

Self-assessment and the inspection process

This booklet explains how the Adult Learning Inspectorate will use your self-assessment report during the inspection process.



excalibur
LEARNING NETWORK



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE



Self-assessment and the inspection process

- We use your self-assessment report to help us plan the inspection.
- We use it when grading leadership and management and quality assurance.
- Effective self-assessment is an integral part of your management activity.



Introduction

This booklet explains how the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) will use your self-assessment report during the inspection process. It sets out what inspectors are looking for and will help you use self-assessment to prepare for inspection.

There are many sources of information available to providers about self-assessment. Some of this information will be from your funding body and will relate specifically to the context of your work within the adult learning sector. You should always consult your funding body for further advice and information about completing your self-assessment report.

How does self-assessment relate to the inspection process?

The *Common Inspection Framework*, the document through which all inspections are carried out, states that one of the main purposes of inspection is 'to promote a culture of self-assessment among providers, leading to continuous improvement or maintenance of very high quality and standards'.

Self-assessment is at the heart of the inspection process. We will use your self-assessment report to help us plan the inspection and it will also be a factor in your grades for quality assurance and for leadership and management.

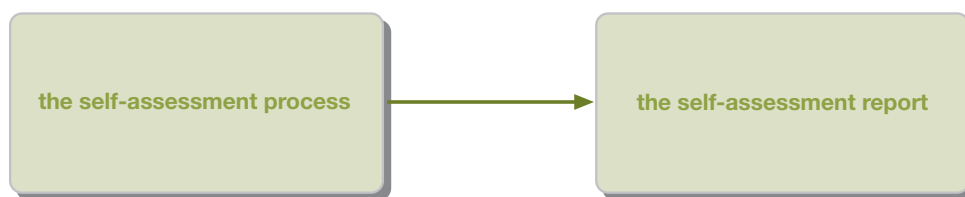
It should not, however, be an additional, separate activity or another hoop for you to jump through for inspection. Effective self-assessment should be an integral part of your planning, monitoring, evaluating and quality improving process. It is a process which you should value as a powerful management tool.

Inspectors look for...

- how well leaders and managers set a clear direction leading to high quality education and training
- how effectively, through quality assurance and self-assessment, performance is monitored and evaluated and steps taken to secure improvement.

When should we carry out self-assessment?

There are two strands to self-assessment.



The self-assessment process should be a continuing activity as you routinely gather evidence and monitor the impact on the quality of your provision.

The self-assessment report must be produced annually and will summarise findings from the self-assessment process. Your funding body will advise you of the date when it should be submitted to them.

Inspectors look for...

- a well-managed process producing an accurate assessment of strengths and weaknesses
- regular and timely revisions to the report.

REMEMBER

- ➔ Self-assessment is a continuous activity.
- ➔ Reporting is annual.

The self-assessment process

How can we use self-assessment to prepare for inspection?

The starting point for self-assessment should be the *Common Inspection Framework*.

Inspectors will make judgements based on the organisation's strengths and weaknesses in relation to the *Common Inspection Framework's* seven key questions:

1. How well do learners achieve?
2. How effective are teaching, training and learning?
3. How are achievement and learning affected by resources?
4. How effective are the assessment and monitoring of learning?
5. How well do the programmes and courses meet the needs and interests of learners?
6. How well are learners guided and supported?
7. How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?

How do we gather evidence?

Begin by

- identifying possible kinds of evidence in relation to the seven key questions
- identifying possible sources of evidence in relation to the seven key questions
- considering the use and value of information you are currently using as part of your management, planning, evaluating and quality assuring activities.

The *Common Inspection Framework* includes bullet points and supplementary criteria under each key question. These can be very helpful in enabling you to identify and review your evidence base for self-assessment.

Further information about the *Common Inspection Framework* is available on our website, www.ali.gov.uk. You can also find guidance on its application to different kinds of provision. Follow the 'About inspection' link.

- Have you missed anything?
- Have you missed anyone?
- Is there anything you are currently using or doing which is not giving you the information you really need?
- Is there anything you are currently using or doing which may be giving you unreliable information?

Inspectors look for...

- a sound, current and relevant evidence base for self-assessment.

REMEMBER

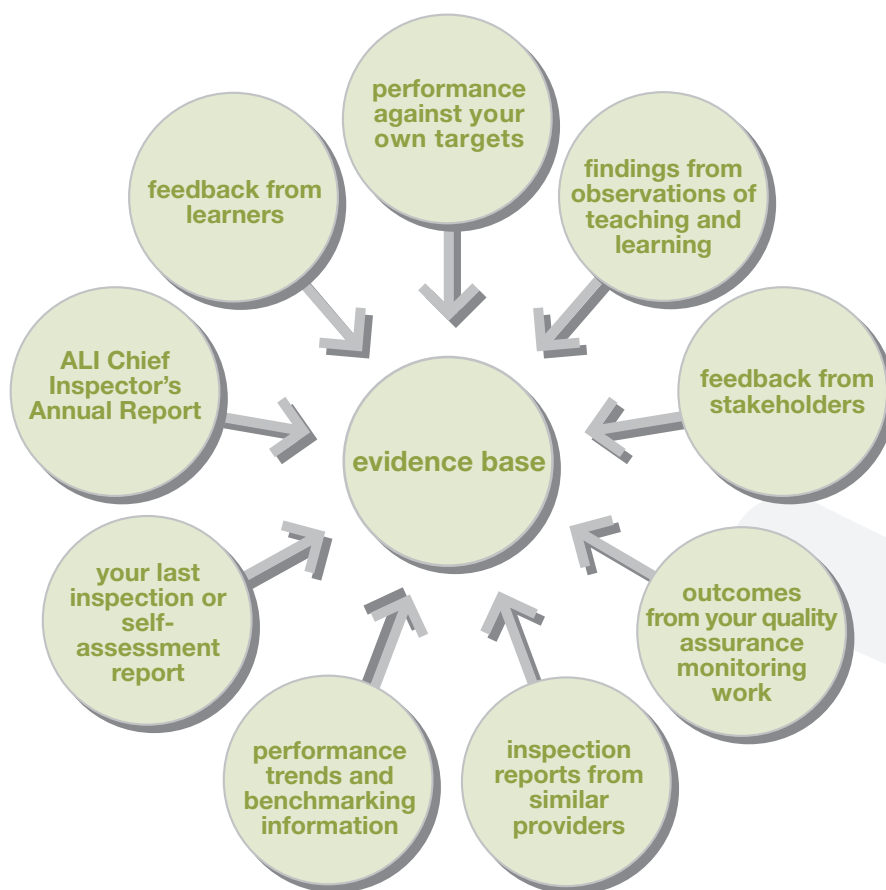
- Collate evidence about the quality of your provision.
- Consider what the evidence is telling you, what are your strengths and weaknesses?
- Compare the evidence against other indicators of quality.
- Validate your findings.
- Focus on a few key strengths and weaknesses.
- What impact do they have on learners and learning?

How do we make judgements about ourselves?

Once you have identified the possible evidence base and sources of evidence under each of the seven key questions, begin the process of working out what they are telling you.

- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses?
- How do you know?

Start making judgements by matching the evidence of your organisation's performance against other indicators of quality. Here are some examples. You may wish to add others.



Once you have collected your evidence and made judgements on the quality of your provision you should have in place some process for validating your findings. You need to 'test' your judgements, to assure yourselves that they are secure.

Inspectors look for...

- the accuracy of your judgements and whether they are based securely on relevant evidence
- the extent to which the report reflects judgements and not just descriptions.

How do we identify 'strengths' and 'weaknesses'?

The learner is at the heart of the *Common Inspection Framework*. They should be at the heart of your self-assessment process too. When you are determining your key strengths and weaknesses, consider their impact on learners and learning. What is the impact of a possible strength or weakness? What difference does it make to the quality of your provision? How does this affect the learner?

Any key strengths should point out aspects of training which are very good or excellent and which are evident throughout the provision offered. Strengths are aspects of your provision that are clearly better than normal good practice. For example, meeting the needs of funding or awarding bodies is normal; contractual obligations are not strengths.

Sometimes changes take a while to impact on provision. New policies and procedures, while possibly evidence of good management, are not strengths in themselves. Good ideas only become strengths when they are embedded in practice and are genuinely raising the standards experienced by learners.

Key weaknesses should reflect aspects which are poor and in need of urgent attention, clearly affecting the experiences of the learner. Where you have identified a weakness, what are you doing about it?

Remember that you are identifying your **key** strengths and weaknesses. Part of the validating process is likely to be determining the key issues that you can take forward into your action plan. It is better to focus on five or six key issues: strengths you can disseminate or build on; weaknesses to be rectified.

It is a good idea to look at some published inspection reports on our website, www.ali.gov.uk, in order to see the kinds of things that inspectors have identified as key strengths and weaknesses in other organisations.

How do we grade our provision?

Weigh up the individual judgements. Which ones are most significant? Which ones will have the greatest impact on the provision, either to improve it or to weaken it? Which ones are most secure? What is the overall picture?

