

Proposals for the next cycle of Estyn inspections

Foreword

Jane Hutt, Minister for Children, Education Lifelong Learning and Skills



I am delighted to provide a foreword to this consultation document and to encourage comment on the proposals.

In Wales we need listening and learning organisations if we are to respond effectively to the evolving needs of learners and I believe that Estyn with its proposals for the next cycle of inspections is acting in this vein. Many of the proposals, including the move to a shorter notice period for inspections and to a greater emphasis on self-evaluation, reflect feedback from practitioners and inspectors' own experiences. Other proposed changes, such as involving learners in the inspection process and an increased focus on literacy and numeracy will support the Assembly Government in addressing many significant challenges across the learning sectors.

Estyn plays a key role in contributing to the evidence base that underpins the continuous improvement of standards in education and training in Wales. I value the independent advice that the Inspectorate provides in helping to improve learner outcomes. For these reasons, I welcome the consultation presented here to make a positive progression from the current inspection cycle.

We are committed to working in close partnership with Estyn to ensure that the new inspection arrangements are aligned with our School Effectiveness Framework (SEF) and the Quality and Effectiveness Framework (QEF) for post-16 learning. This collaboration will help to ensure consistent messages to providers and effective sharing of information as we work towards our common goal of raising standards for learners.

It is important to note that the principles set out in this consultation document are entirely consistent with those set out in the Minister for Finance and Public Service Delivery's recently-published consultation on the Inspection, Audit and Regulation of Public Services in Wales. Estyn will continue to work in collaboration with a wide range of Inspectorates operating in Wales to support the overall assessment and improvement of public services.

This consultation is an important part of making inspection more effective for the benefit of the learner and I urge all stakeholders to respond with their views on the key changes proposed here.

Introduction

Bill Maxwell, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales



I am pleased to be presenting what I believe to be a forward-looking set of proposals for a range of important changes to the way we go about inspecting education and training providers in Wales.

Estyn's mission is to promote excellence for all learners in Wales. Whilst this aspiration may be widely shared across the Welsh education and training community, I believe that we in Estyn can make a unique contribution. This unique contribution stems fundamentally from our ability to provide an independent, high-quality inspection and advice service which does three key things well:

- providing accountability to the users of services and other stakeholders;
- promoting the spread of best practice in management and delivery across providers; and
- informing the development of national policy by Welsh Assembly Government Ministers and their officials.

Our cyclical inspection programmes of individual education and training providers constitute one of the key mechanisms through which we seek to achieve these three purposes. They deliver accountability through public reporting and they promote directly the improvement of practice in the providers being inspected. They also provide a large part of the rich evidence base upon which we draw when developing authoritative advice for policy makers and when seeking to pro-actively disseminate key aspects of good practice across the system at large. A large proportion of our resources is devoted to undertaking these programmes.

The changes proposed in this document are designed to increase the effectiveness of our cyclical inspection programmes in serving these key purposes. Some of the changes are also designed to gain efficiencies which will enable us to devote more time to important aspects of our work beyond undertaking the inspections themselves, thereby allowing us to generate more added value from the rich knowledge base they produce.

The proposals incorporate strong elements of continuity, building on success, as well as areas of quite substantial change.

I believe they are well founded. They are based on a comprehensive process of review which has included both systematic internal reflection and extensive external consultation with a wide range of stakeholders.

This consultation is also timely in the context of wider developments in the Welsh Assembly Government's policy for inspection across all sectors of public services.

Ministers are currently consulting publicly on the first formal statement of Welsh policy on inspection, audit, and regulation in Wales. The Assembly Government's Department of Public Service and Performance have developed this policy statement in consultation with all of the Welsh inspectorates. Our proposals for developing the next generation of education and training inspections are designed to fit into that framework and to maximise the role that our inspection activity can play in that broader setting of legislation, policy, performance frameworks and public accountability for the public services at large. We are committed to more joined-up working across inspectorates and we believe the proposals will help make that possible.

The first phase of the development of these proposals involved an innovative piece of open-ended consultation work which actively sought out the views of a wide range of citizens on the sort of service we should be providing. These views were taken into account in developing the proposals presented here.

