



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

Guidance handbook for the inspection of further education colleges

from September 2019

estyn.gov.wales
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Introduction

Purpose of the guidance handbook

This guidance sets out the way the inspectorate will conduct inspections of further education colleges from September 2019. It sets out the inspection arrangements for colleges and offers guidance to inspectors on making inspection judgements.

Where the inspection identifies important concerns in relation to standards, quality of education and training or leadership and management, then the inspectorate will conduct follow-up activity in the college to support improvement. Guidance on the different types of follow-up activity is available on Estyn's website.

Further education colleges can use this guidance to see how inspections work and to help them in strengthening their own self-assessment and improvement processes.

Further information and guidance about inspections can be found on the inspectorate's website www.estyn.gov.wales

Legal basis for the inspection of further education colleges

In the post-16 sector, the Learning and Skills Act (2000) requires the Chief Inspector to report on:

- the quality of the education and training provided
- the standards achieved by those receiving education and training
- the quality of leadership and management, including whether the financial resources made available to those providing education and training are managed efficiently and used to provide value for money

Policy background

While not governed directly by the following policies and conventions, the guidance handbook takes account of the following:

- the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
<http://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/people/future-generations-act/?lang=en>
- the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the Welsh Government in 2004 as the basis for policy-making for children and young people <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>

Part 1: Inspection arrangements

Introduction

This section is set out in a way that reflects the sequence of work before, during and after a core inspection.

The reporting inspector (RI) is responsible for the conduct and management of the inspection and for the inspection report. While this guidance focuses mainly on the role of the reporting inspector, all team members must comply with the same inspection requirements.

Context

This guidance relates to the core inspection of further education colleges. Estyn regularly inspects aspects of post-16 education and training through other activities. Some of this inspection work results in published evaluations, while other activity does not result in published evaluations.

Further education link inspector work. Each college has a link inspector who meets annually with senior leaders to discuss topical issues related to education and training, as well as college progress. The link inspector visits result in oral feedback and dialogue during the visit. The link inspector work informs thematic inspections or sector summaries in the Annual Report.

Thematic reports. Each year, the Welsh Government asks Estyn to produce national reports on a range of themes. Estyn will often visit a sample of colleges or survey all colleges as part of this work. The visits result in oral feedback and national reports feature individual colleges, where relevant, with case studies of effective practice.

Principles of inspection

Inspectors will:

- ensure that inspection is of high quality and responsive to the needs of all learners
- ensure that judgements are secure, reliable, valid and based on first-hand evidence
- involve colleges fully in the inspection process, including the opportunity for the college to select a nominee
- use the college's improvement priorities as the starting point for the inspection and to identify key issues for investigation in order to make judgements on the validity of its findings
- include peer inspectors in the inspection process
- keep to a minimum any requirements for documentation and preparation by the college
- gain the learners', staff and governors' (or board of directors' where appropriate) perspective and that of other stakeholders

- apply the principle of equality for Welsh and English to all our inspection work, providing bilingual services whenever they are appropriate
- be constructive in identifying and supporting colleges with important aspects or weaknesses that require improvement

Code of conduct for inspectors

Inspectors should uphold the highest possible standards in their work. All inspectors have to meet the standards of Estyn's code of conduct. When conducting the inspection, inspectors will:

- carry out their work with integrity, courtesy and due sensitivity
- evaluate the work of the college objectively
- report honestly, fairly and impartially
- communicate clearly and openly
- act in the best interests of learners
- respect the confidentiality of all information received during the course of their work

It is important that inspectors judge the effectiveness of provision and leadership on their contribution to outcomes and not on the basis of any preferences for particular methods. The key to the judgement is whether the methods and organisation are fit for the purpose in supporting all learners to achieve high standards and strong levels of wellbeing.

Inspectors should inform Estyn of any perceived or actual conflicts of interest as soon as they receive notification that they are on the inspection of the college.

Expectations of colleges

In order that inspection and regulation are constructive and beneficial, it is important that inspectors and colleges establish and maintain a professional working environment based on mutual courtesy, respect and professional behaviour. We expect inspectors to uphold Estyn's Code of Conduct but we also expect colleges 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 the 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 the college
- maintain a purposeful dialogue with the reporting inspector and other inspectors
- recognise that inspectors need to observe practice and talk to staff, learners and other stakeholders without the presence of a manager or senior leader
- draw any concerns about the inspection to the attention of the reporting inspector in a timely and suitable manner through the nominee or senior manager
- work with inspectors to minimise disruption and stress throughout the inspection
- ensure the health and safety of inspectors while on their premises

- maintain the confidentiality and meetings and inspection findings until the final publication of the report

At the point of the inspection notification, colleges should review the composition of the inspection team. It is the responsibility of colleges to highlight any perceived or actual conflicts of interest prior to the start of their inspection.

