

# Supplementary guidance: self-evaluation

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Autumn 2017

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

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

Estyn also:

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

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**What is the purpose?**

To provide guidance to inspectors for evaluating self-evaluation

**For whom is it intended?**

Inspectors of maintained and independent schools, non-maintained settings and post 16/FE

**From when should the guidance be used?**

September 2017

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## Supplementary guidance

The key Estyn documents that guide inspection activity are the inspection guidance handbooks for each sector. However, we also produce supplementary guidance to help inspectors to consider specific aspects of education and training further.

The supplementary guidance documents set out some key principles, considerations and resources for inspectors. They relate to all sectors that Estyn inspects, unless they state that they are for a specific sector. They expand on certain aspects of education/training (e.g. the inspection of literacy) or on ways of conducting inspections (e.g. the use of learning walks) or specific inspection arrangements (e.g. guidance on inspecting church schools).

The supplementary guidance documents do not aim to be comprehensive. Inspectors are not required to work through them exhaustively when covering any specific aspect on an inspection. However, inspectors may find them useful when responding to specific emerging questions that arise during inspections or when they wish to reflect or investigate further.

The supplementary guidance documents may help providers gain an understanding of Estyn's inspection arrangements. They may also be helpful to providers in evaluating specific aspects of their own provision.

Our inspection work is based on the following principles:

- Inspectors will approach inspection with a positive mindset to ensure it is the best possible professional learning experience for the staff in each provider
- Inspectors will take a learner-focused approach to inspection
- Inspectors will always focus strongly on the quality of teaching and learning
- Inspectors will seek out well-considered innovative practice
- Inspectors will tailor the inspection activities according to the circumstances in each provider as far as possible
- Inspectors will be agile and responsive to emerging findings and will use the increased range of inspection tools and approaches available
- Inspectors will consider everything in the inspection framework, but will only report on the key strengths and weaknesses within each provider

## 1 Self-evaluation: general principles

Purposeful self-evaluation makes an important contribution to improving quality and raising the attainment and achievement of learners. Developing a culture of self-evaluation is also vital to identifying and reducing variations in performance between providers. (For the purposes of this document, 'self-evaluation' incorporates all those processes where a provider evaluates the effectiveness of its own provision, including what is called 'self-assessment' in post-16 sectors.)

As a reflective professional process, self-evaluation enables providers to get to know themselves better, to identify their agenda for improvement and to promote positive change and innovation. Crucially, where the self-evaluation process focuses on impact and outcomes, self-evaluation leads to improvements in the educational experiences and outcomes for learners.

Estyn too has promoted the development of self-evaluation across all sectors for many years. In our Annual Reports, we recognise that many providers have good and improving self-evaluation systems. Our inspections place self-evaluation at the centre of the work of providers and inspectors.

The prime purpose of self-evaluation is to improve outcomes for learners. When self-evaluation is an established part of the improvement planning cycle, it is a key management tool for development at all levels. As an annual process, self-evaluation informs strategic and improvement plans and helps providers to focus on their priorities for development.

There is no single formula or approach to self-evaluation. Providers are often complex organisations. There are many different ways in which they can pursue the achievement of excellence in various aspects of their work. Providers already use different self-evaluation frameworks. Many providers base their self-evaluation processes on Estyn's Common Inspection Framework because it provides a well-understood, shared way of organising evaluations about the strengths and weaknesses within providers. Estyn has no preferred approach to self-evaluation.

The Common Inspection Framework sets out the key matters that providers can assess when conducting their self-evaluation. The starting point for all inspections is the provider's evaluation of its own performance. Inspectors do not inspect all aspects of work in depth during a core inspection. They sample evidence to test the provider's own evaluation of its work.

Providers will be at different starting points and will undertake a journey to improvement in different directions and at a different pace according to the needs of their learners and their institution. Critically, whatever approach or direction taken, responsibility for continuous improvement and delivering a better service rests primarily with providers themselves.

Inspectors should focus primarily on how well self-evaluation processes lead to improvement. The inspection of self-evaluation should not focus on the quality of the provider's self-evaluation report alone. The self-evaluation document on its own is unlikely to bring about improvement unless all staff contribute purposefully to the process of self-evaluation and actively take forward the improvements required.

In coming to a view on the effectiveness of self-evaluation, inspectors should look at how well the provider has brought about improvements over time. The stronger the provider's track-record of improvement in the past, the more confidence inspectors are likely to have in the capacity of the leaders and managers in the provider to bring about improvements in the future.

