

Ofsted, the importance of data, and the role of your apprenticeship delivery system



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The vital role of data in Ofsted inspections



Ofsted inspection analysis from the Fellowship of Inspection Nominees (FIN)¹, shows that in a recent 6-month period, one in every five (20.17%) inspections was deemed ‘less than good’, that is to say ‘Requires Improvement’ or ‘Inadequate’.

Ofsted’s questioning spans all key stakeholders – from learners and employers to tutors and senior leaders, with inspectors drawing their conclusions from a range of sources.

Ofsted has always been interested in data, from the perspective of how you use that data to drive your provision. They will want to know:

- ✓ **How you collect data.**
- ✓ **How you analyse data.**
- ✓ **How you use data.**

This eBook will explore some of the recurring ‘areas for improvement’ on which Ofsted is focusing its inspections, with a specific focus on how providers can pre-empt the scrutiny with relevant, actionable data collection. It will offer practical insight into how Aptem, as your apprenticeship management system, can support you in being Ofsted-ready, throughout the inspection lifecycle.

¹In the period 1 November 2023 to 30 April 2024

A word from...



Kerry Boffey, CEO & Founder of the Fellowship of Inspection Nominees (FIN)

Our own research around the 'Ofsted Big Listen' told us that training providers are crying out for inspections that reflect the strengths of their sector. While this crucial conversation around inspection reform continues, it's important that you don't let inspection just 'happen to you'.

Instead, take a proactive approach. This requires accurate and consistent collection of data, and a mindset across the business of using this data to continually improve your provision.



James Lett, Solutions Consultant at Aptem

The old adage of reaping what you sow is never more relevant than in our industry. Recording the right data in your apprenticeship management system will not only set you up for Ofsted and ESFA inspections, it will help you embed a culture of continuous improvement.

We spend a great deal of time working with providers to get the initial set-up correct for their business and offering. Investing in that process will help you to proactively uncover those hidden misconceptions and have data at your fingertips when the inevitable questions come.



Not having the right data and evidence raises questions about quality and leaves providers open to Ofsted's interpretation.

What Ofsted is looking for

FIN members benefit from regular analysis of:

- ✓ Areas that Ofsted inspectors are focusing their inspections on.
- ✓ The recurring ‘areas for improvement’ that they highlight in their reports.

The table below shows the frequency of ‘areas for improvement’ found in Ofsted reports during 2023–2024 (up to 30 April 2024). Ofsted is scrutinising training providers in a number of areas that are consistently weak.

Frequency of ‘areas for improvement’ (AFI) found in Ofsted reports 2023–2024

AFI – All provider types 01/11/2023 to 30/04/2024





How Aptem can help address areas for improvement, through data collection and analysis

Aptem is purpose-built for compliant and efficient apprenticeship management. Implemented and used correctly, it can put you in control of your Ofsted preparedness and identify opportunities to drive quality across your provision.

We've included five common challenges that providers face, taken from FIN analysis, with advice on how to approach quality regulation from a data perspective.

Please note that certain features and functionality highlighted here are exclusive to specific Aptem packages. Please speak to your Business Development Manager, or Customer Success Manager if you are already an Aptem customer, for further information.

1. Starting points and progress



The challenge

An ever-present area for improvement, and a logical place to begin, is starting points. It is, perhaps, hard to believe that something so basic and so critical keeps coming up at inspection. If providers don't get the starting points right, how can they expect to measure progress? This is an essential prologue to the whole apprenticeship programme; and one on which the learner, provider and employer all need to be on the same page.

Starting point data is broader than many providers may think:

- Occupational Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours (KSBs)
- English and Maths, including how they are applied
- Safeguarding
- Prevent
- Fundamental British Values
- Personal development
- Identifying and overcoming personal barriers



Recommended best practice

Kerry Boffey suggests four questions to ask yourself on data collection and analysis of starting points:

- 1 What data do you collect relating to starting points?
- 2 How do you record progress over time against starting points?
- 3 Is progress tracking limited to achievement of qualifications?
- 4 How do you evidence on-the-job starting points?

It's about learning and 'knowing more'. Inspectors will want to know what learners can do now (or do better) than they could before. Providers should be realistic that a learner doesn't know what they don't know. It's reasonable to expect different perceptions from the employer, tutor and learner. It's also reasonable to expect that a learner's score may actually go down, before it goes up, as they start to uncover their own blind spots. It's important to be able to document this, in order to show a journey of progression.

