

Schedule 5

The North East Mayoral Strategic Authority

Quality Assurance Rules For the Adult Skills Programme (ASP)

For the 2026-27 Funding Year

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1. Purpose

- 1.1. This document sets out the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority (North East MSA), Adult Skills Programme (ASP) assurance approach. The approach applies to all Providers that have an Adult Skills Programme Funding Agreement and/or Contract for Services with the North East MSA. The North East MSA reserves the right to amend the Quality Assurance Rules during the funding year.

2. Supporting Documents

- 2.1. The Quality Assurance Rules are designed to be read in conjunction with the following North East Strategic Authority documents and forms part of the Provider's Terms and Conditions.
- The Grant Funding Agreement and/or Contract for Services.
 - Schedule 1 – North East MSA ASP Funding Rules 2026 – 2027.
 - Schedule 2 – North East MSA ASP Performance Management and Payment Rules 2026 – 2027.

3. Assurance Process Background

- 3.1. The North East MSA must submit an annual statement to the DfE detailing various assurances regarding the Providers we commission. This is in addition to existing statutory and other legal and public sector assurance requirements and enables us to demonstrate that public funds are being spent appropriately.
- 3.2. The North East MSA uses learner data, collected by providers, and subsequently shared with the DfE and the Strategic Authority to complete assurance and compliance checks.
- 3.3. Providers are to provide the information about learners and their learning using the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) and the Earnings Adjustment Statement (EAS).
- 3.4. Our internal assurance activities are designed to help provide assurance that Providers:
- Have robust systems, processes and internal controls in place
 - Submit timely and robust ILR data to the DfE and the Strategic Authority
 - Keep and maintain accurate records and evidence to support the funding claims
 - Ensure corrective or preventative action is being taken where appropriate to rectify any issues identified during the assurance activity

- 3.5. In addition to the North East MSA's own assurance work, providers will still be subject to, where appropriate, audit through the national systems operated by DfE. The North East MSA and the DfE are responsible for assurance of their own funds, however working together they will minimise the administrative burden across the providers.

4. Assurance Process Approach

- 4.1. All providers will be subject to an annual assurance inspection by the North East MSA and regular desktop reviews of the submitted ILR data.
- 4.2. The assurance inspection seeks to
- Establish that the Provider has used the Funding correctly and in accordance with the Providers Delivery Plan
 - Verify the Provider's claims for Funding
 - Review the integrity, confidentiality, and security of the Provider's data as well as the North East MSA's access to the data
 - Review the Provider's and/or a Provider Related Party's (compliance with the GDPR and FOIA in accordance with Grant Agreement: Clause 11 (Data Protection), Clause 10 (Freedom of Information) and Clause 9 (Confidentiality) and any other Law applicable to the Services Framework Agreement: Clause 12 (Data Protection) Clause 13 (Freedom of Information) and any other Law applicable with the Services
 - To verify the accuracy and completeness of any management information delivered or required by the Grant Agreement/Contract for Service
 - To evaluate whether the North East MSA is delivering good value for money.
- 4.3. The Strategic Authority reserves the right to increase the frequency of the assurance inspection as outlined above, or to request additional Performance Review Meetings if there are concerns about the ILR data.

5. Assurance Inspection

- 5.1. Assurance inspections will include, but will not be limited to, a review of:
- Detailed checks of Learner files, Learner records and/or evidence packs
 - The Provider's relevant systems and processes
 - The Provider's curriculum
 - Learner / Learning support
 - Provider policies and procedures

5.2. The elements of funding that are in scope for the assurance inspection are:

- Skills Foundation
- Skills Activation
- Skills for Work
- Family Learning
- ASF – early Years Workforce, Skills for Green Jobs, Life Sciences

6. Off-site Compliance Assurance Procedures

6.1. A notification of assurance will be sent to the Provider a month prior to the inspection been conducted with a list of Unique Learner Numbers (ULN's) that have been selected for the assurance check. A date will be provided in the notification e-mail for the files to be uploaded by.

6.2. The North East MSA will use its reasonable endeavours to ensure that the conduct of each assurance inspection does not unreasonably disrupt the Provider or delay the provision of the Services.

6.3. The North East MSA will utilise the most recent Occupancy Report to select a sample of learners from the latest ILR return submitted by Providers. The standard sample size will comprise 20 learners. The North East MSA reserves the right to increase the sample size were deemed necessary.