## 2 Effective self-evaluation

Inspectors should consider self-evaluation as a process, not a one-off event. They should regard self-evaluation as the first, essential step in a cyclical process of bringing about change and improvement. In coming to a view on self-evaluation, inspectors should consider how well leaders and managers reflect professionally on the work of the provider and how well staff challenge and support each other.

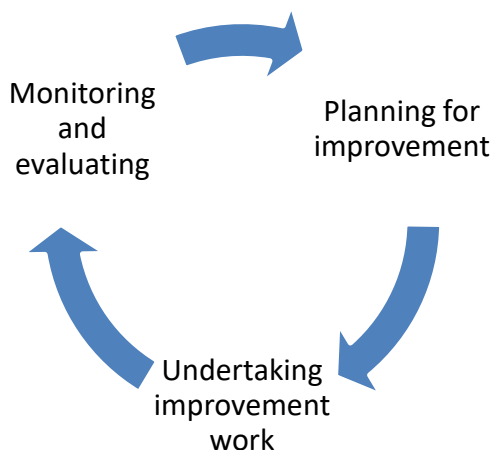
Inspectors should consider how well the provider is responding to the three key questions that sit at the heart of effective self-evaluation:

- How well are we doing?
- How do we know?
- How can we improve things further?

While every aspect of provision is a legitimate focus for self-evaluation, the emphasis should always be on outcomes. ie on an evaluation of the impact of each aspect of provision on the standards and wellbeing of learners.

The process of self-evaluation should be continuous and a regular part of the provider's work. Inspectors should see to what extent the provider's self-evaluation is based on a wide range of information about strengths and areas for improvement which is collected throughout the year. Inspectors should consider how well providers use information from self-evaluation to plan for improvements, to undertake improvement work, and to ensure a regular process of monitoring and evaluation that leads to further improvement.

The diagram below shows the cyclical nature of effective self-evaluation.



It is a mistake to view self-evaluation as a one-off event. Providers should undertake a regular cycle of self-evaluation activities. This cycle may include different activities, at different times, for individual providers. It is likely to include the following regular activities and inspectors should sample the evidence relating to these elements of self-evaluation:

- analysis of performance information from tests or assessments at an individual, subject, learner group, age group or whole-provider level
- observations of lessons by appropriate peers and managers
- evaluating the quality of learners' written and practical work
- evaluating the quality of curriculum planning and assessment, recording and reporting
- sampling the views of learners, staff, parents/carers or other stakeholders
- reviews by managers and external organisations
- auditing practice against policies and procedures, such as those for safeguarding or health and safety
- benchmarking against best or different practice from other providers
- reviewing progress against targets in development or improvement plans

Inspectors should check that self-evaluation is not an exercise carried out solely by the headteacher/principal or a task-group working in isolation. Inspectors should consider to what extent all staff contribute to the process, are aware of the findings and take action based upon them.

Inspectors should consider the extent to which the provider's self-evaluation process benefits from direct observation of classes and sessions, in addition to those required for performance management purposes. These observations provide important evidence about learners' achievement and progress in learning, and about the quality of teaching and assessment. These observations may take the form of lesson/session observations or learning walks. (There is further supplementary guidance on lesson observations and learning walks, listening to learners and listening to staff on Estyn's website.)

A lesson observation programme might include:

- observation of all staff each year by senior managers
- observation of staff by senior managers as part of an evaluation of a topic or theme
- observations by external visitors, such as consultants, local authority or challenge advisers, or teachers from other providers
- observations by other teachers in the provider, for example to observe good practice or to gather information on how well staff implement a new policy

Over time, this work should build up to provide a useful indication of strengths and areas for development in terms of standards, provision and leadership.

Learner voice is a key source of evidence of learners' achievement, attitudes and wellbeing. It is also likely to be useful in evaluating the quality of teaching and assessment. Inspectors should look at the extent to which learners, including those from different groups, have opportunities to take part in self-evaluation. This

involvement may be through surveys, focus groups or representative groups, perhaps using interviews and questionnaires to gain learners' views. Critically, providers will need to ensure that learners are able to contribute to decision-making and improvement planning.

Inspectors should also consider how far the provider's self-evaluation takes account of the views of a wide range of **stakeholders**, including teachers, governors, parents/carers, employers and the community served by the provider. When providers involve stakeholders, staff benefit from gaining a greater insight into the strengths and areas for improvement, as well as shared ownership, collaboration and effective partnership.

