed self-assessment would be enhanced by more dialogue with teachers and the sharing of</i></p>

	<p>response to changing needs to reflect and check on progress and make necessary changes. Where appropriate a supporter such as an advocate, parent or carer is involved in the review process.</p> <p>4.7 Progress reviews demonstrably improve teachers' practice</p> <p>4.8 Progress reviews demonstrably enhance learners' achievements.</p> <p>4.9 Learners' feedback demonstrably impacts on teaching and learning.</p>	<p><i>criteria and norms used to evaluate progress and achievement]</i></p>
<p>5 End-of-programme learner self- assessment; teacher summative assessment; review of overall progress and achievement</p>	<p>5.1 Summative assessment and review processes are undertaken with learners, and where appropriate a nominated person, so they have joint ownership of the process</p> <p>5.2 The end-of-programme review process is learner-centred and inclusive, and uses creative methods and media where appropriate.</p> <p>5.3 Teacher summative assessment reflects learners' targets, provides an overall review of progress and evidence of achievements that are meaningful to learners and other stakeholders.</p> <p>5.4 Achievements are celebrated.</p> <p>5.5 There is evidence that learning programmes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have met learners' aspirations • enable learners to develop the personal, social and employability skills to become more independent in everyday life. <p>5.6 On full-time programmes there is an effective 'handover' to destination providers.</p> <p>5.7 For all learners, documents are prepared for destination providers on time, are owned by learners and are passed on with their permission.</p> <p>5.8 Feedback from learners' reviews informs future planning.</p> <p>5.9 Destination data is gathered, reviewed and used to inform the SAR.</p>	<p>Records of learner self-assessment, group and peer assessment; teacher records of assessment activities and individual/group progress and achievement. Learners' files, journals, diaries, portfolios, artwork; videos, audiotapes, performances, exhibitions and displays; individual or group learner testimony; artefacts, photographs and other forms of evidence, SAR</p> <p><i>[Evidence is likely to comprise qualitative and quantitative information and to demonstrate planned learning outcomes and learning gains identified subsequently]</i></p>

	5.10 The outcomes of this stage of the RARPA process are rigorously reviewed and actions are taken to improve practice and improve learners' progress, achievements and progression.	
--	--	--

Section 2: Organisational Systems to Quality Assure RARPA		
Standard	Criteria	Evidence
6 Staff implement the RARPA process effectively across	<p>6.1 Teaching staff, learning support staff and other relevant interdisciplinary staff and volunteers, have access to information and training to use RARPA. They have a shared understanding of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the nature, purpose and importance of RARPA RARPA five stage process setting individual targets that support progression data and information recording system requirements quality assurance arrangements for RARPA. <p>They are active and engaged at all 5 stages.</p> <p>6.2 Implementation of the RARPA process is consistent across the organisation.</p>	<p>Team meeting records</p> <p>Staff handbooks/ guidelines</p> <p>Staff induction checklist</p> <p>Staff team training records</p> <p>Teacher files including evaluations</p>
7 There is an effective quality assurance system for the review and improvement of the provision using the RARPA process	<p>7.1 A clear quality cycle is in place that includes all elements of RARPA all aspects of provision and all staff. It is learner-centred, and embedded with the organisation's overall quality improvement system.</p>	<p>Organisational quality cycle</p> <p>Q A calendar for individual programme area(s)</p>
	<p>7.2 There are internal methods for moderating the effectiveness of RARPA</p> <p>7.2.1 Internal moderators are identified, trained and keep moderation records</p>	<p>Internal moderation records,</p> <p>List of internal moderators Records of moderator training</p>

	<p>7.2.2 Cross sector/department/subject moderation takes place regarding provision for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities and shows that RARPA is implemented consistently.</p> <p>7.2.3 The consistency of the performance of the internal moderators is moderated across the organisation, any inconsistencies are noted, and appropriate action is taken to address them.</p> <p>7.2.4 Internal moderation results in action plans that clearly identify underperformance, outlines steps required to improve and best practice that is shared.</p>	<p>Records showing cross moderation focus of moderation sampling plan feedback to individual staff summary of feedback</p> <p>Standardisation meeting records with action points</p> <p>Records of action plans showing regular monitoring, with timescale for completion, SAR or course/programme review/improvement plan</p>
	<p>7.3 Provider self assessment review of the RARPA process is both rigorous and consistent and the Quality Improvement Plan leads to improvement.</p> <p>7.3.1 The SAR process for provision using RARPA involves all staff. It is rigorous and the evaluations are appropriately detailed and accurate.</p> <p>7.3.2 Learners, parents and carers and employers are meaningfully and creatively involved in providing evidence, where appropriate.</p> <p>7.3.3 Data on learners' performance, progress and progression is analysed, evaluated and used to inform the SAR.</p> <p>7.3.4 QIPs covering RARPA are challenging and identify targets for improvement and professional development. Their implementation and impact are monitored and evaluated</p>	<p>SAR or course/programme sub-SAR, review, improvement plan</p> <p>Records of Programme Review meetings</p> <p>Learner/stakeholder satisfaction information</p> <p>MIS data, qualitative information collected at course/programme level</p> <p>QIP</p>
	<p>7.4 There are external methods for verifying the effectiveness of RARPA</p> <p>7.4.1 External moderators review internal moderation records for rigour and consistency. They review samples of learners' work and evidence of progress.</p> <p>7.4.2 External moderators review the annual quality cycle for evidence that RARPA is embedded effectively within all aspects of quality</p>	<p>External moderation records</p> <p>Learners work and records</p> <p>Annual quality cycle documents</p> <p>SAR, course/programme area sub-SAR OTL records</p>

	<p>assurance and improvement.</p> <p>7.4.3 External moderators verify that the SAR identifies appropriate areas for improvement, including professional development.</p> <p>7.4.4 External sources are used to verify quality assurance and improvement processes. The outcomes from e.g. PRD groups, inspection, consultant support, 'health checks', EFQM, other quality kite marks, result in improvement actions that are implemented, monitored and reviewed.</p>	<p>Inspection reports</p> <p>PRD Reports</p> <p>Consultancy reports</p> <p>Health checks</p> <p>Quality marks</p>
<p>8. There is effective performance management and professional development in relation to RARPA</p>	<p>8.1 The implementation of the RARPA process and teaching and learning are improved through rigorous performance management and appropriate professional development. This is effective in tackling underperformance.</p> <p>8.2 Rigorous improvement targets are set for individuals, departments and the whole organisation. These are regularly monitored and reviewed in accordance with the organisation's self assessment process.</p> <p>8.3 The CPD programme is clearly linked to improvement plans, is comprehensive, timely, uses appropriate methods such as; shadowing; mentoring; coaching; dialogue; support and training when needed and leads to demonstrable improvements in performance.</p> <p>8.4 Best practice is shared within a coherent programme of professional development. Staff teams have opportunities for development, discussion and sharing best practice about RARPA.</p> <p>8.5 Adequate resources are provided to ensure that improvements to performance can be made.</p>	<p>OTL records and action plans</p> <p>Performance review/ appraisal/supervision records</p> <p>Individual and departmental training plans and records</p> <p>CPD documents</p> <p>Team meeting records</p> <p>Staff development session records</p> <p>Discussions with group of teaching/ support staff</p>