You need to award grades for:

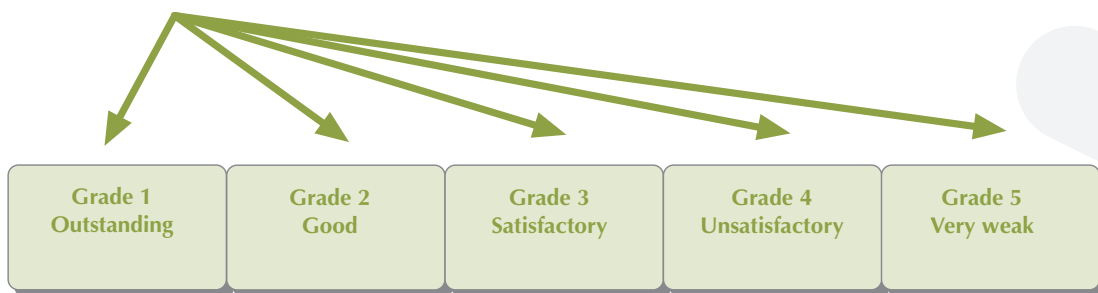
- each area of learning
- leadership and management (including the contributory grades for equality of opportunity and quality assurance)

If an area is particularly large it may be sensible to have contributory grades, especially if there are major differences between programmes or sub-areas of learning in the same occupational area. For example, different programmes within Jobcentre Plus or different construction trades. This allows a particularly strong area to be given sufficient credit, and a weaker area to be highlighted for support in the next year in order to make improvements.

For each of these:

1. Consider the impact of identified strengths and weaknesses.
2. Weigh up the overall balance of judgements.
3. Look at inspection reports to match yourself against inspectors' judgements of other providers.
4. Be objective: would a dispassionate, external 'critical friend' come to the same grading decision as you have?
5. Determine the grade.

Determining the grade



REMEMBER

- ➔ Grade each area of learning.
- ➔ Grade leadership and management, including equality of opportunity and quality assurance.
- ➔ Giving yourselves a realistic grade, even if it is low, will not influence our opinion of the provision and it might improve our opinion of the quality of your self-assessment.

Who should be involved in carrying out self-assessment?

It is important that the process is led and managed by a senior figure in the organisation, but self-assessment works best when it is an integral part of your organisation's activity, not something that is done by just a few people on behalf of all the rest. Everyone should have the opportunity to assess and evaluate their role against organisational aims and targets, and against those parts of the *Common Inspection Framework* which apply to them.

It is important to consult as widely as possible. The views of staff and learners are essential. You might also want to consult parents, partner organisations, trustees, governors, employers, subcontractors and other stakeholders.

Learners' views

A new and relevant section to self-assessment reports might be the views of learners. Give here the views of your learners that sum up what they think of you as a provider. Use individual bullets to reflect their views using the two headings of 'what learners like about your provision' and 'what learners think you could improve'. Many providers already ask these questions in satisfaction surveys using questionnaires to their learners, but make little use of the information in order to drive improvements.

Inspectors look for...

- good understanding of the process by all staff (including trustees/governors)
- good involvement in the process by all staff (including trustees/governors)
- broad consultation with and involvement from, for example, learners, parents, partner organisations, employers, subcontractors and other stakeholders.

REMEMBER

- Everyone in your organisation has a part to play in the process.
- Leadership is vital.
- Include learners' views about what they like and what you could improve.
- Include a wider quality community.

The self-assessment report

How will our self-assessment report be used?

Before the inspection

When you are notified that you will be inspected, your funding body will normally send us your most recent self-assessment report. However, if they do not have the most recent version of your report you should send this to them as soon as possible.

Occasionally we may need you to send your self-assessment report direct to us. We will tell you if this is the case. Wherever possible, please save your report as a single file and email it to **SAR@ali.gov.uk**. If you cannot provide your report electronically, please provide at least one copy either loose-leaf or with easily removable binding.

Your lead inspector will use your self-assessment report to help prepare for the inspection. He or she will read through the report in detail, identifying key “themes” based on the information you have provided. These will be explored during the inspection itself. These themes will be discussed with the nominee during the planning of the inspection.

During the inspection

Inspectors will take a view about the effectiveness of your self-assessment in promoting continuous improvement or maintaining very high quality and standards, based on good planning and accurate self-knowledge.

As they carry out the inspection, inspectors will assess the accuracy of your judgements and grades in relation to each area of learning. Judgements about the quality of the self-assessment process feed into judgements about leadership and management overall, and the contributory grade for quality assurance.

REMEMBER

- ➔ Your funding body normally sends us your most recent self-assessment report.
- ➔ Your lead inspector will use it to identify key ‘themes’ to explore during the inspection.

What should our self-assessment report look like?

This is probably the question we are most often asked. The truth is that, like organisations, self-assessment reports vary in their size and shape. There is no one prescribed format for a self-assessment report. The most important thing is that it works for you (as long as it is easy for others to understand).

Many providers are now finding it helpful to adopt the structure of an ALI inspection report. This will help you to focus on the *Common Inspection Framework* and consequently to be better prepared for inspection.

It is likely that your self-assessment report will contain the following:

- An introduction to your organisation, with background information about learners, programmes, local statistics and any significant issues currently affecting the provision. The introduction may also include a summary table of grades from the self-assessment process. It may also include a brief account of your self-assessment process.
- A report on leadership and management, identifying strengths and weaknesses, evidence, performance trends, an overall grade for leadership and management and contributory grades for equality of opportunity and quality assurance. Key judgements in leadership and management will relate to the effectiveness of the management team in raising standards and improving performance. Remember that your judgements must relate to the impact of leadership and management on the experience and achievement of learners.
- Reports from each of the areas of learning, identifying strengths and weaknesses, evidence, performance trends and an overall grade.

A comprehensive report should...

- fully reflect the work of a provider (imagine you were sitting down frankly explaining to someone how and what you did, including judgements on how well you did it).
- make use of all available data (recruitment, retention, achievement, employment, progression and equal opportunities)
- be self-critical
- make judgements that can be demonstrated to outsiders such as inspectors, funding and assessment bodies
- promote continuous improvement by being the basis to inform an action plan to improve training and outcomes for learners (also referred to as a development plan)
- use plain English and avoid jargon; try to make it accessible to anyone who might read it
- use statistical data whenever possible (achievement, results of questionnaires to learners or employers, equal opportunities data)
- include what is normal or being done to a satisfactory standard
- include an action plan.

The self-assessment report is a working document. It should be a reference point for your development through the next twelve months, as well as providing an authentic perspective on your organisation for inspectors and funding bodies. 'Telephone directories' are likely to be less useful than concise, succinct documents with carefully focused judgements based on relevant evidence.

REMEMBER

- ➔ You may choose to adopt the structure of an inspection report for your self-assessment.
- ➔ The format you use should suit you.
- ➔ Your report should include an introduction to your organisation, a report on leadership and management, and a report from each area of learning.
- ➔ Include an outline of the process used: who, what, when, where and how.
- ➔ It should include all available data, especially statistical data.
- ➔ It should be concise and use plain English.
- ➔ It should include an action plan.

Can we update our self-assessment report in advance of our inspection?

Organisations are constantly evolving. Of course you can prepare an update to your self-assessment report if you feel that it is no longer an accurate guide to the quality of your provision by the time of your inspection. Inspectors want to get it right.

The process of self-assessment can be time consuming. Rather than a full rewrite you may want to consider producing a brief 'signposting' update, identifying:

- any major changes within the organisation, for example staffing, provision, structure, etc
- any changes to the evidence base within the areas of learning or leadership and management which would impact on judgements and grades.

REMEMBER

- You may produce an update to your report for the inspection.
- The update does not need to be a full re-write but should signpost significant changes.

Where do action plans fit in to the process?

Action plans (also known as development plans) are key to driving quality improvement. They are the way in which you make self-assessment work and they keep staff focused on maintaining strengths and doing other things better.

- Action plans should address weaknesses, improve satisfactory aspects, build on strengths and spread good practice to other areas.
- They should have targeted times, measurable success criteria and identify the people responsible (by job title in case of staffing changes).
- It is a good idea to review the action plan at regular intervals between self-assessment reports to assess progress – quarterly intervals work well – and update action plans as things change.
- If the self-assessment report is supported by the action plan the reviews will continually update the report if it is being looked at by an outside party.

REMEMBER

- Action plans drive quality improvement forward.
- Review and update action plans regularly.

AND finally

- **Do it for yourselves, not just for the inspectorate:** link it with other key management processes, eg, planning, target-setting, communication, quality assurance and improvement.
- **Involve as many people as possible:** encourage ownership of the process throughout the organisation. Also include learners, partners and stakeholders.
- **Make judgements, not just descriptions:** ensure they are grounded in the *Common Inspection Framework* and that they relate to the impact they have on the learner and the learning experience.
- Find a way to **validate** the process.
- **Make it a continuous process:** whilst the report will be published annually, many self-assessment activities can be conducted throughout the year.
- **Let the report be a working document:** concise, focused, succinct; something useful and useable.



Through Excalibur, the Adult Learning Inspectorate aims to build a national quality community for everyone in the Learning & Skills sector.

© This document is subject to Crown Copyright. Extracts may be reproduced for non-commercial education or training purposes, as long as the source is acknowledged.



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Adult Learning Inspectorate, Spring Place, Coventry Business Park,
Herald Avenue, Coventry CV5 6UB.

Tel: +44 (0) 870 240 7744 Fax: +44 (0) 870 242 1444

Email: enquiries@ali.gov.uk Website: www.ali.gov.uk