Effective self-evaluation processes:

- benefit from open and honest discussion of strengths, areas for development and weaknesses
- focus primarily on learners' achievements and experiences
- are a continuous process and not just a 'snapshot'
- support strategic planning and draws on regular quality assurance procedures
- involve staff at all levels in assessing outcomes and performance
- seek the views of learners systematically and consults other stakeholders, such as partners and employers, where appropriate
- seek to make judgements in the light of measurable performance information and to identify trends over time
- lead to improvement plans which are monitored against clear targets and success criteria
- result in improvements in standards and quality of provision for learners

The judgements made during self-evaluation should be:

- secure – based on sufficiently robust, reliable and accessible evidence
- first-hand – based on direct observation
- reliable – based on common, well-understood criteria
- valid – based on accurate, objective, unbiased evidence
- corporate – based on the collective view of staff and other stakeholders

### **3 The self-evaluation report and improvement planning**

Self-evaluation is not an end in itself. Providers should use information from self-evaluation to plan for improvements and to ensure a regular process of monitoring, evaluation and improvement planning.

As well as providing immediate feedback for staff and managers, information from a programme of self-evaluation activities will contribute towards a **self-evaluation report**. This report provides an opportunity to identify strengths and to celebrate and share good practice, as well as highlighting areas for improvement.



The starting point for inspection is the provider's evaluation of its own performance, supported by relevant evidence. Inspectors will not inspect all aspects of work in depth during a core inspection. The provider's self-evaluation report will determine how inspectors sample evidence to test the provider's own evaluation of its work. This self-evaluation report should not be one that has just been written for an inspection. It should develop from the ongoing self-evaluation processes within the provider.

Inspectors consider the provider's self-evaluation report carefully prior to the inspection. As a result, the reporting inspector for each inspection identifies a set of emerging questions to guide the initial activity of the inspection team.

A good self-evaluation report should:

- stem from ongoing, well-established self-evaluation processes that involve staff, learners and other stakeholders
- cover the full range of the provider's work
- identify areas of improvement or weaknesses as well as good features
- indicate excellent practice, where appropriate
- give clear, concise evaluative judgements
- ensure that judgements derive from relevant, clearly-identifiable evidence
- refer to recent assessments or reviews of provision
- relate clearly to an improvement plan and targets

Inspectors should check that the information collected from the provider's programme of self-evaluation activities feeds directly into improvement planning. There should therefore be a close match between the outcomes of the report and priorities in the provider's improvement or development plan.

It is appropriate that some aspects of quality and standards should be evaluated more frequently than others. The provider's improvement planning framework needs to be flexible and responsive to matters that are, or ought to be, of current concern.

Effective improvement plans:

- use the outcomes of regular and robust self-evaluation processes
- contribute to self-evaluation processes and to further action planning
- are current working documents that help to achieve the required changes
- have clearly identified priorities and specific actions, targets and timescales
- identify persons responsible for actions and the resources required to bring about the improvements
- set out clear success criteria and monitoring arrangements for checking how well actions have been achieved and their impact on learners

## 4 Self-evaluation and leadership

The key inspection area that relates directly to self-evaluation is **Inspection Area 5 – Leadership and management**.

When considering leadership and management in the light of self-evaluation, inspectors need to remember that effective leadership is primarily concerned with:

- building and co-ordinating a team whose members have a common, shared purpose
- encouraging individuals to contribute actively to the common purpose
- developing the team's capacity to reflect purposefully and critically on standards and the quality of provision
- focusing the team's energy on effective action planning to secure the desired improvements

The most crucial and central role is played by the headteacher or head of the provider or setting. Any evaluation of that role needs to focus on how effective he or she is in those aspects of the provider's work that bear most directly on improving standards and the quality of provision.

Effective leadership also often involves building distributed leadership and ensuring that staff with leadership and management roles make an important contribution. It ensures that staff understand and are committed to delivering their job descriptions. Staff need to focus on how their work in their role can lead to improvements.

Effective leadership also ensures that learners receive encouragement and support to take part in decision-making on issues that affect their learning and wellbeing.

Successful leadership enables staff, learners and other stakeholders to take part in the formulation of aims, values and policies, and in the procedures which arise from them. Successful leadership teams work effectively together and have a shared commitment to excellence.

When thinking about strategic direction, inspectors need to consider the extent to which providers have clear aims, strategic objectives, plans and policies that focus on meeting learners' needs. Setting out and communicating a clear sense of direction, and having suitable plans and processes in place, are not ends in themselves. Plans and processes are only as good as the extent to which they are effective in sustaining high quality and improving provision and standards. Good leadership must have a positive impact.

### Useful questions relating to strategic direction

- Does the provider have clear aims, strategic objectives, plans and policies that focus on meeting learners' needs?
- Are plans appropriately clear, are staff implementing them purposefully and are leaders/managers monitoring their implementation in an effective way?
- Are roles and responsibilities clearly defined, and are the spans of responsibility in the leadership group viable and balanced?

- Do all staff understand and fulfil their roles in direct relation to specific strategic aims, plans and responsibilities?
- Do leaders manage their own time effectively and prioritise activities responsively?
- Do meetings focus on important issues about performance and the core business of the provider, and generate clear action points which are then carried out as agreed?
- Are management and committee structures coherent with the strategic direction of the provider and do they address core issues?
- How well does the provider use performance information to identify strengths and areas for development?
- Do leaders and managers communicate high expectations to staff and learners?
- Do leaders and managers agree and achieve challenging and realistic targets for themselves and others?
- Do leaders and managers negotiate and co-operate well with internal staff and outside agencies?

### **Useful questions about the impact of leadership**

- Do leaders communicate their vision for the provider well and explore how to achieve it in purposeful collaboration with others?
- Do leaders and managers model and promote behaviours and values that contribute positively to creating an ethos in which learners and staff feel valued?
- Do leaders and managers actively support and challenge everyone to do their best?
- Do they build on shared understanding and distributed leadership to create a responsive, learning culture in the provider?
- Do they share convincingly across the provider a common mission to deliver education/training of the best quality?
- Do they manage the performance of staff well in order to help them to improve their practice?
- Do they address underperformance robustly and directly where necessary?
- Does performance management identify the training and development needs clearly for individual staff and at the level of the provider as a whole?
- Do all staff have targets for improvement that support the delivery of the strategic aims in the provider's improvement and other action plans?
- Does performance management help to improve the quality of teaching and learner outcomes?

When self-evaluation becomes a reflective professional process, it helps providers to get to know themselves well, identify their agenda for improvement and promote good and excellent practice.

The processes of self-evaluation and improvement planning should be a regular and routine part of the provider's work. The focus of self-evaluation should be on identifying priorities for development, monitoring provision and assessing outcomes. The process should involve a rigorous review of all aspects of the provider and, most importantly, how these influence the standards that learners achieve and their wellbeing. A key consideration is whether the management of the provider is based on an accurate assessment of its strengths and weaknesses. The leadership and management are unlikely to be good if self-evaluation procedures are not effective.

Improvement planning should flow naturally from self-evaluation activities.

The priorities in any improvement plan should derive from the findings of the self-evaluation process. If the provider's improvement planning is good, then inspectors should expect to see a well-evidenced track-record of improvements.

Inspectors should consider the extent to which there is evidence of direct intervention and support to improve performance, where required. It is not necessary to regard this as a response to failure, but as intervention and support that leads to improvements.

### **Useful questions about self-evaluation**

- Is self-evaluation a regular part of the provider's work and embedded in strategic planning?
- Do leaders and managers carry out thorough evaluation and monitoring of information on standards and the quality of education, including consideration of trends and progress over time?
- Do they draw on first-hand evidence about the quality of teaching and learning?
- Do they involve all staff in assessing outcomes and their own performance?
- Do they encourage learners to share their views and raise issues?
- Do they take account of the views of staff, parents/carers and other stakeholders?
- Where appropriate, do they draw honestly and purposefully on reviews by external agencies?

### **Useful questions about planning and securing improvement**

- Does the provider's self-evaluation activity lead to the formulation of improvement plans?
- Do leaders and managers use information from self-evaluation to set priorities and appropriately challenge targets for improvement?
- Have leaders and managers prioritised the matters that they want to improve?
- Are they implementing sound strategies that are likely to bring about the desired improvements?
- Do all staff play their part in implementing the strategies?
- Where necessary, do leaders and managers act quickly and provide support to improve performance?
- Have they defined the actions for improvement in specified and realistic timescales, and allocated responsibility for their delivery appropriately?
- Have they made sure that the improvement priorities are supported by the allocation of resources?
- Have the planned actions had a positive effect and, where relevant, led to improvements in standards and quality?
- Do providers have a good or excellent track-record in making improvements over recent years?