Sub-contracting best practice guide

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Guidance

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Sub-contracting best practice guide

Audience	Work-based learning (WBL) providers; consortia members; sub-contractors; Estyn; National Training Federation for Wales (NTfW).
Overview	This document highlights examples of best practice in WBL sub-contracting. The aim is to strengthen the provider network's capacity to deliver through a sub-contracting model, while ensuring a commitment to a learner-focused model of delivery.
Action required	This publication is for information, but providers are requested to submit the sub-contracting self-assessment and action-planning template in Annex C in December 2012.
Further information	Enquiries about this document should be directed to: Marilyn Wood Further Education Division Department for Education and Skills Welsh Government Tŷ'r Afon Bedwas Road Caerphilly CF83 8WT Tel: 01443 663900 e-mail: post16quality@wales.gsi.gov.uk
Additional copies	This document can also be accessed from the Welsh Government's website at www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills

Contents

1.   Introduction

1.1   The work-based learning (WBL) delivery environment within Wales changed significantly through the contracting round that commenced delivery in August 2011. This saw the number of learning providers holding a direct contract with the Welsh Government reduced from 64 to 24. In turn these 24 directly contracted organisations hold a collective 85 sub-contracting agreements (as at February 2012); thus increasing significantly the role that sub-contracting plays within the WBL environment in Wales.

1.2   This guide intends to highlight examples of best practice in WBL sub-contracting. The aim is to strengthen the provider network's capacity to deliver through a sub-contracting model, whilst still ensuring a commitment to a learner-focused model of delivery.

1.3   In addition to providing a range of evidenced based observations and case studies, this guide provides a template to enable providers to self-assess their own sub-contracting arrangements. This will enable them to ensure that their arrangements are of an appropriate standard to meet learner need and will prompt them to develop further the quality of provision. It will also assist providers in recognising the different environments that their sub-contractors operate in.

1.4   The guidance in this document expands on the Work-based Learning Programme Specification 1st August 2011 – 31st July 2014 (section P) which covers sub-contracting arrangements.

2.   Background and methodology

2.1   In November 2011 Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales (Estyn) published a remit report 'The effectiveness of sub-contracting arrangements in work-based learning'. This report was commissioned as part of Estyn's annual Ministerial remit letter, with the aim of identifying recommendations to strengthen sub-contracting.

2.2   The remit report covered the period 2007/11 and concluded that about half the providers who acted as lead providers worked with their sub-contractors effectively during that period. It also determined that overall the quality, management and effectiveness of sub-contracting arrangements varied too much across training providers.

2.3   The report went on to state that too many lead providers did not focus enough on the quality of the individual learner's experience. Instead they focused on 'contract compliance', meeting overall learner attainment targets, and completing Department for Education and Skills (DfES) documentation to the required standard.

2.4   The remit report made a number of recommendations in order to improve the effectiveness of sub-contracting arrangements in work-based learning.

2.5   The Welsh Government should:

R1   reinforce advice on how to manage sub-contractors, including their quality assurance arrangements, as part of the DfES Quality and Effectiveness Framework guidance.

2.6   Work-based learning providers should:

R2   make sure all learners receive consistently good training across all sub-contractors.

R3   where possible and when appropriate, align sub-contractors' quality assurance systems with their own.

R4   involve sub-contractors' staff in relevant training and development.

R5   develop and use comprehensive tracking systems to be able to identify underperformance by sub-contractors quickly.

R6   develop robust systems to identify and share best practice across all sub-contractors.

R7   make sure that there are effective contingency plans in place to cover the breakdown of contracting arrangements.

R8   take account of the outcomes of learner satisfaction questionnaires to remedy any shortcomings identified.

2.7   In December 2011 DfES commissioned the National Training Federation for Wales (NTfW) to develop this best practice guide to look at what makes effective sub-contracting relationships.

2.8   Information was gathered from a range of sources and included interviews with:

- lead providers;
- sub-contractors;
- Estyn; and
- Welsh Government.

2.9   These were supported with guidance from NTfW. Providers were invited to take part in the research in a number of ways. They were invited via direct contact, recommendation, promotion on NTfW Moodle and through discussion at DfES's WBL Quality Managers Network.

2.10   In identifying providers to participate in this project the following was considered:

- geographical spread (providers/sub-contractors located throughout Wales);
- representation was sought from both lead providers who sub-contracted with a large number of organisations and those with a small number;
- identifying sub-contractors to participate from both large and small organisations;
- involvement from organisations which sub-contract to more than one lead provider; and
- inclusion of a cross section of providers which had been delivering WBL for varying periods of time i.e. those that were new and those that were well established within the network.

2.11   In January 2012, 16 out of the 24 lead providers held sub-contracts; of these nine (56%) put themselves forward for inclusion in this work. A number of providers declined the opportunity to take part in the process for a variety of reasons including workload and availability of staff.

