Review of Verifiers Management and Recording of Training and Development

Scottish Government
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Contents

Executive Summary

Introduction

1.   The building standards system in Scotland is intended to protect the public interest by setting out the standards to be met when building work or a conversion takes place, to the extent necessary to meet the building regulations. The 32 Scottish local authorities have been appointed as verifiers to provide independent checking of building work at design and construction stages.

2.   Following a report by the Compliance and Enforcement review Panel, the Scottish Government, Building Standards Division launched its workforce strategy in October 2020 to strengthen the resilience of the building standards service. As part of the workforce strategy, a Competency Assessment System (CAS) for building standards staff was developed. The CAS provides a consistent set of competencies that are linked to relevant training and work-based learning options to support attainment.

3.   The aim of the study is to investigate how the recording of training needs identified through the CAS is managed and how the current systems and processes can inform the development of a learning and development hub for the building standards profession.

Approach

4.   The research comprised two main components. First, an online survey of building standards managers was undertaken to understand the current (pre-CAS) processes and systems for recording training and development needs and to understand their initial experiences of using the CAS toolkit. A total of 13 authorities responded to the survey.

5.   Second, a series of discussions were held with eight local authorities and the Improvement Service to explore in more depth how the CAS can be incorporated into wider local authority systems and any improvements that could be made for its online delivery.

Current Process for Identifying, Recording and Addressing Training Needs

6.   All 13 local authorities undertake an annual review to identify the training and development needs of building standards staff. These reviews use generic local authority forms which are usually completed by the employee on a self-completion basis before a face-to-face meeting with their manager. The role of human resources (HR) in the process is relatively limited, but HR can play a monitoring role to ensure the reviews are undertaken.

7.   Some authorities consolidated training and development needs into a 'training plan', but this was not universal.

8.   Training and development needs tend to be formally recorded in the specific local authority appraisal form and most authorities use Microsoft Office packages for

storing the information e.g., Word, Excel. One authority has a more integrated system which includes an online appraisal form. Most authorities referred to authority-wide software which usually relates to payroll and other HR processes, but which can sometimes be linked to mandatory training needs.

9. For most authorities, ensuring training needs are addressed is the joint responsibility of the member of staff and their line manager. The majority of responding authorities identified a role for a central corporate learning and development team, although there were some qualifications surrounding their role. This team usually had a role in the delivery of mandatory corporate training.

10. Responding authorities were asked to rate their existing processes and systems in terms of how well they meet building standards needs on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is very poorly and 5 is very well. While authorities' views on current systems were mixed, the average ratings of the current systems are:

    ■   Identifying training needs – 3.4

    ■   Recording training needs – 2.9

    ■   Addressing training needs - 3.1

11. The results show that the current systems are better at identifying training and development needs than recording or addressing training and development needs. Some of the shortfalls of existing systems include:

    Identifying Needs

    ■   The process can be overly complicated and cumbersome.

    ■   There are no core building standards competencies to assess against.

    Recording Needs

    ■   System does not allow a comparison of needs and compilation of an overall list.

    ■   Training needs can be lost if the form is not used as a live document.

    ■   Needs are sometimes recorded in multiple locations.

    Addressing Needs

    ■   There is a lack of building standards specific training opportunities with corporate courses tending to be generic.

    ■   Training is not always delivered without tracking and constant progress checks.

CAS Process

12.   Approximately half of respondents to the online survey had undertaken assessments using the new CAS. Respondents generally found the assessment planning and agreement stage to be fairly straightforward although it could be very time consuming. The templates for the different roles were helpful, but needed to be tweaked to reflect specific authority needs.

13.   Concerns were expressed about the amount of evidence required and the need to balance the volume of evidence with sufficient evidence to validate competency. Not all respondents had completed the full CAS process, but the assessment, decision making and recording of outcomes were felt to be structured processes, although it was highlighted that it is monitoring that is important and will make the difference.

14.   Authorities were asked to rate how they think the new CAS fits into their existing processes and systems for identifying, recording and addressing training and development needs on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is very poorly and 5 is very well. No authority gave a rating of 1 (very poor) with the average ratings shown below:

  ■   Identifying training needs – 3.8

  ■   Recording training needs – 3.8

  ■   Addressing training needs – 3.5

15.   The benefits of the CAS process related to the job specific roles being clearly defined and the template providing a means of identifying training needs, the type of training required and when the training has been completed.

16.   On the negative side, there were concerns over the amount of time required to complete the process, the potential for duplication of existing processes in some authorities and the lack of specific training available to address the identified needs.

Integration with Existing Systems

17.   The majority of consultation authorities hoped to consolidate the information relating to skills gaps and identified training needs into a 'master' spreadsheet to allow the training needs of the team to be integrated into a training plan. It was generally felt that the CAS process can fit relatively easily into the local authority systems. CAS cannot replace the annual appraisal process as this deals with matters other than just building standards competency, but it can feed into the overall process.

18.   Where HR representatives were involved in the discussions, there was generally positive feedback regarding the integration of CAS outputs into existing processes and systems. However, the time-inputs required for completion and the complexity of the spreadsheet were suggested as being off-putting.

19. CAS training needs should fit into authority processes for delivering training, but concerns were raised about who would pay for training with substantial variation across authorities in the availability of training budgets.

Future Improvements to CAS

20. There was general support for the digital delivery of CAS with a digital version suggested as being important given the size and complexity of the existing version. A number of suggestions for improvements were made including making some of the processes quicker (e.g., a function for completing multiple cells with the same information rather than entering the information in every cell), development of a database for collating overall training needs and linking the assessment worksheet to the skills gap worksheet to pull information from one to the other.

21. It was suggested that an assessment would be required to determine the cost effectiveness of digitising the CAS spreadsheet with initial discussions suggesting that could be a substantial task and software may have to be developed to consolidate the outputs from CAS.

22. All authorities have e-learning platforms which are used to deliver corporate learning courses. There was variation in the platforms used, but there is some ability to deliver e-learning. Not all these platforms 'talk' to each other, but it was suggested that workarounds could often be found if outputs could be produced in excel. However, having systems which could be linked automatically would be preferred.

23. Overall, there was general agreement that a digital system would fit within their existing systems.

Learning and Development Hub

24. Almost all authorities felt that CAS provides a platform for the development of a learning and development hub as it could enable the documentation of training and development needs and the bringing together of these needs across authorities. The CAS provides the opportunity to identify topics where training is required and where there is a shortfall in provision. These topics could be covered by on-line learning via learning and development hub modules and matched to an individuals identified training gaps.

25. CAS was generally considered to be good opportunity for the centralised management and ownership of learning delivery with the benefits identified as being structured training, economies of scale in delivering training, consistency of training across Scotland and the flexibility that online delivery can offer.

26. Development of the hub will require decisions on where to focus resources and the type of training and development required e.g., briefing papers, event, e-learning courses, discussion groups etc. Different issues will arise depending on the type of training to be delivered. It was suggested that approaches to delivering e-learning are changing with different formats and more creative use of technologies to deliver content e.g., videos with workshops, more 'bite-sized' content.

27. A few concerns (from supportive respondents) were raised about the hub including how it would be funded and the need for authorities to be upfront about their training needs and skills gaps. However, there was not universal support for the hub. All authorities are appointed as verifiers in their own right but are resourced differently and have different needs. It was suggested that if a national building standard service is needed, then there should be a national service. Competency had not been an issue before and there were other matters to address before competency.

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 The building standards system in Scotland was established by the Building (Scotland) Act 2003. The system is intended to protect the public interest by setting out the standards to be met when building work or a conversion takes place, to the extent necessary to meet the building regulations. The building standards are intended to:

- Secure the health, safety, welfare and convenience of persons in or about buildings and of others who may be affected by buildings or matters connected with buildings.
- Further the conservation of fuel and power.
- Further the achievement of sustainable development.

1.1.2 Verifiers are appointed by Scottish Ministers to provide independent checking of building work at design and construction stages. Their main functions are providing an independent check of applications for building warrants, granting/refusing building warrants, using reasonable inquiry to provide an independent check of construction activities and accepting/rejecting completion certificates. The 32 Scottish local authorities have been appointed as verifiers for their own geographical area.

