



Review of Estyn and Care Inspectorate Wales' Joint Inspection Arrangements

**Inspecting care and education in regulated non-school settings eligible
for funding for part-time education**

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THE LEARNING PARTNERSHIP WALES 2024



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Review of Estyn and CIW’s joint inspection arrangements for inspecting care and education in regulated non-school settings eligible for funding for part-time education

Section 1 - Context

In Wales, the majority of education before compulsory school age for three and four year olds is provided in schools where the expectation is that children learn through play in line with the evidenced-based pedagogical approach of Curriculum for Wales. A significant number of education places, catering for approximately 10,000 children, are provided in non-maintained childcare settings, such as nurseries, children’s centres, daycare and playgroups; these are funded by the local authority (LA). There are approximately 3,500 settings in Wales, of which around 530 are non-maintained settings funded by their local authority to deliver early education. The trend shows the number of non-maintained settings is decreasing in the longer term but the current indication a slight uplift. *Reference: CIW Childcare (Wales)*

“Estyn is the office of His Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales. It is a Crown body, originally established under the Education Act 1992, which is independent of the National Assembly for Wales but receives its funding from the Assembly under Section 104 of the Government of Wales Act 1998. Estyn provides advice generally on education and training matters to the Welsh Government and, more specifically, in response to an annual remit. In this way, its work contributes to the raising of standards in education and lifelong learning and the development and implementation of policy in Wales.” *(Estyn 2023)*

“Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) is the independent regulator of social care and childcare in Wales. It undertakes functions on behalf of Welsh Ministers to provide assurance on the quality and safety of services. CIW decides who can provide services and takes action to ensure such services meet legislative and regulatory requirements. It inspects individual services and also undertakes national reviews to support improvement of regulated services and local authority social services.” *(CIW 2023)*

Since 2019, Estyn and Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) have engaged in a programme of joint inspections of care and education in regulated non-school settings eligible for funding for part-time education. These joint inspections evaluate the care provided for all children up to the age of twelve and the education of three and four-year-old children that do not receive education in a maintained setting.

As the programme of joint inspections approaches its fifth anniversary, it is timely to review its impact and effectiveness. The Review provides an opportunity to engage with stakeholders to gain their views on its effectiveness so that a current picture can be captured, and further consideration given to planning for required future developments.

The Review focusses on the care and education of three and four year olds attending a non-maintained setting for their education place.

Section 2 - Methodology; Informing the Review

The process of information gathering for the Review, outlined below, was undertaken from January 2024 - March 2024, by five researchers supported by a professional translator for the Welsh Language. Evidence obtained from the actions in the Review was used for comparison and evaluation, and to form subsequent recommendations.

Step 1: Initial Scoping Discussions

In consultation with Estyn and CIW the final scope of the Review was agreed.

Step 2: Desk Research and Preparation

Establishing a deeper understanding of policy and context was essential in reaching an informed, objective view as joint inspections by Estyn and CIW do not happen in a vacuum, they are part of a national picture directed by policy and other external factors.

Desk Research included, but was not limited to:

- A Quality Framework for Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care in Wales
- Care Inspectorate Wales Strategic Plan 2020–2025
- Estyn Annual Plan 2022-23
- Guidance handbook for inspecting care and education in regulated non-school settings eligible for funding for part-time education
- Data from StatsWales and the Welsh Index for Multiple Deprivation (WIMD)
- Children and Families Wales Measure 2010
- Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010
- The Child Minding and Day Care Exceptions (Wales) Order 2010
- National Minimum Standards for Regulated Child Care
- Curriculum for Wales, including the Curriculum for Funded Non-maintained Settings in Wales
- Community Focused Schools
- Research from other organisation such as the OECD to contextualise and compare inspections in Wales with those from other national systems.

Step 3: Review the findings from Estyn and CIW internal surveys of staff members

32 questionnaires were received from Estyn and CIW.

- Explored and evaluated the current messaging/approaches/themes from the perspectives of the two inspection bodies.
- Analysis of responses from the internal inspectorate survey, Estyn and Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) and compared these with the responses gathered from the other stakeholder surveys; Local Authorities (LAs), Registered Person (RI) Practitioners, Umbrella Organisations (Umborgs) and Parents and Carers.

Step 4: Review of findings based on discussions between the inspectorate and policy officials from Welsh Government

- Information relating to current professional understanding of inspection from a policy perspective was reviewed.
- Explored the current policy for inspection and how this relates to future policy direction and aspirations for early years in Wales, specifically the non-maintained sector.
- Considered the strategic and operational components of inspection and whether they are working well and fit for purpose, or whether innovation/change should be considered given the implementation of Curriculum for Wales (CfW), Early Childhood Education and Care (May 2019) (ECEC) and Early Childhood, Play Learning and Care (June 2023) (ECPLC).

Step 5: Family Liaison - Parents/Carers Questionnaires

43 questionnaires were received from parents and carers.

Views were gathered via an online questionnaire from parents/carers about the joint inspection process with reference to their needs/preferences in relation to joint inspections in the NMS.

Step 6: Providers and their Representatives, and Local Authorities - Questionnaires and Focus Groups

67 questionnaires received from providers and their representatives and local authorities.

48 participants attended the focus group meetings.

The aim of this part of the Review was to gather views through a questionnaire and a series of focus groups for providers and their representatives, and local authorities in relation to joint inspections to explore:

- Their experience of the current processes and arrangements, and how this improves/hinders practice and safety.
- Their views on developments for inspection that may be required in light of ECPLC, ECEC and CfW.
- What would be helpful to providers and their representatives, and local authorities pre, during and post inspection.
- If/how inspection impacts their mental health and well-being - pre, during and post inspection.
- Ideas for advocacy for providers and their representatives pre, during and post inspection (or not at all) and whether the Umborgs and LAs or others have a role to play in this.
- What would be viewed as a 'Gold Standard' inspection process and arrangements.
- What they currently value and would like to see in a future relationship with the inspectorate.

Step 7: Focus Groups - The Inspectors

20 participants attended the focus group meetings.

Purpose of the Focus Group for the Inspectors:

- To share collectively, information about inspection gathered to date from the provider/ representative/local authority questionnaires and its significance.
- To clarify/explore further the emerging issues to date e.g. educational, care-based, logistic, operational, resources, mental health and impact on standards.
- To explore and identify both specific and general strategic possible next steps for the inspectorate with regards to their work in the non-maintained settings in line with policy direction.
- To identify and consider recommendations for future approaches to joint inspections.

Section 3 - General Information from the Questionnaires and Focus Groups

The charts and percentages below reflect responses gathered through the questionnaires, and not the entire workforce of Wales (the workforce being NMS, Umborgs and LAs), nor the total membership of the two inspection bodies.

All parties involved in the Review understand the need for a robust, objective inspection process which places the needs of children first.

The online questionnaires for Parents/Carers, Local Authorities and Umbrella Organisations and Registered Person and Practitioners elicited 7% of responses through the medium of Welsh and 93% of responses in English. 72% of responses from inspectors were received through the medium of English and 28% of responses were received in Welsh.

The type of locality of NMS settings is mixed given the geographical nature of Wales, with each kind of locality with its indicative challenges, for example services being hard to reach if a setting is in a rural location, or green spaces being more difficult to access if a setting is in an urban location. These factors are usually taken into consideration during a joint inspection. Responses from the questionnaires indicate that:

- 32% of the workforce work in/support settings in rural locations.
- 38% of the workforce work in/support settings in urban locations.
- 30% of the workforce work in/support settings in both rural and urban location.

74% of the workforce has direct experience of joint inspections from either their current employment or from previous experience and 26% of respondees indicated they had no direct experience of a joint inspection.

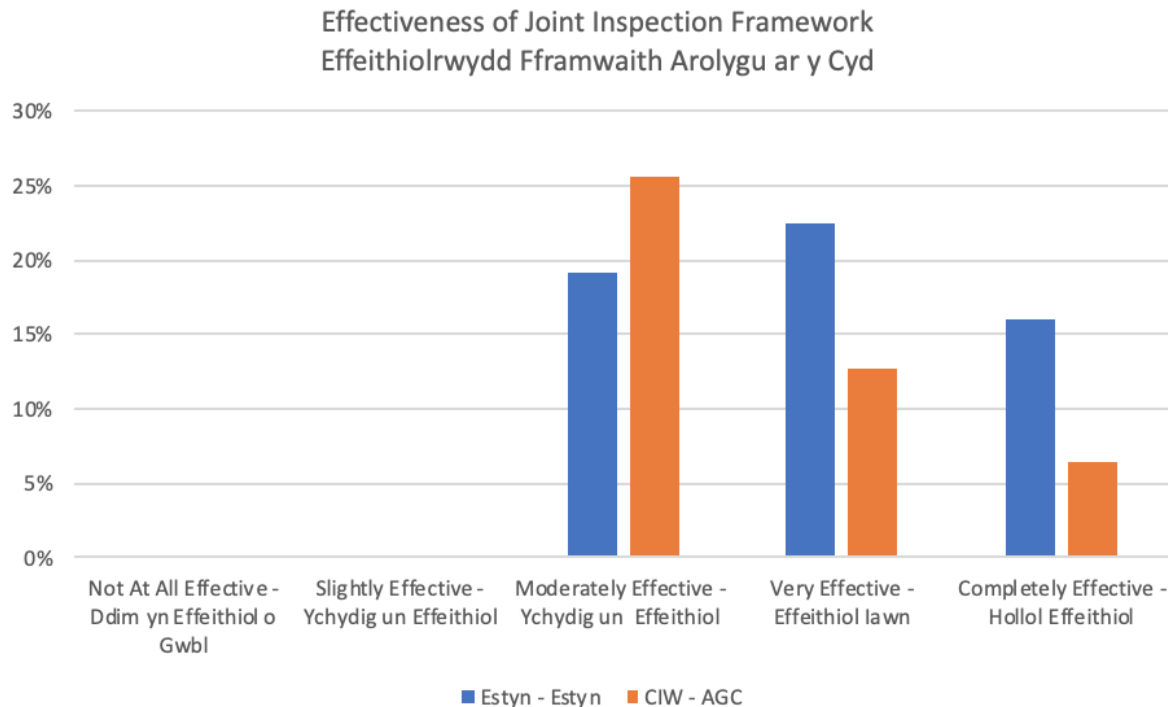
Effectiveness of the Framework

Responses from the inspectors indicate a range of views on the effectiveness of the current joint inspection framework. Approximately 60% of respondees from the two inspection organisations feel it is either very effective or completely effective, and 40% find the framework moderately effective. Considering the curriculum changes that have occurred since the joint inspection framework was introduced in 2019, and whilst an overall positive finding, the responses indicate it would be helpful to explore how the framework could be developed or renewed to better reflect CfW in the future.

“The process is much better for the setting as it reduced the number of inspections they receive - leaders also understand how both inspectorates work together and avoids mixed messages.” CIW inspector.

“Joint inspections have allowed for a more comprehensive evaluation of settings, considering both education and care. I think it has helped to ensure that the inspection process captures a more cohesive picture of the overall quality of care and education provided.” Estyn inspector.

“Having inspectors from Estyn and CIW working together enables the inspectors to share and discuss observations and other inspection evidence to gain a whole view of the setting.”
Setting leader.



Although the current joint inspection framework is not a merging of two previously existing ones, there are specific regulatory and significant legislative implications on each inspectorate. There continues to be distinct elements and specific criteria within the framework which each organisation (Estyn and CIW) is responsible for, so inspections are undertaken by inspectors from each organisation.

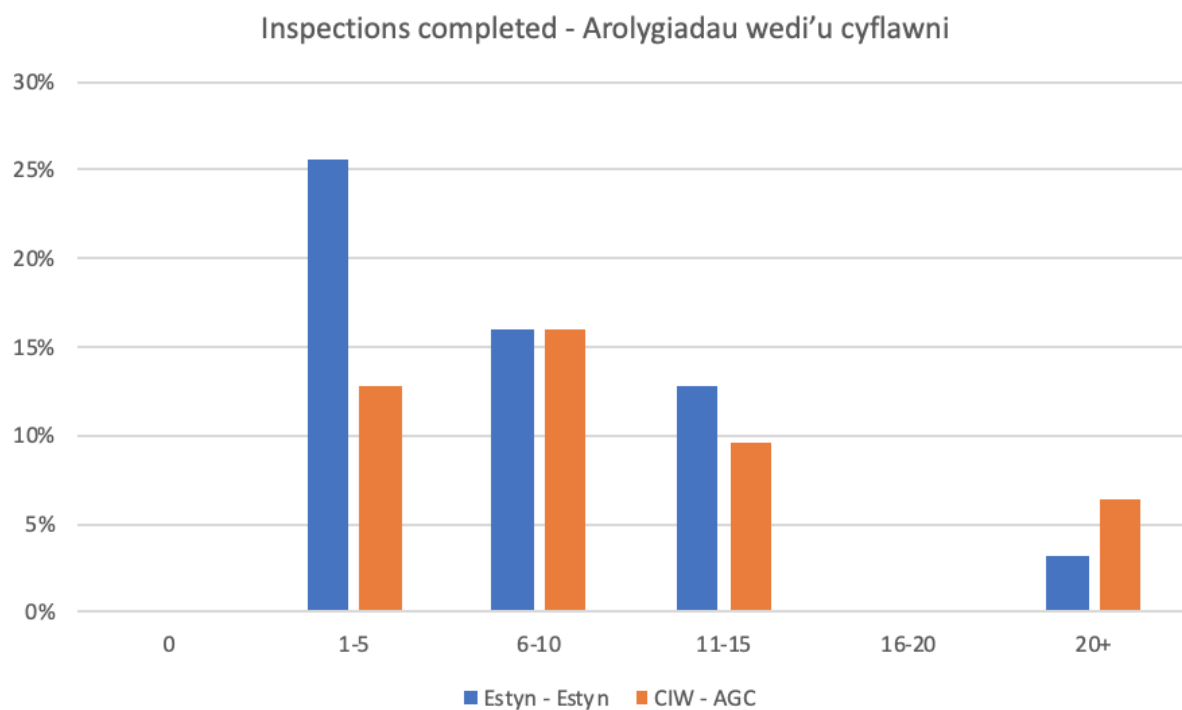
From the perspective of practitioners and setting leaders for the reasons outlined above, it does not always feel or appear that inspectors are evaluating a setting from a shared standpoint. The policy direction in Wales for early childhood, first established through ECEC and then superseded by ECPLC, is to integrate and align care and education. The reported experiences of some setting leaders are somewhat contradictory to the current intention and formulation of the joint inspection framework.

Inspectors also note in the commentary how important it is for inspectors to work as a team to be truly effective and that each organisation has specific responsibilities. This can lead to an imbalance and separation of tasks within the inspection process.