2.12   The interviews were constructed in such a way as to draw out themes and approaches to sub-contracting, and to gain an insight not only into the policies and structures that were in place to support delivery, but into the spirit and culture of relationships and associated activities. The outline of these interviews is attached at **Appendix B**.

2.13   The timing of the meetings with providers means that this guide focuses upon contracting relationships that were established and operational under the latest commissioning round i.e. from 1 August 2011.

2.14   For the purpose of this guide the definition of sub-contracting is taken from the Programme Specification (August 2011-31 July 2014):

> *'sub-contracting' denotes sub-contracting of delivery of a full learning programme or programmes to a third party.'*

2.15   The research did not consider WBL consortia arrangements with their members but did look at any sub-contracting arrangements that were part of the consortia.

2.16   This guide is intended to provide practical advice and examples which can be used by providers to review and enhance their sub-contracting arrangements.

3.   Delivery

3.1   The quality of learning received by a learner is of paramount importance and this should not vary across a lead provider's sub-contracted provision.

3.2   During discussions with providers, it was apparent that the quality of training is dependent upon two components:

- the selection of sub-contractors: are they a good fit with the lead, do they share the same commitment to teaching and learning, support and quality?

- the on-going management of sub-contractors: how are quality assurance procedures linked between lead provider and sub-contractor?

3.3   Provision appeared to be strongest and most consistent for a learner where lead providers had:

- a clear rationale and strategy for selecting sub-contractors, driven by learner need rather than a reactive approach to perceived commissioning requirements;

- a clear process for the appointment and selection of sub-contractors; including risk assessment, due diligence and review of prior learning delivery; and

- peer assessment that is integral to quality assurance systems, and includes sub-contractors in all aspects of planning and delivering learning activity

Best practice

Lead providers should:

- have a clear strategy outlining the business rationale for sub-contracting which is shared with potential sub-contractors at time of commissioning;

- ensure potential sub-contractors are assessed against established and transparent selection criteria which in effect mirrors the requirements that the lead providers have with Welsh Government – for example, health and safety policies, equal opportunities;

- assess potential sub-contractors to ensure they meet the required quality standard and to support them to develop operating processes and policies to the highest standard. This should be undertaken through the implementation of an action plan identifying any development needs with appropriate support from the lead provider;

- be prepared to learn from sub-contractors, flagging up and making an example of their best practice;

- have a contract which clearly identifies the terms of the sub-contracting arrangement. It should also identify the lead provider's obligations with regards to sub-contracting relationships as defined in the WBL Programme Specification;

- encourage a relationship between themselves and sub-contractors which extends beyond the definitions of the contract to one which operates in a spirit of support, co-working and transparency;

- ensure sub-contractor reviews are supported by development action plans which build the capacity of the provider to provide the best possible services to learners;

- view sub-contractors as they would their own staff teams when working through the impact of decisions, particularly those regarding operational methodology.

Case studies

Coleg Menai

Coleg Menai[1] has a clear sub-contracting rationale. As a College serving a defined geographical area, the College has a keen community focus in Gwynedd and Ynys Mon.

The College has two sub-contracting relationships, and these have been developed in response to specific needs:

- support for people with physical/learning disabilities through a sub-contracting relationship with Agoriad Cyf;
- a nursing cadetship programme delivered through a sub-contracting relationship with Betsi Cadwaldr University Health Board.

Coleg Menai's self-assessment recognises that 'both sub-contractors offer different training programmes than the College which meets an identified local need and this enables the region to have a wider range of training provision than the College could deliver.

[1] Now part of Grŵp Llandrillo-Menai

Torfaen Training and LMJ Training

LMJ Training recalls the process of entering into an arrangement with Torfaen Training as very positive, with clear excpectiations at all times as to what was to be delivered by both parties.

Torfaen Training undertook a risk assessment with LMJ Training; taking a comprehensive overview of their operations, quality, policies and procedures.

In certain areas Torfaen Training wished to see adaptations to existing processes within LMJ Training. These adaptations would mean that Torfaen Training was content that LMJ Training was fully equipped to deliver to the standards required by Torfaen Training. An action plan was mutually developed, with SMART targets so that LMJ Training could demonstrate that they were making the changes and adaptatins required by Torfaen Training.

LMJ Training clearly recalls being fully supported throughout this process, and as such gained full understanding and buy-in to the actions that were being requested of them. At no time did they feel 'out-on-a-limb' and through following the action plan they were welcomed into the provider network led by Torfaen Training.

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4. Quality assurance

4.1   The different environments within which sub-contracting operates make effective quality assurance a challenge. A number of providers are in the position where they act as sub-contractors to more than one lead provider, or are both a sub-contractor and lead provider. As such a level of reasonableness has to be applied across this recommendation to enable providers to operate effectively. However, recognising each other's different approaches and methods of quality assurance enables providers to share both the strengths of their quality systems and to develop weak areas with support from each other.

