



Department  
for Education

Guidance

# Condition surveys for school and college buildings: guidance for responsible bodies

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**Applies to England**

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## Background

The [school estate management standards](#) requires that you have up-to-date data on your school or college buildings and estate through a condition survey.

This interim guidance is for responsible bodies that need up-to-date condition information before new Department for Education (DfE) technical standards are published in 2026.

Regular condition surveys help you:

- assess and understand the physical state and level of deterioration of a building
- plan more appropriate maintenance strategies and accurate building investments

# What a condition survey covers

A condition survey is a visual, non-intrusive inspection carried out by an independent, qualified professional. It includes:

- internal inspections
- external checks
- desktop research about the building and site

It does not involve opening concealed areas unless this is included in the scope.

A condition survey is **not** a structural survey.

Inspections are combined with desktop research involving relevant data available for the building and site.

A condition report describes:

- the current state of the site and buildings
- past repairs
- recommended remedial works

A condition report must be accurate, impartial and unbiased.

## Optional extensions

Where needed, the survey may include:

- structural engineering assessments
- limited opening-up works
- specialist testing - for example, asbestos, damp or thermal performance
- compliance reviews - for example, fire safety or accessibility
- guidance on meeting statutory requirements - for example, health and safety

## How often to carry out condition surveys

Responsible bodies should commission a comprehensive survey at least every 5

years. More frequent surveys may be needed if concerns arise between planned cycles. Regular inspections help identify defects early to fix smaller problems and avoid larger costs later.

## Time and cost

Each condition survey is individual to a site with time and cost varying depending on:

- building type
- size of building and gross internal floor area (GIFA)
- scope of survey

Use typical ranges as guidance only.

School type	Average GIFA (m <sup>2</sup> )	Duration	Cost range (including VAT)
Primary	2,000	1	£2,000 to £5,500
Secondary	12,000	1 to 3	£5,000 to £10,000

Duration is the approximate time spent on site.

Costs include the desktop preparation, quality assurance checks and report writing.

## Standard content of a condition survey report

### Title page

The report should clearly state:

- school or college name and address
- unique property reference number (UPRN)
- name and address of the organisation carrying out the survey
- name of building condition surveyor
- quality assurance and sign-off information

- date of issue and version control number

## **Contents**

Should include:

- introduction
- scope and limitations
- optional extensions
- executive summary
- detailed survey outputs
- appendices
- schedules
- estimated costs of remedial works

## **Elements included**

A condition survey will usually identify specific building condition issues, deficiencies and maintenance requirements, including:

- roofs
- floors and stairs
- ceilings
- external walls, windows and doors
- internal walls and doors
- sanitary ware
- mechanical services
- electrical services
- redecorations
- fixed furniture and fittings
- site and external areas
- playing fields

You can use the standard condition survey spreadsheet template for capturing data at the level of:

- site

- block
- room
- element

## **Estimated costs**

Reports should provide cost estimates for repairing or replacing elements where deterioration or failure is identified.

Including indicative costs adds value by:

- informing budgeting and supporting capital investment decisions
- prioritising works
- enabling proactive maintenance strategies and planning long-term maintenance
- helping to avoid unexpected expenditure

Where appropriate, cost estimates may be broken down by:

- urgency - for example, immediate, short-term, long-term
- element type - for example, roofing, windows, mechanical systems

## **Standard outputs**

Building condition survey reports should provide a clear summary of the findings with a detailed condition assessment with priority ratings alongside recommendations for remedial actions or further investigation works. Supporting site plans and photographs of defects should be included.

Reports should include:

- a summary of findings
- detailed condition assessments with grades
- recommendations for remedial works with priority ratings
- marked-up site plans, highlighting areas where there are defects
- photographs of defects, referenced to identify the relevant areas
- a clear statement of assumptions, limitations and exclusions
- clearly identified access restrictions - areas excluded from an inspection (for example, below ground or concealed components) should be noted along with any access restrictions encountered (for example, locked rooms, denied access)

- description of the definition and blocks of buildings, aligned with relevant frameworks (for example, [condition data collection \(CDC\)](#), [net capacity assessment](#))
- reference to pricing bases, standards or frameworks used

## Condition grades and priority ratings

The results of the survey should clearly state the grading and priority rating system used to determine the urgency of repairs or replacements.

[Government function standards for property](#) provide condition and priority ratings and definitions that are consistent with the CDC.

Use the standard:

- A to D grading system to reflect the current condition of an element
- 1 to 4 rating system to reflect the priority and urgency for repair based on:
  - risk
  - impact
  - cost

**Condition** is generally categorised as:

- **A** - good - performing as intended
- **B** - satisfactory - performing as intended but exhibiting minor deterioration
- **C** - poor - exhibiting major defects or not operating as intended
- **D** - bad - life expired or serious risk of failure
- **X** - supplementary designation, assigned in addition to 'B' and 'C' where full replacement is required

**Priority** is generally categorised as:

- **1** - urgent - immediate remedial action required - this is the default priority rating for condition D
- **2** - essential - remedial action required in 1 to 2 years - assigned with surveyor or engineer discretion
- **3** - desirable - remedial action required in 3 to 5 years - assigned with surveyor or engineer discretion
- **4** - long term - outside of a 5-year planning period - this is the default priority rating for condition A

# Preparing the client brief

When commissioning a condition survey, your brief should:

- state the purpose and objective of the survey
- ask that buildings are identified by age and construction type
- describe how the findings will be used - for example, in strategic planning, asset management planning and prioritisation
- include relevant plans, drawings and photographs
- define the survey scope - for example, to include buildings, mechanical and electrical services, external areas
- specify additional requirements such as statutory compliance checks
- request cost estimates and explain how costs should be calculated

## Define blocks and buildings

Ensure the definition of blocks or buildings matches those used across your estate and spreadsheet formats.

The standard condition survey template provides a sample format for a site, a block and a room and the full elemental list and descriptors for capturing data.

If more detailed structural investigations are required, the scope of the survey can be extended to enable structural assessments or further diagnostic work. This could:

- be as limited as removing selected ceiling tiles to give a view of the roof void and roof structure
- involve more investigative works that will require a contractor to repair an area opened up

## Planning and preparing for a survey

Make sure your survey work is planned and risk-assessed. Minimise the disruption to school or college operations by scheduling appropriately and communicating about the survey to all relevant stakeholders and staff.

If investigations of structural or hazardous material are required, ensure qualified, competent and appropriate professionals are involved early to scope and cost the investigations. All works must be undertaken in full compliance with statutory and legislative standards, such as the [Control of Asbestos Regulations](#).

Adapt the scope if unexpected issues arise during the initial inspection. It is recommended to build a contingency sum into the budget in case issues arise.

Specify which format you want the information and data to be provided in. Use digital formats as far as possible so data can easily be used in digital estate management tools.

It is good practice to use unique identifiers for elements in your estate so it is easier to link data and information reliably to the relevant block, space or room. This enhances traceability and helps prioritise remedial actions.

Consider whether you want the information to be updated between surveys. You can opt to update data dynamically so a database is maintained in real time - for example, following capital maintenance or upgrade works - or conduct a new survey at set intervals.

You should:

- plan the work to minimise disruption to school operations
- ensure compliance with health and safety requirements
- involve qualified professionals early if structural or hazardous material assessments are needed
- plan for contingencies
- specify the format in which you want outputs provided (digital recommended)
- use unique identifiers across your estate to support data consistency and digital management tools

## **Structural reports, if required**

If a separate structural survey is needed:

- appoint an independent, qualified, experienced professional
- expect possible intrusive works that expose parts of the building fabric which are currently concealed
- expect temporary disruption if access to restricted areas is required
- expect higher cost and longer lead times for structural surveys
- clearly define and agree the scope to avoid gaps in reporting

## **Other resources**

The [good estate management for schools](#) provides a framework for managing

school and college estates, including buildings, grounds and infrastructure to ensure they are safe, healthy and sustainable.

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