6.4. The assurance sample will be selected from the total number of aims in the following funding streams:

- Skills Foundation
- Skills Activation
- Skills for Work
- Family Learning
- ASF – early Years Workforce, Skills for Green Jobs, Life Sciences

6.5. The North East MSA will ask to see evidence of learner records for each of the samples that have been selected.

6.6. Samples will be uploaded by the Provider into 'Teams' into the 'Assurance' folder.

6.7. Requested documentation can be found in the relevant Appendix.

6.8. The North East MSA reserves the right to request further evidence if necessary to ensure compliance, quality and value for money.

- 6.9. Feedback will be uploaded into the 'Assurance' folder. Where necessary we will hold a feedback meeting with the Provider, either in person or using video conferencing, to discuss the findings or the assurance inspection.
- 6.10. If the findings of an assurance inspection conducted results in the requirement for ILR data to be corrected and re-submitted, the Provider must re-submit the data through the next ILR return.
- 6.11. If the North East MSA identifies that the Provider has failed to perform its obligations under its Grant Agreement/Contract for Service in any material manner, an action plan will be implemented.
- 6.12. Following the assurance inspection, a Provider Assurance Report will be generated and uploaded to 'Teams'. Providers will be assessed and assigned a grade of 'Met' or 'Not Met' per section.
- 6.13. The Provider Assurance Report will contain a list of required actions and recommendations (if required) these will be discussed in your Provider Performance Reviews with your Relationship and Contract Manager. Follow up assurance checks maybe necessary.
- 6.14. If an Action Plan is required, this will be written and monitored in conjunction with your Relationship and Contract Manager.

7. Desktop Reviews

- 7.1. To gain assurance on Provider compliance the North East MSA will also undertake regular desktop reviews of all Providers.
- 7.2. As part of our compliance monitoring, we will continue to monitor compliance with funding rules. We will contact you where we identify you have submitted data that does not meet our funding rules and ILR requirements. We will require you to correct inaccurate ILR or EAS data by the next return.
- 7.3. Where a Provider does not correct their data within the agreed timescale, this will be discussed at subsequent Performance Reviews with your Relationship and Contract Manager.

8. Assurance Visits

- 8.1. Providers will be informed via email of forthcoming assurance visits and provided with relevant details on expectations.
- 8.2. Assurance visits will include, but will not be limited to, a review of
- The Provider's relevant systems and processes
 - Policies in place (quality assurance, safeguarding, complaints, etc.)
 - Risk management processes and registers
 - Evidence of cost control and efficient use of resources

- Learner files
- Learner feedback systems (surveys, focus groups)
- Complaints handling procedures
- Evidence of acting on feedback
- Overall learner satisfaction

9. Learner Support

- 9.1. Learner Support must be administered, evidenced and claimed in accordance with the current North East Mayoral Strategic Authority Adult Skills Programme Funding Rules.
- 9.2. Providers must retain evidence of the assessment, support agreed, support delivered and any associated expenditure. Such evidence must be made available to the North East MSA upon request.

You must:

- have criteria for how you will administer and distribute your funds; these must reflect the principles of equality and diversity and be available to learners and to us on request.
 - assess and record the learner's needs, demonstrating the need for support – you must record this information and retain in the evidence pack.
 - report the appropriate Learner Support Reason codes in the 'Learner Funding and Monitoring' fields in the ILR. This does not apply to non regulated learning.
 - claim on a monthly\regular basis using the EAS.
 - consider the availability of other support for learners, for example from Jobcentre Plus
 - make it clear to learners it is their responsibility to tell the Department for Work and Pensions about any learner support they are receiving from you, as learner support payments may affect their eligibility to state benefits.
 - use either ASP or loans bursary to support specific provision funded by either ASP or ALL where a learner is on 2 courses at the same time.
- 9.3. Providers internal policies must be made available to the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority upon request and must detail how Learner Support is assessed.
 - 9.4. Any support provided must be documented and justified to auditors.

10. IAG

10.1. Minimum Learner Requirements

To ensure consistency, compliance, and high-quality delivery across the Skills for Work Programme, the following minimum requirements must be met for every learner. These requirements form part of the programme's Quality Assurance Rules and must be evidenced on the learner file.

10.2. Initial Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) – Mandatory

Before a learner begins the programme, a recorded IAG session must take place. Providers must ensure that:

- the learner's starting point, barriers, and employment goals are clearly documented
- eligibility checks and required declarations are completed
- the programme offer is explained, including expectations, commitments, and support available
- safeguarding, accessibility, and additional support needs are discussed and recorded

10.3. Required evidence:

- completed IAG form or digital record
- eligibility documents
- learner commitment/induction confirmation

10.4. Ongoing Engagement and Learning Activity

During the programme, providers must maintain:

- an up-to-date learning plan tailored to the learner's goals
- attendance, participation, and progression records
- evidence of coaching, mentoring, or employability support delivered
- review records showing the learner's progress and adjustments made

This forms part of routine QA sampling and compliance checks.