Health, safety and wellbeing issues

Inspectors will carry out inspections in accordance with the inspectorate's guidance on inspecting safeguarding. If they observe anything that they think constitutes in their opinion, a real risk to the safety of staff, visitors or learners, inspectors should alert managers at the college. In all cases, inspectors should make a separate electronic note of the risk and that they informed managers of it. Inspectors should report on obvious risks relating to health, safety and wellbeing under inspection area 4 (care, support and guidance). Where these risks are a serious concern, inspectors should include a short comment in the report and a recommendation in the report. Estyn will send a wellbeing letter to the college asking them to outline how they will address the shortcoming.

Responding to a safeguarding allegation

If an inspector becomes aware of a safeguarding allegation//suspicion in respect of a child, young person or vulnerable adult, they should follow the procedures as set out in the current version of 'Estyn's policy and procedures for safeguarding', which is available on Estyn's website.

Approach to inspection

The starting point for inspection is the college's assessment of its own performance and priorities, supported by relevant evidence. Inspectors will not inspect all aspects of work in depth during a core inspection. They will sample evidence to test the college's own assessment of its work.

The progress learners make from their starting-points and the standards they achieve are the key measures of the quality of the education and training they have received and of the effectiveness of the leadership and management of the college. Inspection will focus on the needs of learners, their attitudes to learning and the impact that the provision makes on supporting their progress and the standards they achieve.

The inspection period and number of inspectors may vary according to the size of the college.

Each inspection reports will cover all inspection areas covered by the common inspection framework.

We will carry out inspections in line with our Welsh Language Policy, available from the inspectorate's website www.estyn.gov.wales and supported by supplementary guidance on inspecting the development of learners' Welsh language skills.

The Virtual Inspection Room

The inspectorate will use an electronic system, called the 'Virtual Inspection Room' (VIR), for managing many aspects of the inspection. It is a web-based system that allows colleges to upload information before the inspection and to download guidance from the inspectorate about the inspection process. The VIR is also the place where colleges can access the emerging questions from the reporting inspector at the start of the inspection and the post-inspection questionnaires.

The inspection team

Inspection teams will be led by a reporting inspector (HMI), with other team members drawn from among HMI, peer inspectors (from other colleges) or additional inspectors (AIs). Additional inspectors may be on secondment or contracted to the inspectorate. Subject to resources, we will invite a member of Wales Audit Office onto our inspection team. This has been standard practice since 2010 on Estyn's inspections of local government education and training services due to the increasing complexities of local government finances and governance. The same is now true of the further education sector so a similar rationale now applies.

We will also invite, whenever possible, an international peer inspector/reviewer from one of the education and training inspectorates in the UK, Eire or Europe, namely ETI (Northern Ireland), Education Scotland, Ofsted, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) or the Netherlands Inspectorate of Education. They will be able to bring an international benchmarking perspective to the inspection, facilitate the sharing of highly effective practice and enable better networking of further education colleges in Wales with their international peers.

The reporting inspector manages the inspection team and is the first point of reference for everyone involved in the inspection.

We will invite colleges to select a senior member of staff, called the nominee, to work with the inspection team. In practice, nearly all colleges accept the invitation, but it is not a requirement. The nominee should have sufficient seniority to act as a link between the college and the inspection team but need not be the leader of the college. Colleges can access the guidance for nominees on preparing for the inspection from links within the initial contact form (ICF), completed by the Inspection Co-ordinator (IC) and available via the VIR.

Student Inspectors

During the academic year 2019-2020, Estyn will be piloting the role of student inspectors on inspections of further education colleges. At the end of the pilot, Estyn will review how the pilot has gone, and will decide how best to continue.

Student inspectors will be full members of the inspection team and will join the inspection for the first three days of an eight-day college inspection. There will be two student inspectors on each inspection. They will take part in meetings with learner representatives and college staff, and speak with learners around the college about their experiences. They will complete a record of their evidence on a judgement form. They will not carry out lesson observations.

Contacting the college before the inspection

The college will receive 15 working days' notice of the inspection.

