



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

Learning area link representative handbook for further education

from

September 2017

The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

- ▲ nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local authorities
- ▲ primary schools
- ▲ secondary schools
- ▲ all-age schools
- ▲ special schools
- ▲ pupil referral units
- ▲ independent schools
- ▲ further education
- ▲ independent specialist colleges
- ▲ adult community learning
- ▲ local authority education services for children and young people
- ▲ teacher education and training
- ▲ Welsh for adults
- ▲ work-based learning
- ▲ learning in the justice sector

Estyn also:

- ▲ provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others
- ▲ makes public good practice based on inspection evidence

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Introduction

This handbook is designed for those further education managers appointed to the learning area link representative role for the inspection of selected learning areas. The learning area link will act as the provider's learning area representative during their inspection. The handbook has been developed primarily with the needs of this role in mind and there is a strong emphasis on practical application. It responds to the frequently asked question - "What do I have to know to be an effective learning area link representative?". Taking time to read through the handbook will provide you with the information you need to prepare for your inspection and to understand the importance of the role as the provider's learning area link representative.

Who should be a learning area link representative?

The learning area link representative plays a vital role in the conduct of an inspection. It is essential that the learning area link representative has an operational role in the learning area and has an in-depth understanding of the work of that learning area. The inspectorate will allow up to three learning area link representatives for each learning area being inspected to ensure coverage of all sites or all subjects within that learning area.

The learning area link representative handbook is in four parts:

Part 1: Before the inspection

Part 2: During inspection

Part 3: After the inspection

Part 4: Completing the online revision guide (to be available online at a later date)

We hope that you find the handbook informative and, most of all, easy to use in preparing for your inspection.

Part 1 and part 2 contain the critical information and actions needed at different times throughout the period of the inspection. Part 3 briefly touches on the role of the learning area link representative post inspection, while part 4 explains in a little more detail about the online revision guide.

It will be helpful to have your copy of the Estyn 2017 sector inspection guidance to refer to as you go through the handbook. It is vital that you are familiar with your sector [inspection guidance](#) before the inspection.

In order to act as a learning area link representative on an inspection, you will be better informed if you have read the learning area link representative handbook and have completed the online revision.

Part 1: Before the inspection

This part is in four sections.

Section A will help familiarise you with your role and responsibilities.

Section B provides guidance on working with the learning area lead inspector (LALI) to put your organisation in context.

Section C allows you to explore briefly the key aspects of effective self-evaluation.

Section D provides guidance on gathering evidence for the team.

Section A: Roles and responsibilities

This section will explain your role and responsibilities as the provider learning area link representative.

This section should enable you to:

- have a good understanding of the role of the learning area link representative
- know and understand the protocol that guides the work of the learning area link representative

Background

Inspections provide an opportunity to involve providers actively in the inspection process by enabling a learning area link representative from the organisation to work with the inspection team. This is to provide greater involvement by the provider and strengthen the partnership between the inspection team and provider staff. It also gives providers a better insight into the inspection process as well as providing valuable opportunities for professional development.

Providers are invited to select a learning area link representative for each of the learning areas to be inspected.

The learning area link representative

As a learning area link representative, you should be sufficiently senior within the learning area to have a good and in depth knowledge of the learning area work and the quality assurance systems. The role of the learning area link representative is valued highly by inspectors as the learning area link representative contributes significantly to ensuring that the inspection runs smoothly and that inspectors see all the relevant evidence so that they can make valid and reliable judgements. If the provider decides not to take up the offer of having a learning area link representative, this will not prejudice the inspection. The fact that a provider does not have a learning area link representative will have no impact on the judgements made by the inspection team.

An effective learning area link representative

The role of the learning area link representative is demanding and requires you to exercise the objectivity essential to an external inspection process. You will also be required to **respect the strict confidentiality of all inspection discussions**. Your role is not that of an advocate or defender of the provider. Your role is to help inspectors access all the evidence they need to see, to listen to discussions, to understand inspectors' reasoning and to signpost inspectors to further evidence, where this is needed.