In theory, the current joint inspection methodology reflects and relies on inspectors from CIW and Estyn sharing and distributing responsibilities across the inspection based on the agreed key themes to be inspected. The perception of setting leaders, Umborgs and LAs is that the current framework should merge the responsibilities of the two organisations and as such each inspector should be able to comment upon all aspects of the framework. In practice,

innovating towards a seamless approach such as this, where common themes are jointly evaluated regardless of which organisation the inspectors are from, is yet to be planned for or fully achieved. At times, the current joint inspection process results in settings experiencing an inspection made up of two simultaneous parts with competing priorities. The question to explore in full is whether or not now is the time to future-proof the inspection process for early childhood by developing a framework that more closely aligns with the future policy direction for Wales. The evidence gathered as part of this Review will offer points to factor in when making decisions for the longer term.

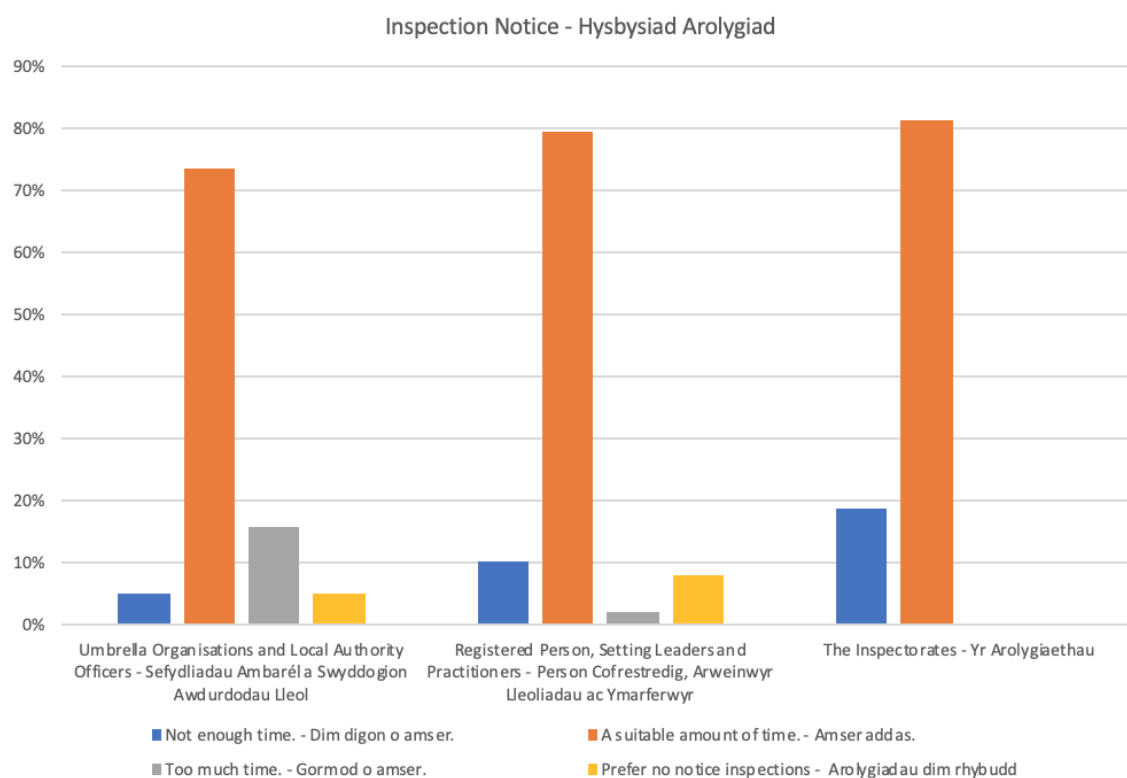
Within the non-maintained sector, the number of joint inspections undertaken by members of the two inspection bodies is outlined in the chart below which indicates a range of experience that provides assurance to the public.



Section 4 - Joint Inspection Arrangements

Notice Period of a Joint Inspection

Ten days' notice is currently given to settings prior to the joint inspection, most professional stakeholders (70%+) felt this was an appropriate timescale with only a few indications in comments that 'no notice inspections' were preferable.



A sample of comments on the period of notice are included below:

“Part of me feels that “no notice” of inspections would be preferable as you would then get an honest picture and staff wouldn't have time to stress and panic. At the same time, if key staff members are on training or they have something out of the ordinary planned, this wouldn't give a true reflection either.”

“The current situation provides a good balance. It gives settings the opportunity to prepare and upload necessary documents without being too stressful and imposing the burden of having to upload all polices.”

“It is felt that 10 days [notice] is too long and provides the setting an opportunity to temporarily change their practice and environment. A shorter time frame would likely give a more accurate insight into the setting.”

“I think it needs to be appreciated that settings are busy and smaller settings do not have a large staff resource to get all documents ready in such a short time. Sometimes a setting can

comprise of one manager who would have to not only provide all these documents, but still deal with the day to day running of the service.”

While the question of 10 days’ notice of a joint inspection was **not directly asked of parents/carers**, a number of them indicated in their commentary that their preference would be ‘no notice inspections’.

A sample of comments from parents and carers included the following:

“Announcing in advance gives a false impression of reality. Settings can ensure that they have adequate staffing, suitable activities, and other measures to maximise their score. Surprise visits will always give the best assessment.”

“I noticed more exciting activities were happening during the inspection. I think this was because they wanted to give a good impression and put in extra time as they knew inspectors were coming.”

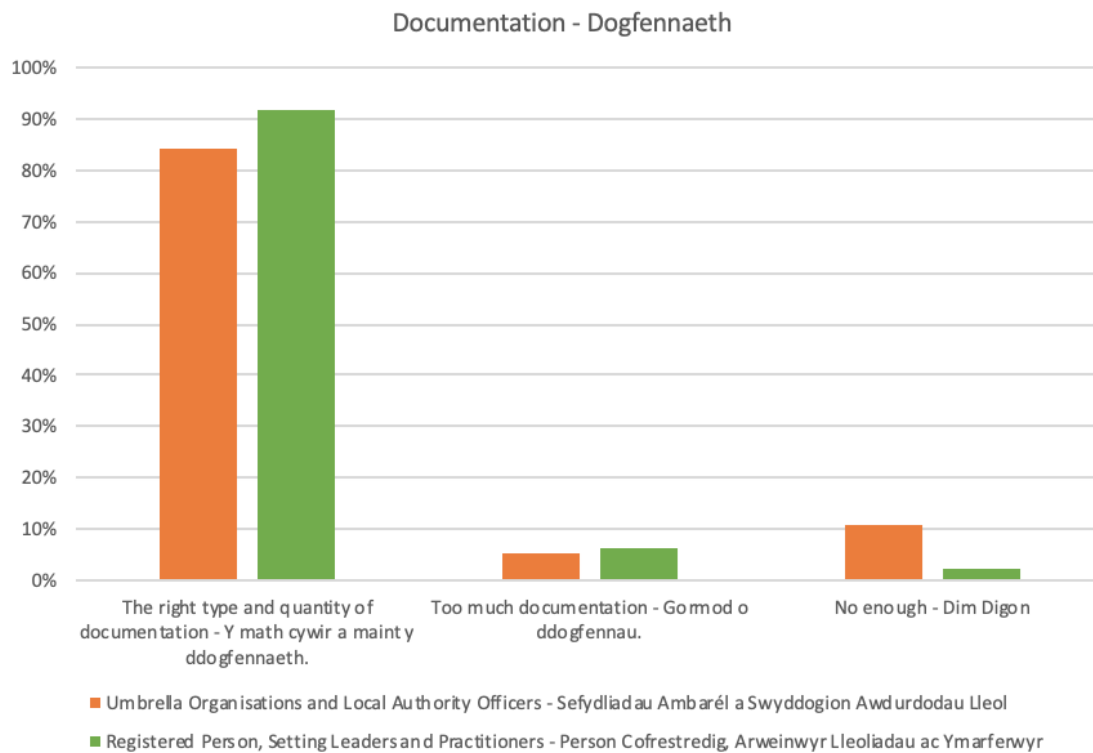
As part of the inspection process, the letter of notice from Estyn states that the LA’s view of the setting is valued and that a short report summarising the LA’s view on the quality of the education provided within the setting, along with any important information about the setting’s context, is welcomed. A simple template is provided by Estyn for this purpose for LAs that wish to use it.

In response to the above requirement, during the ten days’ notice period, the approach taken in some LAs is that Early Years Advisory Teachers (EYATs) provide a report about the setting which has to be checked and quality assured before submitting to the two inspection bodies. The regional arrangements around this task are established locally and vary across Wales. Where the writing of a full report is the LA’s expectation, it is a very tight turn around and can impact on workload, offsetting other essential priorities for EYATs. This is exacerbated if more than one setting in a local authority is being inspected in that period. It was proposed that a short narrative is provided in conjunction with a telephone discussion or Teams meeting with the lead inspector.

Taking all comments and responses into account, on balance, 10 days’ notice of inspection is deemed to be a fair amount of time. There could be a caveat of ‘exceptional circumstances’ within the framework where an additional two or three days’ notice could be granted by the inspection bodies. Examples of exceptional circumstances outlined during the Review include bereavement, illness or unforeseen situations with the setting’s building (such as flooding/refitting), or the temporary re-location of a setting. This would be a welcome addition to the current arrangements.

Documentation that forms part of the Preparation for the Joint Inspection Process (including using the VIR)

Prior to the joint inspection, the setting leader uploads documentation to the Virtual Inspection Room (VIR). This is deemed to be the right type and quantity of documentation from the perspective of the Local Authority and Umborgs (>80%), and from the Registered Person and setting leaders (>90%).



“We uploaded all listed documents to the VIR, we were then asked to submit risk assessments too although these were not listed on the original list of documents.”

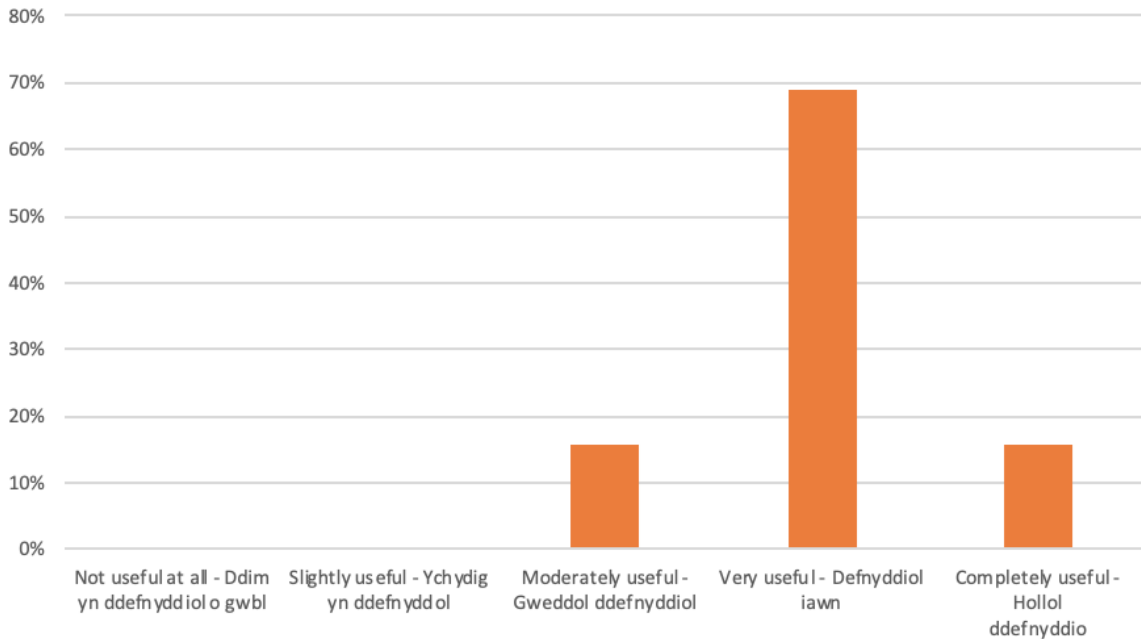
“We thought the amount of documents uploaded was about right, as they would give the inspection team a good overview of our setting prior to the inspection.”

“This is the right quantity of documentation to upload to the VIR for the setting and gives a sufficient overview for the inspector before the inspection date.”

LAs reported that it would be beneficial to open the VIR prior to the Inspection Coordinator contacting the setting, to ensure it is ready for use as soon as notice of inspection is issued.

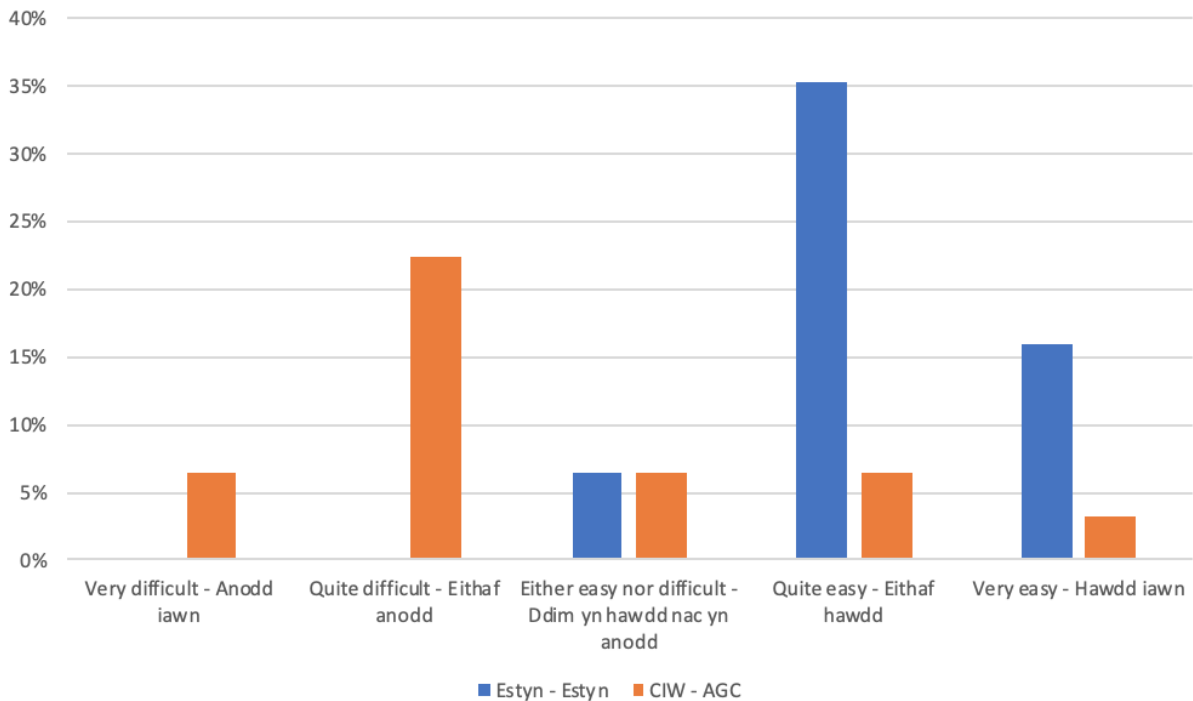
The information from settings is received by the inspectors via a Virtual Inspection Room, and 85% of responses from the two inspection bodies indicated that the information received pre-inspection was “very useful” or “completely useful”.