Following this, the inspectorate will contact the college by telephone to set up the arrangements for the inspection. Inspection co-ordinators (IC) in Estyn will undertake the initial contact with colleges. During this discussion, the inspection co-ordinator will:

- explain the purpose of the inspection and discuss an outline programme for the inspection
- discuss the specific information required before the inspection, including the completion by the college of a self-evaluation form on its provision for safeguarding, and make the arrangements for receiving it in electronic form through the Virtual Inspection Room
- ask if there are any issues or risks the team should be aware of and ask for a general health and safety briefing for the team at the start of the inspection
- establish whether the college wishes to have a nominee and, if it does, agree the role of the nominee and explain the process for completing the nominee guidance
- arrange a meeting at the start of the inspection with the nominee to provide a health and safety briefing for the team
- arrange a meeting at the start of the inspection for the college to set out its priorities for improvement and its current stage of development
- provide links and guidance for the completion of online pre-inspection questionnaires for learners, staff and governors
- agree arrangements for setting up a meeting with governors and employers (where appropriate)
- arrange the availability of supporting evidence, including samples of learners' work
- ensure that there are agreed procedures for addressing any concerns or complaints that might arise during the course of the inspection
- organise any domestic arrangements, such as a base for the inspectors, parking and internet access
- set up the arrangements for feeding back the inspection findings
- agree the arrangements for completing the post-inspection questionnaire
- inform the college through the initial contact form of the key inspection arrangements

The inspection co-ordinator will request the following information from the college through the virtual inspection room as soon as possible after the formal notification of the inspection:

- key background information on the college
- a copy of the college's most recent quality development plan (QDP) and self-assessment report
- the number of learners, including those part-time and full-time learners and their location
- details of the college's curriculum areas' timetables for the period of the inspection
- arrange a date (as agreed with the RI) for the initial planning meeting

If the inspection is to take place early in the academic year, Estyn may ask for samples of learners' work from the previous year.

When we notify colleges of the inspection, they will receive information on how to conduct a confidential online survey of learners. Estyn will also provide a pre-inspection online questionnaire for governors (or board of directors where appropriate), and all teaching, assessment and support staff directly employed by the college. The outcomes of the surveys will form part of the pre-inspection evidence and help inspectors to form emerging questions to investigate.

The team will also consider the most recent survey of learners' perceptions conducted by the college.

During the inspection, inspectors may interview a sample of learners, teaching, assessment and learning support staff as part of their gathering of evidence.

Planning the inspection and preparing the team

Taking into account the college's identified improvement priorities and self-assessment report, and any information already held by the inspectorate, the reporting inspector will plan the inspection and allocate responsibilities to members of the inspection team.

Inspections involve observations of teaching and training, including learner walks and other work of learners.

During the inspection

Initial team meeting

In the initial meeting of the inspection team, there should be a health and safety briefing from a member of the college staff. The college should provide a brief position statement on its strategic priorities and its current stage of development. After that, the team should discuss with senior leaders the improvement priorities identified by the college and the progress that it is making in its improvement work. The reporting inspector will confirm these arrangements with the college during the pre-inspection phone call.

Inspectors will sample, test and validate the college's own priorities and its evaluations of its strengths and areas for improvement and any other strengths and areas for improvement which the reporting inspector identifies. The discussions will also consider the evidence that inspectors need to review. This will include learning walks, session observations, sampling learners' written work, and interviews with learners, staff, and other stakeholders.

Gathering and reviewing inspection evidence

The team will plan the inspection so that they can cover the reporting requirements within the five inspection areas. The team will ensure that they have enough time to review the key evidence they need to make their judgements. The main forms of evidence are:

- documentary evidence, including information on learners' performance and progress

- observation of teaching, training, assessment and other activities
- samples of learners' work
- survey responses from learners, staff and governors
- discussions with learners, leaders, managers, governors (or board of directors where appropriate) and other key stakeholders

The team will use direct observation of learners' practical skills and written work wherever possible to gather evidence to support their judgements. Inspectors may select an additional sample of learners' work to meet the needs of a particular emerging question or to further their investigation of a specific aspect.

Inspectors will undertake a range of activities to gather evidence for their evaluation of learners' progress and the quality of the college's provision. This may include learning walks, where inspectors move relatively quickly through a number of teaching or training sessions looking at a specific aspect of the provision, conversations with selected learners about their work, and discussions with individual teachers, about learners' progress in their training sessions and how they plan work to meet their needs. They may also undertake longer training session observations.

The voice of learners is a key source of evidence for inspectors. Discussions with learners will provide an opportunity to explore learners' knowledge and understanding of their work and skills. It will also help inspectors to gauge how well they feel the college supports learners and contributes to their wellbeing.

Colleges should make information available to the inspection team about the standards achieved by learners, particularly the results of any initial and diagnostic assessments and other assessments of additional learning needs (ALN). This will help inspectors to judge learners' progress, to come to a view about the standards learners achieve compared to their starting-points and the way teachers use the information.

