



Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

Estyn's guidance toolkit for assuring the quality of inspections through IEFs

**Guidance for peer inspectors, team inspectors,
lay inspectors and reporting inspectors**

Updated for September 2024

This document is also available in Welsh.

Information sheet

Information box

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1.0	Barry Norris	January 2013	
1.1	Barry Norris	April 2013	Minor drafting
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3.0	Fiona Arnison	September 2018	Minor amendments to IEF grid titles; removing protocol QAR guidance for RIs and QAR inspectors into separate document
3.1	Fiona Arnison	March 2019	IEF guidance moved into separate document, to allow easier access for PIs, AIs and RIs
3.2	Fiona Arnison	October 2019	Clarification of C grade to align with QA policy overall
4.0	Fiona Arnison	May 2021	Update of language re judgements to align with inspection framework from 2021
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Equality Impact Assessment

A business rationale assessment has been carried out and this policy contributes to Estyn's strategic objectives and delivery principles.

In accordance with Estyn's Equality Impact Assessment, an initial screening impact assessment has been carried out and this policy is not deemed to adversely impact on the grounds of the nine protected characteristics as laid out by the Equality Act 2010.

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Quality Assurance forms and guidance – Inspector Evaluation Forms (IEFs)

The purpose of the Inspector Evaluation Form (IEF) is to enable Estyn to collect information about the quality of its inspection work. We analyse the outcomes and use the information to promote inspection work of high quality, to follow up instances where there are concerns about inspection quality and to inform our training and development work for inspectors. We may use the outcomes when considering tenders and the award of inspection contracts.

On all inspections, Reporting Inspectors are required to complete an Inspector Evaluation Form (IEF) on the work of any contracted Team Inspector (TI), Peer Inspector (PI) and Lay Inspector (LI). The IEFs are available to inspectors in the Virtual Inspection Room (VIR) for each inspection. Normally, a reporting inspector should address comments in the form directly to the peer inspector or contracted inspector, i.e. in the 2nd person (for example, *you did this well, or next you need to work on...*). This ensures that the IEF is personal and supportive. However, in being personal, RIs should take care not to water down difficult messages, as these always need to be conveyed clearly to the inspector.

The Team, Peer and Lay Inspectors first have the opportunity to complete a self-assessment of their own work and to indicate the quality grades (A-D) they think are appropriate on the IEF. They have five days to do this after the end of the inspection. We encourage all inspectors to be reflective and identify areas for future focus which can help us tailor support and training. After that, Reporting Inspectors then complete their part of the IEF and award quality grades. If the self-assessment part is not complete after five days, the Reporting Inspector can complete the form without any self-assessment by the Team, Peer or Lay Inspectors. The Reporting Inspector should normally consider the comments from Estyn's Quality Assurance process (QAR and QAI) before completing the IEF grades and providing feedback for their team.

Reporting Inspectors may also need to take into account the experience of the Team, Peer or Lay Inspector when coming to make judgements. An inspector on their first inspection may require more support than a more experienced inspector.

Minor and major shortcomings in relation to inspections

Estyn requires all inspectors to undertake inspections of good quality. Where the work of inspectors has significant or major shortcomings, it is likely that the inspection may fail to meet Estyn's requirements or may generate a substantiated complaint about the conduct of the inspection. A significant or major shortcoming is any weakness in the inspector's work that may affect the judgements awarded or that may detract significantly from the overall quality of the inspection, or that may reflect poorly on the inspection process as a whole.

A significant or major shortcoming undermines confidence in:

- the accuracy and validity of any Inspection Area and/or
- the quality of Estyn inspections and reports.

The sub-grades and the overall grade on the IEF should reflect the balance of minor and major shortcomings in each inspector's work. The overall grade should normally be no more than one grade higher than the lowest sub-grade awarded. So, if a C sub-grade is on the IEF, the overall grade would normally be no more than a B grade. Normally, if the RI awards two or more sub-grades at a C or D level, the overall grade should be at a C or D level respectively.

Where the RI awards an overall grade that is different to the inspector's own grade, the RI should add a brief comment to explain the difference.