4.2   Where lead providers allocate appropriate resources to the integration of the self-assessment and quality development plan process, this has the greatest effect. Sub-contractors respond well to participating in facilitated and supported sessions, which are delivered in a timely and planned fashion. Where involvement in the quality assurance process is operated within less rigid guidelines and limited levels of support, it is apparent that the level and quality of involvement by sub-contractors varies immensely.

4.3   Quality assurance with sub-contractors was at its strongest where lead providers had:

- a collaborative approach;

- shared resources such as online access to quality reviews, plans, self-assessments and quality development plans via Moodle, SharePoint and Ffynnon; and

- effective communication which is related to expectations, for example the Service Level Agreement (SLA) fully reflected what had been agreed with the sub-contractor.

Best practice

- Lead providers develop clear guidelines for involvement with the quality assurance processes and sub-contractors are aware of how to participate in these, for example planning cycles are shared.

- Lead providers support sub-contractors' participation in the process through guidance, facilitation and support and involvement in continuing professional development (CPD) and reviews.

- Lead providers look at cost-effective ways to utilise technology for quality assurance such as utilisation of Ffynnon.

- Self-assessment reports (SARs) and quality development plans (QDPs) contain designated sections on sub-contracted provision that sub-contractors are able to contribute to.

- Lead providers ensure that all the sub-contractors within their network receive a copy of the final SAR and QDP, to ensure that they develop in line with the partnership of which they are part.

- Lead providers ensure that they plan a timetabled process of reviews and quality audits of sub-contracted provision in collaboration with sub-contractors.

Case study

ITEC Training Solutions Ltd

ITEC Training manages relationships with seven sub-contracted organisations

The provider is developing the post-16 Ffynnon to include sub-contractor contribution. The system will be used as a capacity-building tool for promoting, sustaining, benchmarking and evaluating productive dialogue and critical reflection between ITEC and its sub-contractors, building the capacity to innovate, self-assess and continuously improve the way in which services are organised and delivered.

Through the development of the post-16 Ffynnon, ITEC aims to enhance performance management and analysis; and to help facilitate efficiencies, improved services and collaborative working with sub-contractors. The outcomes of this work will be disseminated across the WBL sector via a Quality Improvement Fund project report.

5.   Training and development

Estyn recommended that providers:

'*involve sub-contractors' staff in relevant training and development*'

5.1   The involvement of sub-contractors' staff in training and development creates a range of benefits. In addition to expanding the CPD offered to staff members it provides opportunity for standardisation and sharing of best practice. This doesn't always have to be through provision of traditional training sessions; it could be through providing mentoring and development or support offered within a day-to-day working environment.

5.2   Research for this guide identified that this was an area where the network was still developing; however there was emerging best practice amongst providers and a general aspiration to develop this further across the network.

5.3   Training and development for sub-contractor staff was strongest where lead providers had:

- enabled sub-contractors to feel part of the wider provider group they worked within; and
- developed relationships between the lead provider and sub-contractor staff which brought about an understanding of each other's needs.

Best practice

- Clear communication channels across the lead provider's sub-contractors identify training and development needs either on an individual or pan-organisation basis.

- Action plans developed as part of the recruitment and management of sub-contractors will identify training needs; these can be addressed on a macro or micro basis dependent upon need.

- Lead providers utilise the strengths within their sub-contracted network, recognising specialist skills of sub-contracted organisations to deliver aspects of training.

- In-house training sessions delivered regularly to ensure standardisation, compliance and effective use of tools such as reviews, learning plans and Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR) paperwork.

Case studies

ISA Training & HB Training

ISA Training views involvement of sub-contractors in training, planning and development as key to successful delivery for learners. For example sub-contractors attend ISA Corporate days which involve strategic planning, team building and skill development such as technical skills and teaching and learning strategies.

HB Training, one of ISA's sub-contractors, has assisted in the mentoring and development of ISA's Beauty Therapy assessors. Working together enables identification of the different organisational strengths and weaknesses and both can save money by assisting each other in meeting training needs.

ACT

ACT is based in Cardiff and manages a network of 15 sub-contractors across a range of geographic areas and learning routes.

ACT has been keen to develop opportunities for its sub-contractors to learn and develop through sharing experiences and best practice with the aim of improving learner outcomes still further. An example of this was a development day it held themed around 'Creative Teaching' to which representatives from its sub-contractors were invited. ACT was conscious not just to invite contract managers but staff involved with project delivery and, due to its expanded network, saw this as an opportunity to get together and share the knowledge that was available across the ACT delivery network.