The team will need to consider stakeholders' views about the college and test out the validity of those views during the inspection.

Where the nominee is not the CEO/principal, it is important that the reporting inspector holds a brief daily meeting with the CEO/principal and nominee to clarify inspection issues and the broad, emerging findings of the inspection team.

Recording inspection evidence

Inspectors will use various forms to note and to collate their findings and judgements.

Wherever possible, inspectors will complete their forms electronically as part of Estyn's electronic system for collecting, collating and recording inspection findings.

Team meetings

The main purpose of team meetings is to arrive at an accurate, reliable, valid and corporate view of standards and the quality of provision and leadership. Meetings will provide opportunities for inspectors to:

- test the judgements in the college's quality development plan and self-assessment
- discuss emerging issues

- review visits to learners
- resolve pre-inspection issues and emerging questions
- identify any gaps in the evidence base
- consider main inspection findings and any recommendations

Professional dialogue

At the end of a session observation, inspectors should have a brief professional dialogue with the member of staff involved in the activity. It may be necessary, in some cases, to conduct this discussion later during the inspection.

The main focus of the discussion should be on the learners, the progress they make during the session and the standards they achieve during the activity. The inspector should stress that these are emerging, interim findings on one aspect of the evidence base and that these may be amended, on reflection, after scrutiny of learners' work or talking to learners, or as the result of moderation within the team. Inspectors should try to focus on any strengths or areas for development in relation to the specific activity seen.

Due to the sharply focused nature of learning walks, and the spread of the activity across a number of activities within a relatively short period of time, inspectors will not be in a position to offer professional dialogue to individual teachers or trainers after learning walk activity.

Formal feedback

At the end of the on-site part of the inspection, the team will provide oral feedback to college leaders and governors. The college should invite representatives from the Welsh Government to this meeting. The feedback should focus on the main judgements for each of the five inspection areas and the reasons for awarding them.

The feedback meeting provides the opportunity for leaders and governors to hear and to reflect on the judgements. The feedback should focus on the strengths and areas for improvement and the factors that contribute to them. The reporting inspector should explain to the college that factual matters may be corrected and judgements may be clarified, although they are not negotiable.

During all core inspections, the inspection team will consider whether the college needs any follow-up activity. The reporting inspector will inform the college if any follow-up activity is required.

During the inspection, the team will also consider if there is any effective practice in the college that is worthy of consideration and emulation by other colleges. Where this is the case, the reporting inspector will ask the college to prepare a case study (or studies) for dissemination on Estyn's website.

All the judgements reported during an inspection are provisional and subject to moderation and validation by HMCI. They are confidential to the college's staff and governors. They should not be communicated beyond this group, including via social media, until Estyn publishes the report on its website.

Complaints about the conduct of the inspection

If there are any issues about the conduct of the inspection overall or the conduct of individual inspectors, then the college, through the nominee, should raise these directly, and as soon as possible, with the reporting inspector. The college should not wait until after the inspection, but should raise any issues during the on-site inspection. Issues often arise due to misunderstandings and these can usually be resolved quickly and satisfactorily in college close to the time when they occurred.

There is guidance for colleges on Estyn's complaints handling procedures on Estyn's website.

After the inspection

The inspection report

The reporting inspector is responsible for producing a final inspection report that is clear to a lay audience and helpful to the college.

When writing reports, inspectors should take account of Estyn's writing guidance which is available on our website www.estyn.gov.wales.

We will publish reports bilingually, where colleges have made this request, in line with Estyn's Welsh Language Policy.

We base the structure of the inspection report on a Common Inspection Framework and the report will take the following form:

About the college

Summary

Recommendations

What happens next

Main findings

- 1 Standards
- 2 Wellbeing and attitudes to learning
- 3 Teaching and learning experiences
- 4 Care, support and guidance
- 5 Leadership and management

The evidence base of the inspection

We will produce the report within statutory or agreed sector timescales.

The factual accuracy check

The inspectorate will give the college a late draft of the report to help check the factual accuracy of the content. The college will normally have five working days in which to consider the draft report and to identify any factual errors.

The focus of the factual accuracy check is on resolving any factual inaccuracies in the inspection report. It does not focus on the findings or the judgements. There is further guidance for providers on the nature and scope of the factual accuracy check on Estyn's website.

The college should raise any complaints about the conduct of the inspection during the on-site inspection. However, if the college continues to have unresolved complaints about the conduct of the inspection after the end of the on-site inspection, then it should refer to Estyn's complaints handling procedures on Estyn's website. The focus of the procedures is on the conduct of the inspection and not the findings or the judgements arrived at by the inspection team.

