Quality Assuring Non-Regulated Provision: the Expanding Role of RARPA

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Introduction

From 2017/18, as part of preparing for the devolution of the Adult Education Budget (where specific local agreements are in place), embedding a culture of lifetime learning and embracing the former Community Learning budget objectives within the Adult Education Budget (AEB), colleges and other training organisations have greater freedom within their 'local flexibility' offer to reshape their provision in order that it can be more innovative and flexible in response to local learning and skills priorities. They will be able to use more non-regulated provision alongside or instead of regulated qualifications, where it is appropriate to the learner's intended learning objectives / outcomes. Of its nature, non-regulated provision can be highly adaptable often allowing providers to use this form of learning to respond to local needs more innovatively and more quickly. Many providers will be delivering a mix of regulated and non-regulated provision with progression routes between types of provision, either directly or through subcontracting arrangements.

The Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA) Cycle has been revised and adapted to ensure that it is fit for purpose for the use of non-regulated provision, particularly where that provision is being used to respond to local skills needs. The RARPA Cycle has been modified to ensure it can act as a robust quality monitoring system which can be used by providers to demonstrate quality improvement and assurance of their non-regulated provision in line with the requirements set out in the AEB funding rules.

RARPA has developed since 2002 as a method of ensuring quality improvement, primarily for provision in adult and community learning and in provision for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities. Going forward, RARPA has a critical role to play across all locally designed provision in the changing context of funding and commissioning. It is fundamental in capturing and measuring outcomes agreed and commissioned locally.

This guidance provides an overview of the process and the quality improvement expectations of a revised RARPA process. Building on good practice in RARPA already established. this guidance provides a clear framework for supporting learners through the learning process with a robust approach to the quality assurance and improvement of non-regulated provision.

An expanded role for RARPA

The use of the RARPA Cycle is intended to be universal and is applicable to all forms of non-regulated provision. This includes skills based provision developed and delivered in response to local needs.   The quality monitoring element of the RARPA process is critical. In circumstances where a provider lacks capacity to undertake this process independently (e.g. a small sub-contracting organisation) they can be made aware from the outset that they still have a shared responsibility to support the main contracting organisation in meeting the requirements within the subcontracted provision delivered. This process will be new to some providers who have been used to working in a "black box" environment to achieve outcomes. There is an expectation that the process and its quality systems will be used where a provider's 'local flexibility' offer encompasses for bespoke locally designed training.

Although there are suggestions given as to the variety and nature of evidence that can be gathered in support of each stage the framework is non-prescriptive. In practice, providers have autonomy over how they evidence learners' starting points, monitoring progress,

ensure assessment decisions are reliable, consistent and comparable, as well as record quality control and improvement processes. Providers are particularly encouraged to think beyond the standard practice of using an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) as the only means of monitoring and recording learners' progress. Being non-prescriptive allows the provider to determine which approach works best for them and their learners in local circumstances. The process is an effective means of ensuring providers meet standards set out in Ofsted's Common Inspection Framework (CIF). The fundamental principle is to place the learner at the centre of the learning process. This corresponds with the key theme underpinning Ofsted inspection which is to evidence that learners are able to achieve their potential.

RARPA enables providers to show how learners are being supported to meet challenging targets in key areas such as skills training, personal, social and employability skills (including English and mathematics) set against their starting points. When making judgements in relation to the quality of learners' outcomes inspectors need to know how well learners have achieved. They also need to know whether courses enable learners to achieve their personal learning goals, progress into higher level qualifications or into jobs that meet local and national needs.

RARPA can be an effective way of aligning with inspection frameworks in terms of outcomes for learners; the quality of teaching, learning and assessment; and, personal development behaviour and welfare. RARPA will also enable practitioners to fulfil their duties under the Children and Families Act (2014). Outcomes for non-regulated provision are critical for learners with Education and Health and Care (EHC) Plans under The Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice which accompanies the Act.[1] This applies to learners who do not need an EHC Plan but self-declare a learning difficulty and/or disability.

Given this change in context, it is important to establish clear links between:

▪ How RARPA ensures how provision meets learners' needs and local priorities, and

▪ How organisational quality assurance processes support this and ensure continuous improvement.

The following diagram presents a model of how the six steps within the RARPA approach is an integral part of a wider quality improvement cycle. These two processes are interlinked and cannot exist in isolation from one another.