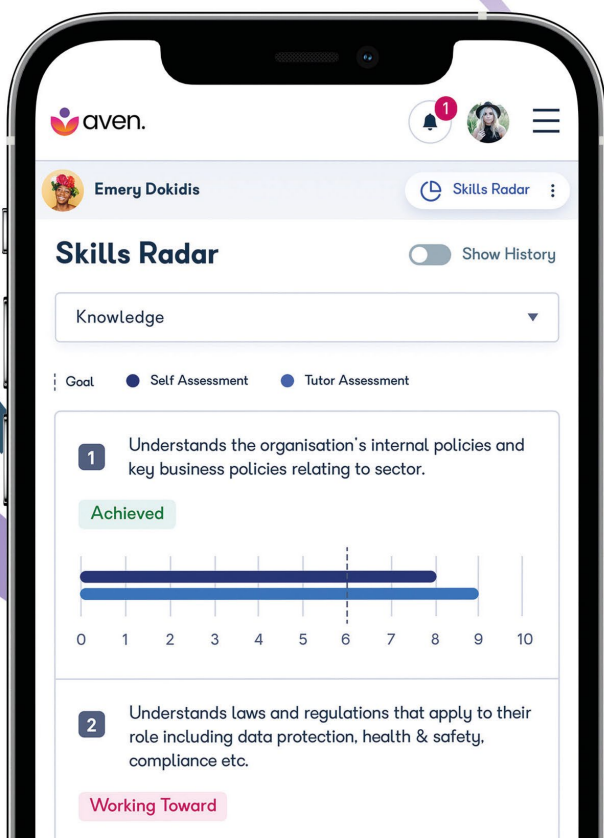


How Aptem supports

For a training provider, focusing on how learners are progressing with their studies is key to ensuring that goals are achieved, and standards of training delivery evolve to meet relevant requirements. An end-to-end technology solution, using a fully integrated learning management system and a content delivery mechanism through the e-portfolio, can monitor how learners are progressing. Key Aptem features help with this:

Skills Radar

- ✓ Aptem's Skills Radar can be set up for a tutor, a learner and an employer to complete.
- ✓ Each of the scores is recorded individually, with one not overwriting the other.
- ✓ By default, Aptem tracks the historical assessment of all three parties. This means progression against the competency levels is easy to track throughout the programme.
- ✓ The Skills Radar is fully customisable. The onboarding wizard will guide learners through each self-assessment assigned to them.
- ✓ Learners can upload evidence to justify their self-assessment grade.
- ✓ Learner self-assessments and tutor assessments are conveniently displayed in the Skills Radar view.



Tripartite reviews

- ✓ In order to be able to demonstrate distance travelled, Aptem recommends to customers that they review the starting points at each tripartite review.
- ✓ These tripartite reviews are fully customisable.
- ✓ With the configuration of Aptem, you can set up collection of starting point and progression data as regularly as you see fit.
- ✓ Up to 90 days prior to the review, you can invite the learner and employer to pre-complete a series of bespoke questions. These will inform meaningful discussion on the day. With Aptem, it's no longer about going through the motions. Rather, it becomes a genuinely useful check-in point for all parties.

Aptem Checkpoint

- ✓ Aptem's AI-driven learning tool, Checkpoint, helps to monitor progress and support development. Checkpoint presents a series of questions to learners at relevant points in their apprenticeship, to boost learner confidence and provide an instant snapshot of their comprehension of KSBs.
- ✓ The tool also helps learners foster a deeper understanding of on-the-job challenges, by allowing them to apply theoretical understanding of the skills and behaviours they're working towards, via realistic scenarios in the context of their employment and programme of study.



All too often, training providers don't get the credit for the help and support they have given their learners, because they didn't capture the starting points.

Kerry Boffey, CEO & Founder of the Fellowship of Inspection Nominees (FIN)

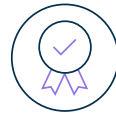
2. Engagement and perception – employers and learners



The challenge

Employer and learner perception holds more sway since the Apprenticeship Accountability Framework Technical Specification was updated in 2022. While not a specific area for improvement as defined by Ofsted, the reported impact of perception is seen across the inspection. This is a challenge for providers who tend to feel that this data is beyond their control, directly at least.

One of the key provider frustrations following an Ofsted inspection is that the perception doesn't match what the provider deems to be reality.



Recommended best practice

There are actually a number of approaches a provider can take to not only mitigate the risk of unexpected poor feedback from learners and employers, but to genuinely improve quality of provision for the long-term.

