



Skillsmark[®]

Rewarding excellence



Skillsmark[®] The Quality Framework for Learning & Development in the Justice and Community Safety sector

Process Guide

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Introduction

Skillsmark® is the recognised quality mark for learning and development in the Justice and Community Safety sector.

The learning and development market is very competitive and you want to be able to show that your programmes are providing the skills and knowledge that employers need. It is often difficult for employers to discriminate between the quality and appropriateness of different programmes on offer. Having your learning programmes endorsed through **Skillsmark®** will show that they have been designed with employers specifically in mind.

Skillsmark®

- provides learners with the skills and knowledge they need for employment, and that employers want from their staff
- shows learners and employers that your programmes are up to date and fit for purpose
- shows employers that your programmes have been designed with them specifically in mind.

If you have decided to make an application for **Skillsmark®**, or are considering doing so, then this guide will give you information and practical guidance on the application process.

The Skillsmark® Quality Framework

The Skillsmark® quality framework reflects current best practice in education and training. Structured to follow the learning cycle, the quality framework takes you through a series of questions that include a number of essential aspects.

There are two versions of the quality framework:

- a full framework reflecting all of the learning cycle
- an abridged, fast-track option for Higher Education.¹

Both frameworks can be downloaded from www.skillsforjustice.com/skillsmark

The Skillsmark® quality framework is an inclusive framework; providing you can demonstrate that the requirements of the quality framework can be met, any type of programme for use in the Justice and Community Safety sector has the potential to be suitable for endorsement through Skillsmark®.

¹In recognition of the requirement for Higher Education to adhere to the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education

The Process



Step 1: Preparation

Your first step will be to download the correct version of the quality framework from www.skillsforjustice.com/skillsmark and review your programme against its requirements.

You will need to assess your readiness for making an application and consider what responses you can give to each essential aspect² of the quality framework and what evidence you can provide to support your responses. If in doubt, you should call the **Skillsmark®** team for advice. The **Skillsmark®** team can offer you one-to-one advice and guidance³ on the quality framework and assist you in making your initial assessment of readiness.

If you find that you are not able to respond to an essential aspect you will need to consider if:

- there is a gap in the learning cycle that needs to be addressed
- part of your programme needs improvement
- there is sufficient evidence to support your responses
- the programme is suitable to put forward for **Skillsmark®**.

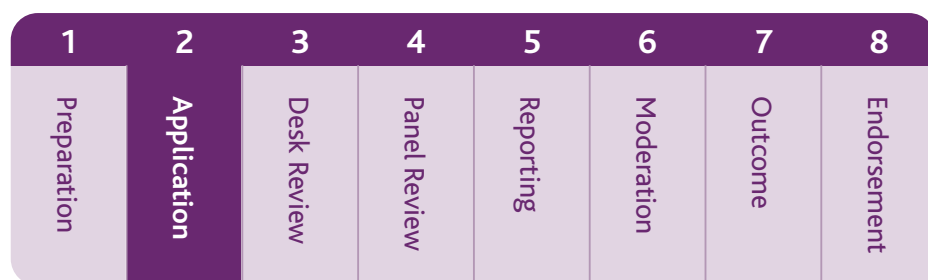
When you think you can meet the requirements of the quality framework you are ready to make your application. You should not proceed to this next step if you think that the programme does not meet the requirements.

Whilst the **Skillsmark®** team can advise you on any aspect of the process, it remains your decision whether to proceed with an application.

² Please refer to the **Skillsmark®** framework for details of the essential aspects

³ An additional charge is made for this service

The Process



Step 2: Application

Once you have assessed your programme against the quality framework you can download the application form from www.skillsforjustice.com/skillsmark. There are two types of application form and you should use the form relevant to your type of programme ie a full application or an abridged fast-track application for Higher Education.

For programmes of 60 notional learning hours⁴ or less you should provide a complete set of programme materials with your application. For programmes of more than 60 notional learning hours you should provide a representative sample of programme materials with your application.