Wherever a team inspector's work falls short of the required standards (i.e. an A or B grade overall), Estyn will take action to monitor, support and help the inspector to improve their practice. Ultimately, we only deploy inspectors whose work meets the required standards and expectations. For contracted inspectors, we may use the outcomes of IEFs when considering tenders and the award of inspection contracts. For peer inspectors, where work falls notably short of our expectations (i.e. a C or D grade overall), we may decide not to redeploy the PI on future inspection activity. You can find further information about Estyn's arrangements to assure the quality of inspections, including the steps we may take to improve inspectors' practice if it falls short of expectations, on our website [here](#)

The grade definitions are as follows:

- A – meets requirements in all or nearly all respects;
- B – meets requirements, but a few minor shortcomings;
- C – meets requirements, but with a few significant shortcomings;
- D – does not meet requirements as a result of major shortcomings or very serious failings.

Inspector Evaluation Form (IEF) – for Pls, LIs and AIs

Self-evaluation

Criteria	Meeting requirements A/B/C/D	Comment
The inspector records appropriate evidence effectively		
The inspector evaluates the provider's work accurately and fairly		
The inspector understands/applies the 'What we inspect' and 'How we inspect' guidance appropriately		
The inspector communicates orally and in writing clearly and unambiguously		
The inspector supports the work of the team purposefully, in line with the inspection mindset		
The inspector responds appropriately to challenge, discussion and debate		
The inspector conducts the inspection to a high professional standard		
The inspector engages fully in the quality assurance process		
Overall IEF grade		
Areas to consider for future inspections		

Feedback				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I found the inspection a positive professional experience				
I received effective support from the RI during the inspection				
I found the initial/update training for my role helpful for this inspection				
Please list some of the useful knowledge and experience you have gained:				
Please use this space to provide any further feedback on your experience on the inspection:				

Reporting Inspector evaluation

Criteria	Meeting requirements A/B/C/D	Comment
The inspector records appropriate evidence effectively		
The inspector evaluates the provider's work accurately and fairly		
The inspector understands/applies the 'What we inspect' and 'How we inspect' guidance appropriately		
The inspector communicates orally and in writing clearly and unambiguously		
The inspector supports the work of the team purposefully, in line with the inspection mindset		

The inspector responds appropriately to challenge, discussion and debate		
The inspector conducts the inspection to a high professional standard		
The inspector engages fully in the quality assurance process		
Overall IEF grade		
Areas to consider for future inspections (grades B and below)		

Guidance table to support IEF judgements

The following table sets out further general guidance on the allocation of IEF grades in relation to minor and major shortcomings on inspections.

IEF grades in the table below relate only to the work of Team Inspectors, Peer Inspectors and Lay Inspectors.

The inspector records appropriate evidence effectively			
<i>Meets requirements</i>	<i>Minor shortcoming</i>	<i>Significant shortcoming</i>	<i>Major shortcoming</i>
Consider an A grade	Consider a B grade	Consider a C grade	Consider a D grade
Records evidence well from scrutiny of documentation	Some thinness in the recording of evidence	The recording of evidence has rather too many gaps	Gaps in the recording of evidence undermine validity and reliability of the inspection outcome, e.g. no evidence in an aspect for which the inspector has responsibility
Records/summarises evidence well from meetings with staff and/or learners	Some thinness in the recording of evidence but generally OK	Recording takes place but there are weaknesses in summarising or evaluating based on the evidence or focusing on impact and standards	Meetings take place, but the record is inadequate or missing; evidence from lessons and scrutiny of work is not summarised in input form
Uses input form system effectively with no difficulty	Uses input form system reasonably confidently, but with occasional, light support required, e.g. where the inspector has changed a filename	Uses input form system adequately but with a lot of hesitation and support required	Lack of confidence in using the input form system requires significant support from the RI, or no evidence provided for the input form at the appropriate time
<i>Generally, a well-organised inspector who records evidence appropriately on Estyn forms and uses the input form system expertly</i>	<i>Generally, the inspector works well, but there are a few tweaks required to their use of the input form system and the recording of evidence</i>	<i>Generally, the inspector works reasonably well with the input form system, but their recording is too hesitant and insecure and a lot of support is required</i>	<i>Generally, an inspector whose recording of evidence is weak. This inspector has organisational shortcomings that significantly affect the inspection and which have the potential to create issues for Estyn in relation to further remedial work or gaps in the inspection database</i>