The Inspectorates Estyn/CIW - Yr Arolygiaethau Estyn/AGC



The ease of use of the Virtual Inspection Room is viewed differently by the two inspection bodies with the Estyn team finding it easier to use and navigate than colleagues in CIW.

Use of VIR - Defnydd o VIR

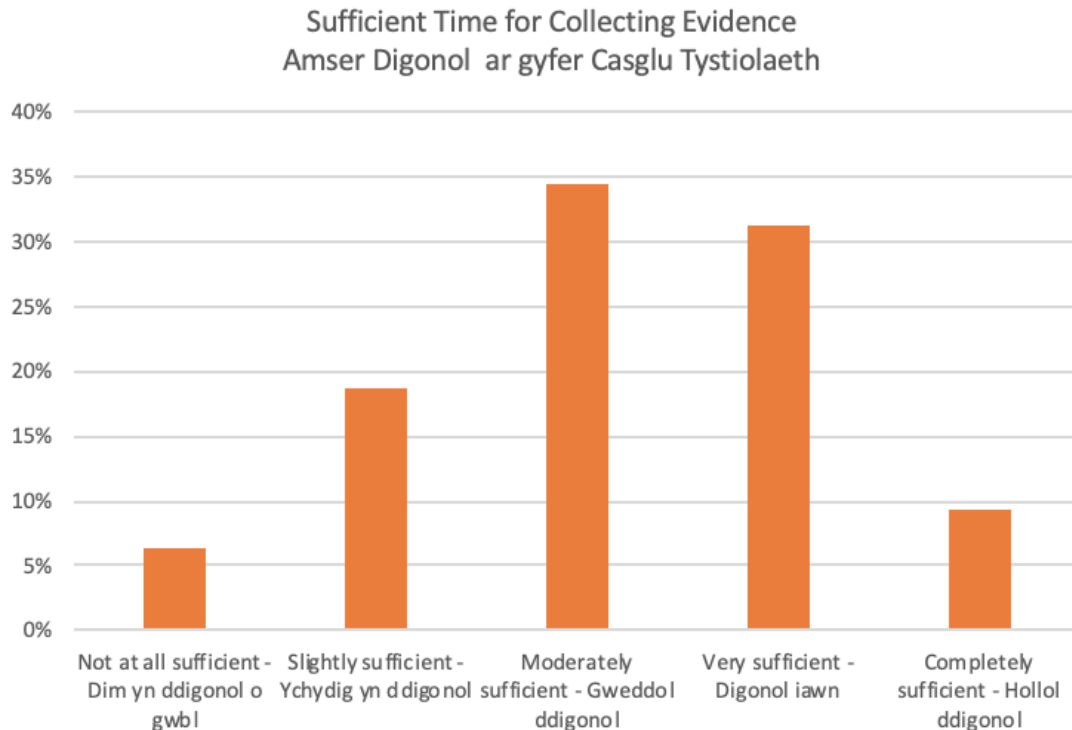


One reason put forward for this differential is that the VIR is hosted by one inspection body (Estyn) and colleagues from the other (CIW) use a software interface outside of their usual technology environment. It causes a degree of frustration and time wasting for colleagues at CIW. Revisiting the functionality and tasking code writers to make the bridge between the

software packages more unified would be a good investment of resources. A component of training in the software for inspectors on induction, or as an on-going refresher/mop-up, would be a welcome benefit to the inspection teams.

From the perspective of the Early Years’ Advisory Teachers (EYATs), allowing them to access the VIR for the setting being inspected would reduce workload and duplication of tasks. On occasion, EYATs have been asked questions about a setting’s practice and have not had access to the information necessary to respond with accuracy and confidence. They have then asked the setting directly and frustration builds as this may have been included in the upload to the VIR. It is appreciated that GDPR regulations may prevent EYATs having full access to information, but it would be helpful on national level to explore the development of additional arrangements/agreements which may enable this. Varying levels of access to software systems is possible and would be worth considering in this case.

There was a more mixed view regarding the length of time needed to collect and review the evidence prior to a joint inspection from the perspective of Estyn and CIW. As some evidence is also gathered and reviewed whilst at the setting, the focus group discussions revealed that the majority of inspectors found it difficult to collect all the evidence needed in the current allotted time. Inspectors would welcome more time to ensure sufficient evidence was gathered when in the setting. An additional half day could be added in order that inspectors could gather all evidence that was needed, particularly in larger settings where full day care was offered. The views of the inspectors are indicated in the chart below.



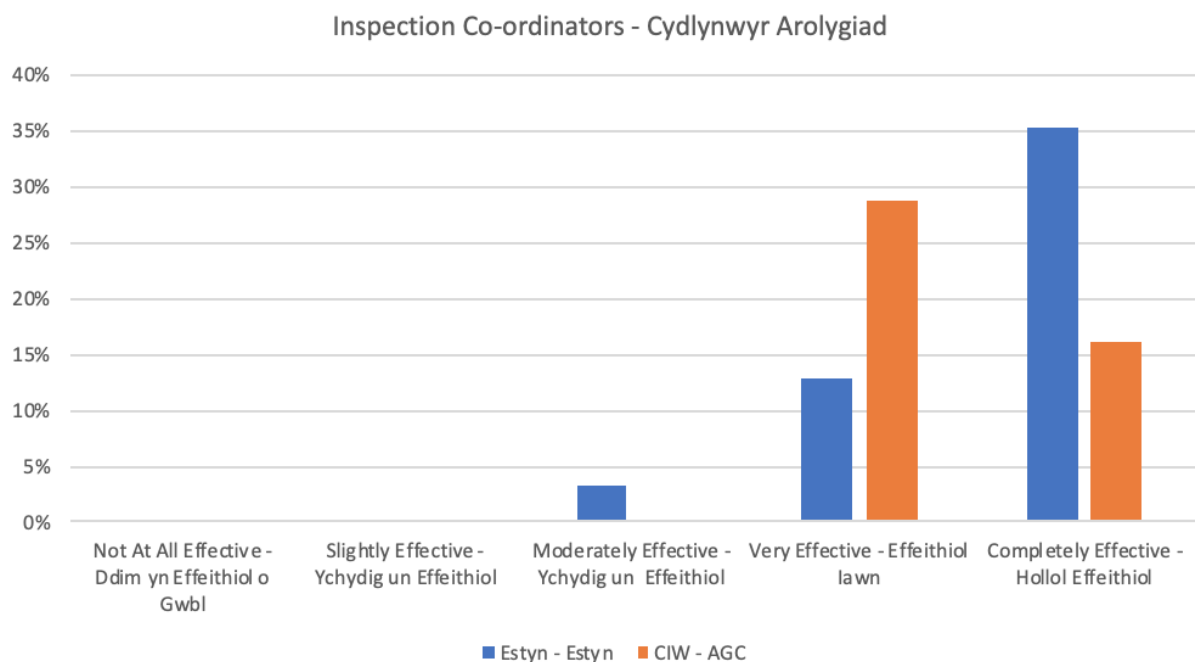
From discussions within the focus groups, setting leaders would welcome an opportunity to upload more information to the VIR in advance of the inspection or have a dedicated time to sharing documentation during the inspection. This would ensure no evidence is missed and

allow for a setting to signpost inspectors to good practice. Setting leaders would also welcome an opportunity to explain their documentation prior to the inspection beginning. Setting leaders would find it useful to meet with inspectors prior to Day 1 in order to explain the context of the setting and outline any issues, this could be undertaken virtually or in person.

As part of a wider discussion, clarity regarding who writes the reports about the setting prior to inspection which are uploaded to VIR, was requested by some setting leaders. There is confusion as to whether two reports were written – one by Early Years Advisory Teacher for Estyn and one by a LA representative to meet the CIW needs. Clarification on the common approach expected by LAs at a local level could be better communicated to settings. While this is an issue at local authority level, it is closely connected to the overall experience of setting leaders during the inspection process and therefore worthy of consideration.

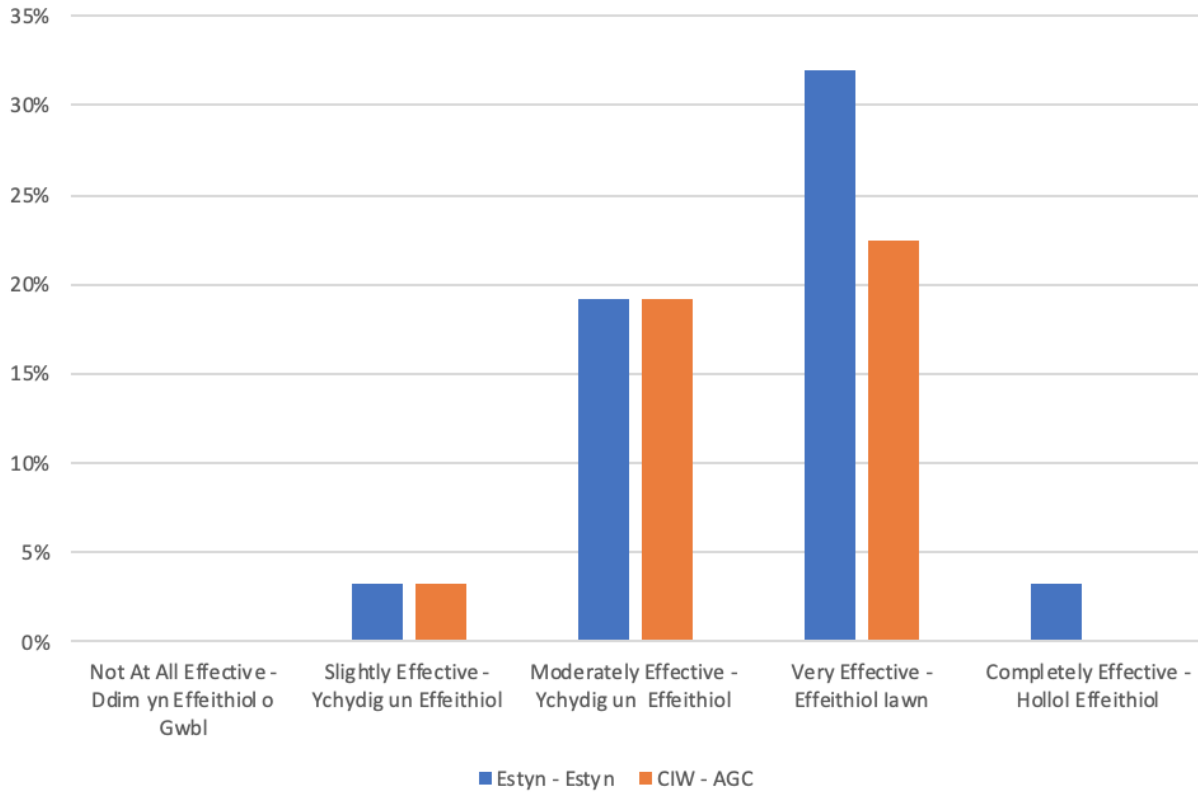
Collaboration and Documentation

The **role of the inspection coordinators** is valued by members of both Estyn and CIW. Comments indicated that they are pivotal in ensuring that the process before and after the time in settings stays on track.



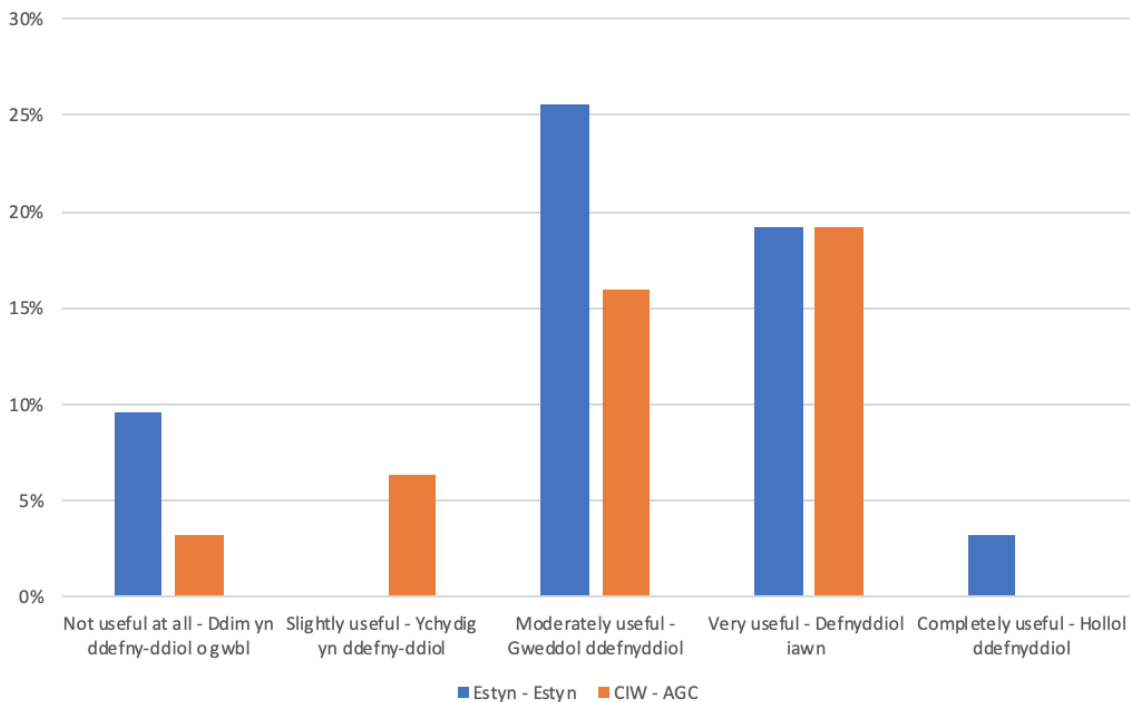
The **pre-inspection collaboration** between inspectors is valued by members of Estyn and CIW to varying degrees. An internal evaluation and review of this process may be helpful to unpick the nuances so that improvements can be made.