1.1.3 Following a report prepared by the Compliance and Enforcement Review Panel, the Scottish Government launched its workforce strategy. The aim of the workforce strategy is to strengthen the resilience of the building standards service to deliver a first class verification service by developing the workforce to ensure it has the necessary skills and experience to carry out the verification role and be given the opportunity to gain relevant qualifications.

1.1.4 The workforce strategy is based around four themes with a shared commitment to timely and accurate data reporting. The themes being:

- A sustainable workforce.
- A skilled workforce.
- A professional framework.
- A profession for everyone.

1.1.5 As part of the skilled workforce theme, the strategy includes the development of a Competency Assessment System (CAS) for building standards staff. The CAS provides a consistent set of competencies that are linked to relevant training and work-based learning options to support attainment.

1.1.6 The CAS is supported by a self-assessment competence matrix which is used to define the level of competence required for different building standards job roles. The CAS provides a structure for all job roles, skills, qualifications and experience requirements for building standards professionals. It sets out a clearly defined career pathway and identifies the skills and experience needed to progress into more senior roles.

1.1.7 All staff involved in building standards service delivery should be covered by the competency matrix. The CAS enables individuals to identify their skills gaps and find learning and development opportunities to expand their competencies and achieve accredited qualifications for their career progression. The findings from the completion of the competency matrix will support the development of training courses and modules to fill any skills gaps identified.

1.2   Study Aims

1.2.1 The study is seeking to investigate how the recording of training needs identified through the CAS is managed and how the systems and processes can inform the development of a learning and development hub for the building standards profession. The specific objectives of the project are to:

- ■   Gather evidence from verifiers about the existing local government training recording systems.
- ■   Describe the current processes and systems that are used to manage, deliver and record training for staff in local authorities.
- ■   Identify how specific training for the building standards profession identified in the CAS can be incorporated into existing processes and systems.
- ■   Identify improvements to the delivery of the CAS that will form the basis of a future options appraisal for a digital solution.

1.3   Methodology

1.3.1 There were two main components to the research:

- ■   An online survey of local authority building standards managers.
- ■   A series of consultations with a sample of local authorities and other stakeholders.

1.3.2 The online survey was undertaken to understand the current (pre-CAS) processes and systems for recording training and development needs. A link to an online survey was sent to all 56 building standards managers in Scotland with a request to participate in the survey. A copy of the questionnaire is contained in Annex A.

1.3.3 Thirteen local authorities responded to the survey including Angus, Argyll and Bute, City of Edinburgh, East Renfrewshire, Highland, Moray, North Lanarkshire, Orkney Islands, Perth and Kinross, Renfrewshire, Scottish Borders, South Lanarkshire and West Lothian.

1.3.4 Following completion of the online survey, a sample of eight authorities were selected for more in-depth consultation. The purpose of these consultations was to explore in greater depth how the CAS can be incorporated into wider local authority systems and how it can be improved and delivered online.

1.3.5 The local authorities selected for this phase of the research were Angus, Argyll and Bute, City of Edinburgh, Moray, North Lanarkshire, Orkney Islands, Renfrewshire and West Lothian.

1.3.6 Further stakeholder engagement was also undertaken with the Improvement Service to understand any enhancements that may be emerging to training and development systems and processes.

1.4 Report Structure

1.4.1 The remainder of the report is organised as follows:

- Section 2 provides a summary of local authority existing processes for identifying, recording and addressing training needs.

- Section 3 summarises the experience of the authorities that have undertaken some assessments using CAS.

- Section 4 presents the results from the consultations.

2. Overview of Existing Processes

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 This section sets out the current processes for recording training and development needs for building standards staff and draws on the responses to the online survey.

2.2 Identifying Training and Development Needs

2.2.1 All 13 local authorities undertake an annual review to identify the training and development needs of building standards staff. These reviews can take a number of names including Performance Development Review (PDR) and Employment Review and Development Process (ERDP). Five authorities have a six-monthly review, one authority has a three-monthly review and one has follow-up where required.

2.2.2 All authorities used generic local authority forms as part of the review process. One authority can cross reference the form to RICS competencies where required and another can also consider core competencies, personal and professional issues and requirements.

2.2.3 The majority of authorities used the forms on a self-completion basis which were then discussed with a face-to-face follow-up. All authorities had face-to-face meetings. A couple of authorities highlighted that the review/appraisal would be "signed off" and checked by more senior managers e.g. the line managers manager. For most authorities the main people involved in the appraisal process are the member of staff and their line manager. This could be a team leader or building standards manager depending on the size and set-up of the building standards department. A couple of authorities highlighted that the training needs for building standards staff are collated and delivered as part of an annual training plan. One authority also highlighted that any training needs are also identified in their "skills audit" which is monitored on a regular basis.

2.2.4 The role of human resources (HR) in the process is limited but can vary across authorities. A few authorities indicated that HR played no role in the process, a few stated that HR played more of a monitoring role to ensure the reviews are undertaken and a few highlighted than HR would only be involved if advice or assistance is required. One authority had involvement from HR to setup the appraisal in specific[1] software.

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[1] Pentana Software. (It is understood that Pentana is being used as a performance management tool).

2.2.5 One authority commented that staff are continually monitored with workload reviews highlighting where possible shortcomings in professional competency are evident. Weekly team meetings are also being helpful in highlighting specific training needs. Another authority felt that the appraisal process was worthwhile in looking at competencies for the role, identifying skills gaps and putting action plans in place to address the gaps.

2.3 Process for Recording Training Needs

2.3.1 Training and development needs tend to be formally recorded in the specific local authority appraisal form. However, there was variation in terms of where these forms are stored. Some authorities retain this form within the building standards team while others store the forms in HR records/systems.

2.3.2 In terms of systems used, nine authorities referred to Microsoft Office packages (including SharePoint) with a few respondents identifying other software –Pentana, Resourcelink Online, People Connect and MyPeople. The latter three packages are understood to be HR software.

2.3.3 None of the packages used for recording training and development needs across all responding authorities are linked to any building standards specific software.

2.3.4 For the majority of respondents, these training and development needs are not shared elsewhere in the authority. One authority referred to information being stored within the wider service and another referred to information being shared with other services and corporately.

2.4 Responsibility for Addressing Training Needs

2.4.1 For most authorities, ensuring training needs are addressed is the joint responsibility of the member of staff and their manager. Occasionally the building standards manager/service manager may also be involved. One authority described internal training as being primarily "on the job" training with external training mainly delivered via LABSS and the consortia groups.

2.4.2 The responsibility for addressing training needs however, can vary depending on the type of training required and if there is a cost involved. Some respondents highlighted that external courses would have to be approved by the building standards manager and that it would be the responsibility of the manager to ensure that adequate budget is available. One example was provided of a manager having to seek support for training funding from the corporate learning and development team.

2.4.3 One authority noted that any requests for training which do not incur a cost are usually approved regardless of whether it has been approved during the performance appraisal. Another authority highlighted than all staff can request to attend any reasonable CPD event and that there was regular in-house training provided.

2.4.4   The majority of respondents (eleven) identified a role for a central corporate learning and development team, although there were some qualifications surrounding their role. A few respondents specified their a role as being the delivery of mandatory corporate training. One authority stated that corporate training was delivered remotely via the iLearn platform[2] while another authority made reference to an online training hub for generic, non-technical matters.

2.4.5   A further authority identified that the central learning and development team can arrange whole team training courses (e.g. working at heights) and were responsible for promoting apprenticeship schemes and attracting people to further education courses.

2.5   Recording Training Needs Identified Outside the Formal Appraisal Process

2.5.1   Of the 13 respondents, five stated that there was a process for recording training needs identified outside the formal appraisal process. These processes included:

■   Monitoring development and on-going discussions with individual and line manager.

■   Through routine policy and technical meetings there is the option to highlight areas of training identified through quality checking or other means.

■   Individual submitting a request form to manager to participate in a course.

■   Responses to service developments or LABSS/BSD e.g. related to new legislation .

