

STAGE 2

INITIAL ASSESSMENT

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RARPA Stage Two: What is involved?

Initial Assessment

Stage Two is about offering an initial assessment process that:

- takes place over a number of weeks or time period appropriate to the length of the learning programme
- identifies learner's strengths and areas for development that will inform the delivery of the curriculum
- includes all the relevant information, gathered from different sources, that informs learners' starting points on entry to their learning programme
- enables the learner to demonstrate their current skills and knowledge in areas that are meaningful to them and relate to their long-term aspirations and outcomes
- clarifies additional support needs and strategies to maximise learner potential
- provides an opportunity to build supportive and positive working relationships between staff and learners.

When initial assessment is well managed:

- there are a variety of approaches and learning opportunities to gain feedback from the learner about their aspirations, preferences and preferred learning style
- information gathered during initial assessment leads to the design of a learning programme that is suitably challenging and ambitious, reinforces previous learning and avoids repetition
- the results of initial assessment are shared with the learner, relevant staff, including the wider multi-disciplinary team and parents and carers, where appropriate
- teachers plan opportunities to assess how learners transfer existing skills into their new setting, taking account of how the transition to a new setting may have affected the learner
- there is a focus on what learners can do independently and where they can build on this for greater independence
- additional support needs are identified and strategies are developed with the learner to meet these needs
- there is a clear identification of what the learner knows and can do now and what they need to know and do in the future, to achieve their outcomes.

RARPA Stage Two: What is involved? continued

Example from a Provider

Initial Assessment to establish the learner's starting point begins at the start of the learner's transition planning process when they are 14. Potential learners for college courses are identified and staff are invited by schools to attend transition review meetings. Wherever practicable, staff are supported to be released to attend transition review meetings. The College is therefore able to draw on the considerable experience of school staff and their knowledge of the learners and their needs to inform the Personalised Curriculum and the support that will be required, so that it can be planned and put in place when the learner starts at college. Staff also make time to go into school to see learners in their classroom so that they can identify and assess which aspects of the learning environment work effectively and can be transferred to a college setting. The College is also able to make contact with other support and therapeutic agencies so that there is an almost seamless transition into college. Assessment documentation is designed to explore learners' likes and dislikes, preferred communication methods, care needs, therapeutic inputs and previous achievements in order to ensure that target setting is appropriate. Establishing effective relationships with parents is also seen as a key strategy, as their role is critical in ensuring that support is given to learners' learning outside college and that what is learnt is transferred to other environments and skills are retained.

(General Further Education College)



Useful links

[An Initial Progress Review \(opens in web browser\)](#) for planning a personalised learning programme after initial assessment has taken place.

[ETF meaningful maths and English resource pack \(opens in web browser\)](#)

[ETF toolkit: Using competition activity in the vocational curriculum with learners with SEND \(opens in web browser\)](#)

RARPA Stage Two: Key Points from the Education Inspection Framework for Further Education and Skills 2019

The Education Inspection Framework sets the standards against which Ofsted will judge the overall effectiveness of a provider. There is a strong focus on how providers meet the standards for learners with SEND across all four key judgements. Using a RARPA process effectively enables providers to demonstrate they are ensuring learners with SEND are not disadvantaged compared to other learners and can access high quality provision that is ambitious, challenging and meets needs. Understanding how RARPA links to the requirements of the Education Inspection Framework supports providers to consider how they are meeting the standards and providing evidence to demonstrate continual quality improvement.

RARPA Stage Two: Initial Assessment

From 'Quality of Education' (para 171) for all learning programmes

- Inspectors will consider the provider's curriculum, which embodies the decisions the provider has made about the knowledge, skills and behaviours its learners need to acquire to fulfil their aspirations for learning, employment and independence. (171)
- Leaders, managers and teachers have planned and sequenced the curriculum so that learners can build on previous teaching and learning and develop the new knowledge and skills they need. (173)
- Learners see links between different areas of knowledge and skills and recognise that some knowledge and skills are transferable. (176)
- Leaders have ensured that a subject curriculum includes content that has been identified as most useful and that this content is taught in a logical progression, systematically and explicitly for all learners to acquire the intended knowledge, skills and behaviours. (176)
- When used effectively, assessment can help learners to embed and use knowledge fluently and to show that they are competent in applying their skills. The results of effective assessment assist teachers to produce clear and achievable next steps for learners. However, assessment is too often carried out in a way that creates unnecessary burdens for staff and learners. It is therefore important that leaders and teachers understand its limitations and avoid misuse and overuse. (179)
- Teachers use assessment to check learners' understanding in order to inform teaching. (178)

RARPA Stage Two: Key Themes from the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice 2014

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice informs the further education and skills sector of its statutory duties in relation to young people and education. Where providers understand their duties to the Code of Practice and how this links to RARPA they will be able to provide evidence that learners are achieving their potential and increasing their opportunities for good life outcomes. The Code of Practice advises a person-centred approach, and this links well to RARPA's focus on personalised learning outcomes and measuring achievement from an individual's starting points. Throughout the Code of Practice, providers are expected to work in partnership with health, social care and other educational providers to support good life outcomes.