Pre-inspection collaboration - Cydweithio cyn arolygiad

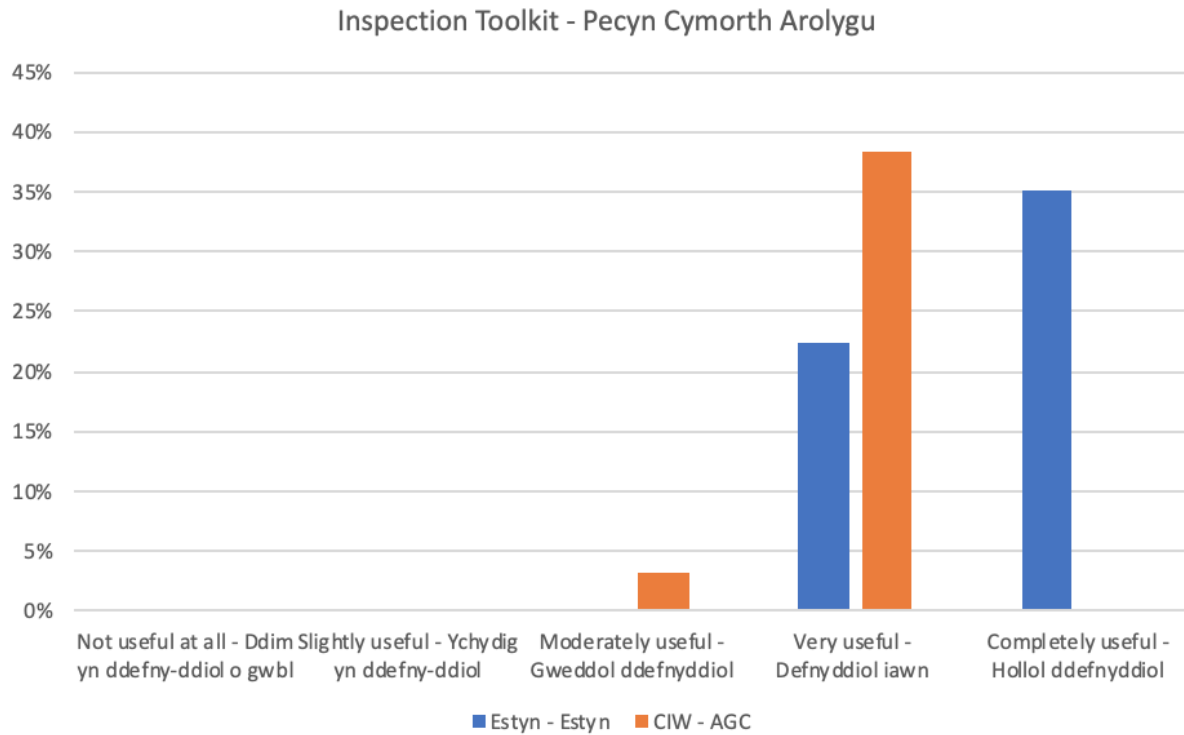


The **pre-inspection plan** used by the inspectors for joint inspections may benefit from a review and an update, as 40% of respondees found it to be very useful or completely useful, and 60% indicated that they did not find it particularly useful (moderately useful, slightly useful, not useful at all).

Plan for preparing for inspection - Cynllun ar gyfer paratoi ar gyfer arolygiad

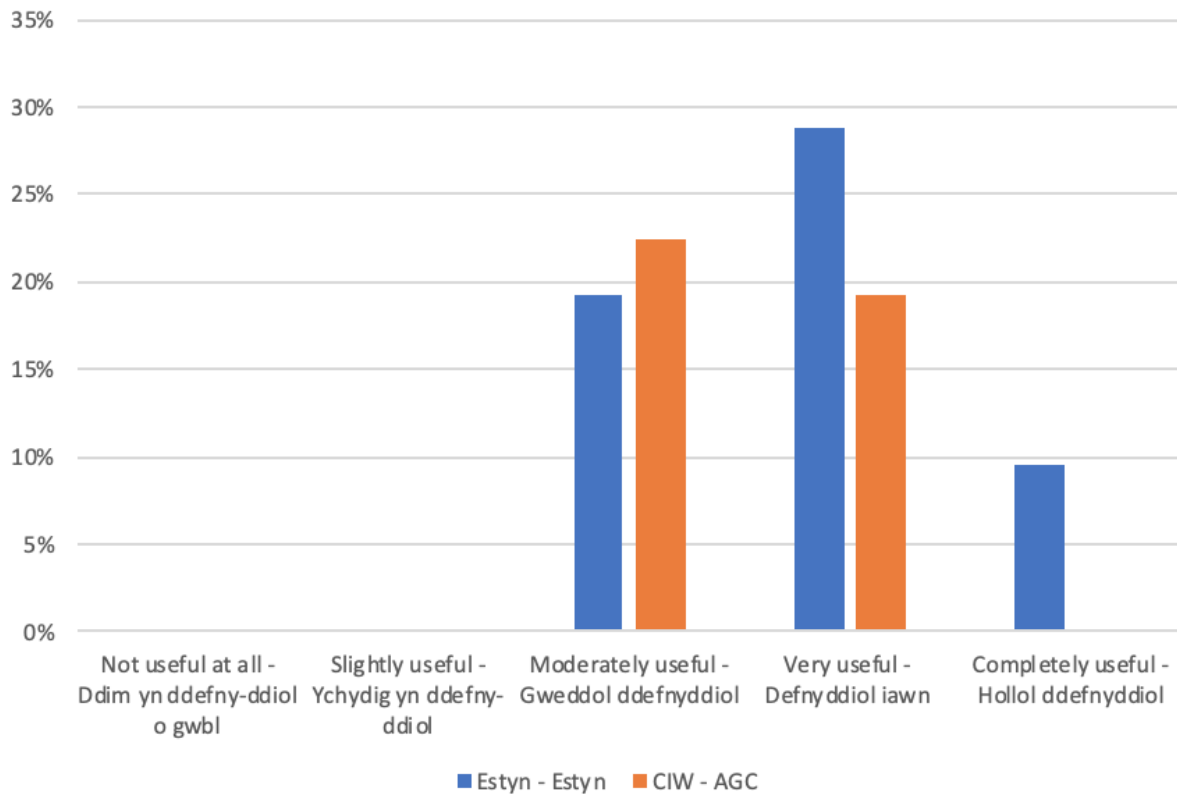


By contrast the **joint inspection toolkit** was deemed to be very useful or completely useful by most members who responded from both Estyn and CIW. This document could be used as a basis/template for the further development of other guidance available.



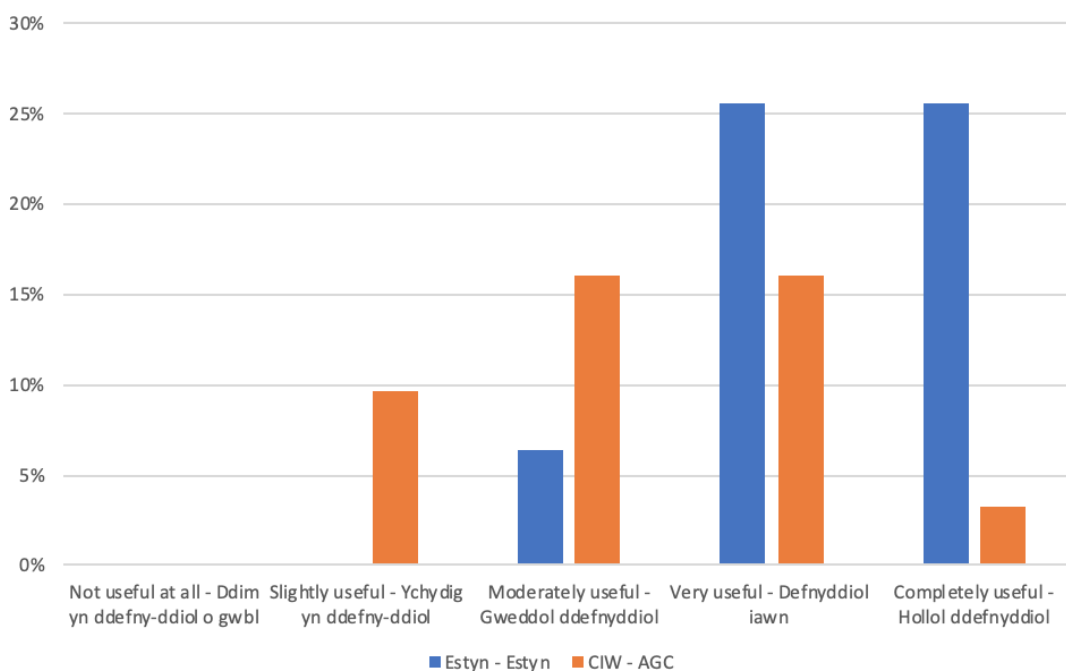
The **documentation which outlines the level of follow up guidance** used by the inspectors when deciding on the required next steps for settings following a joint inspection is regarded positively by approximately 60% of respondees, but over a third indicated they found it to be only moderately useful.

Guidance for follow-up - Canllawiau ar gyfer dilyniant

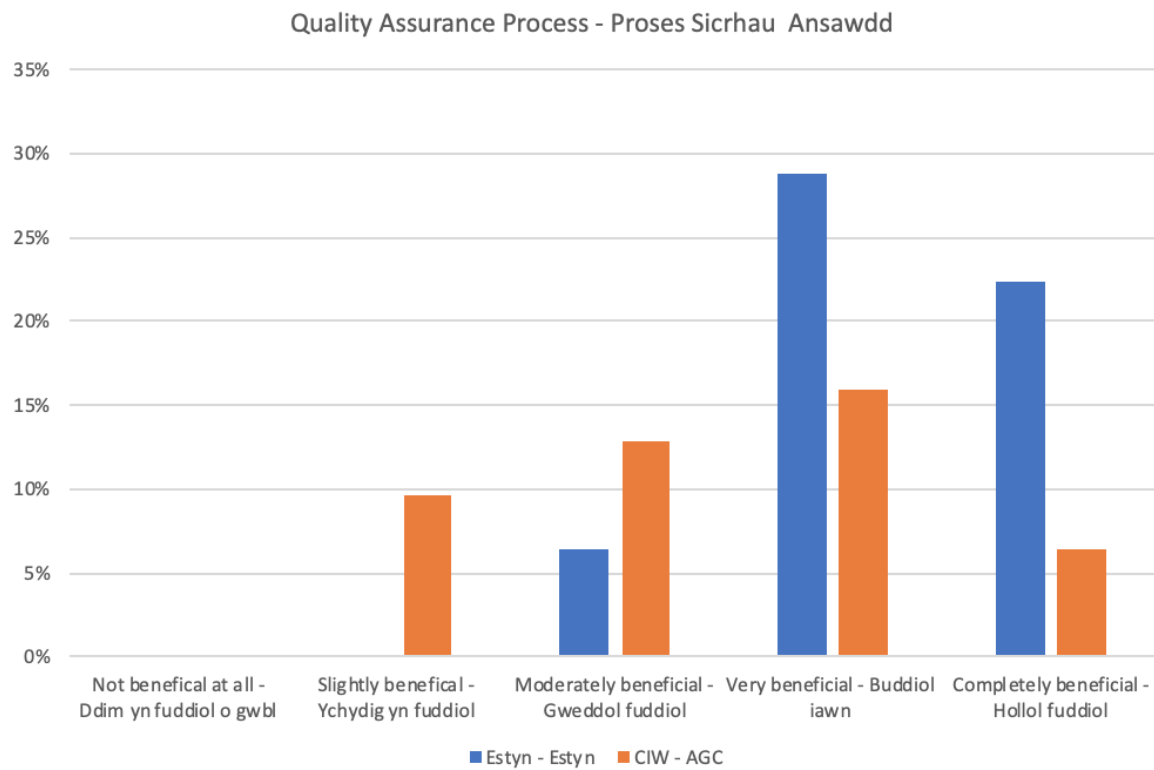


The **quality assurance checklist** used when compiling an inspection report is deemed to be more valuable by inspectors from Estyn than those from CIW. A review of this document to represent the needs of both organisations would be beneficial along with clear communication as to its purpose and effectiveness as a part of the quality assurance process.

Quality Assurance - Sicrwydd Ansawdd

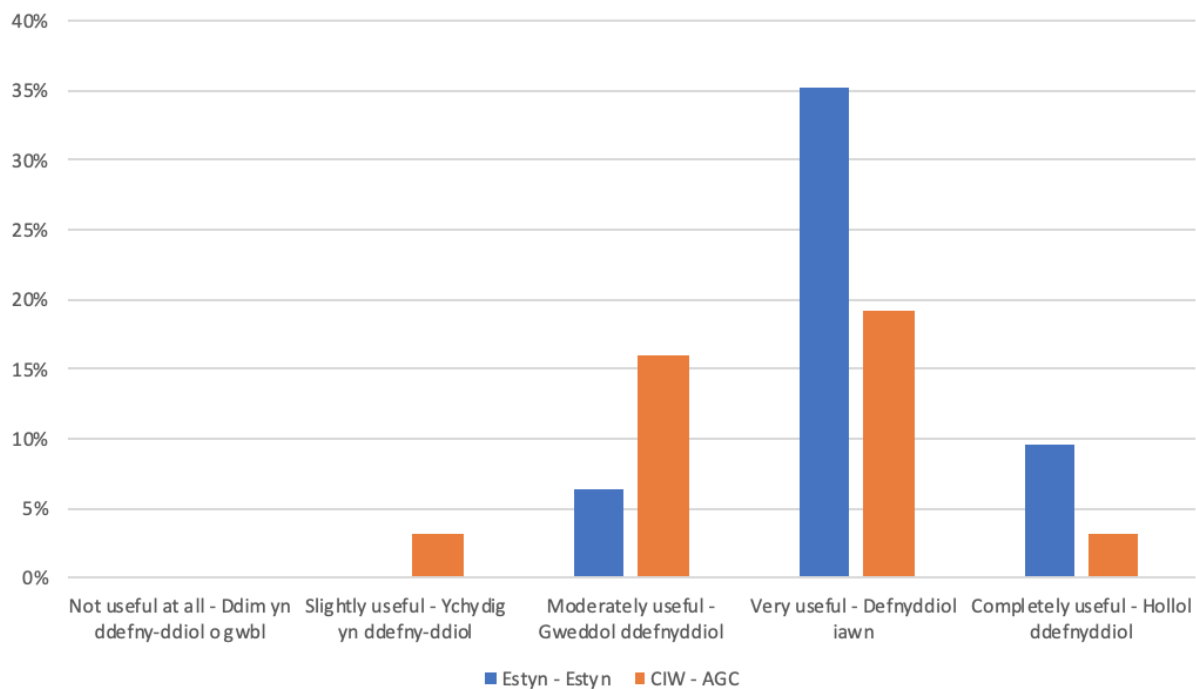


The benefit and value placed on **the quality assurance processes** presents a mixed picture across the responses from the two inspection bodies, with inspectors from Estyn expressing more positive views than those from CIW.



The **factual accuracy guidance** that is used by inspectors when responding to queries from settings again presents a mixed picture; during the focus groups discussions there were deliberations as to whether more queries from settings are directed to Estyn than they are to CIW. One explanation is that the inspection co-ordinators are employed by Estyn who are often the point of contact for queries that arise post inspection. This may be an area for further exploration by the inspection bodies.