When completing your application form you should:

- provide a response to each essential aspect
- provide a numbered list of evidence after each question
- reference your evidence in your text.

Your application should be concise and your responses should focus on the essential aspects. Your evidence should be proportionate to the programme being put forward for **Skillsmark**®. Make best use of your evidence where it can support more than one response.

Your application should be sent electronically to skillsmark@skillsforjustice.com. Wherever possible your evidence should also be sent electronically.⁵ In addition, two paper copies of the application and evidence should be sent at the same time to the **Skillsmark**® team at Skills for Justice, Centre Court, Atlas Way, Sheffield S4 7QQ. If you are not able to send your evidence electronically you should send an additional, third paper copy.

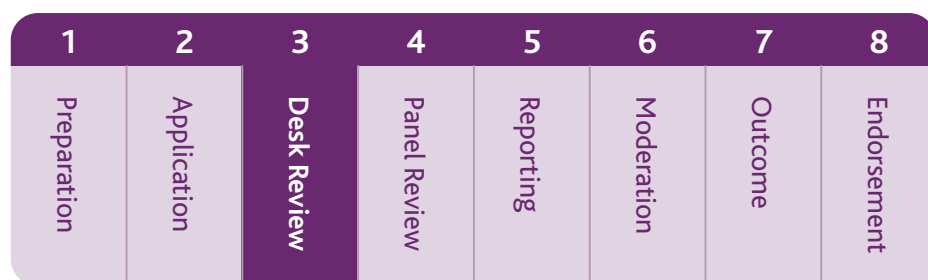
Your application payment must also be made at this time; you will need to provide a purchase order number (if appropriate) and/or an invoice address. The **Skillsmark**® price list can be downloaded from www.skillsforjustice.com/skillsmark.

Your application will not be processed until your payment details have been received.

⁴ The length of learning time which it is estimated will be taken on average to achieve the specified learning outcomes

⁵ Applications on CD or data memory stick are also acceptable

The Process



Step 3: Desk Review

Your application will be logged and reviewed by a member of the **Skillsmark®** team. The desk review is a single, initial check that all of the required information is present, not an assessment against the framework itself. It will establish if the application is complete by examining two key aspects of your application:

- have the essential aspects been addressed?
- does the evidence support the responses given?

If the desk review highlights deficiencies in either responses or evidence you will be given the opportunity to revise your application and/or submit additional evidence⁶.

The **Skillsmark®** team cannot advise you on what you might do to address the deficiencies identified and it remains your decision whether to take note of the feedback or proceed to the next stage with your application unchanged.

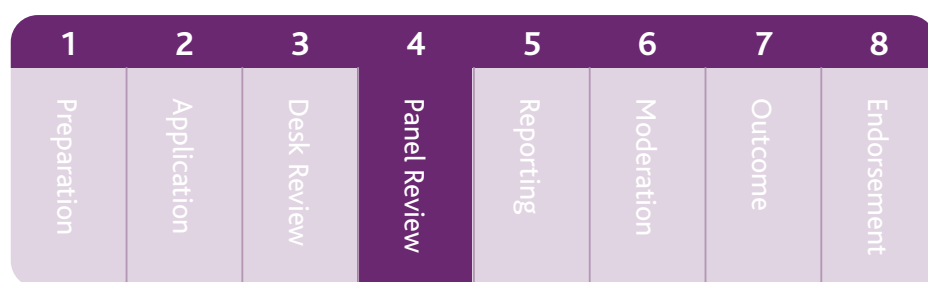
Once the **Skillsmark®** team has completed the desk review and your application is ready to proceed to the next stage, it will be allocated to a **Skillsmark®** Associate Reviewer and a subject expert⁷ and a copy of your application and evidence will be sent to them.