It is equally important to us now, at this more advanced stage of the development process, that we again get clear feedback from all stakeholders to help ensure that we are meeting legitimate expectations and needs as far as possible.

Please do ensure that you give us your views to help us make inspection as productive and effective a process as it can be, with maximum benefits for learners across Wales.

Background

The current six-year inspection cycle began in 2004 and comes to an end in 2010. This paper sets out proposals for the next six-year cycle, which will start in autumn 2010. A few of the changes we propose might need to be phased in over a more extended timescale due to resource and training implications.

We intend to retain the current length of the inspection cycle at six years. This is the length of cycle prescribed in the Regulations attaching to the 2005 Education Act. It means, for example, that most schools will be inspected at least once during the course of an individual pupil's career there.

In 2004, Estyn introduced a common inspection framework that, for the first time, brought commonality to inspection across a range of sectors. There were only two exceptions - the inspections of local authority education services and non-maintained early years settings.

The common inspection framework reinforced two key features that have always been at the heart of the inspection process, namely:

- a focus on the interests of the learner; and
- a focus on first-hand evidence and direct observation of practice as the basis for professional judgements of quality.

The 2004 common inspection framework also introduced some new features:

- using the provider's self-evaluation as the starting point for inspection;
- the involvement of current practitioners as peer assessors in inspection; and
- the use of 'nominees' who were members of staff from the provider being inspected.

The proposals in this paper include an element of continuity in that they build on these features, and others that were built into the current inspection cycle.

They also introduce a substantial element of change, which is partly a response to changes that are taking place in the wider context in which we inspect. These changes include:

- the range of new strategies, initiatives and action plans for education and training introduced by the Welsh Assembly Government since 2004;
- recent and current developments in the overall national strategy for quality improvement such as the School Effectiveness Framework (SEF) and the Quality and Effectiveness Framework (QEF) for post-compulsory sectors;
- the availability of better performance data for more providers;
- the increasing maturity of approaches to self-evaluation amongst providers of education and training;
- the need for inspections to be flexible enough to support joint working and, in some cases joint inspection with other inspectorates; and
- the increasingly important and statutory role of partnerships in the planning and delivery of education for children, young people and adult learners.

In developing these proposals for Estyn's new inspection arrangements, we recognised that any changes need to take account of the perspective of our key stakeholders, especially the users of education and training services. As a result, and in line with the Beecham Report and its focus on the citizen's voice, Estyn commissioned an innovative consultation to discover what the people of Wales want from inspection as the first phase of the development process. The consultation sought to be as inclusive as possible and its findings are at the heart of the proposals set out in this paper.

The findings from this first consultation phase showed that most lay people and many professionals favour shorter, sharper inspection for the best providers, with more attention being focused on the weakest providers. The majority of citizens tend to favour shorter notice periods for inspections and want reports to be clearer and easily accessible. Professionals want inspection to be based on a verification of provider self-evaluation and appreciate the inclusion of peers in the inspection process. All these features are included in our new proposals.

The key features of the proposed arrangements are set out below. We would very much like to have your views on these proposals. A consultation response form is provided at the end of the document to structure your response.

Proposals for the inspection arrangements from Autumn 2010

1. More proportionate inspection

We want to introduce substantially shorter or 'core' inspections for all providers. These will be complemented by enhanced levels of 'follow-up' inspection activity that will be targeted on those providers who have been found, through their core inspection, to be under-performing. We believe this is a better approach than trying to pre-judge the level of risk presented by schools before they are visited.

We want the new cycle of inspections to be focused fully on promoting improvement. We want to place more emphasis on supporting weaker providers, and on promoting and disseminating good practice across the system. We feel that proportionate inspections will help us do this. A key objective of this approach is to enable a shift of resources away from the standard core inspection model towards supporting more follow-up work where there are shortcomings in performance.

This new approach will help us to avoid investing more time than is necessary in inspecting effective providers, whilst still ensuring we can provide a sufficient level of independent public assurance on the performance of every provider we inspect. The core inspection will still ensure that every provider still receives the benefits of a periodic external evaluation of key aspects of its provision and performance.

We have good evidence to show that, where inspectors stay engaged in following up the progress of weaker providers, standards generally improve. However, our current re-inspection activity only impacts on a small proportion of poor providers. We believe that many more providers are not enabling all learners to reach their full potential and would benefit from some form of continuing engagement with the inspection process. The proposed new arrangements will extend a form of follow-up activity to more providers, roughly another 25%. In schools, existing arrangements will continue to apply to the percentage of schools that are identified as causing concern (up to 5%).

The detailed nature of the core inspections and the arrangements for the follow-up inspection activity will vary from sector to sector. However the same principle will apply – that is that all providers will receive a reduced core inspection that represents a substantial reduction when compared to current inspection models. To achieve this reduction, the core inspections will not seek to cover all aspects of provision, such as subjects or learning areas, and Estyn would carry out national surveys of standards and quality in these aspects. For all sectors, follow-up activity will be targeted on aspects of underperformance.

2. A streamlined framework of inspection indicators and grades

Our new inspection arrangements will fundamentally change the way we inspect but will not compromise the validity of the inspection process or our ability to judge whether any follow-up work is needed. We aim to simplify the way we inspect. The new inspection framework will focus clearly on giving us the information we need to target support where it is needed most. We will simplify the criteria that will be used to make inspection judgements and the system of grading.

The new framework will concentrate on key aspects of education and training and will have three key questions that focus on outcomes, provision, and leadership and management. We also propose to reduce the long list of criteria that is found in the current inspection framework and the guidance handbooks for each sector. The new framework will be closely aligned with other quality frameworks: the School Effectiveness Framework (SEF) and the Quality and Effectiveness Framework (QEF).

The new framework will feature:

- two summary judgements – an overall judgement on the provider and a judgement on the provider's capacity to improve. These will make inspectors' opinions of the provider much clearer to the user and stakeholders;
- judgements about literacy and numeracy across all the provision;
- evaluation of the use of the Welsh language and achievements in bilingualism; and
- appendices featuring a data report and a summary of 'customer satisfaction', that is the views of learners (and their parents where appropriate), gauged through discussion and using questionnaires.

An important new feature of the proposed inspection framework is the inclusion of learner wellbeing as a reporting feature. This will contribute to judgements across all three of the key question areas that we are proposing for the new Common Inspection Framework. In schools, for instance, wellbeing may include arrangements for the safeguarding of children, the implementation of anti-bullying policies and include benchmarking rates of pupil attendance and exclusions. There would also be a focus on pupil participation and healthy living. In other sectors the focus would reflect the priorities for the sector concerned.

Reports on the key questions will take account of information collated in the appendices. There will be less of a focus on coming to judgements about individual subjects or curriculum learning areas, but inspectors will continue to observe a substantial sample of teaching and learning.

We propose that the new inspection framework will be common to all sectors. It will consist of:

<p>Context</p> <p>Summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• overall judgement on current performance of the provider• our confidence in the provider’s capacity to drive its own improvement <p>Recommendations</p> <p>Key question 1: How good are outcomes?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• standards• wellbeing <p>Key question 2: How good is provision?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• learning experiences• teaching or training• care, support and guidance• learning environment <p>Key question 3: How good are leadership and management?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• leadership• partnership working• quality improvement• resource management <p>Appendices</p> <p>Data</p> <p>Customer satisfaction</p>
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Together with the new framework, we are proposing moving to a four-point grading scale instead of the current five-point grading scale. In practice one of the current grades, grade 5, was rarely used. We also propose to replace the current numerical grades and their associated grade descriptions with a much simpler and more easily-understood single term. These grades are:

<p>Outstanding</p> <p>Good</p> <p>Adequate</p> <p>Poor</p>
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A summary of 15 judgements will appear in a table at the end of the report. These judgements will cover the two summary judgements and judgements on the three key questions and the bullets listed under them in the framework.

3. Greater emphasis on the user

Current inspections already have a strong focus on the learner, but we want to strengthen this further. We would like to see providers involve learners more in the self-evaluation process. Inspections will incorporate new ways of gathering and reflecting on stakeholders' views and customer satisfaction and we will devote a brief section in our reports to this. We will consider these views when reaching judgements about the provision. We will also consider the ways in which providers take account of and respond to the views of learners, parents and other stakeholders.

In the new arrangements we propose to include learners much more in the inspection process, for example by using questionnaires to gather learners' views and by talking to focus groups of learners during the course of inspection. We will pilot inspections that will involve learners as inspectors in for example the inspection of initial teacher training and adult community-based learning.

4. Extension of the use of HMI-led inspection teams with strong 'peer-inspector' involvement

We aim to move, in almost all sectors, towards having inspection teams led by HMI (or in some cases appropriately trained additional inspectors on secondment to Estyn), with many of the other team members being drawn from a pool of currently practising practitioners in the sector, who will train and deploy a small number of times each year as peer inspectors. This will require major changes to the arrangements in the maintained school sector. In this sector it will involve the phasing out of the 'contracting out' of school inspections to Registered Inspectors over the next few years, replacing that system with a programme of inspections organised directly by Estyn.

We will be looking for the support of local authorities and schools to help us develop arrangements which ensure that we can secure a suitable pool of peer inspectors who can be available for deployment on inspections in this way.

We aim to build on the current use of peer assessors. We intend to use more peer assessors and to give them more responsibility in most sectors. This will help to contribute to increasing providers' capacity to make self-evaluation more effective in the sectors they represent. In line with their increased role, and the greater training they will receive, we intend to call them peer inspectors. Increasing the involvement of peer inspectors should help to spread expertise and skills in evaluating standards and quality, and promote the spread of good practice across the sectors. Peer inspectors develop a range of knowledge, understanding and skills during inspection that they can apply when they return to their place of work. For example, they gain experience of other providers and this helps them to judge, benchmark and improve their own provision. They also develop skills of self-evaluation and observation. Including more peer inspectors in teams also means that we will be able to extend our use of the expertise of current practitioners in the field to extend the range of skills and experience in HMI-led teams.

We hope that using HMI more directly in inspection will augment trust in the work of teams and in the consistency of their judgements. Our gradual introduction of HMI-led inspection across the schools sector should increase public and professional confidence in the reports produced. It will also offer teachers and leaders more opportunities for direct professional dialogue with HMI and with highly effective peers in their field.

Eventually, in most inspections we carry out, we hope that most team members other than the lead HMI will be peer inspectors, but this is likely to take some time to implement as we train sufficient numbers to carry out the role. While we are building the capacity to do this we will continue to make use of additional inspectors, who are either seconded to Estyn or working to short contract. At this stage we want to hear your views on the principle of having inspection teams led by HMI with other team members being peer inspectors.

We will continue to invite providers to select a senior member of staff, called the nominee, to work with the inspection team.

We also propose to deploy a lay inspector on all school inspection teams. A lay inspector is someone without personal experience in the management of a school or provision of education in a school, other than as a governor or voluntary helper.

5. More emphasis on building capacity for self-evaluation and improvement

The new proposals are based on a more robust role for provider self-evaluation. They are also designed to promote effective self-evaluation and to align with national initiatives such as the School Effectiveness Framework and the post-16 Quality and Effectiveness Framework.

The proposals also include the potential for local authorities to become more involved in follow-up inspection activity of their establishments and for DCELLS area teams to play a similar role for post-16 provision. This might include, for example, local authorities reporting back to Estyn on the progress made in improving provision in schools which had relatively weak inspection outcomes, but which were not placed into the formal categories of 'significant improvement' or 'special measures'.

To increase a provider's capacity to improve, we propose to take greater account in the inspection process of the evidence and outcomes of the provider's own self-evaluation procedures. We want to encourage providers to use self-evaluation as an ongoing process rather than using it for the production of a one-off self-evaluation report just before an inspection is due.

6. Clearer, more accessible reports

As we have already stated, we aim to have more streamlined inspections with a more focused inspection framework and grading system. In addition, our consultation with stakeholders, customers and citizens shows that they want more accessible reporting. We plan to produce shorter and sharper reports that will focus only on the

most important features and key strengths and shortcomings that have been used to determine the grade for the quality of the provision. Other than the front page, explanatory pages and appendices, we want the main body of the report to be no longer than about five pages.

7. Shorter period of notice

A shorter period of advance notice for inspections would increase public confidence that inspections are based on provision that has not been 'stage managed' to give inspectors a misleading impression. It is also favoured by many practitioners in order to minimise the stress which can otherwise build up during a lengthy lead-in period. We anticipate making a substantial reduction in the notice period.

Currently providers get between three and six months notice of an inspection. From 2010 onwards we plan to let providers know the actual dates of the inspection about three weeks (15 working days) before it takes place. We need this period to undertake the necessary arrangements for conducting an inspection, for example in giving enough time for the collection of the views of learners and stakeholders, and to enable the provider to assemble any evidence that is needed. This will only apply to the inspection of individual providers, as area and partnership inspections will need longer notice. For area and partnership inspections we propose to give four weeks notice.

Conclusion

We believe that the introduction of the changes outlined in this document will lead to a more proportionate and effective inspection system. Furthermore, we believe that they will help us to increase our positive impact across all three of the main ways in which inspection drives improvement in the education and training system.

Providing better public accountability

Our research shows that the general public place trust in the reliability and consistency of inspections led by HMI directly. Similarly, consultations with professional stakeholders also indicate that they place more trust and value on inspections organised by Estyn and led by HMI. Our gradual introduction of HMI led inspection across the compulsory sector should therefore increase public and professional confidence in the reports and advice they receive.

In order to empower learners and citizens to play their role in driving up quality and standards, inspection must ensure that they receive the information they need in a format they are likely to access and understand, targeted on issues of key concern. The proposed inspection arrangements will include new styles of shorter, more user-friendly reports designed to serve this purpose more effectively.

Informing the development of national policy

The proposed new 'core' inspections in each sector will continue to provide a consistent base for monitoring progress across the system in relation to a select set of key priority issues. Thus issues such as literacy and numeracy and the quality of learning and teaching will be tracked systematically on a national basis allowing us to generate authoritative policy advice on a core set of key issues as required.

However, implementation of the proposed new arrangements for provider inspections will also shift some of the emphasis for collecting detailed evidence on key national policy issues away from the routine cyclical inspection process towards making more extensive use of targeted, thematic surveys and reviews as an alternative way of getting the evidence we need. The streamlining of our cyclical inspection programmes will allow us to free up resources to undertake more thematic survey and inspection activity, enhancing the range and depth of the activities in ways that will allow us to deliver better policy advice through those mechanisms. While the new more streamlined inspection models will certainly not be able to include detailed inspection of every individual initiative being promoted by the Welsh Assembly Government, we do not see this as a problem as we believe thematic inspections and reviews are, in most cases, a more effective way of gathering specialised evidence, rather than constantly accruing 'add-ons' to our standard inspections.

Also, a thematic survey based approach will give Estyn more flexibility to provide advice on new initiatives as they emerge. Leaner core inspection models will also potentially release resources for Estyn to engage more actively in improvement activities designed to promote the adoption of best practice across the system.

Promoting improvement in the delivery of education and training by providers

To increase providers' capacity to improve, we propose to take greater account of the evidence and outcomes of their own self-evaluation procedures in inspection. This will promote more effective self-evaluation and incentivise providers to mainstream effective self-evaluation arrangements on a continuous basis. We will place a strong emphasis on evaluating and reporting on the quality of the self-evaluation arrangements that we find in each inspection.

Increasing the involvement of currently-active, front-line practitioners as peer inspectors on inspections will help to spread expertise and skills in quality evaluation and improvement processes and promote cross-fertilisation of good practice across the sectors. Peer inspectors develop a range of knowledge, understanding and skills during inspection that they can apply when they return to their place of work. For example, they gain experience of other providers and this helps them to judge, benchmark and improve their own provision. They also develop skills of self-evaluation and observation.

High-quality professional dialogue during inspection helps providers identify their own improvement strategies. More Estyn-led school inspections will enable HMI to engage directly with headteachers and teachers, as happens commonly in other sectors. This engagement will promote improvement and more effective self-evaluation in schools. It will also link inspection better to good practice guidance as identified in the remit surveys undertaken directly by HMI.

Your response

The above proposals are based on a comprehensive review, including internal reflection within Estyn and external consultation. We would very much like now to hear your views.