Factual Accuracy Guidance - Canllawiau Cywirdeb Ffeithiol



While the body of guidance materials is directed at inspectors undertaking the inspections, a simplified document explaining the process, which is aimed at settings as its audience, would be welcomed. This could include a procedural diagram making the process more visual. Information about the process for challenging a report should be made explicit, as there were strongly held views that settings did not have the information needed to undertake this with confidence.

In line with CfW, ECPLC and new assessment arrangements, all guidance documentation should be reviewed to ensure consistency within the inspection process and that the language within them aligns with policy documents.

Length of Joint Inspections

The current joint inspection arrangements ensure that inspectors are at the setting for two consecutive mornings (half days). While the questionnaires returned from the Umborgs, LAs and settings indicated that this engagement works well and offers enough time for fair judgements to be reached, the focus group discussions highlighted important aspects for further consideration with regards to the duration and timetabling of joint inspections.

Two consecutive half days - Dau hanner diwrnod yn olynol



From the perspective of the settings this was felt to be sufficient time to gain an informed insight into their work however, further insights were gained from the focus group discussions; in small settings two half days could feel intense and stressful if an inspector was with one or two practitioners for the duration of the morning. Conversely, in larger settings it was felt that the inspectors did not have sufficient time to see and experience everything offered. It would be beneficial to consider a 'scale of time' spent in the settings based on the number of children present; the larger the setting, the longer the joint inspection visit. Regardless of how many children currently take up a place for EY education the size of the setting is constant. Alternatively, additional inspectors could be added to the team to inspect in a larger setting, if it is preferable to keep the timeframe the same. This would ensure that maximum evidence is gathered in an equitable way.

Another consideration shared by the settings and the inspectors, is that because inspectors attend in the mornings, they do not see provision and practice that takes place in the afternoons, for example, they may miss transitions at the end of the day or how larger settings provide for education places in the afternoons. A suggestion that inspectors should have a degree of flexibility in the timings of the day was put forward to capture wrap around provision such as Breakfast Club.

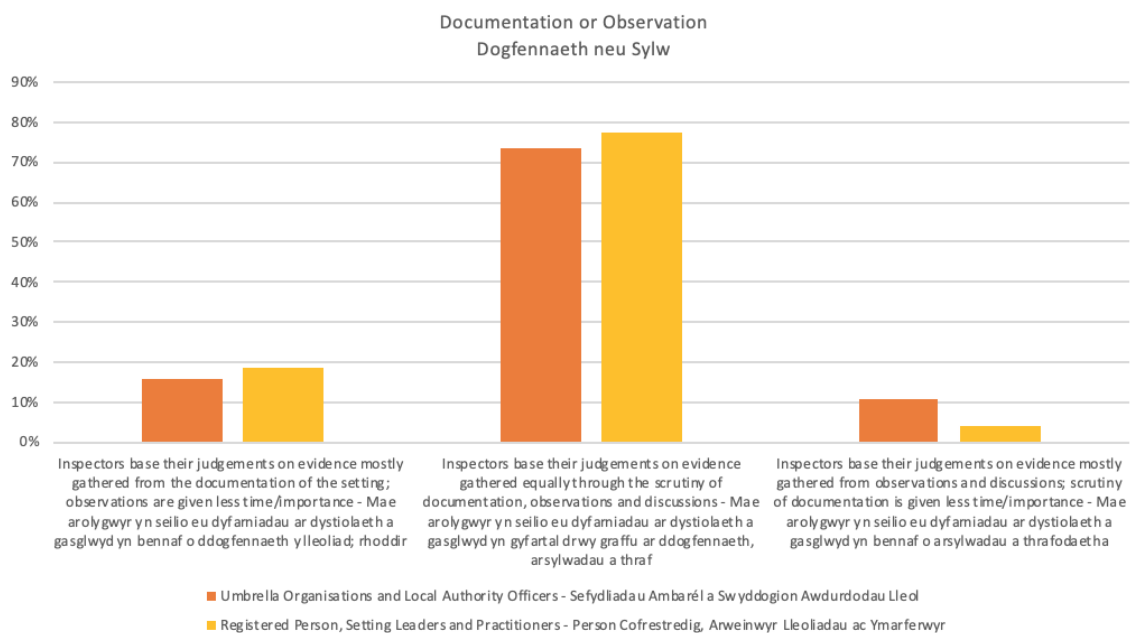
An adjustment to the way in which the time is spent within the settings could be reconsidered where applicable; for example, on Day 1 visit the setting in the morning and on Day 2 visit the setting in the afternoon to ensure that the span of the day is experienced by inspectors, or vice versa. This may mean that the feedback meeting would need to take place on Day 3, or later in the day on Day 2.

As inspectors from both CIW and Estyn indicated that for larger settings an additional half day would be of benefit to ensure they experienced and captured the whole picture, this could also tie in with feedback being given on Day 3. A suggestion that if an additional day or half day was added, it could be spent with the setting leader to request evidence missed, or for the setting to signpost inspectors to good practice not already noted.

From the perspective of the inspectors it was agreed that it was difficult within the time for two inspectors to undertake their task when they are focussing on key aspects of regulation that sit within the remit of each organisation and to ensure all areas are covered in sufficient depth.

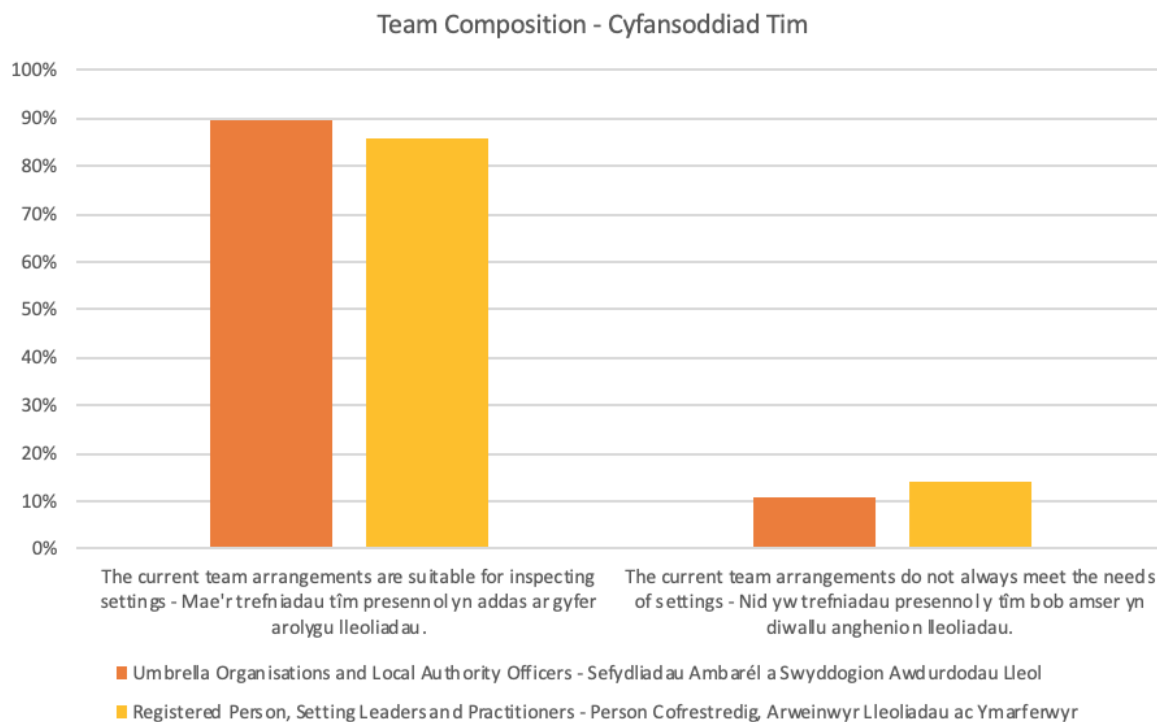
Balance of Evidence

Both written evidence, such as policies and record keeping, as well as observations made during the inspection form part of the process of reaching conclusions for inspectors. The balance of evidence collected, and the priority placed on it when reaching a judgement, is agreed as being fair and reasonable by Umborgs, LAs and settings.



Composition and Consistency of Inspection Teams

The inspection team currently consists of two inspectors; a lead inspector and a team inspector. If the inspection is led by an Estyn inspector, the team member will be an inspector from CIW. If the lead inspector is from CIW, the team member will be an inspector from Estyn. On first impression this representation and arrangement appears to be well received. Members of both inspection bodies, as well as the setting leaders, LAs and Umborgs find these arrangements work well.



When reviewing the commentary provided in questionnaires, it is clear that it can be stressful for practitioners when two inspectors are looking for different aspects of practice and provision as they feel they are “serving two masters”. It would be beneficial if the monitoring of quality in settings was more aligned to a broader approach/policy as some settings have responsibilities to numerous bodies, for example, Flying Start, childcare offer as well as Estyn and CIW.

“I think inspectors should converse more with leaders in asking them what they are looking for. I have been part of several inspections, and every inspector looks for something different, so it is hard to please them all.”

Practitioners stated that they have found some inspection teams to be inconsistent. They reported that in their experience, not all inspectors have embraced the pedagogy of the new curriculum yet and this is frustrating for practitioners and leaders of settings who have worked hard to develop new ways of supporting learning and care which are then not fully understood.

Ensuring that inspectors were experienced and familiar with the additional learning needs (ALN) of children is essential for settings particularly where a high number of children with ALN attend. This indicates the need for on-going or further training for inspectors on the intrinsic pedagogical approaches of CfW and the ALN Act, as the interpretation and perception are that the sector is not confident that these aspects are currently secure with all inspection teams.

It was generally agreed from a practitioner viewpoint that Estyn inspectors are more consistent than inspectors from CIW. Flying Start felt that inspectors from CIW have their own interpretation on judgements as what may be noted in one setting may be overlooked in another. One explanation for this, from the perspective of inspectors, is that as each setting is unique a slightly different approach may be taken to accommodate the setting's context and to explore some areas in more depth than others. That said, it is agreed that a greater emphasis on continuing moderation between the inspection bodies is needed, or a more radical overhaul of the framework so that shared criteria is developed in a more specific way.

There have been many new policy initiatives introduced by Welsh Government, the responsibility for which seems to be dispersed within the government. From a setting perspective, this can become burdensome especially when each directive has its own requirement in terms of action planning, self-reflection and reporting. While requirements sometimes overlap, they can lead to conflicting demands, and these points of contention need more appreciation by the inspection bodies, and ultimately review by policy officials in Welsh Government, in order to reduce the burden of a number of conflicting processes and document production which serve the same outcome.

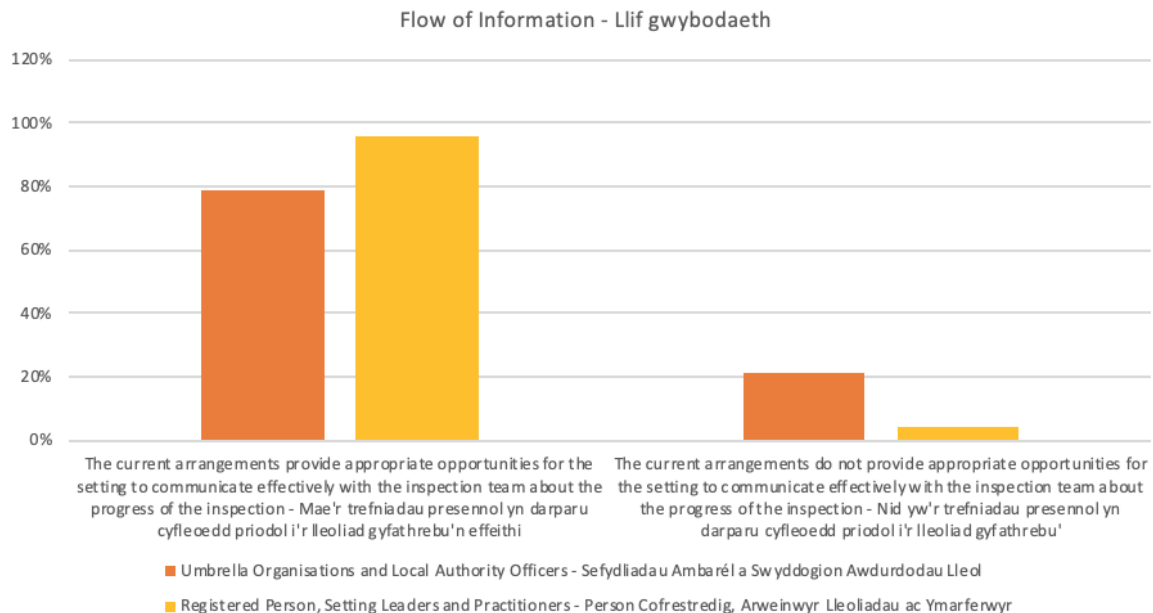
The view of the inspectors is that as each setting is different this inevitably leads to a focus aligned to specific elements that need deeper exploration and full consideration during inspection. Following lines of inquiry that emerge in a setting will lead to different examples of evidence being requested and focussed upon. This may appear as inconsistency to settings, whereas inspectors regard it as flexibly responding to the individual context and stage of development of the setting. Regular communication on this specific matter to settings, alongside some case studies prepared by Estyn and CIW, may address the perception of inconsistency and contribute to an improved shared understanding. Further information on the inconsistencies found by settings would be helpful in order to address any issues. This matter could be followed up with Umborgs and LA officers during the regular touchpoint meetings as a standing item with the inspection bodies. The process for feedback and information sharing is currently undertaken through six weekly meetings with Cwlwm and CIW, and through regular termly meetings between Estyn and EYATs.

Communication During an Inspection

A robust, fair and objective inspection process is welcomed by all stakeholders. The current approach of a joint inspection, in non maintained settings with education places, is one which is valued by all even though there are aspects for development and/or refinement.

Specifically, the process of how a fair inspection is undertaken must consider the needs and the wellbeing of the people involved and is perceived as being closely related to the amount

and quality of communication that occurs. The link between practitioner/setting leader wellbeing and clear communication with inspectors cannot be emphasised enough. The current arrangements are deemed to enable appropriate opportunities for the setting to communicate effectively with inspectors with >70% of professional participants indicating that there are appropriate opportunities for effective communication.



Many practitioners commented (through the questionnaires) on the positive relationship and respect shown during an inspection and that the flow of information between inspectors and the setting at all stages had been open and clear. A minority (approximately 20%) noted that there are disparities relating to communication and what a setting can and should experience.

“There seems to be disparity with this [*communication*] across settings and across Wales. Some settings have a clear relationship with their inspector and there is an open channel of communication during the entire inspection process. However, other settings have experienced the bare minimum of contact between themselves and the inspectors. This has a negative impact of the wellbeing of practitioners.”