The **Skillsmark®** team will identify potential subject experts who have knowledge and understanding of the subject area of your programme but no involvement either in its design or delivery ie no conflict of interest. You may be asked to assist in this identification.

⁶ The **Skillsmark®** team accepts no responsibility for the sufficiency of evidence you provide to support your application

⁷ Excluding Higher Education applications

The Process



Step 4: Panel Review

The purpose of a panel review is to validate your application and supporting evidence. The **Skillsmark**® Associate Reviewer will lead the review, which will be:

- for programmes of 60 notional learning hours or less, a virtual panel including the **Skillsmark**® Associate Reviewer and subject expert
- for programmes of 60 notional learning hours or more, a visit to your premises by the **Skillsmark**® Associate Reviewer and subject expert
- for Higher Education programmes, a visit to your premises by the **Skillsmark**® Associate Reviewer.

When a virtual panel takes place the **Skillsmark**® Associate Reviewer will contact the programme lead to carry out a professional discussion.

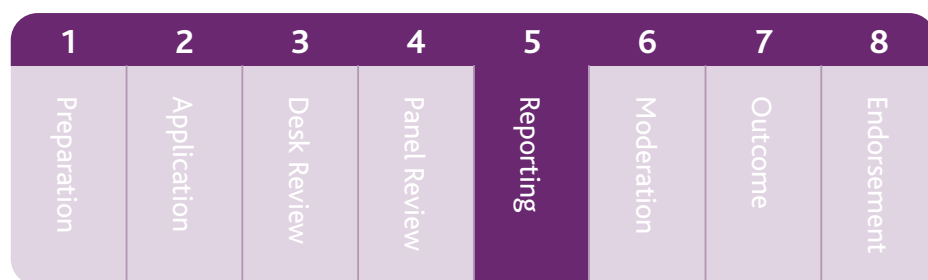
Where the review panel visits your premises, the **Skillsmark**® Associate Reviewer and subject expert⁸ will speak to a range of programme staff, learners and representative employers, which may include some telephone interviews.

The **Skillsmark**® Associate Reviewer will agree the date of the review visit, and the programme for the day in consultation with you. In planning the review visit, the **Skillsmark**® Associate Reviewer may request additional evidence prior to the visit or request that it is made available on the day of the visit. You should identify a responsible person to manage the programme for the day and ensure those persons identified to speak to the review panel are available.

At the end of the visit, the **Skillsmark**® Associate Reviewer will summarise the evidence seen in relation to the essential aspects. However, at this stage, the **Skillsmark**® Associate Reviewer will not give you the outcomes of judgments relating to individual questions or the overall result.

⁸ Excluding Higher Education applications

The Process



Step 5: Reporting

Once the panel review is complete the **Skillsmark®** Associate Reviewer will, in consultation with the subject expert, draft a report summarising their findings and judging the extent to which your programme meets the requirements of the quality framework.

The **Skillsmark®** Associate Reviewer will make a judgment against each of the questions of the quality framework and one overall judgment. Where the evaluation of any question results in a judgment of 2 or 3 the overall judgment is at the lowest level ie Deferred or Not Endorsed.

The **Skillsmark®** Associate Reviewer will arrive at one of three possible judgments:

1. Endorsed

The requirements of the quality framework have been met. Any minor deficiencies identified that do not have an impact on the overall effectiveness of the programme will be reflected in the report under 'scope for further enhancement' but will not be subject to further review

2. Deferred

Some requirements of the quality framework have been met but there are significant deficiencies. Significant deficiencies will be reflected in the report as 'requirements' and will be subject to further review within a maximum timeframe of six months⁹. 'Scope for further enhancement' may also feature in the report but will not be subject to further review

3. Not Endorsed

Most or all requirements of the quality framework have not been met. The programme is not endorsed

Once completed, the **Skillsmark®** Associate Reviewer will send the draft report to the **Skillsmark®** team for quality assurance and editing.