6.   Identifying and managing underperformance

Estyn recommended that providers:

'develop and use comprehensive tracking systems to be able to identify underperformance by sub-contractors quickly'

6.1   A clear element in ensuring that learners are offered a high quality experience is the ability of lead providers to be in a position to identify and address underperformance by sub-contractors, and work with them to address and rectify these issues. It is the responsibility of the lead provider to ensure that learners receive high quality provision across its sub-contracted provision and meets the requirements of the WBL Programme Specification.

6.2   Lead providers recognise the responsibility they have to ensure the quality of delivery through their sub-contracted base. However, there are significant variances in the systems and processes used by lead providers to monitor these, and in some cases systems used risk duplication and hamper efficient working.

Best practice

- Documentation across a provider does not need to be unified as long as the lead provider has approved the paperwork that is in place for each sub-contractor. In many cases the sub-contractors have documentation that is exemplary and lead providers have adopted this.

- Robust management information is generated at a lead provider and sub-contractor level. The lead provider and sub-contractors have dual access to a suite of relevant and accurate reports.

- Lead providers utilise systems such as Maytas 5 or Ffynnon to ensure that all sub-contractors have access to live data.

- Lead providers ensure that sub-contractors understand how to interpret the data and that it is reconciled on a timely basis.

- Lead providers ensure that they deliver regular compliance audits to check the authenticity of data supplied by sub-contractors.

- Nominated contacts in both the lead provider and sub-contracted organisations undertake at least quarterly formal review meetings to review data against contractual performance indicators; the meetings are complemented by the continuous review of data through informal dialogue.

- Where underperformance is identified it is addressed through targeted, measured action plans backed by support and development from the lead provider.

7.   Sharing best practice

Estyn recommended that providers:

'develop robust systems to identify and share best practice across all sub-contractors'

7.1   Sharing of best practice across a provider's provision is critical to success. Lead providers need to recognise that they have a duty to facilitate the sharing of best practice between all their sub-contractors. This has obvious implications in terms of improving the quality of learning delivered. Equally it offers value for money by removing levels of duplication in the development of learning methods, procedures and curriculum resources.

7.2   By sharing best practice benefits can have an impact on learners via:

- increased opportunities; and
- broadening of horizons

Best practice

- The creation of regular forums to share best practice, on a pan-sub-contractor, or one-to-one basis.
- Enabling sub-contractors within a lead provider to interact and engage with each other as opposed to 'working in silos', thus generating peer-to-peer support.
- Lead providers recognise best practice within their network through review meetings and empower this to be shared across their delivery network.
- Lead providers identify development needs with a sub-contractor and address this through sharing best practice from another sub-contractor.
- Establishment of a programme of peer reviews and audits to enable peer-to-peer relationships to develop.
- Systematic cascading of best practice identified through networks, events, conferences, staff development events and Estyn reports, so that sub-contractors as well as lead providers can benefit.

Case study

ACT

ACT has developed a number of tools and forums to facilitate the sharing of best practice across its provision.

This includes a series of working groups/development sessions to share best practice and development needs on delivery areas such as Essential Skills, Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship, and Learner Voice.

Furthermore the provider recognises that across its sub-contractor base there are a number of best practice examples. As such ACT has launched QISS – Quality Improvement Support Service.

It aims to generate peer-to-peer support by matching sub-contracted organisations and individuals with specific strengths with those who will benefit from learning and development through informal buddying.

In short QISS is a 'dating service' for sub-contractors to develop the quality of learner delivery.

8.   Contingency planning

Estyn recommended that providers:

'make sure that there are effective contingency plans in place to cover the breakdown of contracting arrangements'

8.1   Lead providers are responsibility for the delivery of learning to all learners within their provision. Should a sub-contracting arrangement fail, it is the responsibility of the lead provider to ensure continuation of learning to those learners affected.

8.2   Whilst in some instances the breakdown of a sub-contracting relationship can take place over a longer time period which allows for planning, it can also happen overnight where organisational failure occurs.

8.3   All lead providers were fully aware of their obligations to learners in the event of a breakdown of a sub-contracting relationship. Only those who had firsthand experience of managing such a breakdown had defined strategies in place to deal with the situation.

8.4   A clear strategy and process should be in place to deal with a potential breakdown. This should identify designated staff with clear roles who would liaise with displaced learners and employers in the event of such an event occurring.

Best practice

- Performance management and support measures with set processes in place in the event of sub-contractor failure.

- Lead providers maintain a level of due diligence over sub-contractors in order to attempt to identify early signs of organisational failure.

- Lead contractors have a formalised policy outlining the process to take in the event of a breakdown in contracting relationships – this includes guidance on the continuity of learning for learners, communication to learners and employers, and TUPE guidelines for staff.

- Quality processes that are effective would highlight potential problems.

