



Guidance for Inspectors

What we inspect in apprenticeship programme providers

(Inspections from September 2024)



This guidance is also available in Welsh.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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Introduction to 'What we inspect'

This handbook sets out what inspectors need to consider when evaluating the four inspection areas in work-based learning apprenticeship providers. It explains 'What we inspect'. It should be read in conjunction with the document '[How we inspect](#)', which sets out our approach to inspection. There is a separate handbook entitled 'How we inspect' that explains the inspection process and methodology.

The guidance is essential reading for reporting inspectors and all other members of the inspection team, including the nominee. It may also be useful for providers to support their understanding of the inspection guidance. There is a separate handbook that explains the inspection process and methodology, 'How we inspect'.

The four inspection areas are set out below:

Inspection areas

IA1 – Learning

- 1.1 Standards and progress in learning and skills
- 1.2 Attitudes to learning

IA2 – Well-being, support and guidance

- 2.1 Personal development and impact on well-being
- 2.2 Safeguarding

IA3 – Teaching, training, assessment and learning experiences

- 3.1 The breadth, balance and appropriateness of the provision
- 3.2 Quality of teaching, training and assessment

IA4 – Leadership and management

- 4.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers, including governance
- 4.2 Self-evaluation processes and improvement planning
- 4.3 Professional learning

Evaluating each inspection area (IA)

Inspection teams will not give overall grades for each inspection area. However, they will make a robust and thorough evaluation of the provider's provision and its impact on learners' learning and well-being.

Inspectors will always include clear evaluations in relation to the main aspects in each inspection area, as exemplified below. However, what inspectors report on within each inspection area may differ depending on the context and relative significance of what they find at each provider. Inspectors may report 'by exception'. This means that they may report on some aspects only where there are particular strengths or areas for improvement.

Where inspectors identify any interesting or innovative practice that is worthy of sharing more widely, they will request a case study from the provider. We will showcase the case studies on our website.

Where inspectors identify serious shortcomings in one or more inspection areas, follow-up activity will normally be arranged for the provider. There is further guidance about follow-up activity in 'How we inspect'.

About the provider

This section of the report will be brief and contain only factual background information about the provider and will not contain any evaluation of the provision. The reporting inspector normally agrees the content of this section with the provider during the inspection and during the provider's factual check of the draft report prior to its publication. If there is disagreement about the content of this section, the reporting inspector will make the final decision about what to include in the report.

This section will contain brief information on:

- the size, nature and locations of the provider and its sub-contractors
- the levels of apprenticeship training programmes delivered
- the number of apprenticeship learners in-training
- partner or sub-contractor numbers any other relevant factors

Summary

This section of the report should:

- contain a short overview of the main findings (200-300 words), outlining the key strengths and any important areas for improvement that require improvement
- make the link between learners' outcomes, the quality of provision and the effectiveness of leadership and management
- be consistent with the findings in the body of the report, but do not use the same text

Recommendations

The recommendations should:

- link closely to the main evaluation areas of the inspection guidance, with the weightiest recommendations reflected in the overview
- give the provider a clear and specific indication of the area(s) that require improvement
- help the provider to understand clearly what they should do to make the necessary improvements
- be written in order of priority, not in the order of the guidance

What happens next?

The 'What happens next' section will set out what the provider needs to do following the inspection. In all cases, leaders will need to respond to the recommendations by putting in place the actions needed to make the improvements identified by the inspection team.

It should exemplify any interesting or innovative practice case studies that we have invited leaders to share.

The section will explain whether the provider requires any level of follow-up activity by Estyn. The overview will make a brief explanation of the reasons for follow-up.

The evidence base of the inspection

Inspectors will use a wide range of evidence to make sure that their findings are valid, accurate and reliable. This section of the report will explain the sources of evidence that inspectors used as well as the range of activities that they carried out during their visit.

Inspection areas

The following section explains what each inspection area covers and what inspectors need to keep in mind when evaluating each one.

The inspection areas are numbered 1 – 4, but they are equally important. Within each inspection area, the report will not always cover the aspects in the order they appear in this handbook. Inspectors may choose to sequence the aspects differently in order to reflect their findings. For example, in Inspection Area 3 – Teaching and learning experiences, inspectors may write about teaching before the learning experiences and provision if this makes the findings of the team clearer or they may combine elements of teaching and training and the provision to explain their findings where appropriate.