■   Through the dedicated skills audit (created by the manager) and the continuing professional development (CPD) log.

2.5.2   For these respondents, there would be a record of this training on the performance appraisal form or the individual's training record. As with the main appraisal process, some forms are retained by the individual and manager while some are stored on HR systems. The packages referred to in paragraph 2.9 above are used with reference also made to the My View[3] system.

2.6   Updating Records when Training is Complete

2.6.1   Ten of the respondents described a process for updating records when training is complete. These generally included updating the individuals CPD record/ personal development plan through the appraisal process or updating their record through the HR system directly. One respondent identified a difference between the recording of internal and external training. Internal training is recorded on the authority's systems with external training recorded in the individuals CPD record.

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[2] This is understood to be a virtual learning environment for sharing resources.

[3] This is understood to be a web-based portal for viewing personal information.

2.6.2 One respondent stated that corporate training courses/events can be booked by individuals and signed off by the line manager using the My View system. A training record is provided and this is recorded in the individuals training record which the individual can access.

2.6.3 A further respondent stated that the skills audit and CPD records can be updated by the individual staff member on SharePoint. If applicable, resourcelink online is automatically completed if the training is linked to learning and development funding requests or the "always learning" online platform.

2.7 General Processes

2.7.1 Table 2.1 provides a summary of whether the processes for identifying, recording and addressing training needs are building standards specific or authority wide processes. Authorities are relatively evenly split between the processes being building standards specific or authority wide for identifying an recording training and development needs. Addressing training and development needs tends to be more building standards specific.

| Table 2.1: Summary of Processes for Identifying, Recording and Addressing Training Needs – Number of Respondents			
	Building Standards Specific	Authority Wide	Total
Identifying Training Needs	6	7	13
Recording Training Needs	8	5	13
Addressing Training Needs	9	4	13

2.7.2 Other comments made in relation to these processes included:

■ Using council wide templates but in a building standards specific way.

■ Using training plans from LABC for competency levels. These were considered beneficial in advance of CAS being introduced.

■ Area team leaders meetings provide opportunities to discuss specific or general training needs.

■ The RICS Assessment of Professional Competence process also identifies competency or skills gaps.

2.7.3 Respondents were asked to rate the current system in terms of how well they think it meets building standards needs on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is very poorly and 5 is very well. Figure 2.1 provides a summary of responses for each part of the process – identifying, recording and addressing training needs.

2.7.4 The Figure shows seven (54%) of respondents rate the current system for identifying their training needs as well or very well with three (23%) rating the system as poor or very poor. The current system for recording and addressing training needs was slightly less positive with six respondents giving a rating of four or five (it met needs well or very well). For recording training needs, five (38%) respondents rated the system as poor or very poor and for addressing training needs, four respondents (31%) rated the system as poor or very poor.

Figure 2.1: Summary of How Well Current Systems Meet Building Standards Needs

Current system for identifying training needs

Current system for recording training needs

Current system for addressing training needs
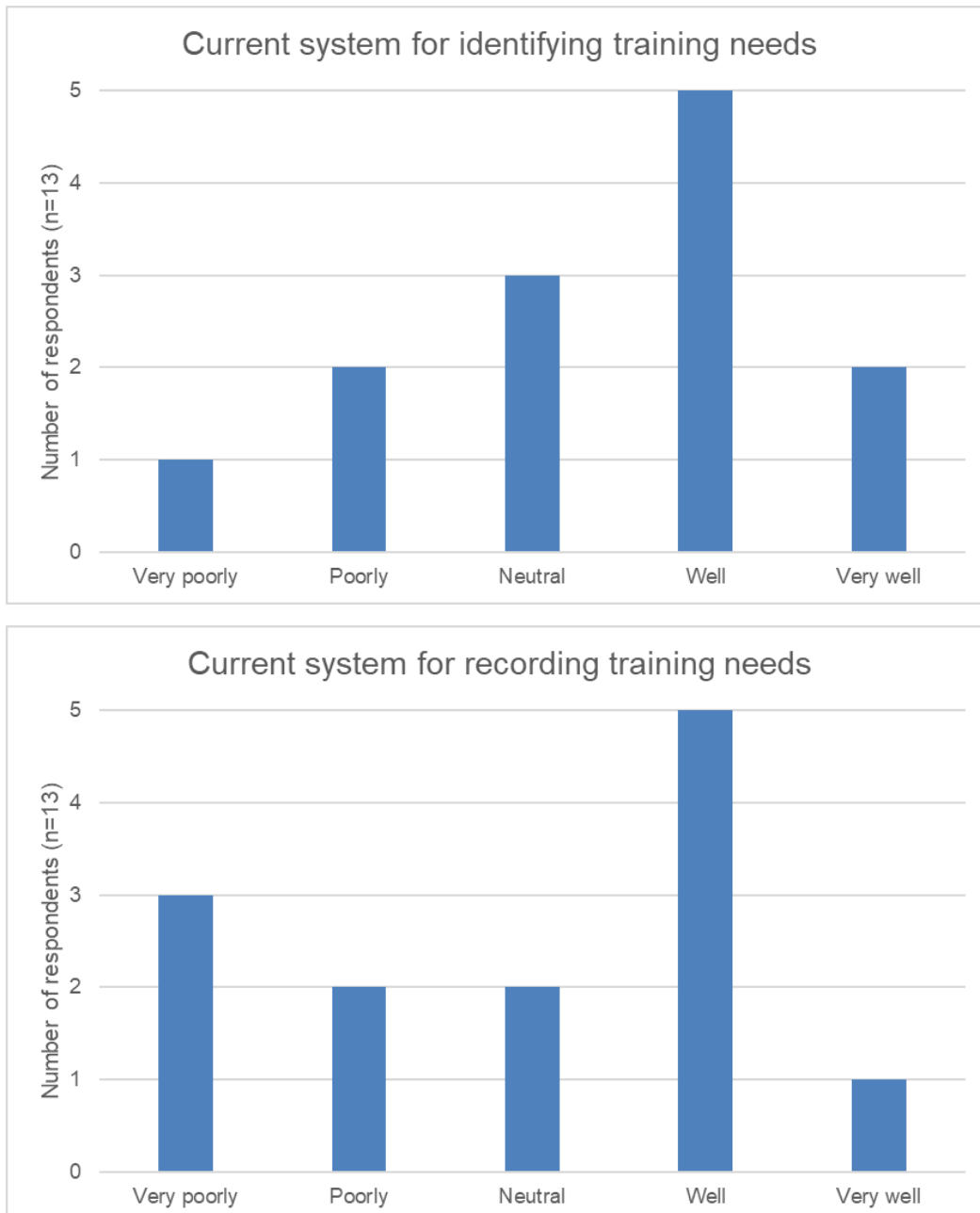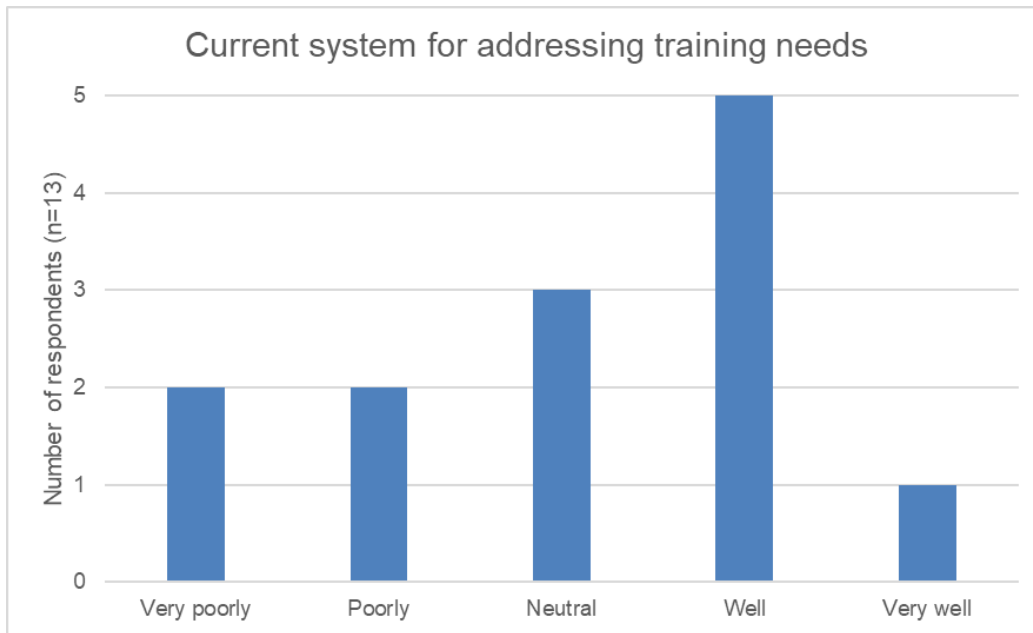
2.7.5 Figure 2.2 compares the average rating across each of the three stages of the current system. The results confirm that with an average value of 3.4, the current systems are better at identifying training needs then recording or addressing training needs with an average value of 2.9 and 3.1 respectively.