'Schools and colleges are expected to design study programmes which enable learners to progress to a higher level of study than their prior attainment, take rigorous, substantial qualifications, study English and maths, participate in meaningful work experience and non-qualification activity. They should not be repeating learning they have already completed successfully. For learners who are not taking qualifications, their study programme should focus on high quality work experience, and on non-qualification activity which prepares them well for employment, independent living, being healthy adults and participating in society'.(para 8.30)

Statutory duties for FE Colleges, 6th form colleges, 16-19 academies and independent specialist colleges (Section 41 Children and Families Act 2014) include:

- duty to cooperate with local authorities in making arrangements for children and young people with SEN
- duty to admit a young person if the institution is named on the EHC Plan
- duty to regard the Code of Practice
- duty to use their best endeavours to secure special educational provision to meet young people's needs for those with or without an EHC Plan.



Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years

Statutory guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities

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RARPA Stage Two: Key Themes continued

Key themes from the SEND Code of Practice	At RARPA Stage Two providers should:
Providers working together should support a planned transition programme to a FE provider transition where learning, care and support needs can be identified and planned for in advance.	Work in partnership with schools and other relevant providers in advance to gather information to plan a personalised initial assessment.
Learners should have opportunities to disclose any learning needs, medical issues or disabilities. Any assessments that follow this should be in relation to the type and level of need.	Provide accessible information to learners about the type of learning support available. Develop support and care plans with the learner so they understand how support will enable them to make progress.
During initial assessment, where special educational needs are identified, providers must use their 'best endeavours' to put support in place. This includes specialist support.	Use an evidence-based approach to identify and provide support, matched to the learner's needs. This may include external specialist support that is commissioned by a provider.
Staff can demonstrate during initial assessment that they have the specialist knowledge and skills to identify and assess needs accurately and to deliver appropriate support strategies.	Conduct a staff skills audit to identify any gaps in knowledge and skills relating to assessment of need. Identify CPD opportunities to build expertise in specific areas and ensure relevant staff have regular briefings and updates about best practice in assessing and meeting needs.
Learners should not be repeating learning they have already successfully completed. Initial assessment should lead to ambitious target setting linked to longer term aspirations and outcomes.	Ensure the initial assessment process correctly identifies the learner's starting points. Effective use of information from previous settings and during transition will support this.
There should be an expectation that all young people with SEND can work and providers will engage with learners to match their career aspirations to suitable jobs.	Include opportunities for learners to demonstrate employability skills during initial assessment. Start to build a vocational profile with the learner to make employment options a reality from the start of the programme.

RARPA Stage Two: Questions providers should ask themselves about Education, Health and Care Plans (EHC plans)

The further education and skills sector has statutory responsibilities for young people with EHC Plans. At each stage of the RARPA process there are actions providers can take to ensure they are meeting these requirements. Young people aged 16 and over have the right to make their own decisions about their plans and should be involved, in appropriate ways, at each stage of the RARPA process to agree their long-term outcomes based on what is meaningful to them. Providers should challenge EHC Plan outcomes that are not person-centred, relevant to the individual and supportive of good life outcomes across the four preparing for adulthood pathways of education and employment, health, independent living and friends, relationships and community.

Questions to ask yourselves	If your answer is no or you are unsure
Has the initial assessment process correctly identified the learner's current knowledge and skills in relation to their planned aspirations and outcomes within their EHC Plan, including their choice of learning programme?	Review the EHC plan aspirations and outcomes with the learner and their parent and carers, if appropriate. Check that the aspirations and outcomes are still relevant. If they are not, contact the local authority to ask for an urgent review. Review the learning activities that took place during the initial assessment process. Was there sufficient breadth of activities to measure a learner's starting points towards their aspirations and long-term outcomes? If not, decide how this could be changed.
Has the initial assessment process confirmed the need for support as described in the EHC plan or identified additional or different requirements?	Clarify that you have a full understanding of the learner's current health, care and learning needs. If initial assessment has shown that additional support is required you will need to contact the local authority about this, if it is not already identified in the EHC Plan.
Do you have a process for supporting a learner to get an EHC Plan needs assessment where initial assessment findings suggest this needed?	Discuss this with the learner and parents and carers, if appropriate. Contact the local authority to ask for an EHC Plan needs assessment. There are specific timescales for this that can be found in the SEND Code of Practice (para 9.41).

RARPA Stage Two: Links to person-centred tools to use at this stage

Person-centred approaches support providers to find out what is important to a learner, what matters to them most and what support strategies work best for them. Providers can use these person-centred thinking tools to support conversations with learners, their parents and carers and other multi-disciplinary professionals throughout the 5 RARPA stages. The tools prompt questions and ways to gather information that keeps the person at the centre. This works well with the RARPA focus on personalisation and emphasis on the learner voice.

