

Estyn's guidance toolkit for assuring the quality of inspections through Inspector Evaluation Forms (IEFs)

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

Updated for September 2026

Information sheet

Information box

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Version control

Document version	Date of issue	Changes made
1.0	January 2013	
1.1	April 2013	Minor drafting
2.0	September 2017	Revisions for new inspection arrangements from September 2017
3.0	September 2018	Minor amendments to IEF grid titles; removing protocol QAR guidance for RIs and QAR inspectors into separate document
3.1	March 2019	IEF guidance moved into separate document, to allow easier access for PIs, AIs and RIs
3.2	October 2019	Clarification of C grade to align with QA policy overall
4.0	May 2021	Update of language re judgements to align with inspection framework from 2021
5.0	September 2024	Updated to align with inspection arrangements from 2024
6.0	September 2025	Updated to reflect changes to Inspector Evaluation Form and grade descriptors
7.0	September 2026	Updated to reflect inclusion of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) statements

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This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: www.estyn.gov.wales

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 professional learning and development work for inspectors. We may use the outcomes when considering tenders and the award of inspection contracts.

On all inspections, Reporting Inspectors (RI) 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 time, 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. Guidance on the tone RIs should adopt in their writing is provided in this document.

The Team, Peer and Lay Inspectors first have the opportunity to complete a self-assessment of their own work and to indicate the quality grade (A-D) they think is 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 development that can help us tailor support and training. After that, RIs then complete their part of the IEFs and award quality grades. If the self-assessment part is not complete after five days, the RI can complete the form without any self-assessment by the Team, Peer or Lay Inspectors. The RI 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.

Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI)

Peer inspectors and contracted inspectors must not use Gen AI tools in any aspect of their inspection work for Estyn. This includes using Gen

AI to generate, summarise, analyse, edit or otherwise process inspection evidence, evaluations or other inspection-related information. Any use of Gen AI by a peer inspector or contracted inspector in carrying out inspection work for Estyn is a serious failing and will result in an overall D grade on the IEF.

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, or there are serious failings, it is likely that the inspection may fail to meet Estyn's requirements and/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
- any aspect of the RI's work or that of the team that may detract significantly from the overall quality of the inspection, or
- any aspect 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 overall grade on the IEF should reflect the balance of minor and major shortcomings in each inspector's work. 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.

The grade definitions are as follows:

A – meets requirements in all or nearly all aspects

B – meets requirements, with a few minor aspects to improve

C – meets requirements, but needs notable support to do so – a few significant areas to improve

D – does not meet requirements as a result of major shortcomings or serious failings

If general concerns arise about any inspector, an action plan may be necessary with the aim of securing improved performance. This process is described in detail in, '**Estyn's arrangements for assuring the quality of inspections: Policy and procedures, September 2025**' (See **Appendix 1**)

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

Self-evaluation and reflection

When completing the IEF, inspectors should consider the following evaluation themes and how initial inspector training, or subsequent update training, has supported them in their roles. They should also identify any further professional learning they would find beneficial. They should use the criteria on p.x to provide an overall self-assessment grade for their work.

Evaluation theme	Evaluation prompt
Knowledge of inspection guidance	Do I fully understand how to apply inspection guidance in all contexts?
Evidence recording	Does the evidence I record clearly support team evaluations?
Evaluation of provider's work	Are my evaluations fair, accurate and based on secure evidence?
Communication	Was my communication helpful and professional throughout?
Team contribution	Did I engage fully in the inspection process and support the team's work?
Fulfilling expectations in 'How we inspect'	Did I uphold the professional standards expected?

Strengths	
Aspects to improve	
Overall self-assessed IEF grade	

Reporting Inspector evaluation

When completing the IEF, RIs should consider the following evaluation themes to identify strengths in the inspector's work, and any aspects the inspector needs to improve on for future inspections. When identifying aspects for improvement, wherever possible, RIs are directed to provide specific guidance or strategies as to how the inspector might improve their inspection skills, knowledge or behaviours.