The inspector evaluates the provider's work accurately and fairly			
<i>Meets requirements</i>	<i>Minor shortcoming</i>	<i>Significant shortcoming</i>	<i>Major shortcoming</i>
Consider an A grade	Consider a B grade	Consider a C grade	Consider a D grade
Evaluates the provider's work accurately, fairly, objectively and without bias at all times	The occasional evaluation does not fully reflect the evidence, or the balance of strengths and weaknesses is not quite right in a few cases	Evaluations are reasonably secure, but there is the occasional bias towards a preferred method or approach	Evaluations are clearly erratic, or the balance of strengths and weaknesses is incorrect in relation to the main evaluation and there is little evidence to support the evaluation when challenged
Ensures that the input form has appropriate supporting evidence to support all statements and evaluations	Some supporting evidence is a little too thin in relation to minor aspects of the inspection framework	Some supporting evidence is too thin in some key areas of the inspection framework	Significant gaps in the inspector's evidence base mean that evaluations are not fully supported by evidence
<i>Generally, an inspector whose evaluations are secure and well supported by appropriate evidence</i>	<i>Generally, an inspector whose evaluations are mostly secure and supported by appropriate evidence in nearly all cases</i>	<i>Generally, an inspector who requires a lot of support to gather appropriate evidence and to arrive at reliable evaluations</i>	<i>Generally, an inspector whose evaluations are weak/insecure and who does not draw on appropriate supporting evidence when challenged</i>

The inspector understands and applies inspection guidance appropriately			
<i>Meets requirements</i>	<i>Minor shortcoming</i>	<i>Significant shortcoming</i>	<i>Major shortcoming</i>
Consider an A grade	Consider a B grade	Consider a C grade	Consider a D grade
Inspector knows the inspection guidance documents 'What we inspect' and 'How we inspect' well	Inspector is hesitant about a few minor aspects of guidance	Inspector requires a lot of support in using the guidance documents 'What we inspect' and 'How we inspect'	Inspector is insecure about significant aspects of the inspection guidance documents
Inspector is aware of and applies handbook criteria or any guidance protocols appropriately	Documentary criteria are not applied appropriately in one or two minor cases	Guidance criteria are not applied in rather too many cases with some aspects skirted over too much	The inspector does not follow 'What we inspect' and/or 'How we inspect' appropriately
All statements/evaluations match handbook criteria and go into the appropriate report sections	There is minor misplacement of content against the 'What we inspect'	There is a trend of misplacement of comments and uncertainty about criteria for aspects and inspection areas	There are significant omissions and/or deviations from 'What we inspect'
<i>Generally, an inspector who knows the documents 'What we inspect' and 'How we inspect' very well and makes very good use of this knowledge</i>	<i>Generally, an inspector who mostly knows the documents 'What we inspect' and 'How we inspect' well, but is insecure about a few minor elements</i>	<i>Generally, an inspector who requires a lot of support to use the documents 'What we inspect' and 'How we inspect' appropriately</i>	<i>Generally, an inspector who does not know the documents 'What we inspect' and 'How we inspect' well enough and requires significant support from the RI and other team members</i>

The inspector communicates clearly (orally and in writing);			
<i>Meets requirements</i>	<i>Minor shortcoming</i>	<i>Significant shortcoming</i>	<i>Major shortcoming</i>
Consider an A grade	Consider a B grade	Consider a C grade	Consider a D grade
The inspector works well as a member of the inspection team and liaises well with team members, staff and learners.	There are one or two occasions where the inspector does not liaise as well with team and others as they might	The inspector works diligently, but struggles on some occasions to take on board the views of others	The inspector does not work well as a member of the team and works too much in isolation or in opposition to the team.
The inspector's oral communication skills are very effective and persuasive	The inspector's oral skills falter on a few occasions	The inspector's oral skills are reasonably sound, but lack energy and are somewhat unconvincing overall	The inspector does not communicate effectively enough orally with other stakeholders
Writing follows Estyn's writing guide in terms of its style and grammar, whether in prose or bullet points. Messages are clear and the writing requires little or no attention from the RI.	A few lapses in terms of written communication in report sections that require the RI's attention to make them feedback ready. However, the messages are generally clear.	Rather too many lapses in writing (whether in prose or in bullet points) that require significant attention from the RI. Overall, the main messages require attention from the RI to make them clear enough for feedback.	Writing/bullet points that are inappropriate in style or where the RI needs to re-write an entire section. They may be overly negative or overly positive. Messages are not conveyed clearly enough through the writing.
Generally, an inspector who communicates confidently and expertly both orally and in writing and works well as a team member	Generally, an inspector whose performance is good overall, but who may be somewhat stronger in one aspect of communication than another (orally or in writing)	Generally, an inspector who has some weaknesses in their communication skills and requires rather too much general support from the RI	Generally, an inspector who requires a great deal of support in terms of their oral or written work on inspection, e.g. their written evaluations (prose or bullets) require significant work before the RI can submit the Reporting input form for edit within Estyn