It is very important that the learning area link representative understands the code of conduct for inspections. In order that inspection and regulation are constructive and beneficial, it is important that inspectors and providers establish and maintain a professional working environment based on mutual courtesy, respect and professional behaviour. Inspectors are expected to uphold Estyn's Code of Conduct and we also expect providers to:

- be courteous and professional
- apply their own codes of conduct in their dealings with inspectors
- enable inspectors to conduct their inspection in an open and honest way
- enable inspectors to evaluate provision objectively against the Common Inspection Framework
- use Estyn's electronic systems for managing inspections as required
- provide evidence that will enable inspectors to report honestly, fairly and reliably about their provision
- maintain a purposeful dialogue with the learning area lead inspector and the inspection team
- recognise that inspectors need to observe practice and talk to staff, learners and other stakeholders without the presence of a manager or a senior leader
- draw any concerns about the inspection to the attention of inspectors and the provider nominee in a timely and suitable manner
- work with inspectors to minimise disruption and stress throughout the inspection
- ensure the health and safety of inspectors while on their premises

In phase one the learning area link representative will:

- work with the learning area lead inspector
- ensure the learning area team have access to all relevant information and evidence
- liaise with the provider nominee to keep them fully informed of progress
- listen to the emerging findings from the learning area teams
- meet with the learning area team on a daily basis to discuss progress

Before the inspection you should:

- become familiar with the sector guidance for inspection
- become familiar with the inspectorate's guidance on the role of the learning area link representative
- play a key role in the learning area's self-evaluation procedures
- become familiar with the inspection documentation

- liaise with the provider's nominee
- make administrative arrangements for the inspection
- collate learning area documentation and evidence required for the inspection

The learning area link representative has a particular role in making sure that all the evidence to support the learning area's self-assessment is readily available and to hand. If evidence is not available the inspection team will not have time to search it out. The effectiveness of the learning area link representative in signposting inspectors to evidence will inevitably have an impact on the judgements awarded by the inspection team.

Summary

In this section, you have read about your role and responsibilities as the learning area link representative. It will be useful for you now to share your understanding of your role with staff and senior managers prior to the inspection.

Section B: Putting the learning area in context

This section provides you with guidance on working with the LALI to put your learning area in context.

Each provider operates in widely different circumstances with different challenges. As the learning area link representative you have a key role in helping the inspection team to understand the context in which you work. If you are unfamiliar with the sort of evidence that the inspection team will look for in writing the context section of the report, then it may be useful for you, the nominee and the LALI to agree this during the inspection.

Please refer to the guidance document for further education

About the learning area

The information that you provide about your learning area will inform inspectors judgements about learners' standards of achievement and attainment, as well as possibly providing them with lines of enquiry.

The 'Learning area context' section should contain brief information on:

- the size, nature and location of the learning area
- the specific programmes of learning that have been included in the learning area inspection
- the number of courses offered at different levels
- the number of learners in the learning area.
- Any other relevant factors

The following example illustrates how inspectors use the provider context to inform

Example A

The LALI, in reviewing the learning area's data, notes that the provider has not compared favourably with similar providers over the last two years. The learning area link representative produced information to show that during this period the learners had been coming into the provision with lower than average levels of GCSEs and that a minority of learners had exceeded their target grades for their subjects. The additional information provided by the learning area link representative, together with evidence from observations, discussions with learners and scrutiny of learners' work, allowed the inspection team to consider all the evidence before making a judgement about standards.

Remember it is very important to have the evidence available to support the provider's analysis about your learning area and the context that it operates in, as well as evidence to support your self-assessment.

Summary

In this section you have read about the sort of information that is needed to put your learning area in context.

Section C: Self-assessment

The learning area will be part of the college's self-assessment processes. Inspectors will consider how well the learning area knows its own strengths and areas for improvement and how well the learning area contributes to the overall college self-assessment process.

In selecting learning areas, the inspectorate will select a range of courses and subjects and these may not correspond to either the Welsh Government's subject sector categories or the provider's faculties or departments. Learning areas and the provider are not expected to produce self-assessment reports purely for the purpose of inspection. Where the provider's self-assessments do not match the components of the selected learning area the inspectors will work with multiple self-assessment documents. They will select the relevant information to inform their lines of inquiry and their judgements.