Assuring the quality of inspections

The inspectorate is committed to:

- effective selection, training, briefing, support and deployment of inspectors, including peer inspectors and additional inspectors
- effective training, briefing and support to allow the nominee to play an active role
- regular dialogue with the nominee and CEO/principal during inspection
- criteria and recording systems that comply with the common inspection framework and guidance
- careful review and analysis of evidence
- unambiguous oral feedback of the team's findings and judgements for each inspection area
- clear, accurate and well-presented reports

As part of its quality assurance procedures, the inspectorate invites colleges to complete a post-inspection questionnaire (PIQ). The questionnaire will be available to colleges in the VIR. Colleges should complete the first part of the PIQ immediately after the on-site inspection and submit it electronically to Estyn through the VIR system. Colleges can complete the second part of the PIQ after the publication of the inspection report, again through the VIR system.

Colleges should raise any concerns about the conduct of an inspector during the inspection as soon as possible with the reporting inspector.

The reporting inspector will carry out the quality assurance of the inspection in the first instance. The inspectorate will quality assure a sample of inspections on site and will assure the quality of all inspection reports before their publication on Estyn's website. Estyn's arrangements for ensuring the quality of inspections and the arrangements for dealing with complaints are available on the inspectorate's website www.estyn.gov.wales.

Part 2: Inspection areas and reporting requirements

The guidance that follows sets out how inspectors should approach the various sections of the inspection report and what they need to consider when evaluating the five inspection areas of the common inspection framework.

The Common Inspection Framework

The five inspection areas of the common inspection framework are set out below.

Each inspection area contains reporting requirements. These are the aspects that the inspection team must cover when reporting on each college.

The Common Inspection Framework

1 – Standards

- 1.1 Standards and progress overall
- 1.2 Standards and progress of specific groups
- 1.3 Standards and progress in skills

2 – Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

- 2.1 Wellbeing
- 2.2 Attitudes to learning

3 – Teaching and learning experiences

- 3.1 Quality of teaching
- 3.2 The breadth, balance and appropriateness of the curriculum
- 3.3 Provision for skills

4 – Care, support and guidance

- 4.1 Tracking, monitoring and the provision of learning support
- 4.2 Personal development
- 4.3 Safeguarding

5 – Leadership and management

- 5.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers
- 5.2 Self-evaluation processes and improvement planning
- 5.3 Professional learning
- 5.4 Use of resources

Making judgements

The inspection team will award each inspection area a judgement from the four-point scale below.

Excellent – Very strong, sustained performance and practice

Good – Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement

Adequate and needs improvement – Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement

Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement – Important weaknesses outweigh strengths

Inspectors will arrive at their judgements by considering and weighing the importance of the strengths and weaknesses in each inspection area. The report on each inspection area will reflect and support the relevant judgement. Weaknesses become important where they have a significant impact on standards and/or wellbeing. Strengths are often present where there are important aspects that require improvement. However, where there are important aspects that require improvement then the appropriate judgement will normally be “Adequate and needs improvement”, or “Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement”.

Where colleges receive “Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement” for one or more inspection areas, the college will normally require a level of follow-up activity. There is further guidance on the nature of follow-up activity on Estyn’s website: [Follow up guidance for post-16 providers and inspectors](#)

Inspectors will always include clear evaluations in relation to the reporting requirements in each inspection area. They will also consider all aspects of these reporting requirements as set out in the inspection guidance handbook. However, what inspectors report on within each reporting requirement may differ depending on the relative significance of what they find in each college.

Inspectors may report ‘by exception’. This means that they may report on some aspects only where there are particular strengths or significant weaknesses.

About the college

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

This section will contain brief information on:

- the number and nature of learners

- the size, nature and location of the college sites (including a brief explanation of how individual college brands operate part of a group structure, where this is applicable)
- the range and levels of learning programmes offered
- the features of the areas served by the college
- any significant changes since the last inspection
- any other relevant factors

Summary

This section of the report will contain a short summary statement (usually 100-200 words) on the inspection findings.

The summary should report on the key strengths and any important aspects or weaknesses that require improvement. It should be consistent with the findings in the body of the report. It should not contain one overarching judgement on the college as a whole.

Recommendations

The recommendations should give the college a clear and specific indication of the areas for improvement that it will need to address. Inspectors should write the recommendations in order of priority. The recommendations should arise from the main judgements in the inspection areas and should provide a clear and practicable basis on which the college can move forward.

What happens next?