Case study

Acorn Learning Solutions Ltd

Acorn has experience of taking action in response to sub-contracted providers who were failing to deliver the appropriate quality of services to learners.

This has been resolved through formal meetings and reviews backed by support from specialist teams (quality, curriculum, etc). In many instances this support has resulted in increased levels of quality being offered to learners.

Aware that failure of relationships with sub-contractors can occur at any time, Acorn has a formalised process for exiting relationships with sub-contractors. This policy covers a number of elements including:

- transfer of learners;
- communication to learners and employers;
- TUPE implications and guidance.

9.   Learner feedback

Estyn recommended that providers:

'*take account of the outcomes of learner satisfaction questionnaires to remedy any shortcomings identified*'

9.1   Learner satisfaction surveys are a key performance measure and an essential tool in the management of the quality of learning. It is essential that these are used as a performance management indicator in managing the delivery of learning of sub-contractors.

9.2   A number of providers have sophisticated systems for ensuring that learners supported via sub-contracted provision are captured within their own learner satisfaction surveys; and at times this is a function that is delivered centrally via the lead provider. Other providers have a much less structured approach to managing and responding to these surveys.

9.3   It is also important to recognise that there are many other ways of obtaining learner feedback alongside questionnaires that incorporate sub-contractors, (for example focus groups and learner forums), and these must be incorporated as part of robust quality assurance processes. Further information is available in DfES's [Learner Involvement Strategy Guidance](#).

Best practice

- Lead providers standardise the learner survey to be used across their provision in order to enable it to be used as a quantitative management tool.

- Lead providers look at the feasibility and cost effectiveness of centralising learner surveys.

- Data from learner surveys is treated as a performance review measure at all performance reviews.

- Lead providers work with their sub-contractors to actively respond to learner feedback, and to use survey outcomes to improve the quality of the learning experience.

Case study

ISA Training

ISA training includes the learners of sub-contractors on their ISA Voice panel as learner representatives. This panel meets 3 times a year and feeds back views from other learners and employers and also helps to plan the direction of ISA's strategy. This has allowed learners to share their experiences and for ISA to identify best practice across all provision.

Quote from a sub-contractor's learner:

'I love being part of the Learner Voice Panel group. It's great to have an input with the way our training is given. As I am doing my training programme, it makes it easier to talk to other learners as I can relate to what they say. Sometimes I find people can't voice their opinions too freely when their employers are around, so by using things like Twitter to communicate is brilliant'

10. Value for money

10.1   It needs to be recognised that lead providers ensure a level of service delivery to their sub-contractors, along with taking on a level of risk, and it is appropriate that they should receive financial recompense for this.

10.2   There is, however, a risk that too high a level of management fee will result in funds not reaching the learner and this would have an adverse effect on the quality of provision.

10.3   There is a significant differential in management fees across the network – and linked to this, variances in the services that were provided for these fees. Some sub-contractors are content that the level of management charge is fair, and is something they are able to negotiate on; whilst others feel that it is something that is imposed with little understanding as to how the level of the fee is derived.

Best practice

- Lead providers offered transparency in how their management fees were calculated, and the services that sub-contractors could expect from them.

- Additional services above core management (such as verification) were cross charged by lead providers based on usage.

- The sub-contracting culture allowed sub-contractors to be able to review and negotiate management fees.

11. Conclusion

11.1   Sub-contracting provides a range of opportunities and challenges for lead providers and by association the learners they serve.

11.2   Delivered well, it can provide a real arena in which to grow services to learners, improve quality, reduce duplication and to create efficiencies which do not compromise quality.

11.3   The levels and types of sub-contracted provision vary from provider to provider, so any best practice guide has to identify concepts and enable these to be adapted to work in individual organisations.

11.4   There are however some clear principles that all organisations entering into sub-contracting arrangements need to sign up to. In summary these are to:

- be clear from the outset as to the reasons for sub-contracting and the expectations on those that they are sub-contracting;

- ensure that ongoing review, support and dialogue is offered to sub-contracted partners;

- treat sub-contracted partners as part of a team, rather than a service deliverer; and

- recognise the accountability that the lead provider has for the learning delivery and to put in place measures to safeguard this.

Appendix A: Acknowledgements and thanks

We would like to thank the following for their input into this guide:

- Acorn Learning Solutions
- ACT
- Agoriad Cyf
- Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board
- Coleg Menai
- Estyn
- Fix Training
- HB Training
- ISA Training
- ITEC Training Solutions
- LMJ Training
- Marcbury Associates
- Rathbone Training
- Torfaen Training
- Welsh Government, Department for Education and Skills

Appendix B: Outline of interviews with WBL sector

1   In meeting with representatives from providers we are seeking to obtain examples of both best and mainstream practice to inform a publication that has been commissioned by the Welsh Government via NTfW – and will be circulated on publication via NTfW in an attempt to share best practice and ensure effective sub-contracting across the WBL network.

