

Independent Review of Estyn's
Contribution to Wales' Education Reform
Programme



Professor Chris Taylor, Professor Sally Power and Rhian Powell

WISERD, Cardiff University

May 2018

WISERD
38 Park Place
Cardiff
CF10 3BB

029 20876938
taylorcm@cardiff.ac.uk

Independent Review of Estyn's Contribution to Wales' Education Reform Programme



Table of Contents

Executive Summary	i
Main Report	1
1. Introduction	1
2. Perceptions of the importance of Estyn for improving the quality of education in Wales	5
2.1 Why is Estyn important to improving the quality of education in Wales?	7
2.2 Why is Estyn not important to improving the quality of education in Wales?	9
2.3 Why does Estyn inhibit improvements to the quality of education in Wales?	12
3. Perception of the value of Estyn's different activities	17
3.1 Familiarity with Estyn activities	17
3.2 Importance of Estyn activities	18
3.3 School inspections	20
3.4 Local authority and regional consortia inspections	26
3.5 Thematic reports	27
3.6 HMCI's Annual Report	32
3.7 Identification and dissemination of good practice	36
3.8 Other Estyn activities	41
4. Estyn and Wales' Education Reform Programme	42
5. Final remarks	49
Appendix – Call for Evidence Questions	54

Independent Review of Estyn's Contribution to Wales' Education Reform Programme



Executive Summary

Introduction

1. This 'call for evidence' was commissioned by Estyn to inform the Independent Review of Estyn's Contribution to Wales' Education Reform Programme, led by Professor Graham Donaldson.
2. The objectives of the Review are:
 - To outline the existing and potential contributions of the work of Estyn to the enhancement of quality in Welsh education within the context of a constructive accountability culture;
 - To establish ways in which Estyn's contribution to improving the quality of Welsh education could be further enhanced;
 - To outline implications for the future operational requirements of Estyn; and
 - To identify implications for the Welsh education system more widely.
3. WISERD were commissioned by Estyn to undertake a 'call for evidence'. This involved an online questionnaire that was made available between 29th November and 17th December 2017.
4. The questionnaire asked a range of open and closed questions about Estyn's current role in improving the quality of education in Wales, its various activities and its future role in the context of the educational reform programme (including the new curriculum) in Wales.
5. Over those 19 days we received 505 valid and near complete responses to the questionnaire.
6. The majority of these responses were from individual stakeholders, but approximately one-in-five were from a group of stakeholders or an organisation.
7. Over 50% of all responses were from school practitioners (including headteachers) and a large proportion were from other educational professionals, including some working in Further Education and Higher Education. Just over 10% of all responses were from Governors, parents or other interested members of the public.
8. Responses were received from 17 other organisations, including two trade unions, the Education Workforce Council, the Children's Commission for Wales, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, Careers Wales, the Youth Offending Service, the

National Adoption Service, private educational providers, diocesan organisations and various other third sector organisations.

Overall importance of Estyn

9. 71.5% of all stakeholders said that Estyn is important for improving the quality of education in Wales. However, 16.5% said they think that Estyn can inhibit improvements.
10. 63% of school practitioners said Estyn was important, but this group were more likely to say that Estyn inhibits improvements. Governors, parents, HE and FE representatives and other members of the public were more likely to say Estyn is important for improving the quality of education in Wales than school practitioners.
11. There were four main reasons for why stakeholders believe Estyn is important: (1) for their monitoring capabilities; (2) for sharing best-practice; (3) to ensure consistency in teaching and monitoring; and (4) because they are an independent, unbiased, national body.
12. There were six main explanations for why some stakeholders were less satisfied with the current impact of Estyn: (1) their role in holding schools to account *duplicates* other accountability mechanisms currently used in Wales (e.g. school categorisation, school self-review, the role of governing bodies); (2) the frequency of inspections either being too frequent or not frequent enough; (3) because stakeholders believe that Estyn does not provide enough support to help educational establishments to improve; (4) because some stakeholders believe that the current inspection framework inhibits creativity and innovation in teaching and learning; (5) because inspections and outcomes can cause considerable stress and anxiety amongst practitioners; and (6) because of concerns about the reliability of inspections.
13. Concerns about the reliability of inspections tended to centre around three issues: (1) inspections can only provide a very partial 'snap-shot' of an establishment's performance; (2) issues around the inconsistency of inspectors (including their conduct); and (3) the perceived over-reliance of quantitative data to inform inspections.
14. A small number of stakeholders were more critical, and questioned whether Estyn now offered value for money, particularly because accountability and support is a strong feature of regional consortia and the concept of the self-improving school.