The link between self-assessment and provider improvement planning is crucial. Detailed and comprehensive processes for self-assessment are of little worth unless self-assessment outcomes are clearly linked to the provider's improvement targets. Inspectors will consider how well the learning areas are aware of their improvement targets and how these are reflected in the overall college improvement plans.

Summary

In this section you have read about the position of learning area self-assessment in the inspection process. If you want to learn more about self-assessment please see the Estyn website for the Post-16 self-assessment manuals.

Section D: Gathering evidence

This section on gathering evidence for inspection will enable you to:

- understand how inspectors judge the application of learners' skills
- understand how inspectors identify and follow lines of inquiry
- be aware of the types of documentation that inspectors may request before the on-site part of inspection

Judging the application of learners' literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills.

This part of the handbook will provide you with information about the skills that inspectors will judge and the sources of evidence they will use to make their judgements. It will help you to know which evidence you should provide and how inspectors will make their judgements.

How will inspectors judge learners' skills?

Literacy, numeracy and digital literacy will normally be inspected as a separate learning area in every inspection. There will be specific inspectors allocated to these roles during phase one inspections.

However, all inspectors in phase one will evaluate whether learners in their learning area have the skills in communication, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy.

Inspectors will give the most weight to learners' literacy and numeracy skills, particularly reading and writing. All inspectors in phase one will also report on learners' digital literacy skills where these areas are particularly good or are underdeveloped and have a detrimental effect on their progress.

Inspectors will judge how well learners' skills give them access to the curriculum based on evidence from observations of lessons, learning walks, scrutiny of learners' work and by talking to learners. For example, talking to learners will provide evidence of their speaking and listening skills, what progress they have made in developing their literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills, as well as their understanding of their work or job role. Scrutiny of work will demonstrate whether learners can write clearly and read for understanding at the appropriate levels. Inspectors will consider the extent to which learners' communication skills support or hinder progress in classroom and interaction with tutors and with peers.

Inspectors will seek evidence to determine whether learners have the skills to:

- cope with the demands of their learning
- make good progress across the curriculum/areas of learning, learning pathway or at work
- cope with the communication, numeracy and digital literacy demands of everyday life

Inspectors will consider learners' preparedness to develop and use the skills they have acquired in different, new or unfamiliar situations, as well as how well they apply their skills without support.

Inspectors will take account of learners' levels of ability when considering evidence and determining judgements.

Inspectors will use the timetables provided by the provider before the inspection to identify the sessions they will observe and when they will undertake learning walks.

Inspectors will not notify staff of the sessions they will observe.

Will inspectors observe support programmes, such as essential and basic skills and literacy and numeracy support sessions?

As part of their role, the literacy and numeracy learning area inspectors will include learners who receive specific support to develop their communication, numeracy and digital literacy skills, such as essential /basic skills programmes, in their evidence base. They will also include GCSE English and mathematics/numeracy. Observations of these learners will provide inspectors with evidence of how well these learners achieve in day-to-day learning tasks and activities. It is advisable for nominees to read, and be familiar with, the [supplementary guidance on inspecting skills](#).

Will inspectors talk to learners?

All inspectors in phase one inspections will determine learners' views of how well they are doing in terms of developing and applying communication, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills and will find out if learners know how much progress they have made and what they must do to improve. Inspectors will talk to learners in classroom observations and during learning walks.

Will inspectors scrutinise samples of learners' work?

Inspectors will scrutinise samples of learners' work to meet the needs of the lines of enquiry identified by the inspection team. If required, inspectors will tell you which samples of learners' work they will need.

Where will inspectors report on learners' skills in the Inspection Framework?

In phase one

Literacy, numeracy and digital literacy will have a separate report from phase one inspections in-line with the other selected learning areas.

In phase two

In Key Question 1, inspectors will report on whether all learners have the skills in communication, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needed to access the whole curriculum and help them progress at work.

In Key Question 2, inspectors will report on the provision for skills. In the overall judgement on teaching, training and assessment inspectors will take account of how well these meet learners' needs, including the development of their practical skills.