This section of the report will set out what the college needs to do following the inspection. In all cases, the college will need to respond to the recommendations by putting in place the actions required to make the improvements identified by the inspection team. The report will also indicate whether Estyn has asked the college to provide a case study in relation to any aspect(s) of its work. The report will state whether the college requires any level of follow-up activity by Estyn.

Inspection areas

For each inspection area, there is guidance on what it covers and the considerations that inspectors need to keep in mind when evaluating it.

Within each inspection area, the reporting inspector may report on the aspects in the order they appear in the guidance handbook, or they may choose to sequence the aspects differently in order to reflect their findings. For example, in Inspection Area 1 - Standards, they may begin with standards and progress in skills, then specific groups and standards, and progress overall at the end. In Inspection Area 3 – Teaching and learning experiences, they may begin with the curriculum and then teaching if this makes the findings of the team clearer.

The report on each inspection area should normally be around 250-700 words.

There is supplementary guidance on the inspection of various aspects of the work of colleges on Estyn's website: www.estyn.gov.wales/inspection/supplementary-guidance.

1 Standards

1.1 Standards and progress overall

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

Inspectors' evaluation of learners' achievement and progress should be based on session observations, assessment and development of vocational or academic skills, scrutiny of learners' work and discussions with learners. Inspectors should evaluate how well learners recall previous learning, develop thinking skills, acquire new knowledge, understanding and skills, and apply these to new situations.

Inspectors should look at all relevant performance information covering a period of time, normally over at least the last three years, to identify trends in performance. Inspectors should consider the performance information in the light of their own evidence from session observations, discussions with learners and scrutiny of written and practical work.

While inspectors should consider a wide range of information on learners' standards and progress, they should normally only report on performance data where the outcomes are both collected nationally and externally verified.

1.2 Standards and progress of specific groups

Inspectors should evaluate the progress of particular groups of learners, for example, learners on different levels, learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and those from minority ethnic groups.

For learners with special education needs (SEN), judgements about achievement should take account of information about their individual needs and abilities. Inspectors should consider the rate of progress these learners make in relation to

their individual targets and starting points. Inspectors should look at the progress of learners with relatively weak literacy, numeracy and digital skills who do not receive support for special education needs.

Inspectors should also consider whether specific groups of learners are making as much progress as they could, in relation to their starting-points and their ability. For example, inspectors should consider how well learners with more developed vocational skills achieve and the extent to which the work they undertake stretches them fully to achieve as well as they could.

1.3 Standards and progress in skills

Inspectors should evaluate to what extent learners develop the literacy, numeracy and digital skills required to complete their qualifications or course programmes.

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

There is further guidance on inspecting learners' literacy (Welsh/English), numeracy and digital skills on Estyn's website (www.estyn.gov.wales).

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

Inspectors should consider learners' standards in Welsh. They should consider the progress learners make in developing and using their Welsh language skills in the context of their vocational programmes (particularly for key priority areas as identified by Welsh Government), or progression to higher education and how they are developing skills for future employment in Wales.

2 Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

2.1 Wellbeing

Inspectors should consider the extent to which learners feel safe and secure, and free from physical and verbal abuse. They should consider how well learners understand how to make healthy choices relating to diet, physical activity and emotional wellbeing, including how to keep themselves safe online. They should consider how well learners use this understanding in their own lives, in college or in preparing them for higher education.

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

Inspectors should consider how well learners show confidence and resilience in their lives, for example in the way they interact with new people and with their peers. Inspectors should consider how well learners are developing as ethical, informed citizens, for example through their awareness of fairness, equality, sustainability and tolerance.

2.2 Attitudes to learning

Inspectors should evaluate to what extent learners are developing the key attitudes and behaviours required throughout their lives. In particular, inspectors should evaluate to what extent learners are developing their employability skills and the extent to which learners are ambitious, confident, capable and independent learners. They should look at how well learners engage with new, unfamiliar experiences and ideas. They should judge learners' interest in their work, their ability to sustain concentration and to avoid distractions. They should consider how readily learners engage in vocational tasks and bring them to completion. They should evaluate how well learners persevere and remain purposeful when they face difficulties or seek other solutions when their first approach to a problem is unsuccessful. They should look at how well learners manage time effectively, prioritising tasks and are able to work to deadlines.

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

Inspectors should consider the extent to which learners demonstrate self-awareness, present a professional, positive image to others and conduct themselves appropriately in sessions and around the college. They should observe whether learners are considerate and relate well to each other, teachers and other adults.

When evaluating participation and enjoyment in learning, inspectors should consider the evidence from teaching or training sessions, scrutiny of learners' work, and interviews with learners. They should consider to what extent learners develop confidence and are motivated to learn.

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

3 Teaching and learning experiences

3.1 Quality of teaching

The evaluation of teaching does not necessarily have to be the first section of the inspection area as inspectors may begin with the quality of learning experiences or the provision for skills if this makes their findings clearer.

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

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

Inspectors should judge how well teachers use various questioning techniques to draw out and further develop learners' responses and gauge their understanding. They should consider the clarity of instructions and explanations and how well the learners develop their literacy, numeracy, digital and vocational skills, knowledge and understanding as a result. They should evaluate how well the teachers motivate and direct learners and make their sessions stimulating and engaging places in which learners can learn productively. Inspectors should judge how successfully technical and support staff support learning.

The focus on assessment in this inspection area is on vocational or academic skills relevant to the learning programme. Inspectors should evaluate how well learners develop and apply a wide range of skills and knowledge appropriate to their qualifications, including considering the extent to which they develop transferable employability skills to meet the needs of the local economy or for further study at a higher level. Inspectors should also evaluate the oral and written feedback from assessors to help learners to know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. They should consider how well learners to assess their own performance. Inspectors should evaluate the extent to which the senior management and staff track and keep records on the progress of each learner and report on these clearly to meet the needs of learners and employers. They should consider how well teachers ensure that their assessments are valid, timely, accurate and reliable.

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

In coming to evaluations on teaching and assessment inspectors should use the full range of evidence available to them. This is likely to include evidence from learners' files or portfolios, schemes of work, assessment records, and information on learners' progress, session observations, and discussions with learners. Inspectors

should not allocate a judgement to an individual session or teacher, but should report on the strengths and weaknesses in the quality of teaching and assessment across the college.

3.2 The breadth, balance and appropriateness of the provision

Inspectors should evaluate the extent to which learning experiences across the provision stimulate and challenge learners so that they engage fully in their learning and make the best possible progress. They should consider whether the range of learning programmes offered provide learners with suitable progression routes into further and higher education as well as employment and training.

Inspectors should consider the college's strategic approach to planning the provision and the extent to which it helps learners to become ambitious, confident, aspirational and well-informed individuals. Inspectors should consider the extent and appropriateness of arrangements for learners to undertake sufficient, relevant and high quality work related experience. They should consider whether these learning experiences develop learners' vocational and employability skills well enough.

Inspectors should consider how well the provision caters for specific groups of learners, especially those with advanced vocational skills and understanding, those with special educational needs and learners with English as an additional language. Inspectors should consider the extent to which teachers might include provision for learners with little prior knowledge.

Inspectors should consider the ways in which the college develops a programme of learning activities that reflects the cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity of Wales.

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

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

3.3 Provision for skills

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

Inspectors should evaluate the extent and quality of the provision for the development of Welsh language skills in the context of their vocational areas, academic subjects or for further study. They should consider how well learners are made aware of the advantages of learning Welsh and becoming bilingual. Inspectors should comment on the arrangements that colleges have to support learners Welsh language skills development.

4 Care, support and guidance

4.1 Tracking, monitoring and the provision of learning support

Inspectors should consider how well the college tracks and monitors learners' progress and wellbeing, including attendance and behaviour. Inspectors should consider how well the college uses this information to consider the progress of specific groups, for example those learners whose circumstances may make them vulnerable to underachievement or those who are more able. They will need to consider how well the college identifies relevant issues and responds appropriately to the outcomes of tracking and monitoring, for example through the provision of appropriate support and challenge, the use of intervention strategies, the mentoring or coaching of individuals or groups. Inspectors should also consider how well the college uses partnerships with others to provide effective support for learners.

Inspectors should consider how well the college supports learners with emotional and social needs so that they can enjoy their learning.

4.2 Personal development

Inspectors should evaluate the effectiveness of impartial guidance and advice provided to learners before the start of their programme from the college and other external agencies.

Inspectors should evaluate the effectiveness of the provision for personal and specialist support for learners. This will include the availability of services of specialist agencies, especially for learners who face considerable barriers to learning, including personal, financial, domestic, transport, health and family care responsibilities.

Inspectors should evaluate the college's arrangements for promoting healthy lifestyle choices, for example in relation to healthy eating and drinking, substance misuse, online safety, mental health issues and work life balance. Inspectors should consider the guidance and other support provided to safeguard the welfare of learners and promote their personal development.

Inspectors should look at how well the college helps learners to understand issues relating to equality and diversity, and develops the values of tolerance and respect. They should consider how well the college develops learners' knowledge and understanding of harassment, discrimination and extremism. They should also consider how well the college responds to and manages any incidents relating to bullying, harassment and discrimination. They should consider to what extent the college challenges stereotypes in learners' attitudes, choices and expectations.