2   The guide will build on the recommendations made in the Estyn remit guide on 'The effectiveness of sub-contracting arrangements in work-based learning', published in autumn 2011.

3   Note for this guide the definition of sub-contracting is being interpreted as '*the sub-contracting of delivery of a learner framework from an organisation with a direct contract with the Welsh Government to another organisation*'.

4   This guide is not looking at the structures or effectiveness of consortia arrangements.

Provider Meeting Briefing Sheet (Lead Providers): Areas for Discussion

Development of sub-contracting relationships

- How sub-contractors were identified and recruited.
- Contractual status – level of KPI information in SLAs.
- Role of any of sub-contractor in informing tender of lead provider.

Management of sub-contracting relationships

- Number of relationships to be managed, size, age and maturity of these relationships.
- Management style and structure.
- Variances in achievement rates between lead provider and sub-contractor(s).
- Engagement of sub-contractors into lead provider's management and quality assurance systems – SAR/QDP development.
- Further support offered by lead provider.
- Performance Management of sub-contractors.
- Dealing with good and poor performance.
- Communication channels with sub-contractors.
- Guiding expectations from sub-contractors.
- Levels of delegated authority.
- Examples of learner focus collaboration and best practice.

Quality Assurance

- Integration of paperwork and systems between providers.
- Standardisation across provider network.
- Sharing of best practice, peer reviews, peer inspections.
- Data, data entry, ownership and guide generation.
- Early intervention performance management.
- Levels of audit / inspection.

Breakdown in sub-contracting relationships

- Awareness of responsibilities to learners should a sub-contractor fail.
- What contingency plans exist.
- Terms of notice.

Financial/Value for Money

- Payment – results based? Profile based? Data based?
- What services are offered by lead provider in return for management fees?

Any further comments input from either side

Provider Meeting Briefing Sheet (Sub-contractors): Areas for Discussion

Development of sub-contracting relationships

- How sub-contractors were identified and recruited.
- Contractual status – level of KPI information in SLAs.
- Role of any of sub-contractor in informing tender of lead provider.

Management of sub-contracting relationships

- Management style and structure.
- Methods of KPI setting.
- Engagement of sub-contractors into lead provider's management and quality assurance systems – SAR / QDP development.
- Further support offered by lead provider.
- Performance Management of sub-contractors.
- Dealing with good and poor performance.
- Communication channels with sub-contractors.
- Guiding expectations from sub- contractors.

- Levels of delegated authority.
- Examples of learner focus collaboration and best practice.

Quality Assurance

- Integration of paperwork and systems between providers.
- Standardisation across provider network.
- Sharing of best practice, peer reviews, peer inspections.
- Data, data entry, ownership and guide generation.

Financial/Value for Money

- What services are offered by lead provider in return for management fees?

Any further comments input from either side

Appendix C: Sub-contracting self-assessment and action planning template

This template together with the best practice guide will help you to:

- evaluate your current position;
- determine whether appropriate first-hand, up-to-date evidence is easily available; and
- identify areas requiring action.

Name of organisation:	
Document completed by:	
Job title:	
Date:	

Checklist key:

Red	Not yet started
Amber	Developing
Green	Developed and embedded

Ref No.	Evaluation and Planning for Action Checklist	Red	Amber	Green	Evidence Strengths/Weaknesses	Action required Y/N
1. Delivery						
1.1	An overall strategy for the recruitment of sub-contractors is in place which is focussed on learner need. The strategy is reviewed to evaluate its impact and the benefits of the arrangements to learners.					
1.2	A risk assessment is undertaken when selecting sub-contractors.					
1.3	A written contract is in place with each sub-contractor. This includes all the requirements of the WBL Programme Specification.					
1.4	There is a Service Level Agreement (SLA) in place which clearly identifies what is required of sub-contractors.					
1.5	Action plans are in place to support the development of sub-contractors. There is a process in place for these to be monitored.					

Ref No.	Evaluation and Planning for Action Checklist	Red	Amber	Green	Evidence Strengths/Weaknesses	Action required Y/N
1.6	Processes are in place for communicating information to sub-contractors. This includes informing them of any changes to programme requirements or new policy directives by the Welsh Government.					
1.7	A management fee is charged to sub-contractors based on a process that is transparent in how it is calculated and the services that sub-contractors can expect.					
2. Quality Assurance						
2.1	Sub-contractors are integrated into the organisation's quality cycle and planning processes. These processes are shared with sub-contractors.					
2.2	The self-assessment identifies strengths and shortcomings for sub-contracted provision. The quality development plan identifies actions to bring about continuous improvement of sub-contractors. Processes are in place to regularly monitor, with each sub-contractor, progress against the actions.					

