



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

# **Estyn's guidance toolkit for assuring the quality of inspections through QAR and QAI**

updated September 2021

**This document is also available in Welsh.**

## Information sheet

Information box

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### Version control

Document version	Author	Date of issue	Changes made
1.0	Barry Norris	January 2013	
1.1	Barry Norris	April 2013	Minor drafting
2.0	Barry Norris	September 2017	Revisions for new inspection arrangements from September 2017
3.0	Fiona Arnison	September 2018	Minor amendments to IEF grid titles; removing protocol QAR guidance for RIs and QAR inspectors into separate document
3.1	Fiona Arnison	March 2019	IEF guidance moved into separate document, to allow easier access for PIs, AIs and RIs
3.2	Fiona Arnison	September 2021	Updated to reflect the removal of summative judgements and subgrades from inspection, and the inclusion of inspection mindset

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## **Equality Impact Assessment**

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

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

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## Quality Assurance forms and guidance

The QAI and QAR forms are submitted electronically through a web-based system using Estyn's Virtual Inspection Room extranet.

The overall A-D grades relate to Contractor-led inspections. (The Yes/No (Y/N) indicator relates to HMI-led inspections.)

The grade definitions are as follows:

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

## Quality assurance of inspections form (QAI)

Aspect	Criteria	Comment (where appropriate)
Preparation and management	The RI prepares, briefs and manages the team effectively	
	The RI organises a suitable range of inspection activity.	
	The RI's demeanour clearly conveys the inspection mindset	
Securing robust inspection findings	The RI facilitates team discussion well	
	The RI challenges the team's findings appropriately	
	The RI weighs evidence and applies follow-up protocols appropriately	
Team input forms (TIFs) and QA	The RI uses the VIR and TIF systems appropriately	
	The RI undertakes suitable quality assurance of the team's work	
	The RI engages fully in the QAI process	
Nominee and team involvement	The RI involves and supports team members well	
	The RI engages well with nominee and senior leaders	
<b>Overall QAI grade</b>	<b>Meets requirements A/B/C/D Y/N</b>	
	Areas to consider for future inspections	

## Guidance on awarding QAI grades

Estyn requires all Reporting Inspectors, whether CAI or HMI, to undertake inspections of good quality.

For CAI-led inspections, HMI undertake a sample of quality assurance visit to inspections. The quality assurance process ensures public confidence in the inspection, including confidence in the conduct and mindset of the inspection, the accuracy and validity of any top-level Inspection Area evaluations and the overall quality of Estyn inspections and reports.

As a result of the visit, HMI will allocate an overall quality assurance grade to inspections (QAI). The grade reflects the overall balance of strengths and shortcomings in the inspection. In addition, HMI may want to identify and comment on particular strengths and any shortcomings in aspects of the reporting inspector's practice.

The following table sets out further general guidance that HMI and CAI may find helpful.

<b>Preparation and management</b>			
<b><i>Meets requirements</i></b>	<b><i>Minor shortcoming</i></b>	<b><i>Significant shortcoming</i></b>	<b><i>Major shortcoming</i></b>
Preparation undertaken according to timescales	A small amount of slippage in time management of preparation but no impact on delivery	Preparation is a little tardy, e.g. not all documents and communications are within the timeframes identified in the toolkits. This creates some awkwardness for team, provider and Estyn	RI's time management means that preparation communications are not within the timeframes expected. This creates significant awkwardness for team, provider and Estyn
Allocation of responsibilities makes best use of team	Responsibilities are fine, but loadings are a little uneven	Responsibilities are too uneven	Responsibilities are too uneven and create coverage and workload issues
Timetable for learning walks/observations by team members is in place and RI adapts it flexibly in relation to emerging findings	Timetable is appropriate, but it is a little rigid and lacks a degree of flexibility	Timetable for first full day is too sketchy and team members are a little confused about what to do	No timetable of learning walks/visits in place for first full day of inspection and team members are unsure of what to do
All relevant meetings identified	Nearly all relevant meetings identified	A few relevant meetings identified	No relevant meetings identified
Everyone on the team follows the code of conduct and acts in a suitably professional way. The RI's demeanour conveys the inspection mindset well. The RI supports team members to convey a similar mindset.	One or two minor actions/comments by the team/RI might lead to criticism, but not to the extent of undermining confidence in the team or their findings. Generally the team convey the inspection mindset appropriately	Actions/comments by member(s) of the team begin to undermine confidence in the team's professionalism	Actions/comments by the team are very likely to lead to criticism and to undermine confidence in the team's professionalism and/or the inspection findings. Demeanour is not in keeping with the mindset
<b>Generally, a well-run, well-organised inspection where everything happens as it should</b>	<b>Generally, the inspection runs well, but there are a few tweaks that could tighten up the organisation</b>	<b>Generally, an inspection where there are organisational weaknesses that begin to affect the conduct of the inspection</b>	<b>Generally, an inspection where there are significant organisational weaknesses that undermine the conduct of the inspection</b>