It's about being proactive. Providers will want to gauge what responses learners and employers might give if called upon during an inspection, and when sharing their experiences and ratings in the public domain. This is something that can be done by FIN through a commissioned project. It can also be done yourself through your apprenticeship management system.

“The key is to gather the perceptions. Don't correct them – as perceptions are very real to the individuals and it's more important that we utilise perceptions to improve provision. Just gather them and then think about how you can change those perceptions. You may have live learners who can really articulate the impact of the programme that won't be in your provision in six months, 12 months, down the line. Capture the evidence now while they are still part of that numbers game. You have more influence now over your inspection than you ever will have during it, and quite frankly, you have very little post-inspection.”
Kerry Boffey, FIN



How Aptem supports

Flexible Learning Plan components to help you gather feedback

- ✓ Help to uncover any misalignment of perception by proactively scheduling feedback questioning.
- ✓ With Aptem, providers can build in Learning Plan components that proactively seek feedback. These components are not mapped to the progress of the apprenticeship.
- ✓ This might look like an 'external training' component that links to a survey such as Survey Monkey or Qualtrics.

- ✓ This means you can demonstrate to inspectors that you have asked the right questions, collated the feedback ready to be acted upon.

SCORM Assets to help you gather feedback

- ✓ SCORM Assets can be uploaded to Aptem or created from within Aptem.
- ✓ They can then be attached to the Learning Plan.
- ✓ Ensuring that you generate evidence will show progress against your criteria.



3. Quality Assurance



The challenge

The Quality Assurance function operates at different levels. On the one hand, it's there to make sure the provision does what it's intending to do – in terms of serving the needs of the economy and employers.

On the other, it's there to make sure individual learner needs are met. It's a complex, continually evolving landscape.



Recommended best practice

Getting the basics right is fundamental. For any organisation, but especially ones dealing with large quantities of information like ITPs, ensuring there are no disparities between data is essential. This has been a common issue faced by training providers who do not use an end-to-end technology solution but instead rely on keeping information up-to-date on multiple systems. An end-to-end technology solution ensures all data is provided in one place and removes the need to use various management information systems, Learning Management Systems or ePortfolios.

Beyond this, Kerry Boffey suggests that QA teams get more involved in understanding learner perceptions – a perspective that Ofsted are increasingly interested in. Inspectors want to know that you are asking the questions, so you can address the challenges. She recommends that providers dig deep into programme quality, through the learner (and employer) lens:

- 1 How is on-the-job and off-the-job training linked?
- 2 How does the curriculum flex if a learner misses some content?
- 3 How sequencing the curriculum is individualised to meet learners' and/or employers' needs.
- 4 How learners nearing their planned end date are risk assessed to ensure learners complete timely.

You need to ensure this information is systematically collected and that QA teams pick it up and act on it.



How Aptem supports

Aptem is designed to support quality assurance within apprenticeships. Just because a learner has been taught something, doesn't mean they have learned it. Your system needs to quality assure the teaching and learning, and not just display an assessment decision made by a tutor. Aptem is designed to support you do both:

- ✔ In Aptem, you can quality assure a review, for example, and document that in the system, just as you would assess a teaching/learning session.
- ✔ Aptem allows you to plan your QA too. For example, a quality assurer could say they want to look at a month 6 review – as that's a good indicator of progress. They get a notification within Aptem that

the review has been completed, and can make comments against the quality of that review – if necessary, asking the tutor to go back and add further details.

In the broader sense of ensuring your provision is reaching and helping the right people, Aptem's in-built Ofsted Quality dashboard is designed to show valuable information. The QAR is a report within this dashboard that specifically looks at achievement rates, enabling you to drill down to interrogate the data around functional skills, ethnicity, gender, age and disability, and more, for specific programmes.

The screenshot displays the 'Delivery Table' in the Aptem system. It features several filter panels on the left and right, and three main data tables in the center. The top table is for 'Gender', the middle for 'Age groups', and the bottom for 'Health or LLD Problems'. Each table has columns for 'count learners', 'live learner count', 'Unknown/Excluded ILR', 'leavers count', 'count leavers achieved', 'count leavers not achieved', 'count withdrawn', 'count on break', 'Leavers: unknown outcome', and 'Achieved Rate'. The 'Total' row for all tables shows 1541 learners, 678 live learners, 102 unknown/excluded, 574 leavers, 194 achieved, 4 not achieved, 342 withdrawn, 28 on break, and a 41% achieved rate.