Evaluation theme	RI evaluation prompts to support an inspector's development
Knowledge of inspection guidance	Clarify expectations using specific examples from inspection guidance
Evidence recording	Identify key principles of effective recording; signpost to strong examples
Evaluation of provider's work	Encourage use of triangulation and the writing guide to support evaluative commentary
Communication	Give direct feedback on tone, timing, clarity, accuracy etc.
Team contribution	Discuss expectations for teamwork and contributions to team meetings
Fulfilling expectations in 'How we inspect'	Reference where specific expectations are not met

Strengths

Areas to improve

Overall RI IEF grade

When providing feedback, the RI should address comments in the form directly to the peer inspector or contracted inspector, i.e. in the 2nd person, and consider the tone of the written comments carefully to ensure these are clear and helpful:

Grade	Descriptor	Tone of RI feedback
A	Highly effective	Positive and affirming – enhancing already strong practice
B	Effective	Constructive and balanced – improving on a solid foundation of inspection skills and knowledge
C	Inconsistent	Clear - focusing on the development of important inspection skills, knowledge and behaviours
D	Serious concerns	Direct – identifying the aspects that compromise the quality and validity of the inspection

IEF Grade Descriptor Matrix

The following matrix provides grade descriptors with examples, aligned to each of the six evaluation prompts on the IEF form. These provide guidance in relation to minor aspects to improve, significant and major shortcomings or serious failings.

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

Evaluation prompt	Inspector reflection	A - Highly effective	B – Effective	C – Inconsistent	D – Serious concerns	RI evaluation
		Meets requirements in all or nearly all aspects	Meets requirements with a few minor aspects to improve	Meets requirements but needs notable support to do so - a few significant areas to improve	Does not meet requirements as a result of major shortcomings or serious failings	
Knowledge of inspection guidance	<i>Do I fully understand how to apply inspection</i>	Demonstrates thorough understanding and applies inspection	Applies guidance accurately in most contexts	Misses key aspects of inspection guidance or	Significant gaps in understanding that undermine the	<i>Clarify expectations using specific examples</i>

	<i>guidance in all contexts?</i>	guidance effectively		applies it inconsistently	quality of the inspection	<i>from inspection guidance</i>
Evidence recording	<i>Does the evidence I record clearly support team evaluations?</i>	Evidence is consistently evaluative, concise and well organised	Mostly evaluative with minor issues of clarity or relevance	Evidence recording is descriptive and lacks evaluative focus. May be disorganised or have gaps	Evidence recording is incomplete or inaccurate. Does not support team evaluations	<i>Identify key principles of effective recording; signpost to strong examples</i>
Evaluation of provider's work	<i>Are my evaluations fair, accurate and based on secure evidence?</i>	Evaluations are insightful, balanced and well-substantiated	Evaluations are secure. Minor improvements may be needed	Evaluations lack balance or evidence to support them	Evaluations are weak or potentially misleading	<i>Encourage use of triangulation and the writing guide to support evaluative commentary</i>
Communication	<i>Was my communication helpful and professional throughout?</i>	Consistently clear, focused, timely and professional (verbally and in writing)	Effective communication overall. May be occasional lapses (e.g. too brief or lengthy)	Communication lacks clarity, precision or timeliness	Communication issues hinder team effectiveness or the accuracy of evaluations	<i>Give direct feedback on tone, timing, clarity, accuracy etc.</i>
Team contribution	<i>Did I engage fully in the inspection process and support the team's work?</i>	Highly collaborative and actively supports others' inspection work. Plays a full	Positive team member. Completes inspection activity reliably	Contribution is uneven or reactive	Limited, passive or aggressive involvement affects the team's work and	<i>Discuss expectations for teamwork and contributions to team meetings</i>

		role in the QA process			the overall quality of the inspection	
Fulfilling expectations in 'How we inspect'	<i>Did I uphold the professional standards expected?</i>	Fully meets and often exceeds expectations	Meets expectations with minor refinements needed	Inconsistent adherence to expectations	Fails to meet several important expectations. Professional conduct is not good enough. Any use of Gen AI in inspection work for Estyn results in an overall D grade.	<i>Reference where specific expectations are not met</i>

Note: Peer inspectors and contracted inspectors are not permitted to use Gen AI in any aspect of their inspection work for Estyn. Where an RI identifies that an inspector has used Gen AI for inspection work, the overall IEF grade must be D, irrespective of the inspector's performance against the other evaluation themes.

Appendix 1: Action plan monitoring sheet

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

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

Additional information:

Summary: