

To all CoVE managers / principals / chief executives of providers who have a Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE)

January 2008

Dear CoVE manager, principal of providers with CoVEs

The Training Quality Standard (formerly the New Standard for Employer Responsiveness and Vocational Excellence).

I am writing to remind you of changes to the CoVE programme and to update you on the Training Quality Standard (formerly the New Standard) for certifying responsive and specialist providers.

As you will be aware, the LSC assumed responsibility for the Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) programme in 2001. It set out to improve radically the capacity of the FE sector to deliver specialist work-based learning. The LSC launched the programme with 16 Pathfinder CoVEs in September 2001 and more than 400 centres had achieved CoVE status by January 2006, exceeding our target to establish 400 by March 2006.

The CoVE programme has facilitated an investment of £140m in capital and equipment grants and £60M to support delivery in these centres, improving the capacity of the sector to meet learner and employer demands for high quality, sector specialist learning environments.

At the LSC we recognise that the CoVE programme has only succeeded because of the hard work and commitment shown by provider staff and we congratulate you on delivering the changes that have already taken place. However, as you will know, we now have more ambitious targets and to deliver these we need to increase the pace of change.

In the 2005 *Agenda for Change* document we outlined how, in order to increase employer investment in workforce development through FE, the next stage of the specialist provider programme would be to focus on employer responsiveness through the introduction of the Quality Mark for employers. In 2006 the FE reform white paper recommended that the Quality Mark development be combined with the re-accreditation of the CoVE programme to create a new Training Quality Standard (TQS) for employer responsiveness and vocational excellence.

The TQS was developed throughout 2006, in conjunction with employers and sector skills councils, and with the help of 68 CoVE and non-CoVE providers. The development work has now finished and the TQS became available in June 2007 under its working title, The New Standard. As of March 2008, a total of 27 providers have been certified under the standard. See www.newstandard.co.uk.

The LSC believes that achieving the TQS will demonstrate a significant commitment to delivering excellence by a provider and that the adoption of the standard by the sector will lead to an increase in employer confidence and investment in FE.

Achieving the TQS will entail assessment against an employer focused quality standard. The award is available on two levels; firstly an institution is assessed as a whole and validated, by employers, as being responsive and delivering excellent training. This leads to the awarding of the employer responsive award. Secondly you may also apply for Excellence status for specific areas or faculties within your organisation which specialise in sector specific training delivery.

Achievement of the TQS will mean substituting your existing CoVE badge (if you have one) with the TQS badge. A provider will not be able to hold both awards simultaneously; otherwise confusion will be created amongst employers and learners. CoVEs will be required to cease using their CoVE status and remove all CoVE badges and branding from their premises and communications 12 months after their original CoVE status expires (31 July 2008, whichever is later), regardless of whether TQS certification is achieved. (See table 1 below for CoVE expiry dates).

The LSC will still honour any financial commitments made on award of CoVE status regardless of whether the TQS is achieved, subject to normal CoVE requirements.

Who can apply?

Any type of learning provider may apply for the TQS.

As management of the TQS could eventually move from the LSC to a third party it will need to become a self-funding model.

Therefore assessment under the TQS will be a costed activity, see www.newstandard.co.uk for further details.

CoVE subsidy

Please note that LSC will offer CoVEs a one off subsidy against TQS assessment costs, up to a maximum of £6,000 for Part A assessment and £1,500 for each additional Part B assessment.

THIS SUBSIDY IS ONLY OFFERED IF REGISTRATIONS ARE SUBMITTED WITHIN THE DEADLINES SET OUT IN TABLE 1, DEPENDING ON CoVE EXPIRY. This subsidy will only be available until 31 March 2010. See the CoVE website www.cove.lsc.gov.uk for further details.

NB Due to the large numbers of registrations forecast for 2008 and in order to guarantee your subsidy, pathfinder to round 4 CoVEs must submit their registrations for TQS by end of May 2008.

Support for providers

The Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) is providing national and bespoke provider support programmes. We recommend that providers discuss their own development needs with QIA well in advance of registering for the TQS. See www.qiaemployerled.org.uk/ for more details and contact information.

A series of awareness events are being delivered around the country to provide further information on the TQS and how to apply. Available dates and instructions on how to reserve a place can be found on www.newstandard.co.uk or by ringing the TQS helpline on 0845 225 1310.

Yours Sincerely



Mark Haysom
Chief Executive

(Agreed by and electronically signed in his absence)

Table 1 original CoVE status expiry table

CoVE Round	Original CoVE status expires	Revised CoVE status expires	Assessment subsidy period (period in which assessment process must be completed in order to access LSC subsidy)
Pathfinder to round 3 inc.	Up to May 2007	End July 2008	June 2007 - end of July 2008 Register by end May 2008
Round 4	September 2007	September 2008	September 2007 – end of September 2008 Register by end May 2008
Round 5	April 2008	April 2009	April 2008 – end of April 2009 Register by end September

			2008
Round 6	September 2008	September 2009	September 2008 – end September 2009 Register by end February 2009
Round 7	March 2009	March 2010	March 2009 - end of March 2010 Register by end August 2009
Round 8	September 2009	* September 2010	* March 2009 - end of March 2010 Register by end August 2009
Round 9	December 2009	* December 2010	* March 2009 - end of March 2010 Register by end August 2009
<p>* Note no LSC subsidy for assessment costs will be paid after March 2010; CoVEs from rounds 8 & 9 will have to register before 31 August 2009 in order to claim their subsidies. Note there is no limit to the number of registrations that can be made but costs are charged for each assessment and the LSC CoVE subsidy is only offered once.</p>			