Figure 2.2: Comparison of Average Ranking for Each Component of Current System

Comparison of average rankings
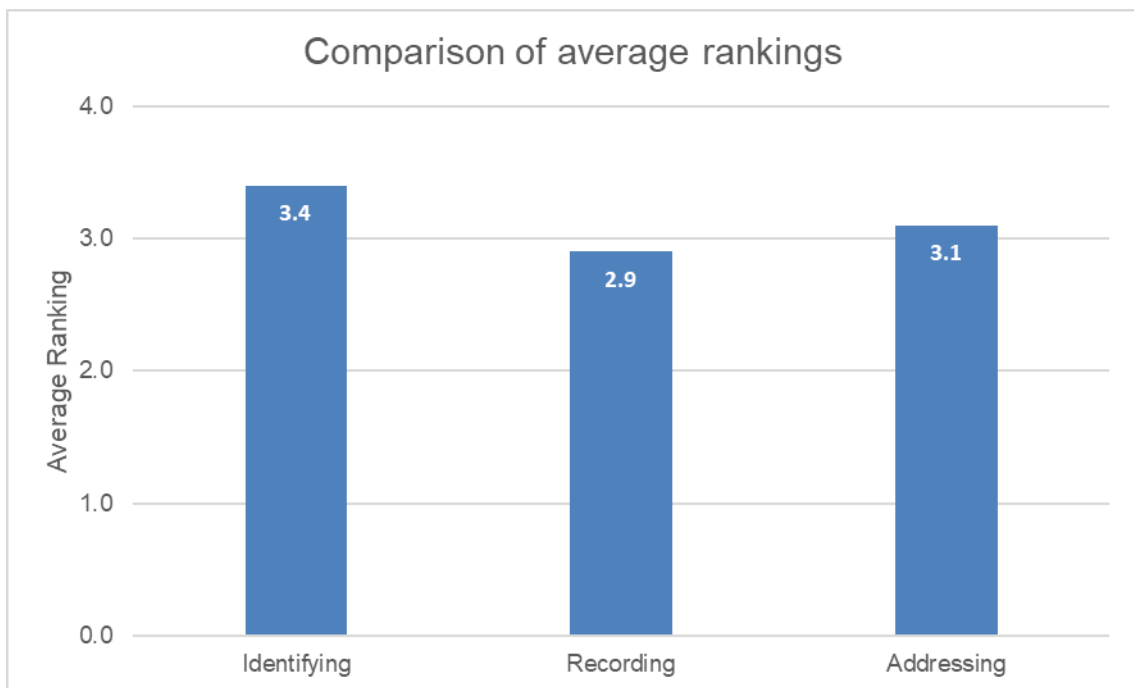
2.7.6 A number of strengths associated with the processes were identified by respondents from a building standards perspective. These are summarised under the relevant process – identifying, recording and addressing training and development needs.

Identifying Training Needs

■ The appraisal process provides a good opportunity for individuals to discuss issues with their line manager. It can be very productive in terms of identifying key areas to work on, although it was recognised that line managers do much of this work on a day-to-day basis. It was also suggested that the effectiveness of discussions was reliant on developing good personal relationships.

■ It is a simple, straightforward process that puts a focus on the need to discuss professional and personal development.

■ It encourages staff to identify any training needs.

Recording Training Needs

■ The discussions are recorded for reference and in some authorities entered into annual training plans.

■ It is a uniform system and process.

■ The system can easily record all activity.

■ The review/appraisal form can be used to pull all discussions together and provide a record.

Addressing Training Needs

■ Re-evaluation (at least annual) ensures identified training is carried out.

■ Helps ensure training needs are addressed, particularly with internal training.

■ It is day to day work and following a plan derived from the review process which provides results.

■ The service creates as 12 month learning and development priorities programme to highlight forthcoming needs.

2.7.7 A number of weaknesses associated with the processes were identified by respondents from a building standards perspective. These are summarised under the relevant process – identifying, recording and addressing training and development needs.

Identifying Training Needs

■ The process can be overly complicated and cumbersome.

■ Some individuals may not know what training they require and be reluctant to ask.

- It is not fluid as it is an annual process. It can be challenging to deal with rapid changes in industry or requirements from external sources e.g. post Grenfell or in response to Covid.

- There are no core building standards competencies to assess against. Assessment of competencies is dependent on the line manager and individuals discussions, but there can be inconsistencies across the whole team.

Recording Training Needs

- System does not allow comparison of needs and compilation of overall list. It also does not allow records to be "ticked off" when training complete.

- Where manual input is required by individual, it may not always be a top priority. It was suggested that sometimes CPD was not recorded as required within the local authority systems, but it was recorded for membership of professional bodies.

- Needs are sometimes recorded in multiple locations.

- Generic forms are not always suitable for building standards.

- Sometimes the training needs can be lost if the individual and manager do not use as a live document.

- There is no collective recording.

Addressing Training Needs

- There is a lack of building standards specific training opportunities with corporate courses tending to be generic.

- Training can sometimes be identified but not always delivered. Tools are required to ensure training happens.

- It requires constant monitoring.

- Without tracking and constant progress checks, needs can sometimes drop from "to do" lists.

- Only training on a "pre-approved" list can be signed off but in an ever-changing industry it is always new subject matters which require training. These subject matters are not covered by the "approved" list of courses. The central learning and development team have limited understanding of building standards.

3. CAS Process

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 This section sets out the experience of respondents who have undertaken some assessments using the new CAS and toolkit.

3.2 Strengths of New CAS Process

3.2.1 Just under half of the respondents (46%) reported that they had undertaken assessments using the new CAS. These six respondents were then asked to identify what aspects of the process worked well in relation to the five steps of the CAS process. The responses provided at each stage are summarised below, but it should be noted that not all respondents provided an answer relating to each step:

3.2.2 **Assessment planning and agreement:** feedback suggested that respondents had generally found this step to be fairly straightforward. However, some respondents felt it was very time-consuming. It was helpful to have a generic template for all levels of staff, but one respondent felt that *"*Each LA requires to carefully consider the Competency Framework and develop their own approach. Critical to do this and to engage with all employees in the process*."*

3.2.3 **Evidence gathering by candidate:** a couple of respondents thought this step was straightforward. However, there was some concern over this step of the process which is explored below in paragraph 3.3.3.

3.2.4 **Assessment***:* the responses indicated that this step is regarded as working well with one respondent stating that "[The] Template is beneficial especially for members of staff starting in [their] career and working through grades*."*

3.2.5 **Assessment and decision making**: a couple of respondents reported that this step offered a structured approach. One LA stated that this step was "In progress but intended outcome is a BS Training Plan. As a result, there may be representations to BSD/LABSS for support in developing 'national training and development issues*."*

3.2.6 **Recording outcomes**: again, a couple of respondents reported that this step offered a structured approach. One respondent made the point that they had *"*Recorded the outcome but it is monitoring this that is important and how we do that which will make the difference."

3.3 Weaknesses of New CAS Process

3.3.1 The survey asked what aspects of the process did not work as well as expected in relation to the five steps of the CAS process. The responses provided at each stage are summarised below, but not all respondents provided an answer relating to each step and one respondent noted that each step would be evaluated in due course with the team and through LABSS.