<b>Securing robust inspection findings</b>			
<b><i>Meets requirements</i></b>	<b><i>Minor shortcoming</i></b>	<b><i>Significant shortcoming</i></b>	<b><i>Major shortcoming</i></b>
Inspection findings are secure due to appropriate challenge by RI and team	Inspection findings are generally secure but do not always receive appropriate challenge from RI and/or team	Inspection findings are taken too much on trust and the lack of challenge begins to undermine confidence in the inspection findings	One or more of the main evaluations are clearly too generous or too harsh and do not receive sufficient challenge from RI and/or team
Inspection findings match the balance of strengths and weaknesses	The balance of strengths and weaknesses is not quite right in a few cases	The balance of strengths and weaknesses is skewed inappropriately in too many cases	The balance of strengths and weaknesses is clearly incorrect and undermines the inspection outcome and the validity of the summary
Team clearly identifies interesting or innovative practice, where appropriate	The reasons for identifying interesting or innovative practice are not always completely clear	The reasons for interesting or innovative practice are not clear enough in all cases	The decision to ask the school to provide case studies of interesting or innovative practice appears erratic and unsubstantiated by evidence
All statements match inspection framework criteria and go into the appropriate report sections	There is minor misplacement of main evaluations/content	There is more significant misplacement of main evaluations/content	There are significant omissions and/or deviations from framework guidance
RI considers appropriate level of follow-up using guidance appropriately	RI considers appropriate level of follow-up, but the process and discussion is not fully developed according to the guidance	RI considers the guidance fully, but misapplies it and arrives at an inappropriate outcome.	RI considers inappropriate level of follow-up and does not follow guidance correctly. The discussion is either too brief or too inaccessible for the nominee to understand the inspection outcome
<b>Generally, an inspection where you feel the RI's work makes sure that inspection findings are spot on</b>	<b>Generally, an inspection where you feel the findings are appropriate, but the RI does not always secure or test the evidence base robustly enough</b>	<b>Generally, an inspection where the RI does not challenge enough and the credibility of the evaluations is somewhat undermined</b>	<b>Generally, an inspection where the credibility of the evaluations and the RI's work are shaky and where the findings are unlikely to stand up to rigorous public scrutiny</b>