Here are suggested tools for each stage of RARPA, produced by the Preparing for Adulthood Programme.

The first two tools are included at each stage because they are the key questions within a person-centred approach.

What we like and admire about a person - to help find out the person's strengths and qualities ([opens in web browser](#))

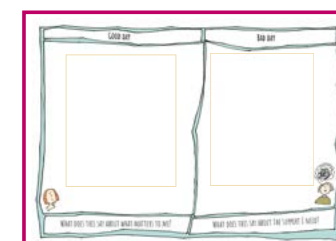
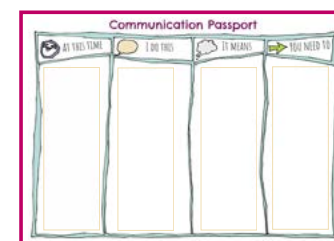
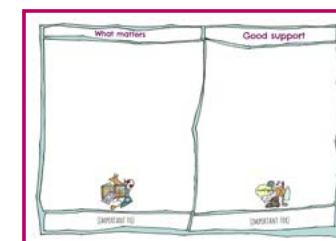
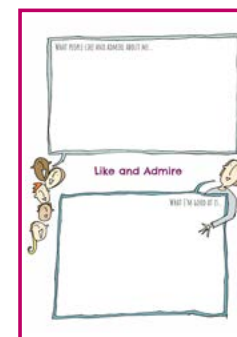
What's important to and for me - to help understand what matters to a person ([opens in web browser](#))

Useful person-centred tools during initial assessment to identify needs and involve learners in planning their learning programme.

Communication Passport - to help understand how communication is linked to behaviour ([opens in web browser](#))

Good day and bad day - to help sort out what a good day looks like and to avoid or reduce a bad day ([opens in web browser](#))

Decision making profile - to help understand how a person can make their own decisions, in a way that works best for them ([opens in web browser](#))



RARPA Stage Two: Quality Assurance

Use the examples of activities to measure quality assurance at this stage. The list is not exhaustive or prescriptive. Providers may already have alternative or additional means of checking quality at each RARPA stage.

Evidence from these activities will inform providers' self-assessment reviews and quality improvement programmes.

Examples of quality assurance activity:

- Sample learner's work during initial assessment and compare this to information about their previous level of skills and knowledge gathered during pre-enrolment.
- Check for consistency in the initial assessment process across subjects or themes in the curriculum, including that English, maths and computer literacy are being assessed at the right level for the learner. Have a clear process for deciding if qualifications are appropriate.
- Identify where the initial assessment process creates opportunities for learners to develop their personal and social communication skills, independence and employability skills and if appropriate, their behaviour.
- Observe and gather feedback from learners about their experience of initial assessment and how it meets their expectations of starting in a new provision.
- Review learner's long-term outcomes and chosen destinations against the completed initial assessment process-to provide evidence that the process is assessing what is relevant for the learner's future.
- Sample additional learning support records to check that there is a correlation between the support learners are being offered and the needs identified during initial assessment.
- Assess the personalised curriculum plans of a sample of learners to identify a match between content and ambitions and preferences expressed by learners during initial assessment.
- Compare initial assessment baseline data with programme learning aims to check that learners are being supported to progress from identified starting points.

Useful links

Use this [template \(opens in web browser\)](#) from a provider of a staff self-assessment tool to use around initial assessment

Use this [template \(opens in web browser\)](#) for an **internal** review of RARPA in your provision

Use this [template \(opens in web browser\)](#) for an **external** review of RARPA in your provision

RARPA Stage Two: Self Audit Tool

Use this self-audit tool to assess what you are already doing well and where you need to take further action.

Stage Two: Initial Assessment				Action Required
Is there sufficient and relevant information being gathered in transition from previous settings and others who know the learner well, to inform initial assessment?				
Has the initial assessment process encouraged and supported learners to communicate what is important to them about their learning programme and how they prefer to be taught and supported?				
Is initial assessment fun and engaging for learners? Does it focus on identifying strengths and positive qualities as well as challenges? Where appropriate, do learners understand its purpose?				
Do staff accurately identify learners' starting points as relevant to their learning programme?				
Is there a consistent approach to initial assessment across the provision? Do all teachers and support staff share the same understanding of what is being assessed, for whom and for what purpose?				
Does initial assessment lead to the development of challenging and ambitious targets that link directly to learner's long-term outcomes? Does this include opportunities to develop personal, social and independence skills?				
Are support strategies identified and plans shared with relevant staff, the learner and parents and carers, if appropriate?				
Does the initial assessment process enable any unmet needs to be identified that would otherwise disadvantage SEND learners?				
Do staff have effective processes to share assessment data and do they use this to plan learning activities that take account of learner's different starting points?				
Are there opportunities for learners to access advice, information and guidance if, during the initial assessment process, it becomes evident that a programme cannot meet their needs?				
Is moderation of initial assessment included in the quality cycle and used to make continual improvements to learning programmes?				

■ No evidence requires attention ■ Requires development ■ Evidence of this informs planning and delivery