3.3.2 **Assessment planning and agreement**: a few respondents felt that this step was time and labour-intensive, with one respondent concerned that there are too many boxes to populate making the process too screen intensive. The process is challenging for people who are colour blind/suffer from migraines.

3.3.3 **Evidence gathering by candidate**: a couple of respondents felt that this step of the CAS resulted in little specific evidence being provided by candidates, but rather an 'agreement in principle' is made. One respondent felt this step to be "*Time consuming and cumbersome. Level of information required and document is extensive and we have had time issues trying to do this. Will be easier for new recruits working way up as can gather as they go rather than do it retrospectively.*"

3.3.4 **Assessment**: again, a couple of respondents felt this step was time-consuming and noted that there was some duplication of information between the CAS assessment and the staff appraisal process.

3.3.5 **Assessment and decision making**: respondents did not make comments specific to this step.

3.3.6 **Recording outcomes**: a couple of respondents repeated concerns that the process is time-consuming. One respondent felt that while the spreadsheet was useful at present, they would like to see it integrated into a software package for ease of use and reporting.

3.4 Overall Assessment of New CAS Process

3.4.1 Respondents were asked to rate how well they think the new CAS and toolkit fit into their existing processes for identifying, recording and addressing training and development needs on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is very poorly and 5 is very well. Figure 3.1 provides a summary of responses for each part of the process – identifying, recording and addressing training needs[4].

3.4.2 The Figure shows that respondents rated the CAS and toolkit fairly positively in terms of the fit with existing processes for identifying and recording training needs with over half stating they fit well or very well. The Figure also shows the fit into existing processes for addressing training and development needs is rated slightly lower with over half of respondents in this case having selected poor or a neutral response.

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[4] n=8 - This includes 5 responses from those respondents who stated they had undertaken assessments using the new CAS and 3 responses from respondents who stated they had not yet undertaken assessments but felt able to answer the question.

Figure 3.1: Summary of How Well New CAS Fits within Existing Processes

CAS fit with processes for identifying training needs

CAS fit with processes for recording training needs

CAS fit with processes for addressing training needs
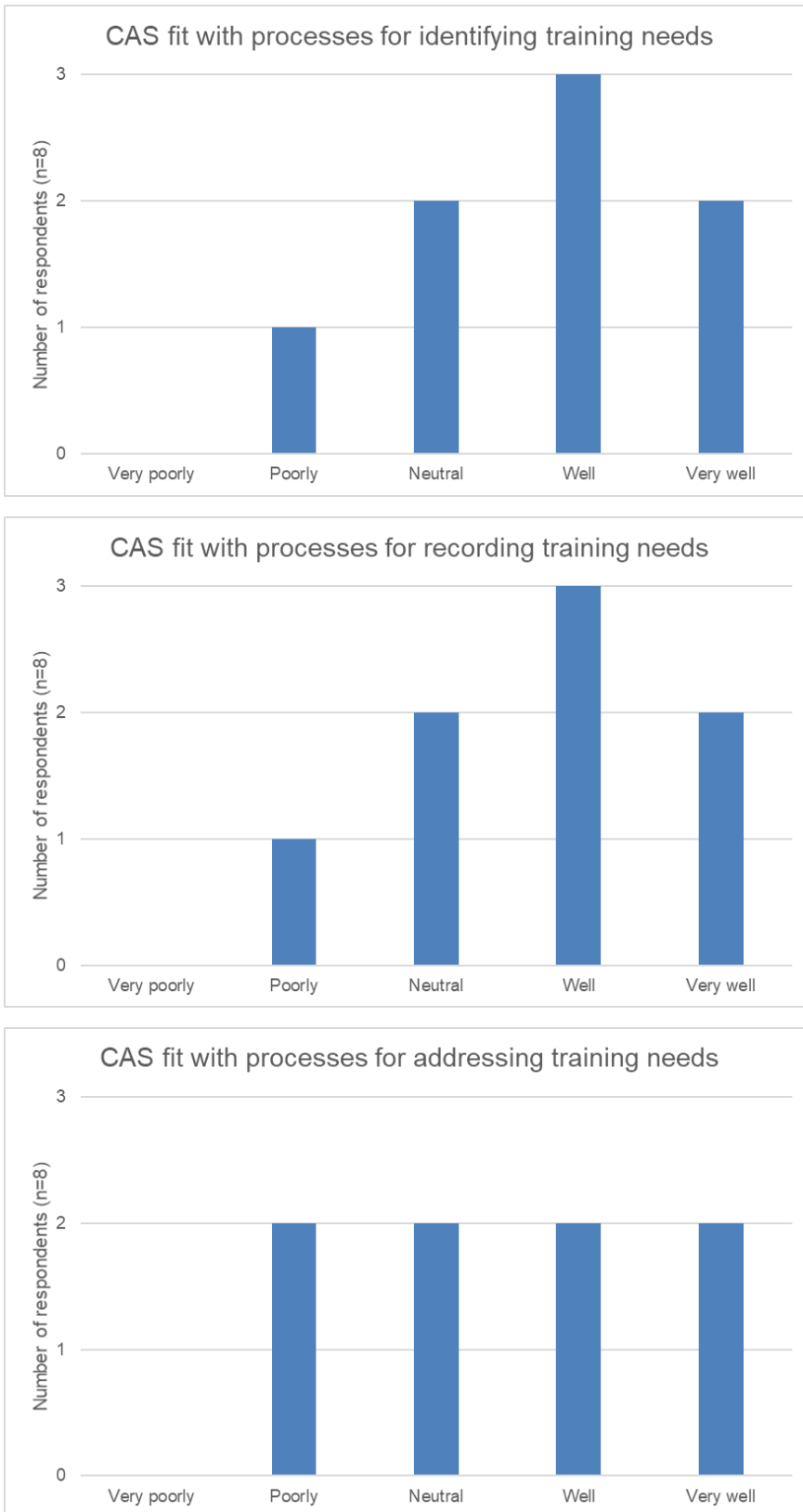
3.4.3 Figure 3.2 compares the average rating across each of the three stages of the current system. The results confirm that with an average value of 3.8, the new CAS process is a better "fit" with current systems when it comes to identifying and recording training needs. In terms of addressing training needs, the CAS had an average rating of 3.5.

Figure 3.2: Comparison of Average Ranking for Fit of CAS with Current System
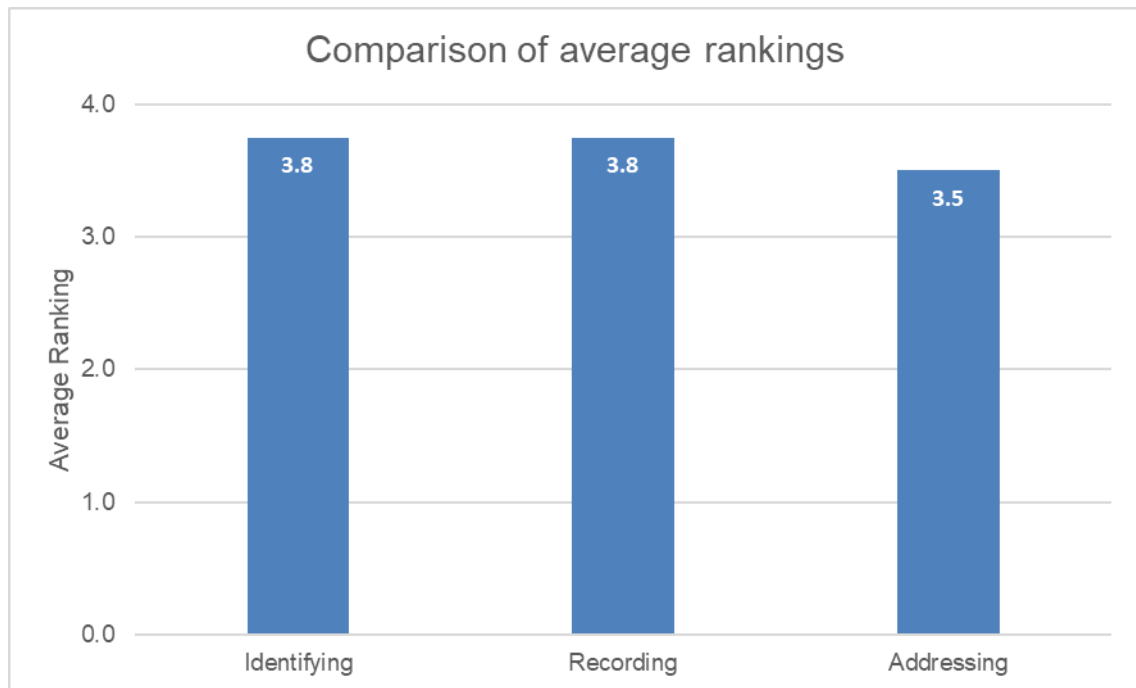
3.4.4 The survey sought to explore the reasons for the selected rankings above. The analysis is presented across all three stages of identifying, recording and addressing training and development needs as there were several duplicate answers across the three stages.