The report on each inspection area will normally be around 700 words.

There is [supplementary guidance](#) on the inspection of various aspects of the work of providers on our website.

Inspection area 1: Learning

1.1 Standards and progress in learning and skills

Inspectors should evaluate the standards reached by learners overall and judge whether these are appropriate to learners' abilities. Inspectors should recognise learners' progress, especially their progress towards achieving their qualifications within their frameworks.

Inspectors' evaluation of learners' achievement and progress should be based on first hand evidence, for example from observations of learners in sessions, undertaking on and off-the-job activities, assessment and development of vocational and technical skills, scrutiny of learners' work (including work created digitally) and discussions with learners. Inspectors should evaluate how well learners recall previous learning, develop thinking skills, acquire new knowledge, understanding and skills, and apply these to new situations.

Inspectors should evaluate the progress of particular groups of learners, for example learners on different apprenticeship levels and from different learning areas, learners from low income households, disabled learners and those from minority ethnic groups.

For learners with additional learning needs (ALN), evaluations about achievement should take account of information about their individual needs and abilities. Inspectors should consider the rate of progress these learners make in relation to their individual targets, agreed learning goals and starting points. Inspectors should look at the progress of learners with relatively weak literacy, numeracy and digital skills who do not receive support for additional learning needs.

Inspectors should also consider whether specific groups of learners are making as much progress as they could, in relation to their starting-points and their ability. For example, inspectors should consider how well learners with more developed

vocational skills achieve and the extent to which the work they undertake stretches them fully to achieve as well as they could.

When evaluating skills, inspectors should evaluate to what extent learners develop the literacy, numeracy and digital skills required to complete their qualification framework.

Inspectors should report clearly on learners' standards in each of the skills of speaking and listening, reading and writing (in Welsh/English), numeracy and digital skills. When inspecting skills, the focus should be on whether learners have the required skills in literacy (Welsh/English), numeracy and digital skills appropriate to their programme and qualification level.

Inspectors should judge standards in literacy, numeracy and digital skills based on first-hand evidence, for example from observations of learners in sessions, scrutiny of learners' work and discussions with learners. Careful observation of learners in sessions and talking to learners will provide evidence of their speaking and listening skills, their literacy, numeracy and digital skills and their ability to think. Scrutiny of work will provide evidence on how well learners can write clearly and read for understanding, how well they can use their literacy, numeracy and digital skills at appropriate levels in a range of learning areas. Inspectors should consider the extent to which learners' communication and higher-order thinking skills support or hinder their progress, and their interaction with other learners and teachers.

Inspectors should consider learners' standards in Welsh. They should consider the progress learners make from their starting points in developing and using their Welsh language skills in the context of their employment and qualification framework (particularly for key priority areas as identified by Welsh Government).

While inspectors should consider a wide range of information on learners' standards and progress, they should normally only report on historic performance data where the outcomes are both collected nationally and externally verified. Inspectors will use this learner performance data to identify trends in outcomes in apprenticeship providers. Inspectors should base their evaluation of learners' standards and progress in learning on own evidence from session observations, discussions with learners and scrutiny of written, practical and digital work. They will consider how well the provider uses its own assessment and outcome information to monitor and support the progress of individuals and groups of learners in inspection areas 1 and 3 (learning, and teaching and learning experiences); and self-evaluation in inspection area 4 (leadership and management).

1.2 Attitudes to learning

Inspectors should evaluate to what extent learners show their workplace skills and the extent to which learners are ambitious, confident, capable and independent learners. They should consider how readily learners engage in vocational and technical tasks and bring them to completion. They should evaluate how well learners persevere and remain purposeful when they face difficulties or seek other solutions when their first approach to a problem is unsuccessful. They should look at how well learners manage time effectively, prioritising tasks and are able to work to deadlines.

Inspectors should consider to what extent learners are able to work in a range of ways, for example independently and in small groups, or remotely. Inspectors should consider how well learners demonstrate strong team working skills, including respect for the contributions of others, for example by allowing others to speak or by remaining calm when others disagree with them, or by appropriate use of online etiquette where appropriate.