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[1] For detailed information see http://www.natspec.org.uk/information-for-professionals/supporting-progression-rarpa/

Figure 1. RARPA and the wider quality improvement cycle

The six step process in detail

Since 2002 the five *stage* RARPA process has been implemented successfully by many learning providers. The new six *step* process updates RARPA and adds a sixth step that focusses on learner progression towards outcomes such as further learning and employment. Other outcomes are possible too, for example volunteering, which can enable learners to keep progressing and gain evidence of employability.
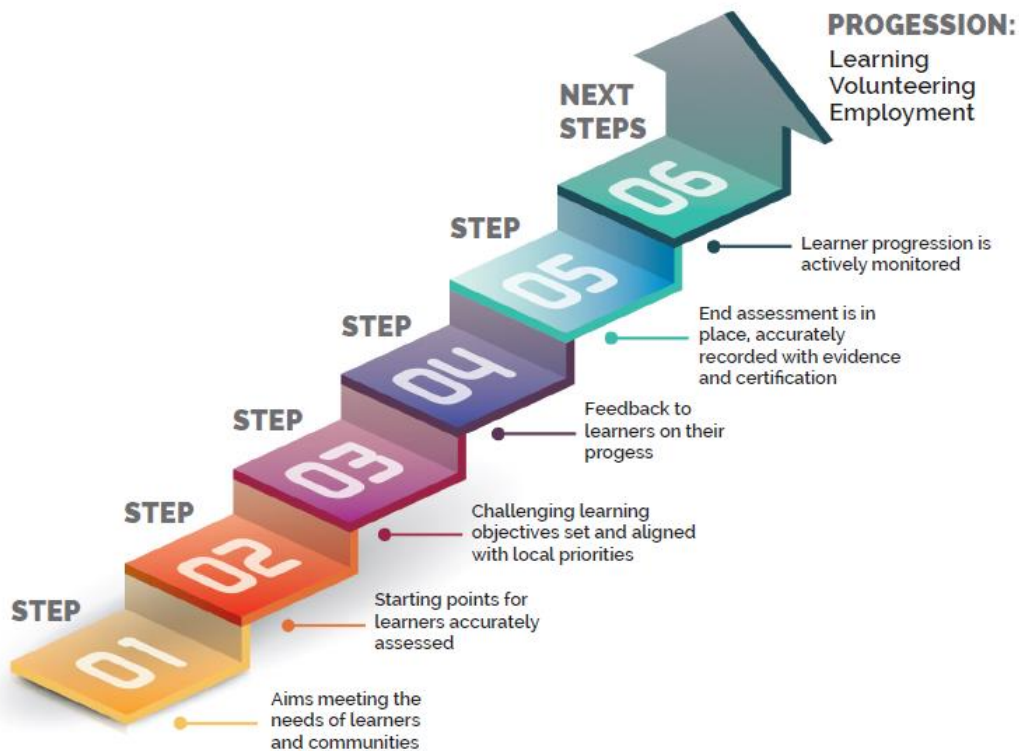

Figure 2. The RARPA steps in detail, showing how progression towards outcomes is facilitated by the process.

The RARPA process sets out clear the expectations for ensuring effective, reliable and valid assessment, recording of assessment, and capturing progress over each learner's journey through non-regulated provision. A summary of the process is included below.

Step	Further Explanation for providers new to RARPA	Potential types of evidence (not prescriptive)
1. **Aims appropriate to an individual or group of learners and local needs**	Clearly stated programme aim(s) supporting outcomes in line with local learning and skills priorities for non-regulated provision. The current nature and scope of non-regulated provision is outlined under the Adult Education Budget funding and performance management rules. [2] .	Pre-course starting point assessment records (if appropriate). Curriculum planning records in line with locally driven delivery agreements reflecting both community and skills needs, marketing and prospectus records. Meetings with key stakeholders. The supporting evidence should clearly indicate the basis for the provider's decision that non-regulated provision is the most suitable intervention for an individual or group of learners.
2. **Starting points**	This refers to establishing and recording the learner's starting point in relation to the course aims, sometimes known as initial assessment. This is separate to initial assessment of English and maths, which may also be included at induction, depending on the type of provision. Processes and details will dependent on type and length of course.	Easily identifiable records of learners' starting points in relation to course aims. Can include self-assessment (where learners define their own starting points), as well as practical evidence of prior learning.

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[2]

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/586301/2017_to_2018_draft_AEB_funding_and_performance_management_rules.pdf

3. **Identification of appropriately challenging learning objectives (initial, re-negotiated, revised) and incorporating generic and individual objectives**	The level of 'stretch and challenge' which is appropriate will vary according to learners' needs, aspirations and starting points. Learning objectives may be amended during the learning programme (as a result of formative feedback and/or assessment). Objectives should support personal, community, social and economic goals aligned with local learning and skills priorities (in relation to agreed local outcomes).	Records of clearly stated suitably challenging learning objectives for all programmes and wherever feasible identification of individual learners' objectives, Lesson plans, learners' portfolios, internally agreed skills/targets matrix.
4. Formative feedback and recognition of progress during programme	This includes the recording of formative assessment; e.g. Identification of learners' developing knowledge, skills and behaviour. Formative feedback to learners supports the development of reflection and the setting of challenging learning objectives.	Learner self-assessment; tutor/key worker records of assessment. Learners' files, journals, diaries, portfolios, photographs, exhibitions and displays, individual or group testimony. Observation of performance, practical demonstration, tests, project, scenario, interviews, professional discussion, case study, showcase. Evidence may include blended learning and use of technology where appropriate.