Importance of Estyn's main activities

15. Stakeholders were asked to provide more detailed views on each of the main activities undertaken by Estyn. These included: school inspections; local authority and consortia inspections; thematic reports; HMCI Annual Reports; and their role in the identification and dissemination of good practice. Comments on other activities were also mentioned, particularly relating to the role of Estyn in the Further Education and Higher Education sectors.

16. Stakeholders were very familiar with school inspections, but less familiar with inspections of other organisations (e.g. local authorities, regional consortia, FE Colleges and Initial Teacher Education). They were also relatively unfamiliar with HMCI Annual Reports.
17. Positive views about school inspections focused on the role inspections can have in identifying best practice and in supporting schools to improve. There was little mention of inspections as being of benefit to parents when helping them choose schools (although the number of parent-only responses was low).
18. Negative views about school inspections were relatively wide-ranging, and almost all stakeholders had some concerns about Estyn even if, on balance, they believed that Estyn is currently very important for improving the quality of education in Wales.
19. Many of the criticisms of school inspections related to the conduct of inspectors, claims that poor inspection reports were unsubstantiated, that inspections are stressful and that inspections are too data driven. But probably the most important concern (and most widely cited) was that inspections are rather punitive and not supportive enough, suggesting that a different accountability system might better help schools improve than the current system does.
20. It is important to note, however, that despite the 'call for evidence' asking for examples to substantiate the views of stakeholders, very few actually provided examples of poor practice amongst inspectors or provided examples of inspections that they believe captured an inaccurate evaluation of a setting. So, although there were a number of critical claims made about school inspections not many stakeholders provided the detail to help substantiate these claims.
21. Similar views were also expressed about local authority and regional consortia inspections. On the one hand the monitoring and accountability of these organisations was seen by some stakeholders as important. But on the other hand, some other stakeholders expressed the view that this does not necessarily aide them in their work and actually is a distraction from their day-to-day role in helping schools improve their quality of education.
22. Estyn thematic reports (and research papers) were generally seen as valuable amongst those that were familiar with them. Stakeholders see these as important in helping to share good practice and as a valuable source of information to help improve the quality of education.
23. Negative views about Estyn thematic reports tended to focus on their breadth – in that they were often too broad or high level – and concerns about the evidence from which these reports were based. There were a number of more detailed observations about these reports, such as: how case studies of best practice were selected (including on what basis does Estyn deem something to 'have worked'); that the content of the reports were often based on what seems to work (as opposed to what does not seem to work); and that the content of the reports rarely discussed how to implement best

practice (including more context specific information that would allow other settings to decide whether this best practice would benefit their context or not).

24. HMCI Annual Reports were perceived to be important because they provide a useful way of sharing key messages to all education providers in Wales – helped by the media coverage they receive. Some stakeholders welcomed the need for regular overviews of education performance in Wales from an organisation independent of Government. And some stakeholders found them useful as a way of comparing the performance of their setting with other settings.
25. The main criticism of HMCI Annual Reports was about whether they were widely read. A small number of stakeholders said they thought they tend to be overly critical and not balanced, and some said they are unreliable, again reflecting a perceived weakness about the evidence base that Estyn inspections and reviews provide.
26. There was generally broad support for Estyn’s role in identifying and disseminating educational best practice. This was seen as inherently important, and some stakeholders recognised the unique role and position Estyn can have in providing insights to help educational practitioners improve the quality of education in Wales.
27. As with thematic reports and research papers, the main criticism is that such information is not detailed enough – including what does not work, how to facilitate or replicate best practice in other settings and that case studies are often context specific. Again, there were some concerns about the evidence base for some of the claims made by Estyn about what constitutes best practice.
28. Several stakeholders also highlighted other activities that Estyn provides that they thought are valuable. These included conferences and seminars that Estyn organises – a particularly useful mode for disseminating and sharing advice and best practice – and the role of peer inspectors. Since the online questionnaire did not specifically ask questions about peer inspectors it is difficult to say how they are widely perceived. However, those that did mention these highlighted how important peer inspectors can be as an alternative and effective way for developing capability amongst the education workforce.

Future importance of Estyn

29. Stakeholders were then asked about the future role of Estyn, particularly in the context of the education reform programme. Generally, more stakeholders saw an important role for Estyn in the future than the proportion who do now, including the role of Estyn inspections. This suggests two things: that stakeholders perceive a future with Estyn, but that they feel Estyn would benefit from some improvement or changes.
30. Many stakeholders said that Estyn needs to give greater focus to the identification and dissemination of best practice and use a wide variety of modes to do so. Some suggested that this would require Estyn to adopt a more advisory and supportive role than the one that they perhaps have now.