3.4.5 Respondents rating the fit of the CAS and toolkit positively offered reasons relating to the clarity and usefulness of the template:

*"*It takes what we do presently and extends to give a standard template for us to follow."

"Job specific roles are clearly defined with all elements of relevant technical standards taken into consideration."

"The template provides a user-friendly key to identify training needs, the type of training required, and when that training has been completed."

"The CAS is broken down in a way that leaves nothing out in terms of our role and therefore it is very straightforward to follow in this regard - if a colleague has noted fully achieved then they can demonstrate how they have achieved

that aspect, however if they haven't, following discussions with that colleague training can be easily identified on what is needed to fully achieve that aspect."

"The CAS system is good, it just needs to be applied flexibly."

3.4.6   Respondents rating the fit of the CAS and toolkit less positively offered the following reasons:

"Duplicates existing processes[5], overly time-consuming and removes some of the Line Managers' autonomy."

"Difficult to fully assess at this time. The process is too protracted and our Service has as yet not completed the assessment for the full establishment."

"Lack of specific training available [to address training needs]."

3.4.7   The survey concluded by asking the respondents if they would like to make any further comments on the CAS and its toolkit. The responses are summarised below by theme:

General support for CAS

■   "A very well-developed plan to ensure staff have the relevant competencies to undertake their respective duties, identify and record training needs."

■   "CAS is a significant step forward in terms of identifying training needs that are specific to building standards."

■   "The CAS is an excellent development tool and puts building standards competency requirements at the core of the development process. It does require each LA to carefully consider how they implement the framework and engagement across the whole team is critical. To be successful, it is important that LAs,' BSD and LABSS support the delivery of training needs in terms of events/opportunities and also funding, although it should be recognised that development takes many forms, including support, mentoring rather than being solely training."

■   "The CAS although a considerable piece of work to complete is a very useful tool that helps verifiers set out training required - if this training can be identified nationally it could be more easily addressed instead of each verifier arranging their own training."

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[5] Note that the duplication of existing processes was only raised by one authority in the online survey

Complexity of CAS process

■ "The concept is sound; however, the process should be greatly simplified. I suspect, any process that relies on such a complex toolkit is not going to achieve any degree of National consistency. It has been stated several times that it can be adapted to suit local circumstances/structures/service priorities, I would suggest such a statement backs up my view. Building Standards teams across the Country are asked to engage in an ever-increasing range of tasks and duties - this process focuses only on competency re Building Standards."

■ "On first inspection of the CAS document and supportive guidance documents it appears way too complicated, lengthy and dare I say; not fit for purpose. The building standards management team have spent almost 2 days (x 2 TLs and 1 BS manager) trying to understand this new process. Assessing the professional competency of an individual within my team shouldn't take the 4hrs that LABSS say will be required per person to initially set the process running. In a team of 28 surveyors the new CAS process will take 14 days to complete."

Duplication of existing systems

■ "In principle this is supported in its very clear intent, however, each LA has its own processes and IF carried out fully, the CAS has not yet offered us real benefits for the time it takes all involved to complete. It would be ideal if it was the only competence system in place in an authority but we as an example now have a requirement which duplicates assessment, recording and monitoring which puts further strain on the other processes required of the Verifier."

4. Consultations

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The authorities listed in paragraph 1.13 were selected for further consultation. Authorities were asked if a human resources colleague could also participate in the consultation to provide a wider perspective. A consultation was also undertaken with the Improvement Service (IS). The main areas for discussion focused on:

■ The CAS process and its integration into existing systems.

■ How CAS could aid the delivery of training.

■ How CAS could aid the delivery of a learning and development hub.

■ Any suggestions for the future delivery of CAS particularly with regard to digital systems.

4.2 CAS Process and Integration with Existing Systems

4.2.1 As described in Section 2, the authorities participating in the consultation all undertook an annual performance review using generic local authority appraisal forms. Each authority had different names for these reviews, but for easy reference, this section will refer to these existing appraisal processes as PDRs (Performance Development Reviews).

4.2.2 All authorities recorded the output from the process in the individuals PDR form which was usually a Microsoft package. Some authorities consolidated training and development needs into a 'training plan', but this was not universal. Most of the consultation authorities felt the existing process worked well.

4.2.3 Seven of the authorities had undertaken some CAS assessments, although not all authorities had completed the whole process for their team. Consultees offered both positive and negative comments on their initial experience of CAS. The positive aspects of CAS include:

■ Giving one authority better awareness of the tasks involved in some standards which are not so relevant to a smaller authority.

■ Providing a more structured and strategic approach to identifying training needs.

■ Providing a comprehensive breakdown of competencies on the technical side.

■ Providing good templates.

4.2.4 In terms of negative aspects, the following points were made:

■ Almost all consultees stated that CAS is very time consuming.

■ A few consultees mentioned issues with evidence gathering. A question was raised about what should be provided and how much evidence is required. There was concern that more senior officers prove competency through their day-to-day work but that can be difficult to evidence. One consultee felt that little evidence was provided and there was 'agreement in principle' that a competency was achieved while another suggested that individuals felt they achieved the competency but could not provide evidence to substantiate the point. One consultee felt that there was sufficient guidance on what evidence was required but there needs to be a balance between having large volumes of evidence and having enough evidence to validate skills and experience.

■ A few authorities mentioned that customising the role profiles took a considerable amount of development work, but it was necessary to develop the profiles to suit the needs of the authority and its staff. There is a need to have different role profiles for different staff at the same level. For example, one authority had developed three profiles for its technicians while another felt they would need seven levels of profile to cover their team and be compatible with their risk assessment approach to building warrant applications and staff competencies.

■ It was suggested that further consideration be given to the wording of some parts of the CAS toolkit. Some parts ask if there is an awareness of a certain regulation whereas others ask if there is knowledge of a certain regulation. This has resulted in having to determine what the "spirit of the question" is.

■ It is important that completing the CAS meets the needs of the person being assessed and is not just about completing the template.

■ A few teething troubles were identified including individuals not completing all the cells to identify their training need if a competency is not achieved.

■ It was suggested that the CAS process may be more useful for junior/less experienced members of staff.

4.2.5 More than half the authorities stated that they would consolidate the information relating to skills gaps and training needs identified in an individual's CAS spreadsheet into a 'master' spreadsheet identifying all training needs. For most, this will allow the overall training needs of the team to be integrated into a training plan. One authority highlighted that "common threads" are already emerging regarding training needs.

4.2.6 All authorities retain training and development needs information within the individuals' own assessments. While most authorities retain information on the training and development needs of their staff in Microsoft packages (e.g. Excel,

Word) within building standards, one authority had a more integrated system with their PDR form being an online form which could record skills gaps.

4.2.7   Most authorities referred to authority-wide software which usually relates to payroll and other HR processes (e.g. annual leave, flexi-time, absence etc.) but which can also be linked to training needs. When linked to mandatory training and development needs, these systems can track when training is undertaken and the benefit of including building standards specific training into this type of system was recognised. Software included iTrent, MyView, MySelf, Resourcelink online.

4.2.8   The extent to which training needs are currently monitored varied across authorities and the systems that they have in place. The authority using the online PDR form also has ISO accreditation and has developed systems to log and monitor training to meet the needs of ISO audits. Other authorities were more dependent on the individuals taking their training needs forward (possibly in conjunction with their manager) and there was often no function for monitoring and tracking training. One of the benefits of some of the HR systems referred to in paragraph 4.8 offer automatic tracking of mandatory training by sending remainder emails to managers when training is due/becomes overdue.

4.2.9   Individuals with professional membership are responsible for logging their own CPD and one consultee suggested that they receive prompts through this mechanism to compete the necessary CPD log. This might be an area worthy of further investigation i.e. how professional bodies manage the demonstration of professional competence by their members.

4.2.10   Opinions were mixed on whether the CAS process is a duplication of existing processes. Two of the authority consultees stated that they felt that CAS was a duplication of processes, reflecting the position that training needs were already being identified through the authorities PDR processes. Other authorities, where CAS was felt to not duplicate existing systems, referred to the CAS as enabling them to take forward issues relating to technical competencies. One authority described the process as being "complementary" with most training identified by the PDR process not being building standards specific. In these circumstances the CAS was seen as an enhancement of existing processes with a much more advanced toolkit. Another authority felt that CAS would enable them to re-start collating information on training needs which had stopped due to budget cutbacks.

4.2.11   It was generally felt that the CAS process can fit relatively easily into the existing local authority systems, although one authority has had to change the timings of the PDR process to allow the CAS assessment to be undertaken. One authority confirmed that the existing system is "person specific" which does not formally collate information across the team. CAS is also person specific but the skills gaps and training needs identified through the spreadsheet may make consolidation easier.

4.2.12   CAS cannot replace the PDR process as this deals with matters other than just building standards competency, but it can feed into the overall process.

4.2.13 Where a HR representative joined the consultations, the consultees felt that the CAS process fitted well with their systems. For example:

- ■ In one authority all training was authorised through the Organisational Development department. The outputs from CAS can easily fit into the PDR form and any training accessed and delivered through existing processes.

- ■ One authority felt that it fitted well with their workforce strategy and as building standards use the HR SharePoint platform, building standards can lead on CAS and still link the outputs to HR.

- ■ HR has moved payroll system to iTrent and there is a learning and development module that could be used to record training and development in the future. This would allow CAS to be tracked alongside the PDR outputs.

- ■ The CAS is a technical competencies assessment which is service led rather than the general competencies identified in the authority-wide PDR, but the two processes can work together. There are examples of other departments having their own competencies e.g., education and social work and these work well with the wider PDR process.

- ■ One authority felt that CAS provided a good set of professional competencies which would also be helpful for workforce planning. The toolkit had already proved useful in developing the job description in a recent recruitment process.

- ■ A more negative point was made in relation to CAS being too labour intensive with HR questioning the 'return' from the process. It was suggested there is a risk that, if not approached in the correct manner, CAS is too off-putting and complex. It would be easy to become too focused on the very specific parts of the technical guidance.

4.3   Delivering Training

4.3.1 There was substantial variation in the availability of training budgets. Some authorities have their own training budgets for building standards, some authorities are competing with other departments for their share of the service training budget and others do not have a specific training budget.

4.3.2 Most authorities rely on internal and CPD sessions (e.g., specialist seminars, toolbox talks, LABSS, suppliers/manufacturers talks etc.) on specific topics rather than formal external courses. Some training was also delivered through LABSS consortia groups using online methods. One authority had a training partnership with the Chartered Institute of Building and have had joint training via this route with other service areas within the authority. There were also examples of authorities sharing training with other authorities and with other services within their own authority to make the training more cost effective.

4.3.3 CAS training needs should fit into authorities processes for delivering training, but concerns were raised about who would pay for the training. One authority hoped to be able to use CAS to develop a business case to put to HR for external training

requests. One authority was also concerned about how training gaps will be addressed.

4.3.4 Authorities were not always clear on how training records would be updated using CAS. For most of the authorities, it was currently the responsibility of the individual to update their PDR and CPD records although this was an area which was being investigated by a number of authorities. For example.

■ HR in one authority has moved to a new payroll system which has a learning and development module. There is potential for this module to be used to record and monitor training and development in the future for both the PDR and CAS. It was also noted that HR send prompts to managers on matters unrelated to training and development such that this could possibly be developed for training and development matters.

■ HR are working in one authority to implement a different approach in building standards which would allow the service manager to access individual CPD requirements thus enabling more formal tracking using existing systems. It was not clear exactly how CAS would fit into this process.

■ One authority has a very streamlined process whereby the building standards manager identifies an appropriate supplier and applies to the training budget holder for funding. When the training is complete, the employees record on the payroll/HR system is automatically updated.

4.3.5 All authorities have a corporate learning and development team which facilitate wider training and development across the whole organisation. These courses tend to be mandatory courses for all employees and not technical courses specific to building standards e.g. data protection, customer service, understanding the council, general management. Most of these courses are delivered through an e-learning platform.

4.3.6 Where CAS identifies a more general training need, it could fit well with the corporate learning and development team courses. One authority referred to their digital build team who can develop online courses, but they felt it would not be cost effective for them to build e-learning courses for building standards. Another authority stated that HR had worked with some service teams to deliver service-specific modules as part of their e-learning offer.

4.3.7 One authority was also part of a partnership of authorities using the same e-learning platform and sharing some general training and development modules.

4.4   Learning and Development Hub

4.4.1 At present, there is no need to share training and development needs outside the authority and most authorities did not envisage a problem with this as long as it was only training themes/gaps and the general level of training that was shared i.e. there would be no need to identify a specific individual. One consultee suggested putting a data sharing agreement with external partners in place and ensuring staff were aware that any training and development needs could be collated and shared externally.

4.4.2 Almost all authorities felt that the CAS provides a platform for the development of a learning and development hub as it enables the documentation of training needs and the bringing together of these needs across authorities. The CAS provides the opportunity to identify topics where training is required and where there is a shortfall in provision. These topics could be covered by on-line learning via learning and development hub modules and matched to an individual's identified training gaps.

4.4.3 Developing the modules and linking to the CAS was recognised by one consultee as a substantial piece of work but suggested that the LABC hub in England and Wales may be helpful while another consultee questioned if there was any material from the Glasgow Caledonian University courses delivered by LABSS which could be used.

4.4.4 CAS was generally considered to be a good opportunity for the centralised management and ownership of learning delivery. The provision of any additional training was considered a positive with the benefits from a learning and development hub identified as:

■ Structured training and the ability to organise regular CPD events.

■ Economies of scale in delivery training.

■ Consistency of training across Scotland.

■ As more staff move to hybrid working, online delivery is necessary and offers more flexibility.

4.4.5 Although recognising the opportunity for a centralised learning and development hub, a couple of potential concerns were identified:

■ How would the hub be funded?

■ Authorities would have to be upfront about training needs and sharing skills gaps, but some authorities may not want to be seen as having skills gaps.

■ Issues around consistency in the application of the toolkit in different types of authorities with the needs of a city surveyor being different to those in a more rural authority.

■ The hub should not be too prescriptive.

4.4.6 There was not however, universal support for a learning and development hub amongst the consultees. It was suggested that there was no benefit from having a national perspective. All local authorities are appointed as verifiers in their own right, but all are resourced differently and have different needs. If a national building standards service is needed, then there should be a national service. It was felt that competency had not been an issue before and that there were other things that needed addressing before competency e.g. the lack of degree provision for building standards.

4.4.7   In terms of developing the learning and development hub, decisions are required on where to focus resources. Is it events, briefing papers, e-learning courses, discussion groups that are to be provided? The approach needs to reflect the topics required and the likely number of people using the resources.

4.4.8   Different approaches to learning delivery will generate different issues to consider. For example:

■   If developing an e-learning topic module, does the participant have to 'prove' knowledge at the end i.e. is an assessment/test required?

■   If holding a discussion forum, does the 'host' have the appropriate specialist knowledge?