Inspectors should consider the extent to which learners demonstrate self-awareness, present a professional, positive image to others and conduct themselves appropriately in training sessions and in the workplace.

Inspectors should consider learners' attendance and punctuality in the training centre or other off-the-job training sessions as evidence of learners' participation and engagement in learning, and reliability. Inspectors should report by exception, i.e. where there is a clear trend of weak or very strong attendance.

When evaluating participation and enjoyment in learning, inspectors should consider the evidence from on and off-the-job training sessions, scrutiny of learners' work (including work created digitally or digitally stored), interviews with learners, observation of their engagement in the workplace or training centre.

Inspection area 2: Well-being, support and guidance

2.1 Personal development and impact on well-being

Inspectors should consider responses to the pre-inspection questionnaires from learners, staff, and employers carefully in relation to learners' well-being and develop emerging questions, where appropriate. Inspectors should also consider evidence from observations of learners interacting with their peers, employers and training staff, as well as evidence from discussions with individuals and groups.

Inspectors should consider how well the provider:

- tracks and monitors learners' progress and well-being
- uses this information to consider the progress of specific groups, for example those learners whose circumstances may make them vulnerable to underachievement, those with additional learning needs or disabilities, or those who are more able
- identifies relevant issues and responds appropriately to the outcomes of tracking and monitoring, for example through the provision of appropriate support and challenge, the use of intervention strategies, the mentoring or coaching of individuals or groups
- makes provision for learners with additional learning needs in relation to their individual needs and abilities
- provides well-considered support for learners' mental health and well-being
- uses partnerships with others to provide effective support for learners

They should consider whether learners feel that the provider listens to their views and takes them into account in decisions that affect them, for example about their learning experiences and training programmes.

Inspectors should consider the guidance and other support provided to safeguard the

welfare of learners and promote their personal development, for example in relation to work life balance, how to keep themselves safe online, as well as understanding issues relating to equality and diversity and developing the values of tolerance and respect. Inspectors should consider the extent to which learners feel safe and secure, and free from physical and verbal abuse.

2.2 Safeguarding

Inspectors will report on whether the provider's arrangements for safeguarding learners meet requirements and give no cause for concern. Where arrangements are a serious cause for concern, inspectors should include a recommendation in the report and Estyn will send a well-being letter to the provider asking them to outline how they will address the areas for improvement. .

Inspectors should evaluate to what extent the provider's safeguarding arrangements ensure that all learners are protected, whether on-site, off-site or online.

Arrangements should include the identification of learners aged under 18, and vulnerable adults in need or at risk of significant harm, safe recruitment practices and having appropriate arrangements for safeguarding referrals. Inspectors should also consider how well the provider promotes safe practices and a culture of safety. The Welsh Government has issued specific statutory requirements and guidance about these safeguarding matters and providers should have in place policies and procedures that comply with them.

Inspectors will look at how effective a provider's arrangements are for preventing and addressing bullying, harassment and discrimination. They should consider how well the provider develops learners' knowledge and understanding of harassment, discrimination and extremism. They should consider how the provider keeps learners safe from the dangers of radicalisation.

Inspectors should consider whether the provider has robust procedures for checking the suitability of staff and others who are in contact with learners and that the provider maintains a record of these checks. Inspectors should check that all staff know what to do to respond to safeguarding issues and that the designated lead officer and lead governor, and other staff where appropriate, have received relevant safeguarding training.

Inspectors should evaluate how well the provider uses its intelligence about safeguarding matters, both within its own provision and that of its sub-contractors, and how well reporting processes are used to quality assure safeguarding by senior managers.

Inspection area 3: Teaching, training, assessment and learning experiences

3.1 The breadth, balance and appropriateness of the provision

Inspectors should evaluate the extent to which learning experiences across the provision stimulate and challenge learners so that they engage fully in their learning and make the best possible progress.

Inspectors should consider the provider's strategic approach to planning the provision and the extent to which it helps learners to become ambitious, confident,

aspirational and well-informed individuals.

Inspectors should consider how well the provision caters for specific groups of learners, especially those with advanced vocational and technical skills and understanding, those with additional learning needs. Inspectors should consider the extent to which teachers, trainers and might include provision for learners with little prior knowledge.