Ref No.	Evaluation and Planning for Action Checklist	Red	Amber	Green	Evidence Strengths/Weaknesses	Action required Y/N
2.3	Sub-contractors are supported in the self-assessment process. Resources, such as online tools, are used effectively to incorporate the involvement of sub-contractors in self-assessment.					
2.4	Processes are in place to identify best practice in sub-contracted provision and taken up to use as standard practice throughout the organisation.					
2.5	Peer review arrangements incorporate sub-contractors.					
2.6	A planned schedule of quality reviews for sub-contractors is in place.					
2.7	A procedure is in place to investigate complaints about sub-contractors and this is regularly reviewed to evaluate its effectiveness.					
2.8	Sub-contractors receive a copy of the organisation's final SAR and QDP.					

Ref No.	Evaluation and Planning for Action Checklist	Red	Amber	Green	Evidence Strengths/Weaknesses	Action required Y/N
3. Learner and employer feedback						
3.1	Strategies are in place for listening to the views of sub-contractors' learners and employers. Views are gathered through a number of methods. The feedback is acted upon.					
3.2	Learner and employer surveys are standardised and used across the provision including sub-contractors. They are used as a quantitative management tool.					
3.3	Data from the surveys is treated as a performance review measure at all performance reviews with sub-contractors.					
3.4	Feedback from sub-contractors' learners and employers is used to inform the self-assessment.					

Ref No.	Evaluation and Planning for Action Checklist	Red	Amber	Green	Evidence Strengths/Weaknesses	Action required Y/N
4. Identifying and managing underperformance						
4.1	Robust management information reports are generated for sub-contractors on a regular basis, reports include benchmarked data. The reports are used to analyse performance (including the impact of sub-contracted provision on overall performance) and to set challenging targets for sub-contractors. Processes are in place for the reports to be shared with sub-contractors.					
4.2	Processes are in place to ensure the accuracy and timeliness of sub-contracted data. This includes compliance audits.					
4.3	Sub-contractors have effective systems in place to track learner progress.					
4.4	Formal review meetings are undertaken with sub-contractors on a regular basis to review data against contracted performance indicators. These are undertaken by nominated contacts for the lead provider and sub-contractor.					

Ref No.	Evaluation and Planning for Action Checklist	Red	Amber	Green	Evidence Strengths/Weaknesses	Action required Y/N
4.5	Where underperformance is identified with sub-contractors it is addressed through targeted measured action plans backed by support and development from the lead provider.					
5. Training and development						
5.1	Staff of sub-contractors are integrated into the organisation's overall CPD arrangements. The arrangements are communicated to staff of sub-contractors.					
5.2	The training and development needs of sub-contractor staff are identified and action plans in place to address their needs. Any 'specialist' skills are identified and shared across the organisation.					
5.3	CPD activities are run jointly for lead provider and sub-contractor staff.					
6. Sharing best practice						
6.1	A range of strategies are used to gather and disseminate best practice from sub-contractors.					

Ref No.	Evaluation and Planning for Action Checklist	Red	Amber	Green	Evidence Strengths/Weaknesses	Action required Y/N
6.2	Best practice is identified, captured and shared across the organisation including sub-contractors.					
6.3	The sharing of best practice with sub-contractors has provided benefits for learners.					
7. Contingency planning						
7.1	Processes are in place to identify early signs of sub-contractor failure.					
7.2	A formalised contingency management strategy is in place to deal with a sub-contractor failure. This is underpinned by formalised processes. The processes cover guidance on the continuity of learning for learners, communication to learners and employers and TUPE guidelines for staff.					

Action Plan

Using the Action Plan template indicate all areas requiring action against the appropriate reference number and record the actions to be taken. You should complete as much information as possible, including links to any appendices you wish to include. You can use this as an effective communication tool, both internally and externally.

Area for improvement		Action	Outcomes	Responsible for action	Responsible for monitoring	Timescales for completion/ review	Resource implications	Progress and other comments
Ref No	Y/N							
1. Delivery								
1.1: An overall strategy for the recruitment of sub-contractors is in place which is focussed on learner need. The strategy is reviewed to evaluate its impact and the benefits of the arrangements to learners.								
1.2: A risk assessment is undertaken when selecting sub-contractors.								
1.3: A written contract is in place with each sub-contractor. This includes all the requirements of the WBL Programme Specification.								