10.5. Exit IAG – Mandatory

Before leaving the programme (regardless of outcome), an Exit IAG meeting must be completed and recorded. This must capture:

- the learner's achievements and skills gained
- next steps into employment, self-employment, further training, or job search
- signposting or follow-on support
- any updated details relevant for outcome tracking

Required evidence:

- completed Exit IAG form or digital record
- updated learning plan marked as "complete"

10.6. Registers : Providers must retain signed registers, electronic attendance records, digital confirmations, learning platform records, or other auditable evidence which verifies attendance and participation.

Registers should include as a minimum:

- learner name;
- course title;
- learning date;
- start time;
- finish time;
- guided learning hours delivered; and
- learner signature, electronic signature, attendance confirmation or equivalent auditable evidence.

Where alternative evidence is used, providers must be able to demonstrate the learner's active participation in the learning activity.

Failure to provide sufficient attendance evidence may result in funding being recovered.

10.7. Learner Survey

- North East MSA require providers to share the Learner survey with all learners following course completion. We expect a minimum of 10% of learners to complete this survey and this will be discussed during performance review meetings with your RCM.

11. Outcome Evidence - Skills for Work

- 11.1. For learners progressing into employment, providers must retain evidence demonstrating that the learner has entered paid employment for a minimum of four (4) consecutive weeks.
- 11.2. Acceptable evidence may include:
- employer confirmation;
 - employment contract;
 - payslips; or
 - other documentary evidence deemed acceptable by the North East MSA.
- 11.3. Evidence must confirm:
- learner name;
 - employer name;
 - job title;
 - employment start date;
 - contracted hours where applicable; and
 - confirmation that employment has been sustained for a minimum of four consecutive weeks.
- 11.4. The employment outcome must be achieved within 12 weeks of programme completion.
- 11.5. The evidence must be provided from an e-mail address clearly associated with the employer. In cases where employment is pursued through an agency, documented evidence from the agency confirming current live vacancies must also be provided.
- 11.6. For learners progressing into self-employment, providers must demonstrate sustained trading activity for a minimum of four (4) consecutive weeks.
- Acceptable evidence may include:
 - invoices issued to clients;
 - client contracts or service agreements;
 - bank statements showing trading income;
 - HMRC self-employment registration; and
 - a completed North East MSA Self-Employment Declaration.

- 11.7. Where the learner was already self-employed prior to programme participation, evidence must clearly demonstrate new work, contracts, customers or trading activity secured as a direct result of the programme.
- 11.8. The self-employment outcome must be achieved within twelve (12) weeks of programme completion.

12. Assurance Judgements

- 12.1. Each section of the assurance inspection will be assessed independently and assigned one of the following outcomes:

Met

- Required systems, controls and evidence are in place.
- Evidence is complete, accurate and supports the funding claimed.
- No significant compliance concerns have been identified within the section being reviewed.

Not Met

- Required controls, documentation or evidence are missing, incomplete or ineffective.
- Funding compliance cannot be fully evidenced within the section being reviewed.
- Issues have been identified which require corrective action or additional evidence.

- 12.2. The Provider Assurance Report will record a judgement of either Met or Not Met for each individual assurance area reviewed.
- 12.3. A Not Met judgement in one section will not automatically determine the outcome of any other assurance section. Each section will be assessed independently based on the evidence available at the time of review.
- 12.4. Where a section is awarded Not Met, the North East MSA may require additional evidence, corrective actions, an action plan, follow-up assurance activity or other contractual interventions as appropriate.

13. Assurance Escalation

- 13.1. In the event that a Provider fails to submit the requested learner files within the specified timeframe, the following escalation process will apply:
- 13.2. **Initial Non-Submission**

- The Provider will be issued a formal written reminder, with a grace period of five (5) working days to submit the required documentation.
- During this period, the Provider may contact the North East MSA to explain any mitigating circumstances and request a short extension, which may be granted at the Authority's discretion

13.3. **Continued non-compliance**

- If the Provider fails to submit the required documentation within the grace period, the assurance inspection will be deemed to have automatically failed.
- The North East MSA reserves the right to suspend or withhold payments, in whole or in part, until the required documentation has been submitted and assurance activity has been completed to the satisfaction of the Authority.
- Due to limited capacity, any late submission will result in the assurance inspection being rescheduled at the next available opportunity, which may cause further delays to payment and performance review processes.