The inspector responds appropriately to challenge, discussion and debate			
The inspector always remains professional and unflustered, even when challenged. They contribute to team debate well and support the team to reach valid conclusions. They listen attentively to other team members and contribute as and when appropriate.	The inspector responds professionally to discussion and debate but may become flustered by challenge. They may not listen carefully enough to contribute valid points at pertinent moments.	The inspector may respond too defensively when challenged by team members. They may need encouragement and support to contribute their views to the team discussion, or the RI may need to prevent them from dominating the discussion over other team members.	The inspector does not respond appropriately to challenge or debate. They may become aggressive or upset and may not contribute to team discussion appropriately. Their evaluations may not reflect the evidence that the team has contributed, or they may interject inappropriately, de-railing purposeful team debate and discussion.
The inspector responds robustly but appropriately to challenge from team members, using well-chosen first hand evidence to support their view. The inspector asks for clarification and engages professionally and robustly in team discussion, both within the team and in meetings with the nominee.	With support, the inspector responds appropriately to debate. They articulate their evaluations appropriately and, when encouraged, offer well-synthesised evidence to support their view. They amend their view sensitively in the light of challenge, where appropriate	The team member requires some support from the RI to articulate their views in team discussion, and support them with the evidence they have gathered	The inspector does not have a well-formed evaluation or synthesis of the evidence they have gathered. They require instruction to amend their evaluation following team debate. The inspector challenges other team members but has not thought through their challenge well enough, and the RI may have to remedy the situation
The inspector supports the work of the team purposefully, in line with the inspection mindset	Generally, the inspector supports the team's work and uses well-rounded evidence to support the debate	The inspector generally agrees with everything the team discusses and is somewhat reticent in putting forward their own views and evaluation without prompting	The inspector does not play their part as a full team member and does not support the team's work purposefully.
Generally, an inspector who responds well to challenge, debate and discussion. They may not always agree but their stance and demeanor is always professional and supportive.	Generally, the inspector engages appropriately in debate and discussion when encouraged, although they may be nervous or anxious about being controversial.	Generally, an inspector who requires support from the RI to engage in team discussions	Generally, an inspector who does not respond well to debate, challenge and does not support the team dynamic or the inspection mindset well enough.

The inspector conducts the inspection to a high professional standard;			
<i>Meets requirements</i>	<i>Minor shortcoming</i>	<i>Significant shortcoming</i>	<i>Major shortcoming</i>
Consider an A grade	Consider a B grade	Consider a C grade	Consider a D grade
Inspector's work is entirely professional and beyond reproach. They convey the inspection mindset well	One or two minor actions/comments by the team member are not entirely in keeping with the inspection mindset. These might lead to a small degree of criticism from the school/provider, but not to the extent of undermining confidence in the team or their findings overall	Rather too many actions/comments that are inappropriate and do not align with the inspection mindset. These may attract criticism from the nominee but the inspector responds appropriately and the RI can resolve the situation with effort	Inappropriate actions/comments by the inspector, out of line with the inspection mindset, are very likely to lead to criticism and to undermine confidence in the team's professionalism and/or undermine the inspection overall
Inspector is open-minded and shows no bias or personal prejudice	Inspector allows their own experience to dominate on a few occasions, but not to the extent that bias intrudes on an open mindset	Rather too much bias, e.g. showing favouritism for one method or commercial scheme over another that is not aligned with the mindset	Inspector allows bias and/or personal prejudice to dominate and this undermines the reliability and validity of their evaluations
Inspector works well as a member of the team and engages purposefully and proactively in discussions with all stakeholders	Inspector is not always fully involved at all times or dominates discussion too much on a few occasions	Inspector is too hesitant in discussions or stands back too much from challenge and robust discussion but their evaluation and comments are valid and reliable overall	Inspector is too separate from the team and/or does not engage appropriately in discussion with other team members or with staff/learners/stakeholders
Generally, an inspector who acts professionally at all times	Generally, an inspector whose minor actions/comments draw some minor criticism from the provider or another team member, but which are easy for the RI to resolve	Generally, an inspector whose actions/comments could attract too much criticism and which the RI has to resolve. The inspector's conduct does not fully meet Estyn's expectations as outlined in 'How we inspect'	Generally, an inspector whose actions/comments open up the team to significant, justifiable criticism from the provider and/or others. The inspector's behaviour does not comply with the inspection mindset as outlined in 'How we inspect'.