Inspectors should consider the nature and extent of additional learning opportunities. For example, relevant industrial or educational visits, participating in occupational skills competitions, achieving additional qualifications and charity and fund raising events.

Inspectors should evaluate the extent to which the teaching and training arrangements ensure that learners acquire the necessary skills in literacy (Welsh/English), communication, numeracy and digital skills to support their work. Inspectors should consider how well the provider has taken account of the development of learners' literacy, communication, numeracy and digital skills in the planning of learners' vocational, technical or wider skills experiences.

Inspectors should evaluate the extent and quality of the provision for the development of Welsh language skills from their starting points, in the context of their learning areas. They should consider how well learners are made aware of the advantages of learning Welsh and becoming bilingual. Inspectors should comment on the arrangements that providers have to support learners' Welsh language skills development.

The main evaluations, context and summary should not report directly that the provider has achieved any named awards, including those that are publicly funded. However, there may be reference to named awards in the evidence base, particularly where the award has had an impact on improving standards or provision.

3.2 Quality of teaching, training and assessment

When evaluating teaching, inspectors should note that there is no fixed template that teachers, trainers and assessors should follow, and teachers, trainers and assessors may use a range of different approaches over time. The key consideration is whether the teaching is successful in engaging learners' interest and how well it develops their literacy, numeracy and digital skills, vocational and technical skills and knowledge and understanding to an appropriately high level as they move through their programme.

Inspectors should evaluate the extent to which teachers, trainers and assessors have high expectations of all learners. They should consider the quality of short, medium and long-term planning and how well their planning meets the needs of the qualification framework. They should consider the extent to which teachers, trainers and assessors have clear objectives for learners' learning and use a range of approaches and resources to engage learners' interest and to challenge them to achieve as well as they can. They should consider the extent to which they make their training sessions stimulating and engaging places in which all groups of learners, including the most and least able, can learn productively.

Inspectors should judge how well teachers, trainers and assessors use various questioning techniques to draw out and further develop learners' responses and gauge their understanding. They should consider the clarity of instructions and explanations and how well the learners develop their literacy, numeracy, digital and vocational skills, knowledge and understanding as a result. Inspectors should judge how successfully technical and support staff, where appropriate, support learning.

The focus on assessment in this inspection area is on vocational and technical skills in the workplace. Inspectors should evaluate how well learners develop and apply a wide range of practical skills and theory knowledge appropriate to their qualification. Inspectors should also evaluate the oral and written feedback from assessors to help learners to know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. They should consider how well learners to assess their own performance. Inspectors should evaluate the extent to which the senior management and assessment staff track and keep records on the progress of each learner and report on these clearly to meet the needs of learners and employers. They should consider how well assessors ensure that their vocational and technical assessments are valid, timely, accurate and reliable.

Inspectors should evaluate whether learners regularly review their own learning, understand their progress and are involved in setting their own learning targets.

In coming to evaluations on teaching, training and assessment inspectors should use the full range of evidence available to them. This is likely to include evidence from learners' portfolios (including those completed online), schemes of learning, assessment records, and information on learners' progress, session observations, and discussions with learners. Inspectors should not allocate a judgement to an individual session or teacher, trainer or assessor, but should report on the strengths and weaknesses in the quality of teaching, training and assessment across the provider.

Inspection area 4: Leadership and management

4.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Inspectors should evaluate the extent to which leaders and managers have established and communicated clear vision and appropriate aims, strategic objectives, plans and policies that focus on meeting learner needs. They should consider the priority that leaders have given to ensuring that all staff understand and promote the provider's safeguarding culture.

Inspectors should reflect on how well leaders and managers at all levels set high expectations for staff, learners and themselves. They should consider how well leaders and managers develop an effective, engaged team of staff. They should consider the extent to which leaders and managers model and promote professional values and behaviours that contribute positively to provider improvement and effective collaboration between staff and with other providers. They should consider how well staff at all levels understand and discharge their roles and responsibilities and how well they collaborate in driving forward strategic priorities and improvement.

Inspectors should consider a wide range of evidence when evaluating the quality of leadership and management, for example minutes from a range of recent meetings,

interviews with staff, improvement action plans and reports on their implementation, recent self-assessment from leaders and managers and the analysis of information on learner performance.