<b>Team input forms (TIFs)</b>			
<b><i>Meets requirements</i></b>	<b><i>Minor shortcoming</i></b>	<b><i>Significant shortcoming</i></b>	<b><i>Major shortcoming</i></b>
TIFs are present in the VIR in the correct format and collated regularly	TIFs are in the correct format but with a minor shortcoming, e.g. one has a file name where the name has changed from the original	TIFs are in the correct format, but with a few minor shortcomings. Collated TIFs are not shared during the course of the inspection, so team members are not aware of other inspectors' work	TIFs are not in the VIR or they are in the wrong format. More than one file name has been changed or tags have been lost. The RI does not collate the TIFs during the inspection to have an overview of the emerging findings
RI ensures that TIFs have appropriate supporting evidence to support all main evaluations	One or two supporting evidence sections are just a little thin, but they still support the main evaluation	Supporting evidence content relies too heavily on cutting and pasting from the school/provider's SER. The evidence is not set out clearly enough to enable a database search.	Too much supporting evidence is missing or is so thin as to undermine confidence in the main evaluation
RI ensures that TIFs contain appropriate content	TIFs contain appropriate information, but have minor shortcomings, e.g. they contain the names of individuals	TIFs contain mostly appropriate content, but there are comments which are too informal or display some degree of bias	TIFs contain too much inappropriate content or no content or they rely far too heavily on cutting and pasting from SER with little/no verification.
<b>Generally, the RI makes sure the team meets all the TIF requirements; no further work required</b>	<b>Generally, the TIF processes are suitable, but the TIF content has one or two shortcomings; a little tidying required</b>	<b>Generally, the TIF processes are mostly OK, but the content shows a pattern of shortcomings which reflects a certain lack of care and attention to detail but without undermining the validity or reliability of the TIFs overall</b>	<b>Generally, the TIF processes are weak or of poor quality and these have the potential to create issues for Estyn in relation to further remedial work or gaps in the inspection database</b>

<b>Nominee and team involvement</b>			
<b><i>Meets requirements</i></b>	<b><i>Minor shortcoming</i></b>	<b><i>Significant shortcoming</i></b>	<b><i>Major shortcoming</i></b>
The RI ensures that the nominee is involved well in the inspection and attend all team meetings. They ensure that the nominee understands the messages and clarify where necessary, but manage any defensiveness on the part of the nominee well.	The nominee is suitably involved but misses an important discussion at one point (e.g. teaching is discussed outside the team meeting). The RI allows the nominee to interject defensively or inappropriately.	The nominee is fully aware of the inspection process, but does not hear all important discussions on the findings or main evaluations, for example relating to the quality of teaching. The RI does not provide opportunities to check the nominee's understanding of the discussion.	The nominee is not involved enough and the inspection findings come as too much of a surprise
The RI ensures that the nominee has undertaken the relevant online training and has checked the appropriate box in the VI printed off the certificate as evidence	The RI has asked the nominee if they have completed the online training, but the record in the VIR is not complete or does not have a copy of the nominee's certificate	The RI misses opportunities to clarify the role of the nominee and does not support them to fulfil their role actively enough	The RI does not ask whether the nominee has undertaken the relevant online training and has not checked the record in the VIR. The nominee does not receive good enough support and clarification from the RI nominee's certificate as evidence
The RI ensures that the PI is involved very well in the inspection and receives very good support	The management of the PI is generally good but there are a few occasions when the PI could have been included more fully	In general, the RI supports the PI well but the PI arrives at their findings too much in isolation from the rest of the team	The management of the PIs' involvement is generally poor and the PI works in isolation too much.
The RI ensures that all team members have suitable opportunities to contribute to the team discussions about key areas such as teaching and learning. They manage the discussion effectively and efficiently and ensure that the nominee understands the team's emerging thinking.	Generally, the RI manages the team discussions well, although they may miss occasional opportunities to encourage contributions from quieter inspectors through supplementary questioning, or to prevent one team member from dominating the discussion unnecessarily	The RI does not manage the team discussion efficiently enough, particularly concerning teaching and learning in the round. They miss too many opportunities to ensure that all team members contribute their findings meaningfully.	The team discussion is not of a good enough quality, e.g. the team meeting may be either overly long or too superficial, or the RI may dominate the meeting too much. As a result, the nominee is unclear about the team's findings and the reasons behind the main evaluation or the inspection outcome

<b>Overall QAI grade</b>			
<b>Consider an A grade</b>	<b>Consider a B grade</b>	<b>Consider a C grade</b>	<b>Consider a D grade</b>
<b>Generally, an inspection that runs very well, with secure evaluations, appropriate use of the TIF system and good involvement by everyone concerned</b>	<b>Generally, an inspection where there are some minor lapses here and there, but nothing that undermines the overall running of the inspection or the security of the evaluations</b>	<b>Generally, an inspection where there are rather too many minor shortcomings and these begin to raise questions about the quality of the inspection overall</b>	<b>Generally, a weak inspection that is likely to attract criticism or complaint and undermine confidence in the inspection outcomes</b>

## Quality assurance of reports (QAR)

Aspect	Criteria	Comment where appropriate
Reporting input form (RIF) and VIR	The RI uses the VIR/RIF systems well and collates findings regularly	
	The RI ensures completion of all sections of the Reporting input form	
The written report	The overview is cohesive and reflects the main findings well. It makes clear links between leadership, the provision and outcomes, and identifies 'cause and effect' appropriately.	
	The recommendations are appropriate and emanate from the evaluations and overview	
	The level of follow-up is appropriate and follows agreed protocols	
	Evidence supports each of the five evaluations suitably	
	Findings across the report are internally consistent	
Presentation	Writing conforms to Estyn's requirements	
	The RI engages purposefully in the QAR process	
<b>Overall QAR</b>	<b>Grade A/B/C/D or Y/N</b>	
	Areas to consider for future inspections	

## Guidance on whether a reporting input form meets requirements (QAR judgement)

For CAI-led and HMI inspections, HMI allocate an overall quality assurance grade to reports (QAR). The grade (A-D or Y/N) reflects the balance of strengths and shortcomings in the inspection report and the evidence submitted to support the report's findings (the reporting input form). HMI should highlight strengths and shortcomings in the reporting input form (using Track Changes) during the edit, moderation and validation phase, for further consideration by the Reporting Inspector.

Estyn requires Reporting Inspectors to produce reporting input forms and reports of good quality. Where the reporting input form contains serious shortcomings, it will fail to meet Estyn's requirements and is likely to be awarded a D or N grade overall. A serious shortcoming is a significant weakness in the evidence within the reporting input form or the inspection report that affects the accuracy of the overall evaluation, and/or the level of follow-up, or detracts significantly from the overall quality of the report.

A serious shortcoming undermines confidence in:

- the accuracy and validity of any top-level Inspection Area evaluation or level of follow-up, and/or
- the overall quality of Estyn inspections and reports

HMI will complete the relevant QAR form before the draft report is sent to the school/provider for a factual check. The edit, moderation and validation phase and completion of the QAR form occurs prior to publication on Estyn's website.

The following table sets out further general guidance to support the allocation of an overall QAR grade. HMI and CAI RIs may find it helpful.

<b>Reporting input forms (RIFs) / VIR</b>			
<b><i>Meets requirements</i></b>	<b><i>Minor shortcoming</i></b>	<b><i>Significant shortcoming</i></b>	<b><i>Major shortcoming</i></b>
Evaluations are very secure and are very well supported by appropriate evidence	Evaluations are secure in nearly all respects but are occasionally borderline in relation to the evidence provided	Evaluations are just about secure but the evidence base is thin in too many sections so that it is not always possible to see the internal consistency between the overview, outcome (follow-up), main evaluations and evidence	Evaluations are not secure because the RI has not weighed the evidence appropriately or there is a lack of evidence to support many of the statements, or it is clear that the overview and level of follow-up are not consistent in relation to the evidence within the RIF
The evidence and overview match the balance of strengths and weaknesses very well, and is consistent across the RIF	The balance of strengths and weaknesses is mostly reflected correctly in the commentaries and evaluations. There may be an occasional discrepancy between the overview and the overarching messages in the main evaluations	The balance of strengths and weaknesses is broadly right for most evaluations but it is inappropriate in a few. The overview does not match the evaluations well enough for a few of the aspects	The balance of strengths and weaknesses is clearly incorrect
The evaluations match criteria in the inspection framework and any deviations are explained fully	The evaluations match criteria in nearly all cases and deviations are noted	Most evaluations match criteria, although any deviations are not always fully explained	The evaluations do not follow the inspection criteria. They are not explained clearly enough in the report or through the supporting evidence provided
Level of follow-up is appropriate and explained fully within the 'reasons for follow-up' of the Reporting input form	The level of follow-up is appropriate but is not fully explained in the Reporting input form	Level of follow-up is probably appropriate but there is no explanation from the RI to relate findings to the follow-up level – remedial work required from RI	Level of follow-up is clearly inappropriate and does not follow guidance protocols

Recommendations are well chosen and highly relevant. They emanate clearly from the evaluation text and major recommendations emanate from the overview. The number of recommendations is appropriate	Recommendations are generally appropriate and suitable. They emanate from the main evaluations.	There are too many or too few recommendations. Generally, the recommendations stem from the main evaluations but may not link tightly to the overview or may not be the most relevant.	The recommendations do not emanate clearly from the text and may be inappropriate in number or content. Recommendations do not appear clearly relevant to the reader.
All statements match 'What we inspect' criteria and relevant report sections	There are minor omissions	The report follows the 'What we inspect' criteria but there is selective use of evidence on occasions	There are significant omissions within various sections of the framework and these undermine the validity and reliability of the inspection outcomes
<b>Generally, a report where you feel the evaluations and summary are spot on</b>	<b>Generally, a report where you feel the evaluations are sound, but with occasional uncertainty or inconsistency</b>	<b>Generally, a report where the evaluations and summary are broadly OK, but where gaps and inconsistencies begin to create uncertainty about the robustness of the inspection findings</b>	<b>Generally, a report where the evaluations and summary are very weak and would be unlikely to stand up to rigorous public scrutiny</b>

<b>Presentation</b>			
<b><i>Meets requirements</i></b>	<b><i>Minor shortcoming</i></b>	<b><i>Significant shortcoming</i></b>	<b><i>Major shortcoming</i></b>
Style is clear and plain with very few passives and no jargon terms	Occasional use of passives and over-complex sentences	The messages are clear, but there is too much use of jargon or repetition across sections	Style is too dense or sentences and syntax are confusing in too many places
Very few/no lapses in relation to grammar, spelling or punctuation	Occasional, very minor errors of grammar, spelling and punctuation	There is a trend of grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors in one or more sections	Significant errors of grammar, spelling and punctuation throughout text
The report has one voice/style that permeates all its sections. The overview summarises the school well and links cause and effect cohesively.	The report has one voice in the main but one or two quality indicators read differently from the rest. The overview is appropriate but may need a little rewriting to improve the flow	The report gets its messages over reasonably well, but there is a mixture of voices within the report. The overview is 'clunky' e.g. it feels like cut and pasted sentences	The report is a mish-mash of voices and styles with little or no coherence overall
Emphasis is on evaluation over description	A bit too much description in places, which is not always helpful to the reader (e.g. not linked to a recommendation or evaluation of impact)	Too much unfocused description within too many sections. The link between the overview, main evaluation and the associated recommendations may be tenuous on occasions.	Far too much description with little/no evaluation. Recommendations do not emanate clearly from the text.
Follows Writing Guide in all respects; very little attention required at the edit stage	A few deviations from Writing Guide (e.g. erroneous capitalisation); little attention required at the edit stage	Regular deviations from the Writing Guide in one or two respects throughout the report which require significant attention at the edit stage	Very many and persistent deviations from the Writing Guide which require a great deal of attention at the edit stage
All sections complete, formatted correctly and in the right place	An occasional small formatting error, for example with setting out bullets	More persistent errors	A section of the report is missing or in the wrong place or formatting is clearly wrong
<b>Generally, a report that requires little or no editing – a report that could go out pretty well as it is</b>	<b>Generally, a report where there are just occasional lapses, and which need tidying up before you would feel happy about its publication</b>	<b>Generally, a report which requires more intensive editing before publication and where the lapses are too persistent</b>	<b>Generally, a poor report, with little evidence of robust, careful editing, that is likely to undermine confidence in inspection outcomes when/if published</b>