13.4. **Repeated or Serious Non-Compliance**

- Repeated failure to comply with assurance requirements, or a serious breach of contractual obligations, may result in:
 - The implementation of a formal Action Plan
 - Increased assurance frequency or additional monitoring
 - Payments to the Provider will be paused.

14. **Appeals and Mitigation**

- 14.1.1. Providers may submit a written appeal if they believe the failure to comply was due to exceptional circumstances. Appeals must be submitted within ten (10) working days of the failed assurance notification.
- 14.1.2. Appeals will be reviewed by the Strategic Authority's Relationship and Contract Management Team, and a decision will be communicated within ten (10) working days.
- 14.1.3. This escalation process is designed to ensure fairness, maintain accountability, and protect the integrity of public funding

Appendix A – Evidence Pack Skills Foundation

Evidence pack required for a North East MSA ASP Assurance Inspection is as follows:

- provider evidence of induction to the programme,
- provider Learning Agreement\Enrolment Form for each learner,
- Proof of benefits, or where unavailable, a self-declaration confirming the learner's unemployed status and that their earnings fall below the specified threshold,
- provider evidence of initial/diagnostic assessment,
- support needs to be identified, including how you will meet these needs and the evidence of that,
- provider copy of Personal Learning Record (from Learning Records Service),
- provider version of learner Individual Learner Plan clearly outlining why the learner is attending the course and what the learners intended outcome is,
- provider scheme of work including Guided Learning Hours (GLH),
- Providers must retain signed attendance records that clearly evidence the Guided Learning Hours (GLH) delivered,
- provider evidence of advice and guidance 'on-programme' and on completion,
- provider evidence of assessment for Learning Support (if applicable),
- detailed evidence of any learner or employer contributions,
- provider evidence of completion/achievement of the programme,
- provider evidence of exit review,
- provider evidence of evaluation (Learner Feedback),
- provider evidence of learner destination\progression tracking\outcome.

Appendix B – Evidence Skills Activation

Evidence pack required for a North East MSA ASP Assurance Inspection is as follows:

- provider evidence of induction to the programme,
- provider Learning Agreement\Enrolment Form for each learner,
- Proof of benefits, or where unavailable, a self-declaration confirming the learner's unemployed status and that their earnings fall below the specified threshold,
- provider evidence of initial/diagnostic assessment,
- support needs to be identified, including how you will meet these needs and the evidence of that,
- provider copy of Personal Learning Record (from Learning Records Service),
- provider version of learner Individual Learner Plan clearly outlining why the learner is attending the course and what the learners intended outcome is,
- provider scheme of work including Guided Learning Hours (GLH),
- Providers must retain signed attendance records that clearly evidence the Guided Learning Hours (GLH) delivered,
- provider evidence of advice and guidance 'on-programme' and on completion,
- provider evidence of assessment for Learning Support (if applicable),
- detailed evidence of any learner or employer contributions,
- provider evidence of completion/achievement of the programme,
- provider evidence of exit review,
- provider evidence of evaluation (Learner Feedback),
- provider evidence of learner destination\progression tracking\outcome.

Appendix C – Evidence Skills for Work

Evidence pack required for a North East MSA ASP Assurance Inspection is as follows:

- provider evidence of induction to the programme,
- provider Learning Agreement\Enrolment Form for each learner,
- Proof of benefits, or where unavailable, a self-declaration confirming the learner's unemployed status and that their earnings fall below the specified threshold,
- provider evidence of initial/diagnostic assessment,
- support needs to be identified, including how you will meet these needs and the evidence of that,
- provider copy of Personal Learning Record (from Learning Records Service),
- provider version of learner Individual Learner Plan clearly outlining why the learner is attending the course and what the learner's intended outcome is,
- provider scheme of work including Guided Learning Hours (GLH),
- Providers must retain signed attendance records that clearly evidence the Guided Learning Hours (GLH) delivered,
- provider evidence of advice and guidance 'on-programme' and on completion,
- provider evidence of assessment for Learning Support (if applicable),
- detailed evidence of any learner or employer contributions,
- provider evidence of completion/achievement of the programme,
- provider evidence of exit review,
- provider evidence of evaluation (Learner Feedback),
- provider evidence of learner destination\progression tracking\outcome as stated in section 10.

Appendix D – North East MSA self-employment declaration

Participant Name	
Business Name	
Business Start Date	
Sector Area	
Brief outline of what the business did before attending the course (if operational)	
Outcomes Achieved	Having completed (insert course name) I took the following actions and have obtained new contracts or new opportunities that utilise the new skills acquired through the Skills for Work programme. List of actions taken
How the course has helped me achieve these outcomes	
Evidence Supplied	Invoice from employer / supplier / client or new contract information
Participant signature	
Date	