<p>The inspector engages fully in the quality assurance process</p> <p><i>Ris should note that this indicator refers to engaging in the quality assurance process during the inspection, not the completion of an IEF. Ris should not 'mark down' an inspector who does not choose to complete an IEF. We would encourage inspectors to reflect on their work, but completing an IEF is not part of their contract with us.</i></p>			
<p>The inspector is proactive in seeking feedback and takes good account of any feedback from the RI during the inspection. They ensure that their evidence base and main evaluation (prose or bullet points) align well and withstand scrutiny.</p>	<p>The inspector takes feedback from the RI well and strengthens their practice to learn from any (minor) shortcomings or suggestions.</p>	<p>The inspector is a little defensive when offered feedback to improve their work. They do not fully appreciate the critical importance of robust inspection evaluation and the value of quality assurance.</p>	<p>The inspector is somewhat complacent when shortcomings are pointed out to them. They may be totally unaware of the need for robust evidence gathering and evaluation</p>
<p>Where appropriate, the inspector takes note of and works to address feedback from previous IEFs or Ris. As a result, they work pro-actively to improve their own practice, learning from their experience.</p>	<p>With support, the inspector may begin to identify for themselves how to strengthen their evidence gathering and evaluation. They take account of feedback from previous inspections eg through IEFs.</p>	<p>The inspector takes some limited account of feedback to strengthen their work, as part of the RI's role, but lacks urgency to rectify, or a full understanding of why the shortcoming is important.</p>	<p>The inspector does not take appropriate action to strengthen their work, even when reminded. This creates additional work for the RI to strengthen the inspection findings and evidence.</p>
<p>Generally, a reflective, self-aware inspector who works pro-actively to strengthen their practice. The inspector understands Estyn's QA process and actively contributes to ensuring that the inspection is robust and can withstand public scrutiny.</p>	<p>Generally, a reflective inspector who takes feedback appropriately and works to strengthen their practice as a result. Their work gives no serious cause for concern.</p>	<p>The inspector needs a few reminders of the importance of inspection practice that can withstand public scrutiny, and that is robust enough to withstand scrutiny.</p>	<p>Generally, an inspector whose work has notable shortcomings that they do not recognise as a risk to the robustness of the inspection process. Despite reminders, they do not take action that results in strengthened practice.</p>

Overall IEF grade			
<i>Meets requirements</i>	<i>Minor shortcoming(s)</i>	<i>Significant shortcoming(s)</i>	<i>Major shortcoming(s)</i>
Consider an A grade	Consider a B grade	Consider a C grade if two or more sub-grades are a C	Consider a D grade if two or more sub-grades are a D
Generally, an inspector whose work is first-rate, has no shortcomings, requires no support from the RI. The RI would be happy to see the inspector on their team the next time around.	Generally, an inspector whose work needs tweaking and very occasional support from the RI here and there but is good overall. The RI would be happy to see the inspector on their team next time around but would hope they had improved in a few minor aspects of their work, e.g. fully applying the 'How we inspect' document.	Generally, an inspector who requires significant support from the RI. On this occasion, the inspector's work falls short of requirements. The RI would be happy to see the inspector on their team next time around, provided that they took good account of the feedback in the IEF and worked to improve the situation.	Generally, an inspector whose work has significant weaknesses. The inspector requires too much support from the RI or Estyn to help them to meet requirements. The RI would have serious doubts about the inspector's ability to meet Estyn's requirements.

Action plan to improve individual performance:

Period plan covers:

Monitoring:

Key agreed area of improvement	Specific requirement	Evidence required	End of period: Assistant director assessment/comments

Additional information:

Summary: