

**Quality assuring the work of the appropriate bodies:
Collaborative pilot of a quality review**

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Quality assuring the work of the Appropriate Bodies: Collaborative pilot of a quality review

NTA, part of the CST family, is a large, well established national Appropriate Body working with schools and trusts across England, as well as some international schools. It was originally set up in 2013 at the request of the DfE, to provide a high quality, sector-led alternative to Local Authority assessment and accreditation services for newly qualified/early career teachers. As an organisation, it provides a high standard of service to its registered schools and trusts, evidenced by high levels of customer satisfaction, retention and continued year-on-year growth. In 2020, Sheffield Hallam University was commissioned by NTA to co-develop and pilot a new quality review framework.

With a strategic objective to provide the 'gold standard' of induction for newly qualified teachers, we hoped to develop a framework which could be used to conduct a holistic evaluation of the rigour and depth of how we fulfil our statutory role as an Appropriate Body and inform continuous improvement. The intention was to identify how NTA could quality assure its offer to schools and trusts, drawing on learning and processes from other quality assurance models. From there we planned to build on NTA's existing approaches, strategies and developmental activities, and design a model of quality assurance which might also ultimately be used by other Appropriate Bodies to review their own work.

Our approach

Our approach was to collaboratively develop and pilot a quality review and improvement process which included benchmarks of quality, opportunities for reflection and identification of action points. Given the lack of any existing quality review and assurance processes for Appropriate Bodies, we drew on evidence from other quality assurance models, particularly the development and trialling of quality assurance systems for teacher professional development (Chedzey et al, 2021; Perry et al. 2022).

The process was consciously designed for flexible use through external, self- or peer-review models, and was initially piloted internally by NTA. It included:

- a set of quality criteria to benchmark the quality of the Appropriate Body's work
- a self-review process of collating and reviewing evidence, benchmarking against the quality criteria and identification of areas of strength and areas for improvement
- a 'critical friend' review

For organisations like Appropriate Bodies, setting benchmarks for quality is not straightforward, either in the identification of indicators of quality or in establishing a level of quality. The criteria used in this pilot (Figure 1) are intended to be flexible enough to accommodate a diversity of practices and organisational structures across a range of Appropriate Bodies, while the level of quality against each criterion is simply judged as 'fully met', 'partially met' or 'not met'.

Figure 1. Appropriate Body quality criteria

The Appropriate Body:

- provides schools with high quality support in developing and implementing their ECT induction
- supports schools through training, advice and guidance along with a rigorous scrutiny of process
- communicates effectively with schools
- can advise on improvement processes
- has an effective governance system

Each of the quality criteria is supplemented with further details to support the collation of evidence and review process (Figure 2 shows the details for a single quality criterion). These offer more detailed markers of quality and suggestions of evidence to collate and analyse.

Figure 2. Further details of the criterion ‘The Appropriate Body has effective improvement processes’

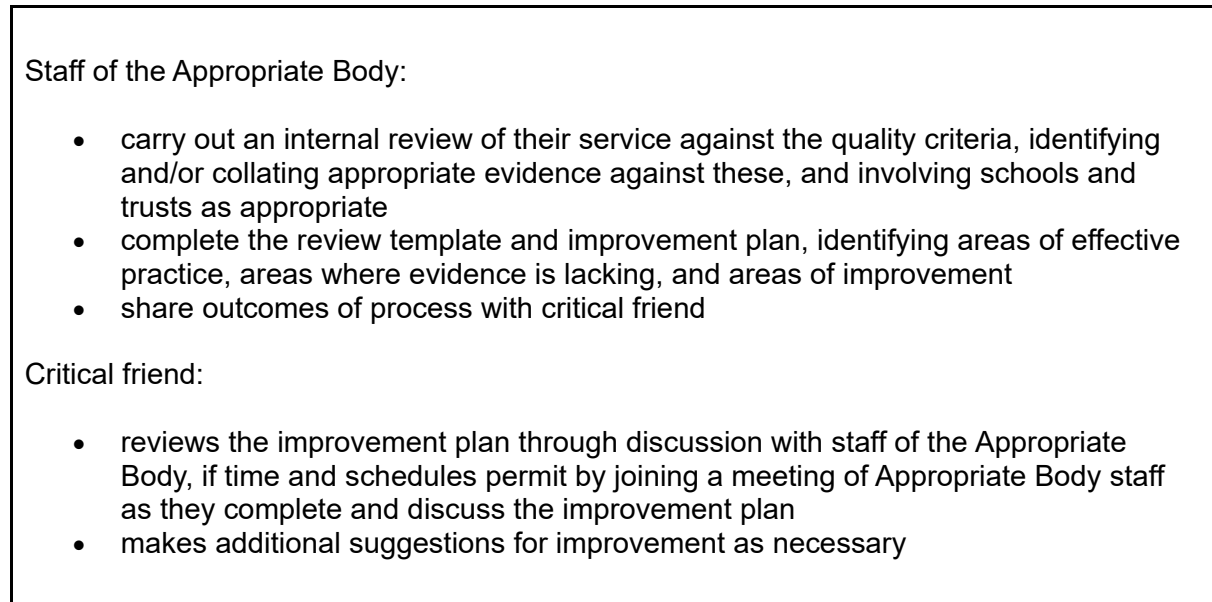
Criterion	Further details	Examples of evidence to collate
The Appropriate Body has effective improvement processes	Improvement is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing • Based on evidence from a range of sources • Inclusive of stakeholders’ views • Supported by governance structures which foster a culture of constructive challenge and continuous improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How evidence is collected to support improvement, such as the robustness and impact of the systems and processes developed and deployed • Internal improvement models, eg for ongoing quality improvement or expansion/review of offer • Staff development programmes and processes • Stakeholder involvement in feedback and improvement processes • Research being used to inform staff development • How plans are developed and implemented in response to changes in the landscape (e.g. the Early Career Framework)

The process of quality review (Figure 3) involves internal review and reflection, drawing on a range of evidence collated from within the organisation. A review template and improvement plan is completed by staff of the Appropriate Body to record the following information for each of the quality criteria:

- Assessment of quality (fully met, partially met or not met)
- Overall assessment of quality
- Evidence used to make this assessment

- Examples of effective practice
- Additional evidence which could support meeting this criterion
- Areas for improvement

Figure 3. Quality review process



Finally, a ‘critical friend’, a member of staff from another organisation, reviews the improvement plan against the evidence to offer commentary, further suggestions, and, where appropriate, challenge.

Our learning

Our findings from this pilot show that this process led to reflection by NTA staff on the effectiveness of their activities and the identification of areas for further improvement. For example, in our first round of piloting, NTA identified the benefits of engaging more frequently with other Appropriate Bodies, in order to share practice and influence policy.

How quality might be benchmarked remains complex. For example, some criteria were deemed to be fully met, but areas for improvement were also identified. The judgements against each criterion might therefore be amended to go beyond ‘fully met’, to include an option of ‘exceeded’.

The critical friend role provided a ‘critical edge’ to reflections and planning for improvement, prompting deeper consideration of the meanings of evidence, why and how particular areas of work might be improved and how these changes might be evaluated. In this pilot, this role was played by Sheffield Institute of Education staff but could be staff from another Appropriate Body in a peer-review model.

Finally, as with all quality review and improvement processes, there is a need to balance the time needed to collate evidence with the time available to use the evidence to inform improvement, and to balance this in turn with the potential value of the improvements identified.

Next steps

Following this initial pilot, our next steps include a review and revision of the process, including the quality criteria and a trial with a different Appropriate Body. Our original intention was to develop a process which would support NTA to improve its own work with schools and Trusts. Due to planned changes within the Appropriate Body market, and the outcome of the related consultation 'Appropriate Body and Statutory Induction Reform' NTA will no longer be operating as an Appropriate Body beyond the end of the 2023/2024 academic year. This process could, however, be used by Appropriate Bodies in the future and have the potential to improve the quality of performance in the new system that will be led by the Teaching School Hubs. It will offer a model of quality review and improvement which can support new Appropriate Bodies, providing opportunities for reflection, improvement, peer review and sharing of practice, through a consistent set of standards of quality.

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