“Staff automatically can go into "flight" mode during the inspection process if there is poor communication with the inspectors and are not then seen in their normal capacity. They can be fearful that they are being judged or being asked misleading questions to try to trip them up. This is really hard to overcome as it the normal reaction of anyone being monitored.”

Strong views relating to clear communication were expressed in many of the focus groups which represented all of the stakeholders. Participants agreed that practitioners found challenging an inspector difficult. It was felt that finding a process where staff feel confident to challenge an opinion should be sought. A clear route to voice any complaints regarding the conduct of the inspection team, or the process of inspection, is important as is having the opportunity to present further evidence on the second day or in relation to questions posed by the inspectors.

In the Review, it is noted that while it is the role of the setting leader to show that they are strong in leading a team and challenge the inspectors if needed, in practice this can be daunting. Within the framework there should be a mechanism for dialogue during an inspection at regular points, whereby key points of discussion are documented to ensure that the communication flow between the setting and the inspectors is openly recorded. One suggestion is noted below:

“Occasionally the settings feel obliged to say that the inspectors are conducting the inspection professionally as they worry it will impact on the outcome of the inspection. Could there be a questionnaire after the first day which may allow the setting to provide feedback virtually?”

The setting leader has a crucial part to play in the flow of communication. Where the leadership is strong, then they are more confident and likely to question the inspectors decisions, but built-in mechanisms are needed to ensure an expectation on the part of inspectors and leaders for open discussion and dialogue.

It was noted and discussed that wellbeing and communication also impacts the inspectors and how this nuanced aspect of their role facilitates reaching a fair conclusion. If honest conversations are required to address shortcomings, then on-going support and training for inspectors in this aspect are crucial to ensure that their wellbeing is also prioritised.

Feedback Meeting

The end of inspection feedback meeting is welcomed by settings.

There should be consideration as to the location of the feedback meeting. Not all settings have sufficient space to accommodate a large meeting. It should also be a place where the setting leader feels at ease. Setting leaders appreciate two practitioners from the setting being present at the meeting as it is difficult sometimes to remember everything that is said.

Confidentiality needs to be respected, but no setting leader should be placed in a position of being the sole bearer of bad news to a wider audience on the issuing of the report. From the focus group discussions, it was suggested that in this instance, the setting leader should be allowed to nominate a professional of their choice to act as their mentor and supporter for this interim period, and funding for this support should be from a central source. Potentially, there could be a meeting a couple weeks after the feedback meeting between inspectors and the setting leader accompanied by their chosen representative to re-visit the issues raised once the news has settled, giving time for reflection and a more measured response.

It is agreed that the feedback meeting is a very helpful touchpoint for professionals connected to the setting only. The number of people present should be specified and this should be kept the same for all settings, with some provision for exceptions. Some leeway could be added in the framework for additional personnel to be present if circumstances indicated that this was needed. The purpose of a particular body being represented should be the deciding factor, for example, if their presence contributed to outcomes of the meeting. As the outcomes of

the inspection are sometimes altered in the report following the meeting, this would be another reason to keep the representative group small.

The expectation is that inspectors from both Estyn and CIW are present during the feedback meeting. It is noted through focus groups with setting leaders that on rare occasions, representation from only one organisation is present. In these exceptional circumstances this is due to sudden illness or other unforeseen circumstances.

Inspectors, setting leaders, EYATs and Umborgs all agree that parents should be informed of outcome of the inspection only once the report is published and should not participate in the feedback meeting, as per current arrangements.

Reporting Timescales

Following the joint inspection, a report is produced within 45 working days from the start of the inspection.

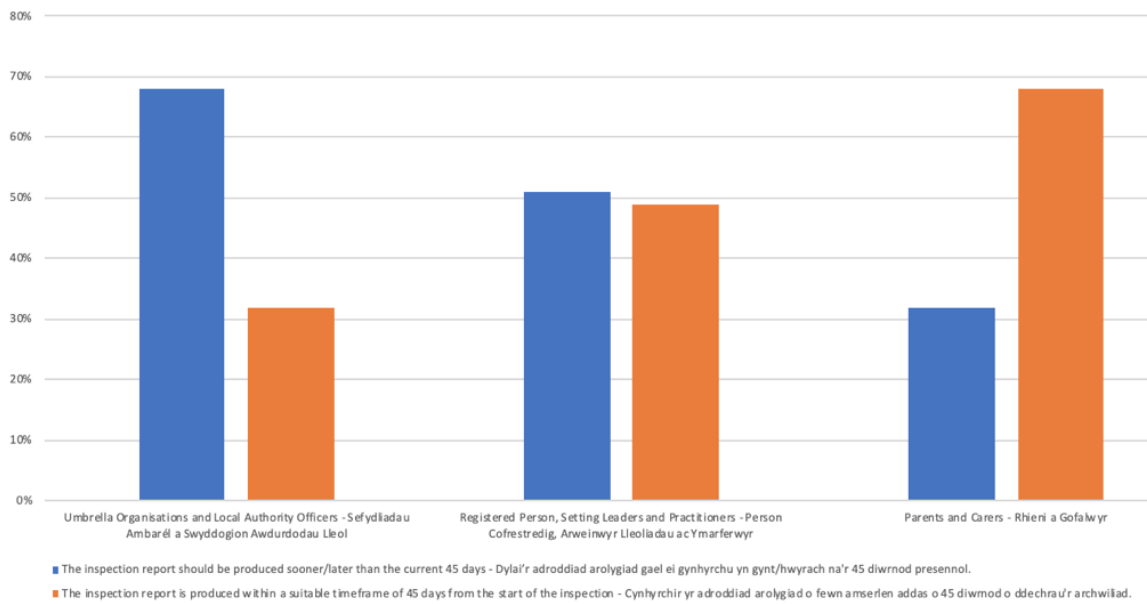
The views on the 45 day period differ according to the perspective of the stakeholder; with some people wishing to have a shorter reporting period and others a longer one. The logistics of preparing the report and having it quality assured must be given due consideration and prioritised to ensure quality and accuracy.

Where there are issues of non-compliance, there was agreement that these reports should be expedited in order to address shortcomings more quickly.

“I would like to see the report produced within a shorter timescale, especially where there is non-compliance or a number of shortcomings.”

In cases where CIW issues a Priority Action Notice to a setting, this is outlined during the feedback meeting with the required action made clear to ensure full compliance. In these cases, the Priority Action Notice is normally shared with the setting before the publication of the inspection report.

Inspection Report - Adroddiad Arolygiad



From the perspective of the setting, when they are eager to share a good news scenario, 45 days can feel like it is too long a period. Alternatively, settings are eager to improve and begin the work on any areas that need addressing but are mindful of not breaking confidentiality by suddenly starting a new strand of work. These aspects were captured in comments from the questionnaires.

“I appreciate that writing the report is time consuming, particularly if you are trying to incorporate the views of two inspectors; however, this can feel like a long time for a setting to wait, it can feel a bit like an anti-climax when the report is eventually issued.”

“As the findings are confidential until the final report is completed it makes it difficult for settings to begin working on priorities/recommendations without disclosing result of inspections and if inspection has gone really well it's a long time before they can share the good news.”

“I think it should be produced within 2/3 weeks. We were so excited about our gradings but had to wait until the report had been published which was hard as we wanted to celebrate with our staff and service users sooner.”

On balance, 45 days continues to be a workable and fair position, with the exception of non-compliance where the full report should be expedited.

Section 4 - Recommendations; Joint Inspection Arrangements

Timescales

- Maintain the ten days’ notice period but consider adding a caveat of “exceptional circumstances” whereby an additional two or three days’ notice could be offered.

- Review how the EYATs provide information to the Estyn and CIW about a setting prior to the inspection. Potentially replace the written report with a short narrative in conjunction with a Teams meeting or telephone call.
- Inspectors stated they need more time to consider the evidence gathered via the VIR; this has implications for the ten days' notice period. Alternatively, consideration could be given to streamlining the evidence collected prior to the inspection.
- It would be valuable to consider a 'scale of time' spent in the settings based on the number of children present; the larger the setting, the longer the joint inspection visit (adding one day as needed), regardless of the number of education places.
- Reframe the pattern of visits made by inspectors so that on Day 1, they visit the setting in the morning and on Day 2, they visit the setting in the afternoon, to ensure that the span of the day is observed and experienced by inspectors.
- Consider a third half-day or full-day for larger settings.
- Maintain the 45 day period for issuing the report with the exception on non-compliance whereby there is a faster turn-around on the report.

Virtual Inspection Room

- Consider how improvements might be made to the VIR for ease of access and usability.
- Revisit the functionality of the VIR and task code writers to make the bridge between the software packages more unified.
- Training in the VIR software for all inspectors on induction and as an on-going refresher/mop-up would of benefit to both inspection teams.
- Setting leaders stated an opportunity to discuss the evidence in the VIR with inspectors prior the start of the inspection would be beneficial to all parties.
- Explore feasibility of allowing EYATs to access information on the VIR to facilitate and streamline workload.
- Ensure the VIR is open prior to the Inspection Coordinator contacting the setting to ensure that it is ready for use as soon as notice of inspection is issued.

Collaboration and Documentation

- Review documentation that forms part of the joint inspection process for its use and purpose to the two inspection bodies to ensure that it meets the needs of both. (Pre-inspection Plan, Joint Inspection Toolkit, Follow-up Guidance, Quality Assurance Checklist, Quality Assurance Process, and Factual Accuracy Guidance)
- Revise the language of all guidance documentation to reflect the terminology of CfW and ECPLC.
- Maintain opportunities for inspectors to collaborate at all points of the joint inspection.
- Create a simplified document aimed at settings which highlights the procedural elements of an inspection, including process diagrams.
- Ensure documents provide clear information for settings that wish to challenge the findings of an inspection.

Length of Joint Inspections

- Consider adjusting the length of the joint inspection based on the size of the setting; larger settings may need more time.
- Consider the timetabling of inspection actions over the two days to ensure that all practice and provision is observed and experienced by the inspectors e.g. breakfast club, after school club, lunch provision, morning session, afternoon session.
- Add an additional half or full day for larger settings to ensure that there is time for everything to be observed and that there is sufficient time for the feedback meeting.

Balance of Evidence

- Maintain the balance of evidence gathered through the inspection process.
- Provide an opportunity for discussion about evidence in the VIR between the setting leader and the inspection team prior to the commencement of the inspection.
- Provide an opportunity for the setting to explain evidence while inspectors are at the setting.

Composition and Consistency of Inspection Teams

- **A significant and key recommendation from the review for the longer term is to develop an early years inspection framework aligned with the aspirations of ECPLC so that the team is working from a unified, common framework, that reflects the changes in Early Years. There are key considerations for change within this due to the current complex picture of Early Years in Wales; some documentation is not statutory such as the Quality Framework. A unified but simplified inspection across Early Years is recommended.**
- Closer alignment between the two inspection bodies is highly recommended so that in future rather than offering a joint inspection, it is simply an “early years inspection”. In practice it would mean that inspectors would potentially inspect all/any areas of the framework, regardless of their organisational roots. It is clear that inspectors from both organisations are skilled and knowledgeable in early years, so consideration could now be given to a more blended team when undertaking inspections; could Estyn comment of the remit of CIW and vice versa? Additional exploration of legislative remits may need to be reconfigured over time to facilitate this change/development.
- With the cooperation of Welsh Government policy officials, streamline the demands on the early years’ workforce with regards to inspection evidence. Reporting requirements from different parts of early years’ policy creates unnecessary replication for setting leaders and practitioners.
- Provide regular mandatory training for inspectors on the ALN Act, CfW and ECPLC to ensure that the pedagogy, process and language used in documentation and observations is fully understood, recognised, and reported upon when inspections are undertaken.

* Developing an inspection approach based on ECPLC could potentially overlap with inspections of Nursery and Reception within schools to ensure that the same aspects of early

years practice are being valued and to minimise disparities between sectors. While this approach is aspirational in nature, inspection is considered by the stakeholders involved as a mechanism for developing cohesion for all parties involved in early years care and education in Wales.

Communication During an Inspection

- The flow of information during an inspection could be better secured by establishing “information touchpoints” as part of the process between the inspectors and the settings.
- Develop a mechanism for virtual feedback which can be used anonymously by the team at the setting to register key points and concerns during the inspection process.
- Offer training to setting leaders in managing and engaging with honest/challenging conversations. This recommendation could be fed back to Welsh Government colleagues as a national training need.
- Ensure that the current support is in place for inspectors who may need to deliver difficult messages to settings is communicated well in both organisations.

Feedback Meeting

- Consider the location of the meeting to ensure comfort and confidentiality.
- No setting leader should be placed in a position of being the sole bearer of difficult news to a wider audience on the issuing of the report. Developing a mechanism for the setting to nominate a professional of their choice to act as their mentor and supporter for the interim period between the feedback meeting and the issuing of the report would be seen as an extension of the duty of care to professional wellbeing. This important initiative would require funding from a central source.
- As per current arrangements, keep the number of people attending the feedback meeting to a minimum with the caveat that, if needed, additional stakeholders can attend. Communicate clearly the rationale for their attendance.