Gender	count learners	live learner count	Unknown/Excluded ILR	leavers count	count leavers achieved	count leavers not achieved	count withdrawn	count on break	Leavers: unknown outcome	Achieved Rate
Female	538	219	21	202	80	0	107	11	0	45%
Male	945	459	43	372	114	4	235	17	0	37%
Unknown	4	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Total	1541	678	102	574	194	4	342	28	0	41%

Age groups	count learners	live learner count	Unknown/Excluded ILR	leavers count	count leavers achieved	count leavers not achieved	count withdrawn	count on break	Leavers: unknown outcome	Achieved Rate
16-18	40	33	0	9	7	0	7	0	0	53%
19-24	864	522	2	344	115	2	222	2	0	37%
25+	637	123	100	221	72	2	113	26	0	37%
Total	1541	678	102	574	194	4	342	28	0	41%

Health or LLD Problems	count learners	live learner count	Unknown/Excluded ILR	leavers count	count leavers achieved	count leavers not achieved	count withdrawn	count on break	Leavers: unknown outcome	Achieved Rate
LLD or Health problem	233	135	5	84	40	0	51	1	0	42%
No LLD/Health problems	1308	543	97	490	154	4	291	27	0	35%
Total	1541	678	102	574	194	4	342	28	0	41%

4. Achievement – learner retention early warning flags and interventions



The challenge

Providers across our industry are working towards the ambitious target set by the skills minister of a 67% achievement rate on apprenticeship standards by 2025. While the new Government is yet to fully lay out the new landscape and targets, the goal of increasing retention and achievement inevitably remains.

Providers are also working against a backdrop of ever-increasing pressures to grow learner numbers, whilst ensuring programme suitability and retention.



Recommended best practice

Kerry Boffey explains, 'When we look at some of the programmes that haven't done very well on inspection, it's about this increased growth. If you have had, or are hoping to have, a significant growth in learner numbers, you should be prepared to explain how you are addressing learner retention. Does your sales team have a KPI that relates to retention? Do they have an investment in making sure it's the right learner on the right programme, not just at the start, but further down the line?'

It's about recruiting with integrity.' Once on programme, your technology should support your retention goals.



How Aptem supports

- ✓ Aptem users are able to create custom markers – a hugely effective way to manage risk, identify opportunity and prompt timely intervention. 'As is commonplace in Aptem, the markers are customisable,' explains James Lett. 'Customers might use them to identify learners with a funding risk, a progression issue, or to flag a specific support requirement.'

Markers are reporting tools that are not visible to employers or learners. They are there to support you as a provider and can be automatically triggered as part of your system configuration, or switched on and off manually to reflect the detailed insight held by tutors and administrators. For example, you could set up conditions in your reviews to trigger a marker if a learner has not completed a Skills Scan in the last eight weeks – giving you an early indicator of risk.

✓ **Performance dashboards.** We encourage all Aptem customers to use the RAG status within the Performance Dashboards that are available. An important part of configuration is to decide what red, amber and green mean for you, in order to make those statuses meaningful. Aptem users can also see learner progress at a glance, and filter this data by group, programme or even tutor. On the right of the dashboard, users can see the components overdue for each learner, with the ability to drill down into the detail of where the bottlenecks are.

These dashboards tell providers when learners are in a high-risk part of the programme – for example, those that are in the first 30 days of the programme, or those that have past their planned end date. This hugely valuable data can be interrogated and cross-examined (for example you might want to look at how many red learners are in onboarding), setting you up to take meaningful action.



5. Curriculum, stretch, feedback, and personalisation



The challenge

FIN reports curriculum planning as a continual area for improvement. This is often related to pedagogy and Ofsted wants to make sure that your staff have the right teaching skills to be able to deliver that curriculum. The focus is on giving each learner the best chance of success, which, naturally, relies on personalised learning to appeal to each learner's own strengths, weaknesses and preferences.



Recommended best practice

Curriculum planning should be a combination of additional learning support and stretch learning. The former requires a robust approach to cognitive assessment, that enables providers to follow through on the assessment results, to provide reasonable adjustments throughout the Learning Plan and EPA. The latter requires the tutors to have a toolkit of appropriate stretch opportunities and materials at their fingertips, ready to respond to individual needs.



How Aptem supports

In reality, this is a big ask of your time-poor tutors, and is incredibly hard to evidence, without a flexible apprenticeship management system to support. The practical challenges can also relate to the OTJ hours. Within your delivery programme, you will put in the basic components, and if someone achieves it more quickly, you will need to make up that time to hit their planned hours.

There are various ways to approach this within Aptem. Each method leads to tailored Learning Plans, which are proven to increase propensity to successfully complete the programme. The end result is a programme that supports a learner's goals.

✓ **Ad hoc additions to the Learning Plan**

This is a bank of components that sit in Aptem and can be added to a Learning Plan, or group of Learning Plans on an ad hoc basis.

✓ **Miscellaneous components within the Learning Plan**

These can be built into the Learning Plan but remain hidden from the learner until made visible by the coach. They will then automatically be added into the learner's hours and progress trackers.

✓ **Sub-programmes**

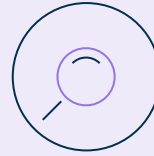
These allow administrators to add relevant stretch or support programmes to a learner or group of learners. This can be done retrospectively as needs and opportunities for stretch are identified.

✓ **Built-in cognitive assessment**

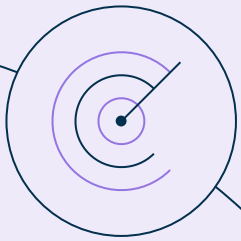
Aptem Assess is an integrated cognitive assessment tool that enables you to seamlessly identify and respond to learning needs. It offers an estimated 87% of learners an experience that takes no more than 15 minutes and gives providers guidance on reasonable adjustments for Learning Plans and End Point Assessment.



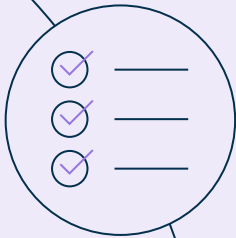
Recommendations and what to apply in Aptem



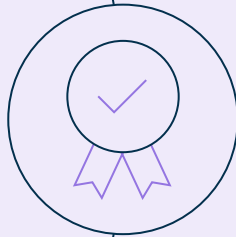
Having the right evidence makes it easier for providers to challenge back – increasingly important as the focus shifts to learner and employer perception.



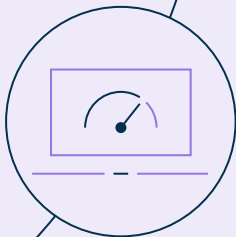
1 Starting points and progress:
Skills Radar, tripartite reviews, progress checkpoints



2 Engagement:
Learning plan, SCORM



3 Quality Assurance:
Reviews, Quality Dashboard



4 Achievement and learner retention:
Custom markers, Performance Dashboard



5 Curriculum:
Learning plan, sub-programmes





About the Fellowship of Inspection Nominees (FIN)

The Fellowship of Inspection Nominees provides invaluable assistance and guidance to help improve provision that helps to minimise risk and maximise outcomes at inspection. The team, led by Kerry Boffey, provides a wide range of resources specifically designed to help nominees in their planning to ensure their organisation is thoroughly inspection ready.

- An extensive resource library focused on quality improvement, safeguarding and inspection preparation in-line with the EIF.
- Monthly detailed analysis, picking up inspection trends and patterns.
- Member's networking events & topical working groups.
- Discounted rates on all CPD training including webinars, masterclasses and bootcamps.
- SAR review and written feedback.
- Expert confidential remote support when you need it most.

Providers, other than further education colleges, sixth-form colleges or designated institutions, may now, if they wish, have a shadow nominee as well as their nominee. FIN can provide advice and guidance on how to make the most of this initiative, identify the skills and attributes needed for this supporting role and CPD for the nominee and shadow nominee.

Email info@fin-online.org.uk for more information.



Intelligent technology®

If you would like to transform the way you deliver high-quality apprenticeships in a cost-effective, efficient and compliant way, get in touch:

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020 3758 8540

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Aptem is one of the fastest-growing SaaS software companies to manage vocational training, skills and employability programmes. In addition to Aptem Apprentice, we offer a range of other solutions to support the development of vocational skills and re-employment.

- ✓ **Aptem Enrol**, remote onboarding of apprenticeship students, for colleges and universities.
- ✓ **Aptem Employ**, a unique, flexible, award-winning employability system that helps to get people back into the workplace quickly and for the long term.
- ✓ **Aptem Skills**, our award-winning end-to-end delivery platform that enables fully compliant AEB course delivery and accelerates re-employment.
- ✓ **Aptem Assess**, a cognitive assessment tool that enables you to seamlessly identify and respond to learning needs.



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