Inspectors should evaluate the extent to which learners, including those from different groups take on responsibilities and play a part in the wider community. Inspectors should evaluate how well the college helps learners to develop an understanding of their culture, the local community and the wider world.

4.3 Safeguarding

Inspectors will report on whether the college's arrangements for safeguarding learners meet requirements and give no cause for concern. Where arrangements are a serious cause for concern, inspectors should include a recommendation in the report and Estyn will send a wellbeing letter to the college asking them to outline how they will address the shortcoming(s).

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

Inspectors will look at how effective college's arrangements are for preventing and addressing bullying, harassment and discrimination. They should consider how the college keeps learners safe from the dangers of radicalisation.

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

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

5 Leadership and management

5.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers, including the governing body

Inspectors should evaluate the extent to which leaders and managers have established and communicated clear vision and appropriate aims, strategic objectives, plans and policies that focus on meeting learner needs.

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

Inspectors should consider a wide range of evidence when evaluating the quality of leadership and management, for example minutes from a range of recent meetings, interviews with staff, improvement action plans and reports on their implementation, recent self-assessment from leaders and managers and the analysis of information on learner performance.

Inspectors should consider how well leaders and managers act in accordance with the principle of sustainable development and how well they make decisions and set priorities for improvement that balance immediate, short-term needs with the long-term needs of learners, the local community and Wales.

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

Inspectors should consider the extent to which leaders and managers are purposeful and successful in meeting national and local priorities. Inspectors should evaluate the extent to which leaders and managers plan strategically to provide purposeful opportunities for learners to develop their Welsh language skills in formal and informal situations.

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

Inspectors should evaluate how well governors, or those on the board of directors understand and discharge their roles and responsibilities. They should consider how well they know the college's strengths and areas for development and the degree to which they have participated in setting the college's strategic priorities. They should consider whether there is an appropriate balance between support and challenge in the way it holds senior leadership to account.

5.2 Self-evaluation processes and improvement planning

Inspectors should evaluate how accurately leaders and managers know the college's strengths and weaknesses. They should consider how well leaders and managers gather and analyse first-hand evidence of standards of provision, including teaching and assessment, and as a result of involvement and consultation with a wide range of appropriate partners and stakeholders, such as other further education colleges, and professional learning networks.

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

Inspectors should investigate the college's track-record in making improvements and the extent to which they have led to a positive impact on learners' learning and wellbeing, for example through improvements to the quality of teaching and training. Where appropriate, inspectors should consider how well the college has responded to recommendations from previous Estyn inspections or from strategic partners and whether the college's actions have led to improvements.

5.3 Professional learning

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

Inspectors should evaluate the impact of leaders in the way they manage the performance of staff in order to help staff to improve their practice. They should also judge whether leaders and managers address issues of underperformance robustly and directly where necessary.

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

5.4 Use of resources

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

Inspectors should consider the extent to which leaders and managers know the costs of existing learning programmes and activities, keep them under review and question whether they are cost-effective. Inspectors should consider the size of any surplus or deficit relative to the college's budget. They should consider whether there is a consistent trend of spending that is significantly above or below the annual delegated budget and explore the reasons for this, where it occurs.

Inspectors should consider whether there is an appropriate level of staffing and learning resources to deliver the planned provision effectively. Inspectors should consider whether the college uses its accommodation effectively and efficiently, and the extent to which the accommodation supports or detracts from teaching and learning of high quality. Inspectors should consider the quality of learner workplaces

and the opportunities they have to undertake the full range of learning and assessment activities.

The evidence base of the inspection

The report will contain a brief overview of the evidence base of the inspection. In this section, reporting inspectors will summarise the activities undertaken by members of the inspection team and the sources of evidence that they considered before, during and after the inspection to ensure that the findings of the inspection are valid, accurate and reliable.

Thematic focus

Estyn may choose a small number of additional themes to focus on each year. The themes chosen will help Estyn to gather information on specific aspects of education and training in Wales. Estyn will use the information to complement its remit work and to inform the findings of the Chief Inspector's Annual Report.

Where there is an additional theme, the inspection team will focus on only one additional theme on each inspection. There will be no separate section of the report or a separate judgement on the additional theme in the published report.

The inspection team may approach the gathering of evidence for the additional theme in a variety of ways, depending on the theme chosen. It may involve a questionnaire or an interview with a specific member of staff or scrutiny of documentation or learners' work, or a combination of approaches. The aim is to make the gathering of evidence as proportionate and as manageable as possible for the college and the inspection team.