4.4.9   Discussions suggested that approaches to delivering e-learning are changing with different formats and more creative use of technologies to deliver the content e.g. videos with workshops at the end, more "bite-size" content. Microsoft Teams has considerable functionality and would be compatible across authorities. It can cater for relatively large numbers of participants and can provide a record of participants.

4.5   Future Improvements to CAS Delivery

4.5.1   There was general support for the digital delivery of CAS with the following points raised as areas for improvement:

■   The CAS is very complex so a digital tool is almost a necessity. It would be good to link the CAS to training opportunities and solutions to meet any identified gaps.

■   A simplified version using a straightforward digital tool would be useful.

■   CAS has almost 700 lines of information for each profile and you have to go through each line during set-up, assessment and the discussion i.e. three clicks per line for 700 lines. Any process to make this quicker would be welcomed.

■   It would be good to have a function for completing multiple cells for "no training needed" instead of having to complete each individual cell. This is particularly relevant for more experienced staff who may have competence across all the lines of a particular standard.

■   The spreadsheet is good, but development of an Access database may be better for collating overall training needs.

■   It would be good to link the traffic light assessment spreadsheet within CAS to the skills gap spreadsheet so that information is pulled through from one to the other.

4.5.2   An assessment will be needed to determine whether it would be cost effective to digitise the CAS spreadsheet. Factors to consider include the number of entries per person, the number of people completing it and the frequency with which it is

completed. Initial discussions suggest that digitising the spreadsheet could be a substantial task and that software may have to be developed to consolidate the outputs from CAS.

4.5.3   A number of different e-learning and management platforms are used by authorities and one consultee suggested that not all platforms "talk" to each other, but as long as the system can produce outputs in excel, authorities should be able to bulk upload information. However, having systems which could be linked automatically would be preferred. There were limited suggestions of software/packages that could be used for the digital delivery of CAS, but the following were referred to by consultees:

- Firmstep (from Granicus) was used by one authority to manage the training budget which was previously held on Excel. Firmstep allows questions to be asked (useful for filtering) and can be linked automatically to email (to confirm training is approved) and finance (to generate a PO number). It is hoped to also link it to Resourcelink online which is used for recording training.

- Always Learning, iLearn and LEON were mentioned as systems for e-learning. The need to be able to access the platform from any computer was emphasised to support the move to flexible working.

4.5.4   There was however general agreement amongst authorities that a digital system would fit within their existing systems.

4.6   Final Comments

4.6.1   Most consultees were supportive of CAS, but made a number of final comments, both positive and negative. On the negative side:

- There is a danger that there is less scrutiny of the competency of managers as their line managers may be from another service and lack detailed building standards knowledge. This depends on the structure of the authority and where the building standard service sits with other services.

- It has taken a long time to go through the CAS process with the whole team, so PDRs have been delayed. If your CAS assessment was at the beginning of the process, it could be many months before any identified training is delivered.

- There are some concerns about the time and cost involved in implementing CAS, particularly for more junior staff. There is also no funding to support the roll-out.

- There is a need to recognise that assessing building warrants and site inspections are two different skill sets. There is a need to ensure that shadowing/mentoring provides the opportunity to understand what is happening on a site e.g. is a product being used correctly?

- It was hoped that any sharing of data would not be used to monitor authorities' completion of CAS.

- There is a potential public confidence issue if it comes to light that there are gaps in building standards services' knowledge and skills. Could gaps come to light that mean an authority is no longer able to meet its requirement as a verifier?

- It is a positive tool, but perhaps it could be more streamlined which would reduce the time commitment required to complete it.

- The current system is not reasonable and, in light of resources constraints, would you rather have people delivering the service or filling out a form?

4.6.2 In terms of positive comments, the following points were made:

- CAS deserves praise and meets a need for the service. It is a valuable addition to the authority-wide appraisal system and is more technically specific.

- It is important to sell the benefits of CAS to the team to encourage buy-in from staff.

- A digital solution may make it easier to identify common issues across authorities.

- CAS will bring benefits from the identification of skills gaps and the opportunity to deliver training solutions nationally.

- It is hoped that spending time and effort setting up CAS correctly in the first year will make it easier and quicker to use in future years.

- Hopefully, authorities will see progress in future years as training and development needs turn from red to amber then green.

Annex A   Local Authority Building Standard Managers Survey

Local Authority Survey: Review of Verifiers Management and Recording of Training and Development

Introduction

Optimal Economics has been appointed by the Building Standards Division (BSD) of the Scottish Government to undertake a review of the management and recording of the training needs of verifiers to support the delivery of the workforce strategy. The study is seeking to investigate how the recording of training needs identified through the new Competency Assessment System (CAS) is managed and how the systems and processes can inform the development of a learning hub for the building standards profession.

As part of the research, Optimal Economics is undertaking an online survey of all local authority building standards manage to understand the current processes and systems that are used to manage, deliver and record training for staff in local authorities and how the new CAS fits with these processes and systems.

The survey is split into two parts with the first part dealing with existing systems and the second part dealing with CAS. All references to existing or current systems refer to the position before the introduction of CAS.

Background Information

Name:

Job Title:

Local authority:

Existing (Pre-CAS) Processes and Systems for Recording Training and Development Needs

1.   Can you describe the current process for formally identifying the training and development needs of buildings standards staff. Please describe:
     a. Frequency of appraisal
     b. Use of forms e.g. Building standards specific or generic local authority
     c. Format of appraisal – e.g. self-completion form followed by face to face meeting
     d. Who is involved eg. BS manager, line manager
     e. The role of human resources (HR), if any
     f. Other comments

2.   Where specific building standards training and development needs are identified, what is the process for formally recording these needs? Please describe:
     a. Where e.g. within BS team, personnel records within HR system,
     b. What systems are used e.g. Microsoft packages, HR software
     c. Are these linked to any specific BS software e.g. Uniform
     d. Are these needs shared elsewhere in the authority?
     e. Other comments

3. What is the process for ensuring training needs are addressed for building standards staff?
   a. Responsibility of individual, building standards department, HR etc.
   b. Does this vary depending on the type of training e.g. internal or external courses
   c. Is there a role for a central corporate learning and development team?
   d. Other comments

4. Is there a process for recording training needs identified outside any formal appraisal process? If yes, please describe:
   a. The broad process
   b. Who records the training need and where is it recorded
   c. What software and systems are used
   d. Other comments

5. Is there a process for updating records when training is complete? If so, please describe.

6. Are these processes for identifying, recording and addressing training needs specific to building standards or are they authority wide processes? (please tick)

	BS Specific	Authority Wide	Other (please describe)
Identifying needs			
Recording needs			
Addressing needs			

7. On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is very poorly and 5 is very well, how well do you think the current system meets the needs of your staff in terms of:
   a. Identifying training needs
   b. Recording training needs
   c. Addressing training needs

8. Please identify any strengths of these processes from a BS perspective:
   a. Identifying training needs
   b. Recording training needs
   c. Addressing training needs

9.   Please identify any weaknesses of these processes from a BS perspective:
      a. Identifying training needs
      b. Recording training needs
      c. Addressing training needs

New CAS Processes

10.   Have you undertaken any assessments using the new CAS and its toolkit? Yes/No

11.   If Yes, what aspects of the process worked well?. Please provide comments in relation to the five steps of the CAS process:
      a. Assessment planning and agreement
      b. Evidence gathering by candidate
      c. Assessment
      d. Assessment decision making
      e. Recording outcomes

12.   What aspects of the process did not work as well as expected? Please provide comments in relation to the five steps of the CAS process:
      a. Assessment planning and agreement
      b. Evidence gathering by candidate
      c. Assessment
      d. Assessment decision making
      e. Recording outcomes

13.   On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is very poorly and 5 is very well, how well does CAS and its toolkit fit into your existing processes for identifying, recording and addressing training and development needs:
      a. Identifying training needs
      b. Recording training needs
      c. Addressing training needs

14.   Can you explain the reason for your answer to Q13?
      a. Identifying training needs
      b. Recording training needs
      c. Addressing training needs

15.   Are there any other comments you would like to make about CAS and its toolkit?

Thank you for your time.

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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at

The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

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