Area for improvement		Action	Outcomes	Responsible for action	Responsible for monitoring	Timescales for completion/ review	Resource implications	Progress and other comments
Ref No	Y/N							
1.4: There is a Service Level Agreement (SLA) in place which clearly identifies what is required of sub-contractors.								
1.5: Action plans are in place to support the development of sub-contractors. There is a process in place for these to be monitored.								
1.6: Processes are in place for communicating information to sub-contractors. This includes informing them of any changes to programme requirements or new policy directives by the Welsh Government.								
1.7: A management fee is charged to sub-contractors based on a process that is transparent in how it is calculated and the services that sub-								

Area for improvement		Action	Outcomes	Responsible for action	Responsible for monitoring	Timescales for completion/ review	Resource implications	Progress and other comments
Ref No	Y/N							
contractors can expect.								
2. Quality assurance								
2.1: Sub-contractors are integrated into the organisation's quality cycle and planning processes. These processes are shared with sub-contractors.								
2.2: The self-assessment identifies strengths and shortcomings for sub-contracted provision. The quality development plan identifies actions to bring about continuous improvement of sub-contractors. Processes are in place to regularly monitor, with each sub-contractor, progress against the actions.								
2.3: Sub-contractors are supported in the self-assessment								

Area for improvement		Action	Outcomes	Responsible for action	Responsible for monitoring	Timescales for completion/ review	Resource implications	Progress and other comments
Ref No	Y/N							
process. Resources, such as online tools, are used effectively to incorporate the involvement of sub-contractors in self-assessment.								
2.4: Processes are in place to identify best practice in sub-contracted provision and taken up to use as standard practice throughout the organisation								
2.5: Peer review arrangements incorporate sub-contractors.								
2.6: A planned schedule of quality reviews for sub-contractors is in place.								
2.7: A procedure is in place to investigate complaints about sub-contractors and this is regularly reviewed to evaluate its effectiveness.								

Area for improvement		Action	Outcomes	Responsible for action	Responsible for monitoring	Timescales for completion/ review	Resource implications	Progress and other comments
Ref No	**Y/N**							
2.8: Sub-contractors receive a copy of the organisation's final SAR and QDP.								
3. Learner and employer feedback								
3.1: Strategies are in place for listening to the views of sub-contractors' learners and employers. Views are gathered through a number of methods. The feedback is acted upon.								
3.2: Learner and employer surveys are standardised and used across the provision including sub-contractors. They are used as a quantitative management tool.								
3.3: Data from learner surveys is treated as a performance review measure at all performance reviews with sub-contractors.								

Area for improvement		Action	Outcomes	Responsible for action	Responsible for monitoring	Timescales for completion/ review	Resource implications	Progress and other comments
Ref No	Y/N							
3.4: Feedback from sub-contractors' learners and employers is used to inform the self-assessment.								
4. Identifying and managing underperformance								
4.1: Robust management information reports are generated for sub-contractors on a regular basis, reports include benchmarked data. The reports are used to analyse performance (including the impact of sub-contracted provision on overall performance) and to set challenging targets for sub-contractors. Processes are in place for the reports to be shared with sub-contractors.								
4.2: Processes are in place to ensure the								

Area for improvement		Action	Outcomes	Responsible for action	Responsible for monitoring	Timescales for completion/ review	Resource implications	Progress and other comments
Ref No	Y/N							
accuracy and timeliness of sub-contracted data. This includes compliance audits.								
4.3: Sub-contractors have effective systems in place to track learner progress.								
4.4: Formal review meetings are undertaken with sub-contractors on a regular basis to review data against contracted performance indicators. These are undertaken by nominated contacts for the lead provider and sub-contractor.								
4.5: Where underperformance is identified with sub-contractors it is addressed through targeted measured action plans backed by support and development from the								

Area for improvement		Action	Outcomes	Responsible for action	Responsible for monitoring	Timescales for completion/ review	Resource implications	Progress and other comments
Ref No	Y/N							
lead provider.								
5. Training and development								
5.1: Staff of sub-contractors are integrated into the organisation's overall CPD arrangements. The arrangements are communicated to staff of sub-contractors.								
5.2: The training and development needs of sub-contractor staff are identified and action plans in place to address their needs. Any 'specialist' skills are identified and shared across the organisation.								
5.3: CPD activities are run jointly for lead provider and sub-contractor staff.								
6. Sharing Best Practice								
6.1: A range of strategies are used to								

Area for improvement		Action	Outcomes	Responsible for action	Responsible for monitoring	Timescales for completion/ review	Resource implications	Progress and other comments
Ref No	Y/N							
gather and disseminate best practice from sub-contractors.								
6.2: Best practice is identified, captured and shared across the organisation including sub-contractors.								
6.3: The sharing of best practice with sub-contractors has provided benefits for learners.								
7. Contingency Planning								
7.1: Processes are in place to identify early signs of sub-contractor failure.								
7.2: A formalised contingency management strategy is in place to deal with a sub-contractor failure. This is underpinned by formalised processes. The processes cover guidance on the								

Area for improvement		Action	Outcomes	Responsible for action	Responsible for monitoring	Timescales for completion/ review	Resource implications	Progress and other comments
Ref No	Y/N							
continuity of learning for learners, communication to learners and employers and TUPE guidelines for staff.								