31. A smaller number of stakeholders thought that Estyn's role in the accountability of schools already duplicates the function of other accountability measures and activities undertaken by settings themselves or by local authorities and regional consortia. Shifting their role more towards advice and support could only seem to exacerbate this and add further weight to the concerns about value for money.
32. There were three other specific suggestions for improvement: (1) either the opportunity for schools to adjust to the new curriculum before being inspected or to take this into account during upcoming inspections; (2) that Estyn inspectors should have more recent educational experience and/or have more relevant training; and (3) that inspections should be broader in scope, with less perceived reliance on quantitative data.
33. Interestingly, other than a small number of calls for reducing the influence and importance of Estyn there was no mention or discussion about an alternative or more radically different accountability system for education in Wales. This may be, in part, because many stakeholders acknowledge that accountability now stems from various parts of the education system, not simply from a national inspectorate. But it may also reflect how few stakeholders have considered what kind of accountability system Wales needs in the future as it embarks on a radical overhaul of the school curriculum and assessment.

Independent Review of Estyn's Contribution to Wales' Education Reform Programme



Main Report

1. Introduction

Significant changes are happening in Wales through the development of a new curriculum together with a wide range of enabling education reforms. These are set out in the Welsh Government's action plan *Education in Wales: Our National Mission 2017-2021*. In recognition of the importance of Estyn's role in the success of the reform programme, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education in Wales commissioned an independent review of the implications for Estyn of these reforms. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills fully supported the review. Professor Graham Donaldson was asked to undertake this review between August 2017 and early 2018.

The objectives of the review are:

- To outline the existing and potential contributions of the work of Estyn to the enhancement of quality in Welsh education within the context of a constructive accountability culture;
- To establish ways in which Estyn's contribution to improving the quality of Welsh education could be further enhanced;
- To outline implications for the future operational requirements of Estyn; and
- To identify implications for the Welsh education system more widely.

A key part of this review was to commission the Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research, Data & Methods (WISERD) to undertake an independent 'Call for Evidence'. This Call took place between 29th November and 17th December 2017.

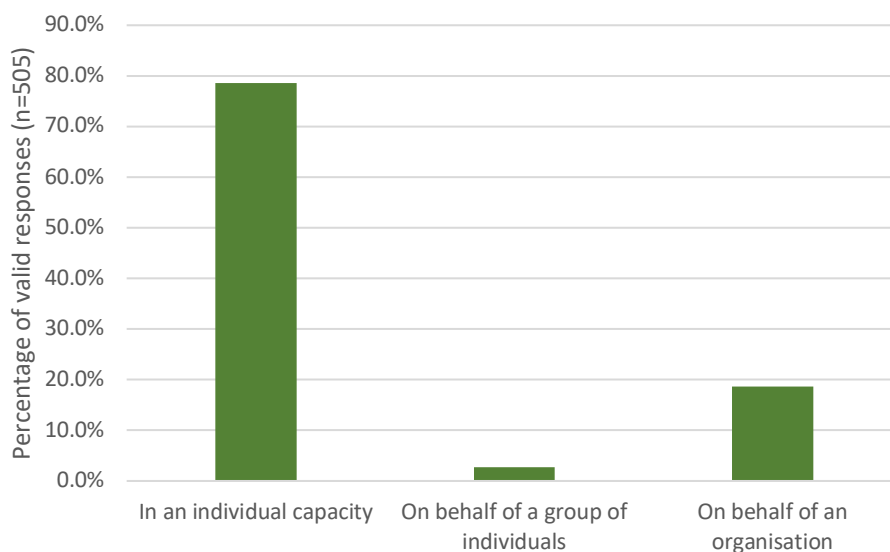
The 'Call for Evidence' was undertaken using an online questionnaire. This included a variety of 'closed' and 'open' questions inviting stakeholders to share their views and experiences on a variety of activities that Estyn provides. Crucially it also invited stakeholders to consider the future role of Estyn in the context of the new curriculum in Wales and the Welsh Government's wider education reform programme, as set out in *Education in Wales: Our National Mission 2017-2021*. The full list of questions used in this Call are in the Appendix to this report.

Responses to the online questionnaire were completed anonymously. However, stakeholders were informed that they could identify themselves in the responses and that this information might be used or shared.