⁹ A charge will be made for further review, variable depending upon whether the **Skillsmark®** team undertakes the review or a further review visit is required

The Process



Step 6: Moderation

The **Skillsmark®** team will review the draft report, including the judgments made and the issues raised. In reviewing the draft report, the **Skillsmark®** team will:

- ensure judgments are consistent, fair and accurate
- ensure judgments are clear and evidence-based
- ensure consistency between **Skillsmark®** Associate Reviewers
- make any corrections to grammar and spelling.

The draft report may at this stage be referred back to the **Skillsmark®** Associate Reviewer for further work.

Once the **Skillsmark®** team is satisfied with the draft report it undergoes a final independent review and sign off by a Skills for Justice Director.

The Process

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Preparation	Application	Desk Review	Panel Review	Reporting	Moderation	Outcome	Endorsement

Step 7: Outcome

The **Skillsmark**[®] team will send you an electronic copy of the draft report for a factual accuracy check. You have a time-limited period to identify any errors in factual accuracy and notify the **Skillsmark**[®] team. If you do not respond to the request to verify factual accuracy within the specified timeframe, the **Skillsmark**[®] team will assume that you are content with the factual accuracy of the report.

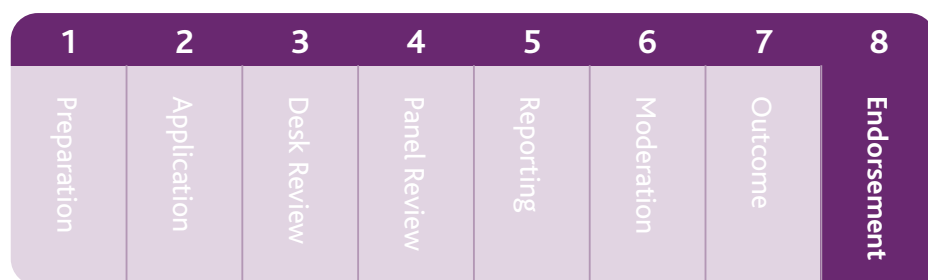
Once any factual accuracy adjustments have been made to the draft report, it will be finalised and sent to you electronically. The final report will set out the findings of the review panel and confirm the judgments made.

Where a deferred judgment has been made, you have up to six months within which to present evidence to demonstrate that the issues identified have been addressed. It is your responsibility to provide such evidence within the timeframe¹⁰. Should you not provide evidence within the timeframe, or if evidence provided does not demonstrate a resolution of issues, the programme will be judged as 'Not Endorsed'.

In instances where a programme is judged as 'Not Endorsed' you would need to make a fresh **Skillsmark**[®] application.

¹⁰ The **Skillsmark**[®] team will not send you reminders to this effect

The Process



Step 8: Endorsement

The outcome of the **Skillsmark®** process will give you:

- a rigorous assessment of your programme
- an independent, expert view on the quality of your programme and its relevance to employers in the sector
- a feedback report summarising the extent to which your programme meets the requirements of the **Skillsmark®** quality framework
- an opportunity to promote your learning programme to employers in the Justice and Community Safety sector.

Your programme will be endorsed for three years and will be entered onto the Skills for Justice e-directory at www.skillsforjustice.com/skillsmark. The information provided by you in your application form will be used to complete your entry into the e-directory and you will be asked to verify the accuracy of that information.

You will be able to use the **Skillsmark®** logo for learning providers on your programme materials and guidelines will be provided on its use.

Skills for Justice will also promote your endorsed **Skillsmark®** programme in its publications for employers across the UK.

Providing Evidence

The type of evidence that you present to support your application can be wide and varied, depending on how you manage your programme. However, it should be appropriate and support your response to each essential aspect. This section gives you some suggestions of the types of evidence that may be appropriate to support your application. It is for guidance purposes only; it is not exhaustive, it is not mandatory and it may not be appropriate in all cases.

Each question within the quality framework is replicated below with a list of possible sources of evidence under each question. No priority is given to the examples shown.