Inspectors should consider how well leaders and managers act in accordance with the principle of sustainable development and how well they make decisions and set priorities for improvement.

Inspectors should look at the extent to which leaders and managers sustain high quality or improve weak aspects of provision. They should consider how well leaders and managers prevent problems from occurring in the first place and how quickly they bring about any remedial action required.

Inspectors should consider the extent to which leaders and managers are purposeful and successful in meeting national and local priorities. Inspectors should consider the extent to which the provider's contract commitments ensure that improvement plans reflect Welsh Government apprenticeship priorities.

Inspectors should evaluate the extent to which leaders and managers plan strategically to provide purposeful opportunities for learners to develop their Welsh language skills in formal and informal situations.

Inspectors should consider how well leaders and managers share positive features of provision with staff and collaborate with other education providers and partners within the sector to achieve improvements locally, regionally and nationally. Inspectors should focus on how well the provider uses strategic partnerships and collaboration with other agencies to help to build its capacity for continuous improvement and to reduce the impact of poverty on attainment.

Inspectors should evaluate how well consortium members and sub-contractors understand and discharge their roles and responsibilities. They should consider how well they know the provider's strengths and areas for development and the degree to which they have participated in setting the provider's strategic priorities.

Inspectors should evaluate the extent to which the provider's spending decisions, contract management, including arrangements for sub-contractors/consortium members, and broad financial planning link appropriately to its strategic priorities and its improvement planning. In relation to spending decisions, inspectors should consider how well the provider balances its short-term needs alongside the long-term needs of learners.

Inspectors should consider the extent to which leaders and managers know the costs of existing training programmes and activities, keep them under review and question whether they are cost-effective. Inspectors should consider the size of any surplus or deficit relative to the provider's budget.

Inspectors should consider whether there is an appropriate level of staffing and learning resources to deliver the planned provision effectively. They should consider how well the provider promotes the welfare and well-being of its staff.

Inspectors should consider whether the provider uses its accommodation effectively and efficiently, and the extent to which the accommodation supports or detracts from

teaching and learning of high quality. Inspectors should consider the quality of learner workplaces and the opportunities they have to undertake the full range of learning and assessment activities.

4.2 Self-evaluation processes and improvement planning

Inspectors should evaluate how accurately leaders and managers know the provider's strengths and areas for improvement. They should consider how well leaders and managers gather and analyse first-hand evidence of standards of provision, including teaching and assessment, and as a result of involvement and consultation with a wide range of appropriate partners and stakeholders, such as other work-based learning providers, professional learning networks, and through learner voice or involvement.

Inspectors should consider the impact of improvement planning processes and how well identified priorities for improvement link to the outcomes of the provider's self-assessment. Inspectors should consider how well leaders and managers ensure that priorities are supported by the allocation of resources. They should evaluate how well leaders and managers define relevant and measurable actions for improvement in specified and realistic timescales and allocate responsibility for their delivery.

Where appropriate, inspectors should consider how well the provider has responded to recommendations from previous Estyn inspections or from strategic partners and whether the provider's actions have led to improvements.

4.3 Professional learning

Inspectors should evaluate to what extent leaders have created a culture and ethos to support the professional learning of all staff, including the arrangements to support the active engagement of all staff in increasing their professional knowledge, understanding and skills. They should consider the extent to which staff participate effectively in professional learning experiences, appraisal and performance management.

Inspectors should evaluate the impact of leaders in the way they manage the performance of staff in order to help staff to improve their practice. They should also judge whether leaders and managers address issues of underperformance robustly and directly where necessary. Inspectors should consider how effectively leaders and managers support the well-being of staff, including workload considerations and the extent to which leaders consider the impact of any new or revised work requirements.

They should consider professional learning undertaken by staff and its impact on learners' progress and well-being and their own practice. They should explore the extent to which staff have shared professional development outcomes with other staff, including with sub-contractors and partners. They should look at how well leaders have identified good practice within the provider and ensured that other staff may benefit from it. They should also consider how well staff work with other providers of professional development to help them develop their professional practice and keep their vocational skills and technical knowledge up-to-date.