In Key Question 3, as part of their judgements about leadership and quality assurance, inspectors will consider how well leaders and managers develop, support, monitor and evaluate the provider's strategies and policies for developing learners' skills.

Lines of inquiry

This part of the section will provide you with information about how inspectors identify and follow lines of inquiry.

The guidance handbook explains that the starting point for phase one and phase two inspections is the provider's assessment of its own performance, supported by relevant performance information. You should be aware that inspectors will not inspect all aspects of work in depth during an inspection. They will sample evidence to test the learning area's own judgements about its work.

In phase one, the learning area lead inspectors will formulate lines of inquiry after scrutinising the learning area(s) self-assessment reports and other information provided by the organisation as well as any other information held by the inspectorate. These lines of inquiry, will be shared with the nominee and the learning area link representative on the first day of the inspection.

The inspection will be planned so that the learning area teams can pursue the identified lines of inquiry that are specific to the learning areas and cover the requirements of the common inspection framework.

Inspectors will take into account the results of Estyn learner questionnaires and any in-house learner questionnaires carried out by your provider. Inspectors may use the questionnaires to pursue a line of enquiry.

Documentation

This final part of this section will provide you with information about the documentation that inspectors will request before the inspection to help them inform their judgements.

Part 2 of the handbook will provide you with information about which documentation may be required during the inspection. You will find full details of the sources of evidence in Annex 2 of the guidance handbook.

Documentation required before the inspection

Almost all of the provider's contact before the inspection will be with the Inspection Co-ordinator (IC) and through the nominee. The IC will contact the nominee by telephone about four weeks before the inspection to let them know the date of the inspection. During this telephone call he/she will provide the nominee with details of the learning areas to be inspected, the inspection teams. The IC will discuss arrangements for the inspection. Once your nominee has been notified that an inspection is to take place, they will be asked to provide the following information for the virtual inspection room:

- key background information on the organisation

- a copy of the most recent self-assessment report(s) and improvement plan
- the latest unverified data
- a full plan of all staff's intended activities during the inspection week.

The inspectorate will ask the nominee to inform other stakeholders about the inspection so that inspectors may gain their views.

The nominee or college principal will appoint the learning area link representatives for the selected learning areas to be inspected. The nominee will liaise with the learning area link representatives to make sure they are fully informed about the inspection arrangements. The nominee may require the learning area link representatives to provide information before the actual inspection weeks.

Summary

In this section, you read about how inspectors judge skills, the sources of evidence they will use to make their judgements and how they will report on skills. You also read about how inspectors may identify a line of inquiry and the documentation that inspectors will request before the inspection.

Part 2: During the inspection

Section A will familiarise you with your role during the inspection

Section B provides information about what happens during the onsite part of the inspection

Section C explains how documentary evidence requested by the inspection team during the inspection supports lines of enquiry

Section D clarifies the inspectorate's quality assurance processes

Section E contains a series of frequently asked questions

Section A: Role and responsibilities

This section will provide you with information about your role and responsibilities during the inspection.

During the inspection the learning area link representative will:

- ensure that inspectors are fully informed about the context of the learning area's work
- work with the learning area team of inspectors to ensure they have access to all relevant evidence
- contribute to meetings of the learning area inspection team during phase one
- hear emerging findings of the team and liaise with the provider's designated nominee

Summary

In this section you read about your role and responsibilities during the inspection. It will be useful to share this with managers and staff so that they have a better understanding of what you will be expected to do.

Section B: A walk through the inspection period

This section will enable you to have a better understanding of:

- what the inspection team will do during the inspection week
- and your role in team meetings

Annex 1 provides a possible model of how inspectors may use their time during the inspection. It will be useful to share this information with staff before the inspection.

A very important feature of the inspection process is the team meetings. As a learning area link representative, you can and should meet with the learning area inspection team on a daily basis.

Your role in these meetings is to listen carefully to the emerging findings of the inspection team. You are advised to take notes for reference after the meeting and for liaison with the nominee. Your role is not that of an advocate or defender of the provider. Your role is to help inspectors access all the evidence they need to see, to listen to discussions, to understand inspectors' reasoning and to signpost inspectors to further evidence, where this is needed. You may not be able to provide further information and evidence immediately but may need to speak to your nominee and your learning area team before providing this evidence as early as possible the following day.