In total there were 820 recorded responses to the online questionnaire. However, many of these are partial responses (e.g. where stakeholders began to complete the questionnaire but did not complete it) or include duplicate responses. After detailed analysis of responses and subsequent cleaning of the data there are a total of 505 responses (either complete submissions or where more than half of the questionnaire had been completed)¹. The 'closed' questions are used to generate largely quantitative data. The 'open' questions are used to generate qualitative *and* quantitative data – through systematic coding of responses we are able to 'quantify' key themes to emerge from their analysis.

The vast majority of stakeholders completed the questionnaire in an individual capacity (Figure 1). Approximately one-in-five responses were made on the behalf of a group or organisation. For the purposes of the quantitative analysis all responses are treated equally. However, consideration is given to the response type when analysing the qualitative data.

Figure 1. Response type

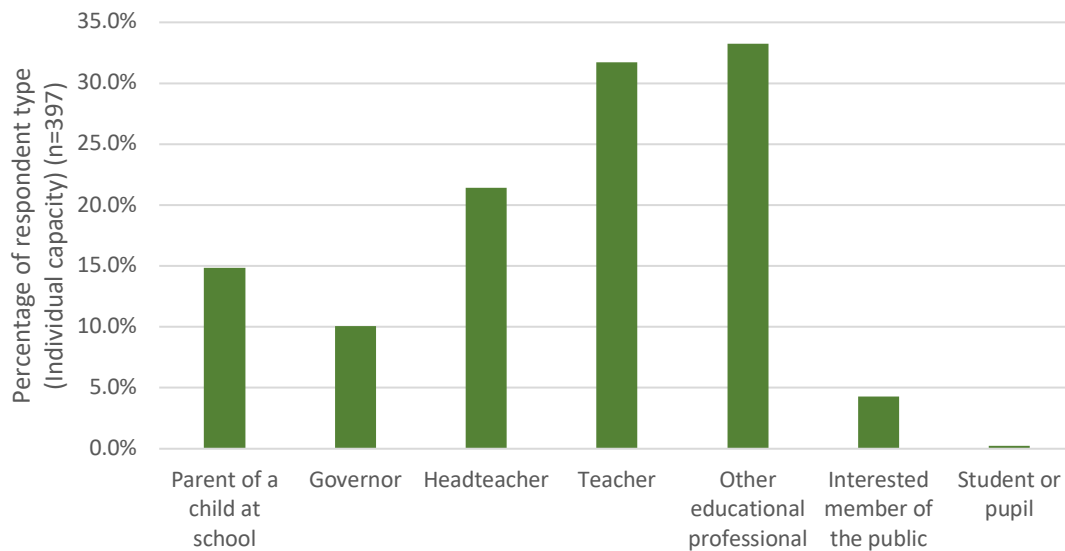


Individual stakeholders were allowed to identify whether they belong to seven different categories (and they were allowed to identify more than one category – e.g. as a teacher and parent) (Figure 2). Of these the vast majority identify themselves as professional educators of

¹ Due to the nature of the online questionnaire and the detailed questions it is very likely that many respondents began the survey in order to look at the questions and then returned at a later date to complete their responses (and using a different MAC address or device than the one they first opened the questionnaire with).

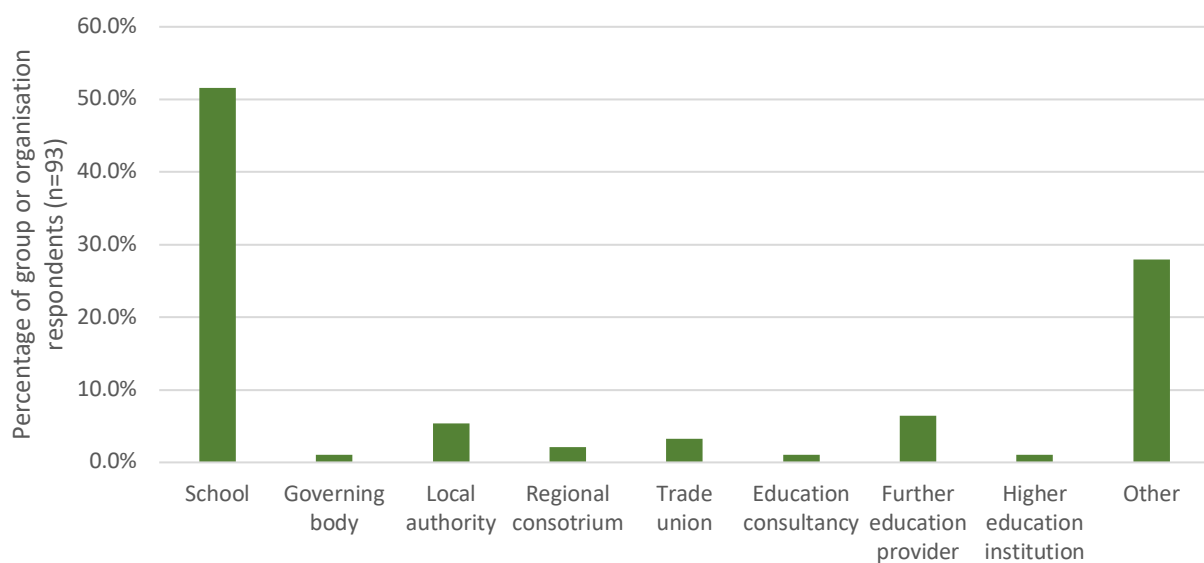
some kind. This includes 85 headteachers and 126 teachers. In addition, there are 59 stakeholders who identify themselves as parents and 40 who are school governors.

Figure 2. Stakeholder type responding in individual capacity



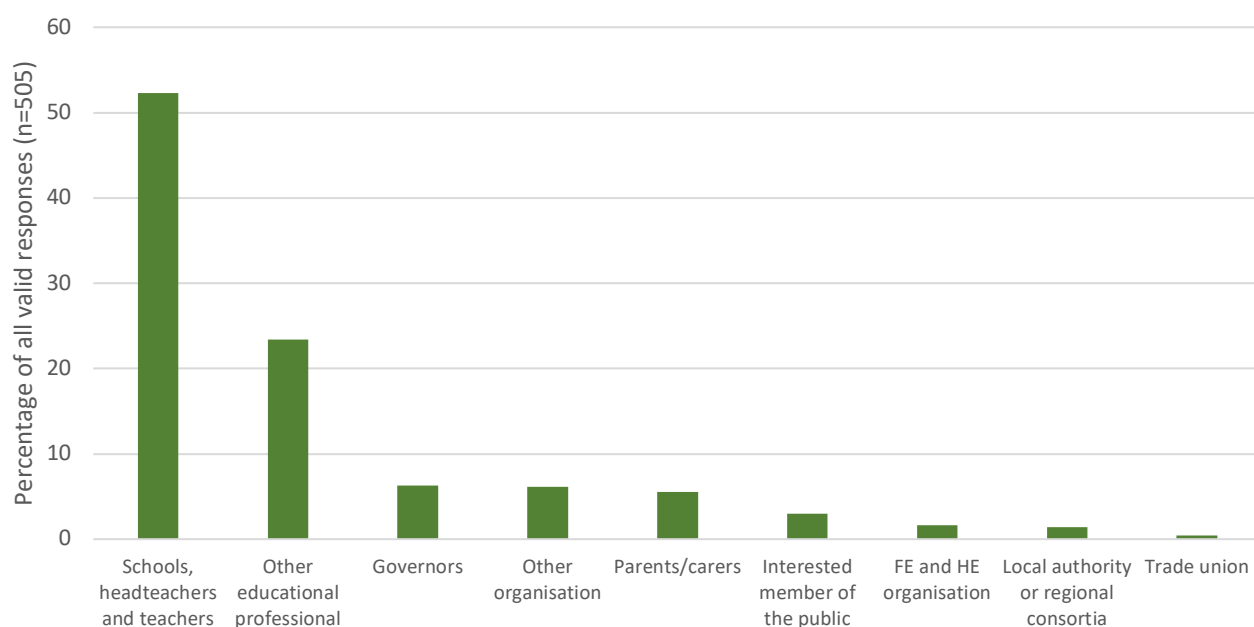
Group or organisational responses are similarly categorised (Figure 3). The overwhelming majority of these are from schools. The 'other' category include various third sector organisations and government agencies.

Figure 3. Organisation or group type of response



Based on these responses a final response type was determined based on a hierarchical organisation of all these categories so that each response is categorised into just one type. Figure 4 presents these final categories – and these categories are used throughout the reporting of results. This shows, for example, that 52.3% of all valid responses are from schools, teachers or headteachers. This groups of responses are followed by 23.4% of responses from other educational professionals. A total of 5.5% of responses can be said to represent parents/carers (28 in total) who, as far as it is possible to tell, do not have any other relevant educational affiliation.

Figure 4. Final categorisation of response



The remainder of this report is structured in the following way. In Section 2 we examine the perceived importance of Estyn for improving the quality of education in Wales currently. From this we identify three sets of stakeholders – those that think Estyn is important in this way, those who think Estyn is not that important in this, and those who would go further in their criticisms to suggest that they think Estyn actually *inhibits* improvements in the quality of education. We examine the justifications and arguments for each these of three ‘positions’. In Section 3 we examine the views of stakeholders for some of the main activities Estyn undertakes. We distinguish between the following activities:

- School inspections
- Local authority and consortia inspections
- Thematic reports

- HMCI's Annual Report
- Identification and dissemination of good practice

Section 3 considers the levels of familiarity the stakeholders have with each of these activities before moving on to examine the perceived importance of these activities. Section 4 then considers stakeholders' views about the future role of Estyn, particularly in the context of Wales' education reform programme as set out in *Education in Wales: Our National Mission 2017-2021*. The final section, Section 5, concludes with other additional comments made by stakeholders and provides a commentary on issues or perspectives that do not seem to have been highlighted by stakeholders.

2. Perceptions of the importance of Estyn for improving the quality of education in Wales

In this Section we consider the perceived importance of Estyn for improving the quality of education in Wales. To help frame this presentation stakeholders were initially asked to choose how important they thought Estyn was for improving the quality of education in Wales. Figure 5 shows responses to the question "*Overall, how important do you think Estyn is for improving the quality of education in Wales?*" A very large majority (71.5%) of responses agreed that Estyn is important in improving the quality of education in Wales. Of those that do not agree with this a sizable group (16.5% of all responses) believe that Estyn *inhibits* improvement in quality.

Many of these views diverge by type of stakeholder (or group or organisation). Table 1 shows that responses from those 'close' to practice (e.g. teaching staff and trade unions) are more likely to say that Estyn is either not at all important or inhibits improvements in quality. These groups are followed by local authorities and regional consortia and other educational professionals. However, other groups, most notably governors or governing bodies and responses from interested members of the public, are significantly more likely to agree that Estyn is important to improving the quality of education in Wales.

It is also important to recognise that some of these groups have quite polarised views. For example, the two trade unions who responded to the call for evidence are very divided; one suggesting that Estyn is very important and the other suggesting that Estyn inhibits improvements. Another group with relatively divided opinions are local authorities and regional consortia. Four of these seven responses suggest that Estyn is very important, but two others suggest that Estyn is not important or actually inhibits improvements.

Figure 5. Overall importance of Estyn in improving the quality of education in Wales

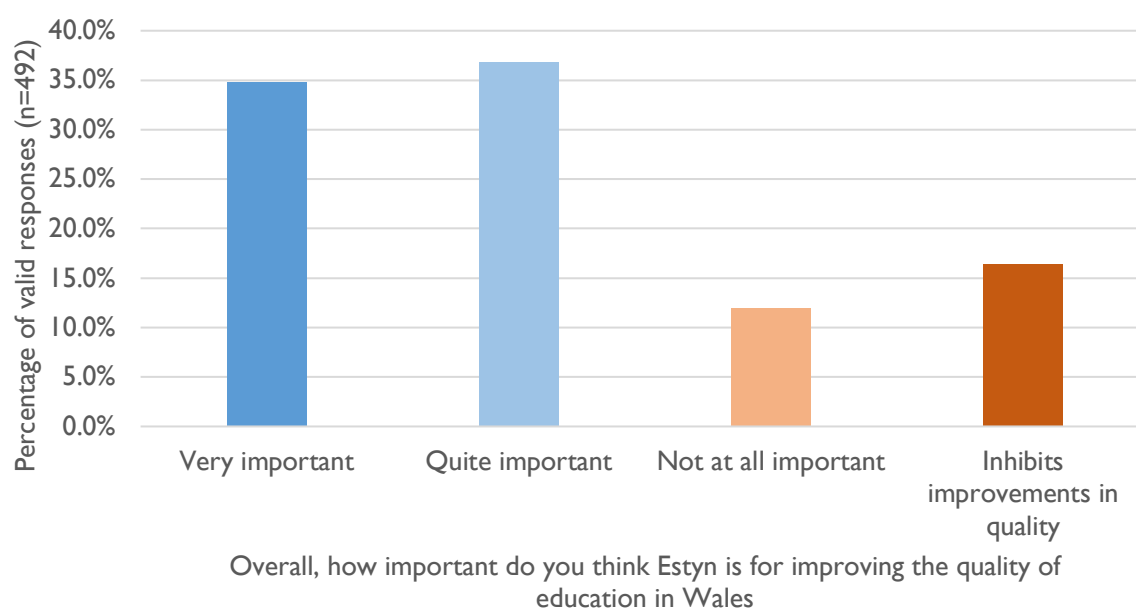


Table 1. Overall importance of Estyn in improving the quality of education in Wales by stakeholder type

	Very important	Quite important	Not at all important	Inhibits improvements
Schools, headteachers and teachers	23.0%	39.8%	16.0%	21.1%
Governors	48.4%	32.3%	16.1%	3.2%
FE and HE organisation	62.5%	25.0%	0.0%	12.5%
Trade union	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%
Other educational professional	43.6%	33.3%	7.7%	15.4%
Interested member of the public	61.5%	30.8%	0.0%	7.7%
Other organisation	58.1%	38.7%	0.0%	3.2%
Parents/carers	35.7%	42.9%	10.7%	10.7%
Local authority or regional consortia	66.7%	0.0%	16.7%	16.7%
Overall	34.8%	36.8%	12.0%	16.5%

These divergent views are fairly well aligned with stakeholders' responsibility for accountability or practice; and those organisations perhaps equally responsible for both accountability *and* practice demonstrating equally divided views.

2.1 Why is Estyn important to improving the quality of education in Wales?

Those who believe Estyn is important for improving the quality of education in Wales were then asked to explain why they had this opinion. Of the 352 who said they thought Estyn is important to improving the quality of education in Wales, 212 gave further explanations for this. These reasons can be summarised as:

- Monitoring capabilities
- Sharing best-practice
- Consistency in teaching and monitoring
- Independent, unbiased, central body

The overwhelming response for why Estyn is important relates to its monitoring capabilities. Stakeholders from all backgrounds recognise the importance of Estyn for quality assurance and in ensuring schools meet expected standards. Some examples of this in the data are:

I believe Estyn acts as a quality assurance body. I believe they are best placed to observe and scrutinise practice across Wales comparing varying institutions, highlighting good practice and pointing out weaknesses in provision and/or leadership. (Teacher)

[Estyn] Provides valuable reports on various aspects of education in schools. Inspects schools on a regular basis, drawing attention to strengths and weaknesses. It is a safeguard for the parents and community of each school to know the extent to which their children are receiving a quality education of a good standard as set down by Welsh Government and the local authority. (Governor)

It is an objective process of inspection which successfully can identify a school's strengths and areas for development. It is important to identify schools which are underperforming. (Headteacher)

Consistent monitoring is seen as a way to ensure students receive the best possible education. Many stakeholders mentioned that consistent monitoring means educational providers can be held accountable for underperformance. For example:

To hold senior managers to account for the way that they manage their school and embed teaching and learning within it and ascertain whether it is a supportive environment for children and staff. (Teacher/ Governor/ Parent)

Sharing of best-practice

Teachers, headteachers and other educational professionals regularly highlighted the importance of providing schools with the opportunity to share best-practice. Estyn's ability to

gather a wide range of performance information from schools across Wales is generally perceived as a reliable means to collate and disseminate best-practice guidelines. For example:

Best practice reports are very useful so that providers can find excellent practice and use it within their own schools. (Headteacher)

The inspection process is one way in which the quality of provision and leadership in schools and its impact on standards is evaluated. The wealth of knowledge regarding best practice as a result is shared through their thematic reports. Schools can access this important information as part of their improvement journey. (Other educational professional)

Estyn inspects all schools and is therefore a central body for sharing good practice and maintaining consistent standards of education in Wales. (Teacher)

Consistency in teaching and monitoring

Several responses believe Estyn helps to improve the quality of education in Wales because it ensures consistency across Wales in both teaching and monitoring:

There needs to be a consistency marker against which all schools are measured and compared to ensure all learners across Wales have equality of opportunity. (Teacher)

To be able to see how schools work and to ensure, they are all working towards the same aim, to provide excellent teaching and learning for all pupils and students. (Parent)

Estyn are able to provide a standard across Wales. This reduces 'postcode lottery' and helps to ensure quality. (Other education professional)

Independent, unbiased, central body

Many responses stressed the importance of Estyn as an independent body capable of providing unbiased, external inspections. Knowing that Estyn is independent of Government and non-political ensures that many of the stakeholders feel the feedback they are given is more reliable. This is recognised as being particularly important by parents:

An objective, external view of public services, education in this case, is pivotal to any robust accountability system. (Parent/ Other education professional)

It is important to have an independent view on the Standard of Education in Wales. (Parent/ Headteacher)

It acts as an independent arbiter of standards and progress that is not driven by political expediency. (Trade Union)

It is important to note that despite recognising the importance of Estyn, many of these responses also acknowledge issues with Estyn and its work, particularly in relation to the practical implications of their inspection. These include inconsistent inspections and the impact on practitioners' workloads and stress – issues often identified amongst those that do not think the work of Estyn is important (see below).