Section 5 - Inspection Themes

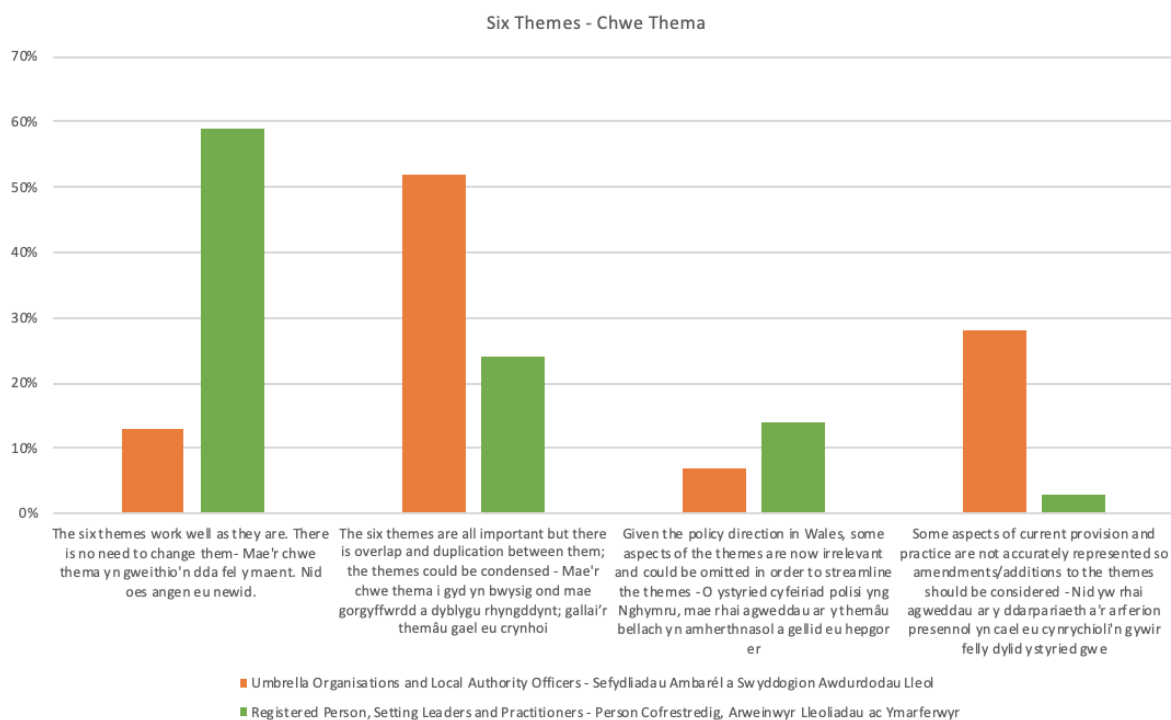
The joint inspection framework currently incorporates six themes:

Children: Themes 1 and 2 consider children’s outcomes. (Wellbeing and Learning)

Practitioners: Themes 3 and 4 consider how well practitioners contribute towards these. (Care and development, and Teaching and Assessment)

Leadership: Themes 5 and 6 consider the quality of leadership in ensuring good outcomes for the child. (Environment and Leadership)

As the impact of embedding CfW within non-maintained settings that offer education places continues to strengthen, views on the themes that are inspected during a joint inspection indicate a more polarised view between settings and their leaders, and the Umborgs/LAs. Setting leaders and practitioners feel that the six current themes work well, while the Umborgs and LAs have identified overlap and duplication between them and their comments indicate that an overhaul on the themes is needed.



One explanation that came through the focus group discussions for this difference of opinion is that settings directly experience inspections less frequently than LA and Umborg officers. For the latter groups, their core work is frequently linked to inspections and so their views take account of a broader range of experiences based on their work with different settings, while setting leaders/practitioners base their views on their most recent experience of inspection, which may have occurred sometime previously and could relate to a single experience.

“All 6 themes are important but could perhaps be more closely aligned with the curriculum e.g. effective environment, enabling adults and engaging experiences (these could include planning and assessments and reflective practice), wellbeing (this could incorporate aspects of care and development) and leadership and management would also have to remain as stand alone.”

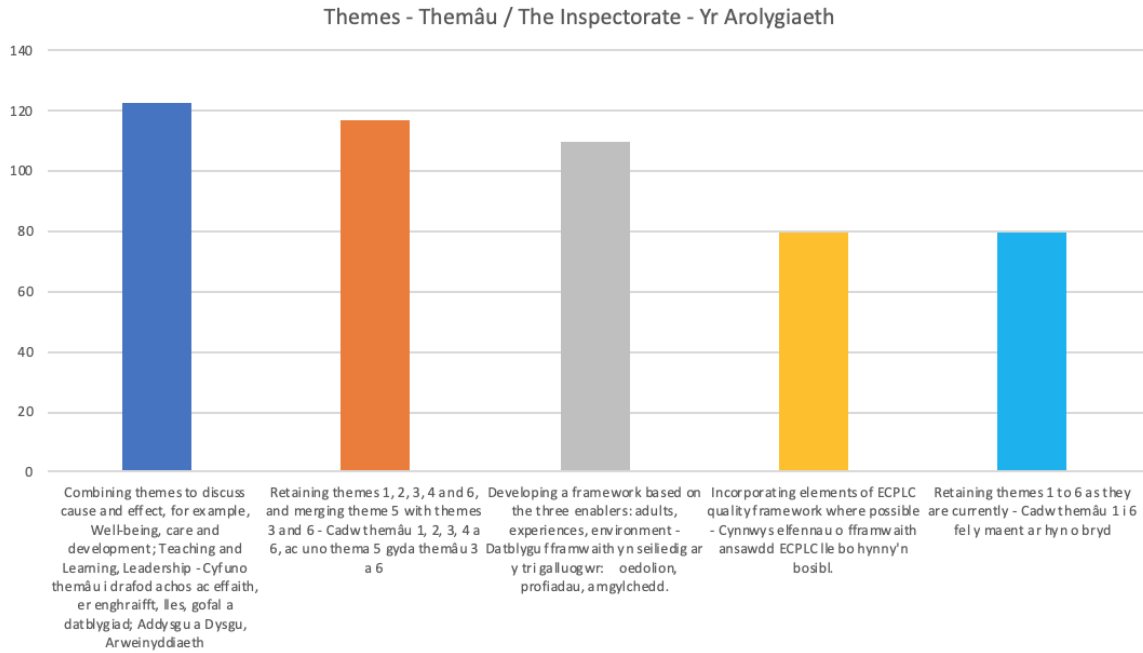
“It would make sense for the themes to be condensed and aligned with those of the curriculum for the non-maintained. i.e. enabling adults, environment, experiences, and leadership.”

During the focus groups, participants were tasked with considering alternative approaches and lenses through which settings could be inspected. Suggestions included:

- Use the three enablers as themes for inspection: the effective environment, enabling adults and engaging experiences, with Leadership as a stand-alone strand.
- Bring themes into line with the developmental pathways of the Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care (ECPLC) document. This would allow for greater consistency in strategic improvement planning for this age group in general and align with policy aspirations and intentions.
- Using the five Developmental Pathways to streamline planning, assessment, and value added within the new curriculum and add leadership as an additional theme.

During the focus group discussions, one agreement that was reached by settings/leaders and LAs/Umborgs is that a better alignment of the inspection framework with ECPLC is essential as this would improve links between curriculum, practice, provision, leadership and inspection.

As part of the internal questionnaire, inspectors were asked to prioritise their top three preferences for arranging the themes for inspection. Their responses indicate a boarder range of views of what would work best in future, but they align with the suggestions put forward by other stakeholders. The following chart indicates the inspectors’ responses:



From the perspective of parents and carers, when asked what findings mattered to them most from an inspection, 58% of parents and carers stated their number one priority is how safe children are, and 42% of them stated they were most interested in the quality of play and learning. Both of these priorities are at the heart of ECPLC and for parents and carers could be incorporated in the approach going forward. Ideally, they would be commented upon specifically in the inspection report.

Section 5 - Recommendations; Inspection Themes

- Review the themes for joint inspections to align with Welsh policy direction using Early Childhood Play Learning and Care (2023) (ECPLC) as the foundation for inspection.

Section 6 - Summative Judgements

The use of summative judgements within inspection reports fields deeply held opinions and views which are frequently polarised. The following section outlines the views of different stakeholders.

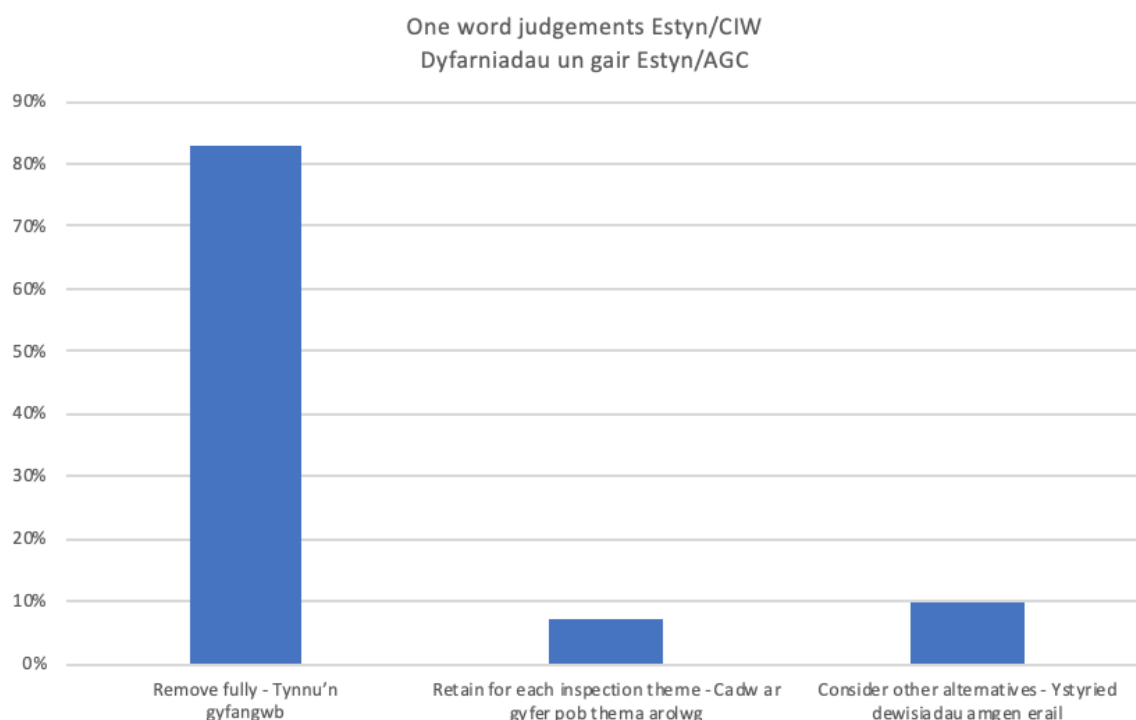
The inspectors' response from the questionnaires is a resounding and collective one to desist from using them in future. When asked, "How do you feel we should progress with the use of summative gradings?" More than 80% indicated they should be fully removed with a further 10% indicating other options should be explored. Only 7% felt they should be retained in future inspections.

Comments from inspectors include the following:

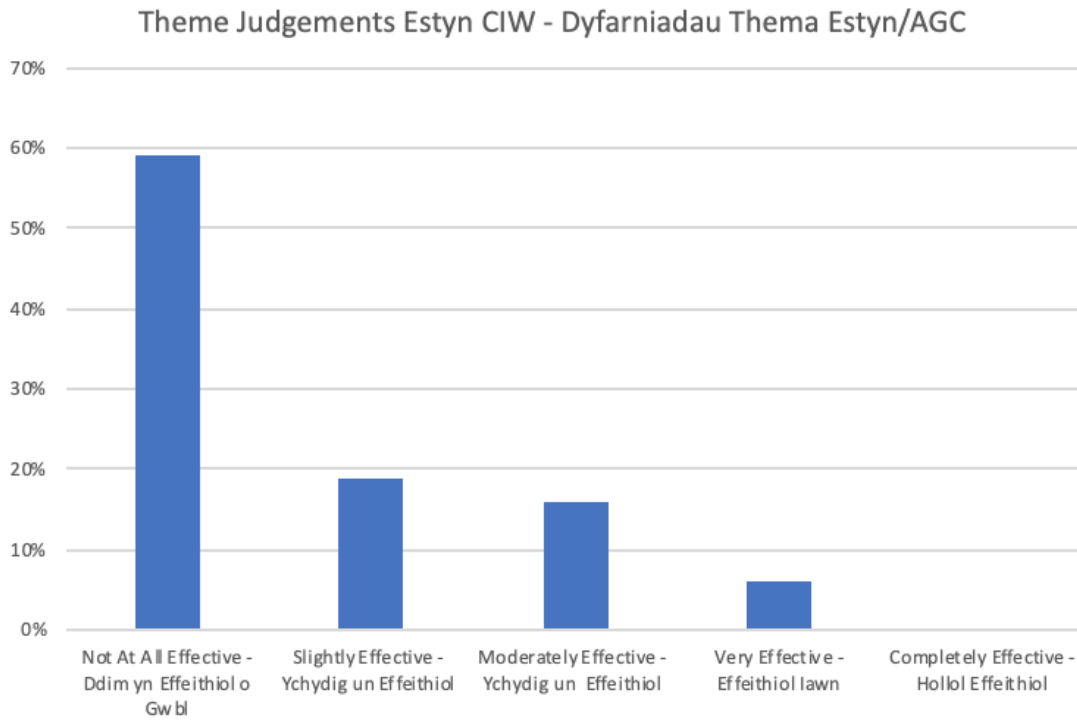
"The gradings create a lot of stress for providers and for us. It's hard in two short windows of visits to be completely sure the grading is right and providers and the public are so focussed on the grading it makes you wonder if they read the rest of the report and listen to the more detailed feedback positive and negative."

"Giving grades to ensure improvement but possibly not publishing them in the report. Save them on database/CIW portal/Estyn portal."

"They are not useful. More time is given to discuss if the setting is good or excellent, for example. Settings generally don't listen to the strengths and areas for improvement and there is a greater focus on the word."

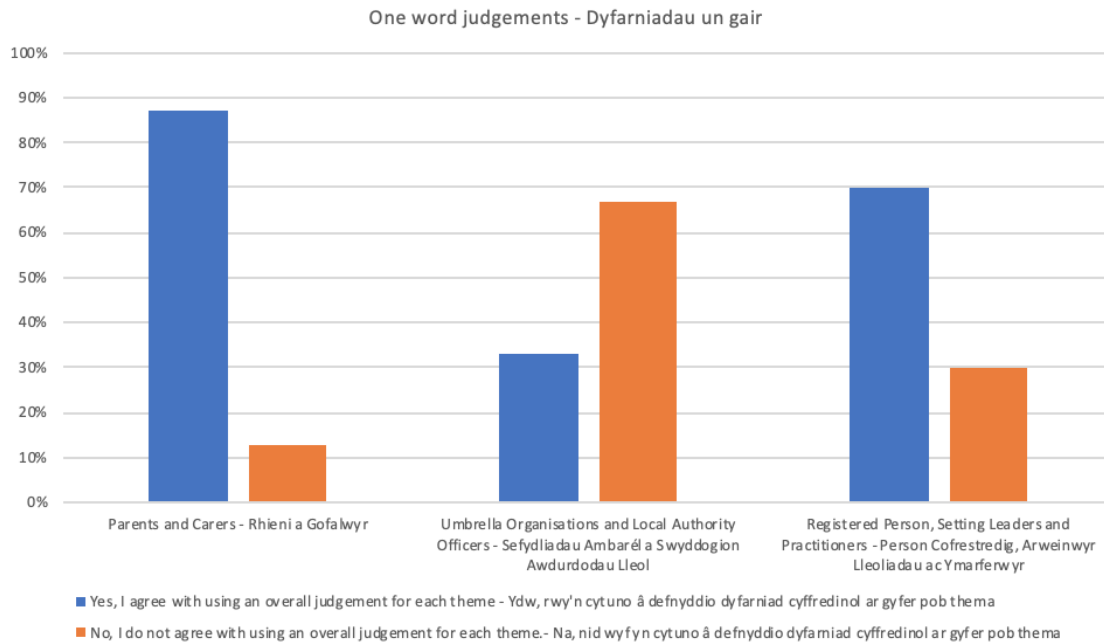


The inspectors were also asked “How effective do you find overall summative gradings for each inspection theme?”



Commentary from the inspectors stated that the summative judgements could lead to a misrepresentation of a larger issue from an inspection, and sometimes time taken agreeing on the judgements with colleagues is out of proportion to the narrative created for the body of the report. Alternatives to summative judgements were put forward by inspectors, for example;

“Short feedback focussing on positives in an informal manner. Followed by robust recommendations and a brief discussion with LA teacher to highlight how this could be developed to ensure improvement.”



70% Registered Person/Setting leaders agree with using summative judgements for each theme.

Reasons that came through from this Review are that settings find the summative judgements clear and from a business stance as it enables them to promote their settings to prospective families by quoting the judgements as strengths.

“Practitioners can see strengths and weaknesses, room for improvement from the language. Parents can make an informed choice at a glance.”

“The overall judgement does not show a true reflection but helps us in other ways.”

“By giving a brief overall judgement at the particular time of the inspection, it's easier to quickly see where improvements can be made.”

“It showcases our setting and what we are doing well.”

32% Umborgs and LA officers agree with using summative judgements for each theme, those who opposed their use (68%) gave reasons why they are not always helpful. For example, the Review uncovered that the use of summative judgements makes settings competitive and not as willing to share good practice. It can be detrimental to judgement outcomes as the practice is not unique to a setting and therefore is played down by a setting. It can also impact on morale if the outcome is not positive and lead to a disengaged workforce, a workforce that already faces huge retention issues.

The vocabulary used within judgements was an area of broad discussion with concerns raised about the connotations of certain words:

“The vocabulary used needs to be more positive. The word adequate carries negative connotations. I hope that judgements are removed in the future as they cause unnecessary stress and anxiety and have on occasion led to people leaving the sector.”

Focus group discussions revealed that many professional colleagues indicated that having summative judgements can be too broad and need to be removed to open up an honest professional dialogue about provision and practice rather than relying on single words as a watertight position.

“I feel the current vocabulary can have a massive impact on perception. It is not encompassing of the full nature of the service and can be very demoralising.”

LA officers and Umborgs compared joint inspections with practices in inspecting schools where opinions indicated that removing summative judgements has led to far richer dialogue now that they have been removed. Their removal may also result in a more open and relaxed inspection as it may be perceived as a less high-stakes approach.

EYATS, Umborgs and settings leaders appreciated that summative judgements stay with a setting until the next inspection even if the practice alters in the meantime. This can be misleading and may unnecessarily advantage or disadvantage a setting.

“Adequate sounds like the setting is not achieving. Judgements can become quickly outdated and irrelevant but remain in place until the next inspection.”

“If you get a poor grading, it might be for something minor such as an admin process which can be quickly put right, but it stays with the setting until the next inspection. This doesn’t seem a fair approach.”

Summative judgements can be restrictive and not represent the full picture of practice and provision and it may lead to the full report having its impact diminished. The narrative in a report is sufficient, as it reflects the practice in the setting better than single words.

“In our field, the judgements and descriptors may determine what additional support (if any) is required. However, for parents viewing a report this may cloud their choice or decision and/or also give them outdated information once time has passed.”

86% Parents and carers agree with using summative judgements for each theme as they felt this was a clear way to understand how well a setting performs. When asked if they had ideas for relaying information on other ways there was some interest in summaries:

“Brief summaries and a full report being made available would probably suit most people who wish to have the full report or just a summary.”

While one parent indicated a desire to return to a colour coding system:

“I felt the old colour coding system schools used to have was helpful. A green setting is great, a red setting not so great.”

If summative judgements are retained, then new vocabulary should be selected and introduced as some of the current terms are too broad to be meaningful. If summative judgements are removed, then it would be important to ensure the report reflected the standard that a judgement would have given.

Section 6 - Recommendations; Summative Judgements

On balance the removal of summative judgements in full is recommended.

Reasons for their removal (which are described in the section above) include:

- they are juxtaposed to the ethos of CfW;
- the implementation of Curriculum for Wales has moved away from such judgements so retaining them would mean that the non maintained sector is the only sector using them which is out of step with schools;
- a point in time judgment remains in place for long time which disproportionately advantages or disadvantages settings;
- the stress relating to receiving the judgements for setting leaders, and for inspectors who make the assessments and award them, is an on-going concern;
- overall judgements create a sense of competition which inhibits collaboration between settings;
- more emphasis is placed on overall judgements than on the body of the entire report giving a narrow view of a setting's strengths and areas for development;
- the language of the judgements is ambiguous/confusing, sometimes incorporating too large a range;
- it is difficult to capture the entire performance and achievements of a setting in one word.

Reasons for retaining the judgements primarily link to the following:

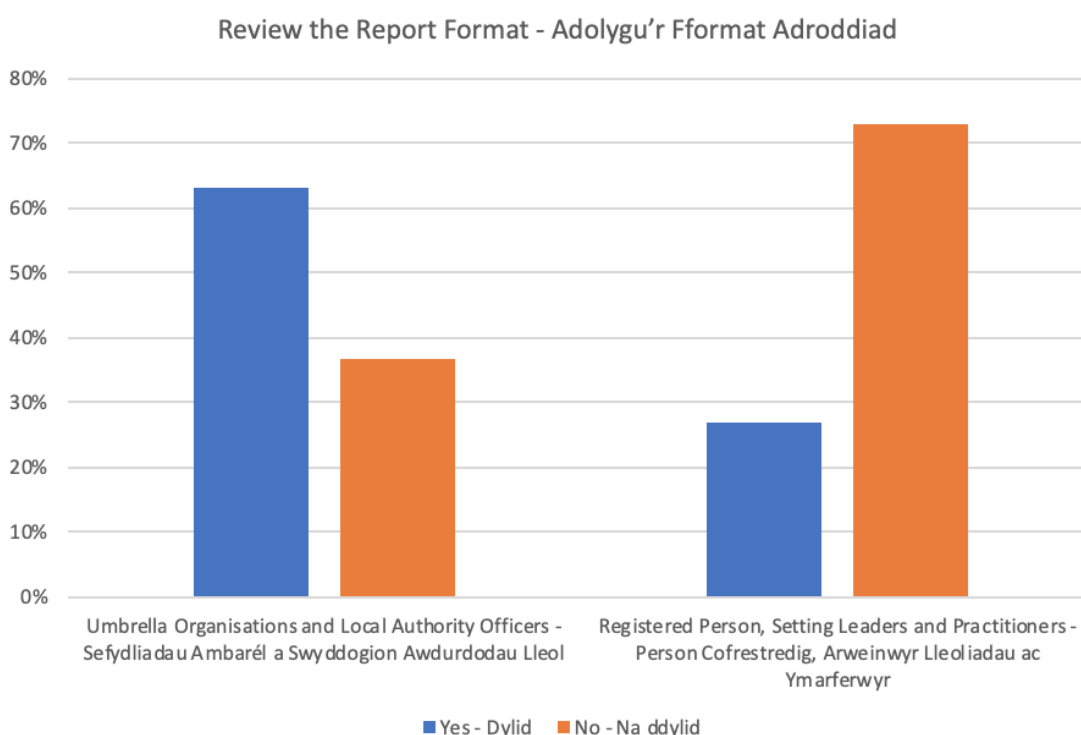
- While parents/carers and setting leaders indicate that they wish to retain overall judgements, the principal reason presented by these groups is that they capture, in a simple and brief way, how a setting is performing. Relaying this information could be achieved in other clear and understandable ways, for example, through a one page summary of findings linked to an updated report format. (See Section 7)

Section 7 - The Report

It was unanimously agreed by all stakeholders that the final inspection report should capture the key headlines of the inspection findings and give enough information as to the current status of a setting. There were differences in opinion of what the report should comprise of.

There are differing views between stakeholder as to whether the inspection report format should be reviewed in full in line with recommendations on other aspects of the process, for example, summative judgements.

Should the current format of the joint inspection report be reviewed?



More than 60% of Umborg and LA responses indicated that a change in format is needed, while over 70% of RIs and setting leaders indicated a review of the report was not needed. Generally, it is felt that a narrative is sufficient in a report, but some terminology was stated to be misleading, particularly for parents who may not appreciate the subtlety of “many”, “most”, “nearly all”. The writing of the report may need refining in order to better consider its audience.

When considering how well the current report highlights the areas of strength and development, responses from the inspectors indicated that these are captured quite well (over 70%) or very well (15%).

“I would like to see the report written in a more holistic way rather than under the 6 themes, often there is repetition across the themes. I don’t believe that the parent/carers fully understand the quantifiable language used.”

“As the Curriculum for Funded Non-maintained Settings focusses on the 3 Enablers (Enabling Adults, Engaging Experiences and Effective Environments) then surely Joint Inspection reports should also respond under the 3 Enablers.”

“Include quotes from parents, children and staff to make it more personal.”

From focus group discussions, we can conclude that there is a collective respect for the thought and analysis that goes into creating the narrative of the report. It was agreed that the narrative is most often used by other professionals and this must be retained to both mark the setting’s current performance and to ensure feedback is comprehensive and informative; it must not be dumbed down.

“Meeting the needs of multiple stakeholders is difficult and we hold concerns that trying to publish reports that encompass all may detract from the main purpose of the report - to support practitioners and settings and ultimately improve outcomes for children.”

There was also a high level of interest in developing a one page summary to complement a narrative report that would be used to capture key findings and replace the summative judgements. This approach would serve settings in providing a quick-glance document for supporting the business aspect of their work as well as an ‘at a glance’ option to share with parents and carers who may not be interested in reading the whole report.

“I like the idea of a one page profile, common to all settings, which captures the key findings of the joint inspection under agreed headings which could be used alongside the main report to support parents and quickly provide key information.”

Section 7 - Recommendations; The Report

- Maintain the 45-day period for issuing the inspection report with one exception; where major shortcomings are found within a setting, the report should be expedited to facilitate immediate action to alleviate issues around stress and wellbeing.
- The main body of inspection reports should continue to capture the key headlines and findings making clear the current position of the setting.
- Maintain the rigour found in current narrative reports as this is most frequently used by other professionals to support continuing improvement.
- Review the report format in line with any changes in the themes that are reported upon.
- A review of some of the terminology utilised when creating the report would be welcomed. While professionals understand the nuances of quantitative language such as “many”, “most”, “nearly all” etc. considering more inclusive vocabulary for a boarder audience such as parents and carers would be a positive change.
- Consider the addition of a one page summary to the main inspection report which could be used to capture the headline findings, replace summative judgements and complement the full narrative version.

- The one page summary could serve the needs of parents and carers, as well as providing headline information by settings new families and as an “at a glance” version. The one page summary would need to align with any changes made to the themes.

Conclusion

The hard work and commitment of the sector is valued, respected and appreciated by the inspection bodies. Over the last decade much has been achieved for children taking up funded NMS places. By establishing a shared vision for care and learning, there is a clear way ahead, even though the implementation of the vision of ECPLC is not yet universal.

The joint inspection process has been welcomed by settings and provides a valuable insight into their work and development. Collectively, joint inspections since 2019 have provided a picture of practice across Wales in the funded NMS and has led to an increase in mutual understanding and respect, between the inspection bodies and the sector, which was evident throughout the Review.

Against a challenging backdrop of retention and rising costs in the NMS, settings have worked hard to develop their practice in line with the aspirations of CfW. Joint inspection commentaries clearly depict this development. Many settings offer high quality opportunities for young children and those that don't meet expectations through the inspection process are supported by LAs and Umborgs. They support them in progressing and refining practice in line with key recommendations and an agreed level of support, a key success of the joint inspection approach.

Evidence gathered throughout the Review revealed that the skill set of the two organisations, Estyn and CIW, overlaps considerably. The longer term direction of joint inspections must be connected to the aspirations of, and alignment with, the ECPLC. This moment in time, post the introduction of CfW, is viewed as an optimal period for creating and developing a new inspection process that is rooted in evidenced based practice and genuinely meets the needs of young children.

A blended model of inspection is robustly proposed whereby a group of inspectors, who are early years specialists, would undertake inspections based on one core set of criteria, bringing together both care and education. Currently the inspections may be jointly operated by Estyn and CIW but there is a perception that they are based on parallel criteria which is judged separately by the two inspection bodies and then assembled for reporting and accountability purposes.

The era of ECPLC should be a time of development across the sector and between the inspection bodies. In future, inspections in the funded, non-maintained sector should be undertaken to reflect the long term aims of Wales for early childhood, care, provision and pedagogy. This will require careful strategic planning at policy level in conjunction with leads from Estyn and Care Inspectorate Wales, and other stakeholders.

Overview of Recommendations

Timescales

Review timescales before, during and after inspections.

Virtual Inspection Room

Consider how improvements might be made to the VIR for ease of access and usability.

Collaboration and Documentation

Review documentation that forms part of the joint inspection process for its usefulness and purpose to the two inspection bodies to ensure that it meets the needs of the inspection teams. (Pre-inspection Plan, Joint Inspection Toolkit, Follow-up Guidance, Quality Assurance Checklist, Quality Assurance Process, and Factual Accuracy Guidance).

Revise the language of all guidance documentation to reflect the terminology of CfW and ECPLC.

Length of Joint Inspections

Consider adjusting the length of the joint inspection based on the size of the setting; larger settings may need more time.

Consider the time needed to observe all practices throughout the day.

Balance of Evidence

Maintain the balance of evidence gathered through the inspection process and provide opportunities for further discussions about it between the setting leader and the inspection team.

Composition and Consistency of Inspection Teams

A significant and key recommendation from the review for the longer term is to develop an early years inspection framework aligned with the aspirations of ECPLC so that the team is working from a unified, common framework, instead of the current blended one.

With the cooperation of Welsh Government policy officials, streamline the demands on the early years' workforce with regards to inspection evidence, as reporting requirements from different parts of early years' policy create unnecessary replication for the setting leaders and practitioners.

Provide regular mandatory training for inspectors on the ALN Act, CfW and ECPLC to ensure that the pedagogy, process and language used in documentation and observations is fully understood, recognised, and reported upon when inspections are undertaken.

Communication During an Inspection

Secure a better flow of information during an inspection by establishing “information touchpoints” as part of the process between the inspectors and the settings.

Feedback Meeting

Review and reflect on arrangements for the feedback meeting to ensure that all parties are well informed; provide training and support as needed.

Section 5 - Recommendations; Inspection Themes

Review the themes for joint inspections to align with Welsh policy direction using Early Childhood Play Learning and Care (2023) (ECPLC) as the foundation for inspection.

Section 6 - Recommendations; Summative Judgements

Remove summative judgements in full and replace with a one page summary to accompany the full report.

Section 7 - Recommendations; The Report

Review the format of the report in line with specific recommendations in the body of the Review.