It is important that, as the learning area link representative, you pay due regard to standard protocol. This is particularly the case in team meetings where discussions will cover the strengths and weaknesses of the learning area. A good learning area link representative is well prepared, briefed and contributes positively to team discussions. Do not be afraid to ask for clarification if something is said that you don't understand. After all, you are the person who is likely to be the key to helping move the learning area forward following the inspection so it is important that you know why things are being said.

Summary

In this section, you read about the inspection week. You may wish to consider how this information can be shared with staff so that they gain a better understanding of the inspection process.

Section C: Documentation required during the inspection

This section will provide you with information about the range of documentation that inspectors may request to help them judge the provider's work in relation to the Common Inspection Framework.

Annex 2 in your sector handbook contains details of the main sources of documentary evidence. Please read the information in this annex before continuing.

Now that you have read about the main sources of documentary evidence, you will be aware of the type of information inspectors may request. You should note that inspectors may not request all of this information, but will choose the evidence they need to support their lines of enquiry. The following examples focus on the types of documentary evidence that inspectors may request to pursue a line of enquiry. In addition to documentary evidence, they may observe the implementation of policies and procedures in practice and seek the views of learners, employers and staff.

Summary

In this section, you have read about how documentary evidence may be requested in order to support a line of enquiry. It will be useful to share this information with managers and staff so that they have a better understanding of the inspection process.

Section D: The inspectorate's quality assurance processes

This section will provide you with information about how the inspectorate quality assures inspections.

In phase one, the inspection teams will be joined by a Quality Assurance Inspector (QAI). The QAI will normally join the teams on the Wednesday afternoon and Thursday. However, the RI may request the QAI to join the inspection earlier if significant issues warrant an independent view. The QAI may also choose to visit the provider earlier in either week to conduct learning walks and establish a context for the inspection work.

Monitoring inspections and inspection reports allows the inspectorate to:

- assess the work of team inspectors on inspection visits, as well as that of the reporting inspector; check how well the nominee understands his/her role and the nominee protocol
- ensure that all inspectors comply with the requirements of the relevant inspection framework and guidance
- raise issues of consistency in practice from inspection to inspection
- challenge the inspection team
- use the information to determine the quantity of future work for inspectors directly employed by the inspectorate
- use all quality assurance information to inform training and further guidance

Summary

In this section, you have read about how the inspectorate monitors the quality of work of its own inspectors and contracted inspectors. It will be useful to share this information with staff and governors so that they are well prepared if the inspection is quality assured.

Part 3: After the inspection

This section reviews, briefly, the role of the learning area link representative after the onsite inspection is complete.

After the inspection, the nominee will receive a draft copy of the inspection report including the reports for the learning areas. The nominee will be asked to check the report for factual accuracy before the report is published. The nominee may ask you to check the learning area report for factual accuracy or to provide information where relevant.

You have now read through the handbook and can begin to prepare for your inspection. You may now find it useful to read Estyn's guidance on preparing for inspection. Please see the Estyn website for the for Inspections handbooks.

Annex 1: A walk through the inspection week

The following information is intended to provide further general information about the model of Estyn inspections. Learning area link representatives should also note that model outlined below will vary slightly according to the size of the provider and to the sector being inspected.

Phase one – please note that this is an outline model and actual timings may vary according to the requirements of the inspection.

Day	Time	Activity
Monday	12 noon	Inspectors arrive
	12:30 pm	Pre-inspection team meeting for full team
	2:00pm	Learning area team meetings and learning walks
Tuesday	8:30 to 18:00	Inspection activity and team meetings
Wednesday	8:30 to 18:00	Inspection activity and team meetings
Thursday	8:30 to 13:00	Follow up activities, writing time and judgement meetings
	13:00 to 18:00	Moderation meetings and writing
Friday	9:00 to 11:30	Final writing for teams
	11:30	Full team meeting to share outcomes
	13:00	Feedback to learning area teams