Analysis

Sources of evidence might include:

- business plan
- commissioning document
- correspondence with employers
- employers' consultation on specific requirements
- external qualifications: contextualisation needs
- identification and use of relevant external benchmarks
- identification and use of relevant National Occupational Standards
- minutes of meetings with employers
- module descriptors
- needs analysis (sector-wide or within specific organisation)
- programme plan
- programme specification
- validation documentation

Design and development

Sources of evidence might include:

- agreement of programme with employer(s)
- assessment strategy
- design process audit trail
- design process map
- examples of learning materials
- examples of programme materials and activities
- module descriptors
- programme design policy
- programme plan
- programme specification
- review of learning materials
- session plans
- sign off process
- teaching resources
- validation documentation

Delivery

Sources of evidence might include:

- assignments
- examples of CPD activities
- examples of how technology is used
- examples of information and guidance provided to staff
- examples of learner feedback
- examples of learning activities
- list of resources
- list of staff identifying their responsibilities to the programme
- observation reports
- organisation plan showing management of programme
- performance reviews
- policy and process on providing feedback and supporting evidence
- programme plan
- programme specification
- programme team meeting agendas and minutes
- qualifications and experience of staff/CVs
- records of tutor/trainer observations
- reviews of tutor/trainer performance
- session observations
- session plans
- staff development policy
- task briefings
- task sheets/assignments
- training policy

Assessment of learners¹¹

Sources of evidence might include:

- appeals procedure
- assessment plan linked to learning outcomes
- assessment strategy
- assessment tasks/activities and information provided to learners
- awarding body approval, verification and/or moderation reports
- computer file security
- examination protocols
- examples of assessment methods
- examples of assessment records
- examples of internal verification and moderation
- examples of learner feedback
- guidance on assessment to tutors and trainers
- information to learners on assessment
- learning outcomes/assessment criteria
- marking schemes; pass/fail criteria
- policy relating to plagiarism and cheating
- reports from external examiners
- sampling plan

Review and evaluation

Sources of evidence might include:

- agenda, minutes and actions of management meetings showing need for change identified and acted upon
- analysis of employer and learner feedback
- analysis of learner achievement data
- audit trail of programme improvements
- daybooks
- evaluation plan
- evaluation strategy
- examples of employer and learner feedback
- examples of learner achievement data
- examples of tutor/trainer feedback
- internal and/or external quality assurance reports
- list of changes
- programme team review process and supporting evidence
- review minutes
- review reports
- version control system

¹¹ Not applicable to Higher Education

Code of Conduct

Skillsmark® Associate Reviewers

Skillsmark® Associate Reviewers are trained and approved by Skills for Justice and have the expertise and experience to review education and training provision.

Both Skillsmark® Associate Reviewers and subject experts will uphold high professional standards throughout their work and carry out the review according to the requirements of the Skillsmark® quality framework and the guidance provided to them.

In carrying out their reviews, Skillsmark® Associate Reviewers and subject experts will:

- adhere to the principles of diversity
- base their judgments on clear and robust evidence
- be fully prepared for the reviews they undertake
- be impartial and objective
- be open and transparent in the way they work
- communicate clearly and openly with you
- have no connection with you which may undermine their objectivity
- keep requests for evidence to a realistic minimum
- report honestly, fairly and impartially
- respect the confidentiality of all information received during the course of the review
- work with integrity, courtesy and sensitivity.

How you should engage with Skillsmark® Associate Reviewers

For the review of your application to be productive you should:

- enable the Skillsmark® Associate Reviewer to conduct their review in an open and honest way
- provide evidence that will enable the Skillsmark® Associate Reviewer to report reliably about your programme
- respect that the Skillsmark® Associate Reviewer may talk to staff, learners and employers without the presence of the programme lead
- work with the Skillsmark® Associate Reviewer to minimise disruption.



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May 10/V1/PDF