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5: End-of-programme learner self- assessment, tutor assessment, review of overall progress and achievement.	This is in relation to learner starting points and on-going learning objectives. Qualitative and quantitative information and reviews of additional learning gains to be identified here. Where appropriate, progression into work or further learning and skills development should be evidenced.	Learner self-assessment; tutor/key worker records of assessment. Learners' files, journals, diaries, portfolios, photographs, exhibitions and displays, individual or group testimony. Observations of performance, practical demonstrations, scenario, tests, projects, interviews, professional discussions, case studies, work readiness interviews etc. Certificates/awards and other relevant records and demonstrations of attainment of new skills/knowledge.
6. Next Steps Supporting learners to make informed choices about their next steps into further learning and work	Learning providers will need to provide evidence of providing appropriate individual and/or group information, advice, and/ or guidance tailored to need and desired outcomes.	Evidence of individual and / or group information, advice and /or guidance Providers need to show that they have evaluated the overall learning programme with learners.

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How RARPA is supported by your quality improvement process

The RARPA cycle cannot be operated in isolation. It is incomplete without the underpinning support factors and quality improvement and assurance processes. These are the processes that are common to both regulated and non-regulated provision.

RARPA sits within a wider organisational, quality improvement and assurance system, that is applied equally to all provision, whether it leads to a regulated qualification or not.

The following section provides an overview of the underpinning support factors and Quality Improvement and Assurance requirements.

Essential support factors

The following elements are essential in underpinning the RARPA process:

- **Information, Advice and Guidance**: as with regulated provision, IAG is critical at all stages of the process to support learners to make an informed choice about their future progression, whether in learning, employment or in the community.

- **Staff development and observation of teaching and learning**: for tutors new to using RARPA, support and additional training may be needed in formative and final assessment. Many tutors will teach on both regulated and non-regulated programmes and observations of teaching and learning can be integrated into existing schedules of internal quality assurance and moderation.

- **Management Information**: the same rigour in analysis and collation of achievements and outcomes is required for non-regulated provision as for regulated qualifications. Where appropriate this should include outcomes gathered from sample post course reviews. Stage one of the RARPA process integrates outcomes required to meet local needs and effective collation of achievements and supports reporting for the local commissioning processes. Local commissioners will expect to see robust evidence of this.

- **Curriculum review and management**: non-regulated provision should be reviewed alongside regulated qualification bearing courses to ensure that both provide the best fit to address local priorities and individual needs.

Quality Improvement and Assurance

Fundamental to the quality assurance of the RARPA process is that it is **fit for purpose** and appropriate for the length, duration and type of course. It should provide a **value for money** means of ensuring the process is used effectively and the outcomes achieved can be verified.

Each provider will have its own **quality improvement and assurance processes** and the expectation is that these will also be applied to RARPA in a way that is fit for purpose. For example, a 10-hour course will not need the same level of approach as a one-year programme. It is not the intention to place additional bureaucratic burdens on providers.

The expectation is that non-regulated provision will be treated with the same rigour as accredited provision. Providers may wish to review their quality procedures to ensure that the outcomes, achievement and delivery of non-regulation provision is in-line with both national inspection requirements and key local commissioning priorities.

Providers new to using RARPA and /or new to Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) funded programmes will need to consider the following extra steps appropriate to the curriculum:

Quality Improvement Element	Potential Evidence
Systems and moderation includes review of the RARPA cycle including the consistency of assessment decisions and achieved learning aims and outcomes; ensuring challenging goals are set and achieved, appropriate capturing of outcomes.	Records of internal and where appropriate external moderation, learner and tutor records, learner portfolios with evidence in a variety of formats, lesson plans, tutor reports, and sampling of assessment decisions.
Self-Assessment – inclusion of non-regulated provision into existing self-assessment processes. Includes overall analysis of outcomes and achievements and considers alignment to the Common Inspection Framework.	Report / documents shows clear understanding of the achievements and outcomes of non-regulated provision in the line with the local, individual and group aims. As with regulated qualifications, shows strengths and weaknesses and includes actions to improve weaknesses.
Leadership and Management – evidence from actions above as to how RARPA and non-regulated provision is meeting the wider aims of the organisation, learners and the locality.	Plans for improvement, CPD records, Observations of Teaching and Learning, reports of meetings, including Governors, stakeholder and learner views. How is the provision being evaluated and what steps are providers making to improve provision?

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- Northern College

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