2.2 Why is Estyn not important to improving the quality of education in Wales?

Those who believe Estyn is not important to improving the quality of education in Wales were asked to explain why they had this opinion. Of the 59 stakeholders who suggested that Estyn is not at all important to improving the quality of education in Wales, 42 gave suggestions for this. Reasons provided by these stakeholders can be summarised in the following way:

- Repetition
- Frequency of Inspections
- No support to improve
- Reliability
 - Snapshot
 - Inspectors
 - Quantitative data focused

Repetition

Some stakeholders feel that Estyn is redundant because other bodies already carry out similar work, particularly through 'internal' governance and accountability:

Estyn has been an initiator of school improvement behaviour for some time however other systems are in place to do the same, including those that are led by schools and their leaders. (Parent/Governor/Teacher/Other Educational Professional)

As a parent governor I acknowledge that the school needs to be accountable, but there is a rigorous process of data collection in place. Parents hold the school to account regarding their own children's progress, the governing body who challenge the school and to the local consortia also challenge the school. (Parent/Governor)

Frequency of Inspections

Many stakeholders reported that the frequency of inspections is problematic. The length of time between inspections varied by stakeholder and consequently there are examples of stakeholders feeling that inspections are too infrequent whilst others feel the inspections are too frequent. Explanations for inspections being too infrequent are as follows:

The results of an inspection report would not influence my choice of school or make me view my child's school differently, particularly as the reported are only published every five or six years. The content of the report may well be outdated within a very short period of time – changes to staff, different cohorts of children can obviously influence the performance of the school and so the findings of an inspection report are only a snapshot in time. (Parent/Governor)

Estyn only visiting and inspecting every 6-7yrs is too far apart. That is the majority of time of a child in school. A whole year group can be disadvantaged between inspections and no one is looking at this. (Parent/Other Educational Professional)

The above accounts show that too infrequent inspections impact on the perceived reliability of the review. When inspections are too frequent, however, some stakeholders said this causes teachers and other school staff to become overly stressed from the pressure that inspections bring:

As a teacher in a school in special measures having had 10 Estyn visits in 7 years I am pondering the impact they have had in the education of our children. This number of visits has caused nothing but work-related stress resulting in a very transient staff, which does not have any positive impact on our children's education. (Parent/Governor/Teacher/Other Educational Professional)

No support to improve

Several stakeholders believe Estyn does not help to improve the quality of education in Wales because it does not provide enough support to assist schools in improving. Many of the stakeholders suggest the current system is overly-critical and judgemental without providing adequate advice on how to improve:

They are critical rather than helpful. Rather than say you are doing this wrong perhaps suggest ways to improve. (Teacher)

I believe that the quality of education in Wales would be better improved and have more of a long-term impact if inspections were carried out in a more advisory and supportive rather than judgemental way. (Teacher)

Estyn is not developmental, it is judgemental – it can be quite a damaging process for schools and communities. (Headteacher)

It should be more about supporting schools than naming and shaming. (Headteacher)

Reliability

Perceived reliability of inspections is regularly seen as a concern amongst stakeholders. Stakeholders said they do not feel Estyn is important for the improvement of education in Wales because the inspection methods are unreliable. Consequently, inspection reports are not seen as valid by many of the stakeholders. Some of the reasons for this perceived unreliability are explored below.

Snapshot – Some stakeholders felt Estyn inspections were much too brief and visiting a school for a few days could not produce an accurate picture of what that school is like on a daily basis:

A few days Estyn inspection does not reflect what goes on in schools. (Parent/ Governor/ Teacher)

They come into a school, take a snapshot following set criteria, make a judgement and then disappear. No way forward is suggested. (Headteacher)

Inspectors – A concern raised by stakeholders working in schools related to the consistency of the inspection teams. Some respondents mentioned having different experiences with different inspectors. And some stakeholders felt inspectors were biased and not working towards a common framework:

The system is flawed there are too many inconsistencies in inspections. Appear to be subjective on the part of certain teams. (Teacher)

Currently, the quality of Estyn inspectors varies greatly with a lack of consistency in judgement. Estyn and categorisation descriptors do not correspond or marry well enough leaving schools needing to answer 2 sets of criteria. (Governor)

Mae dal gormod o wahaniaeth mewn safon arolygiadau; yn ddibynol ar yr unigolion sy'n arwain yr arolwg.

There is still too much difference in inspection standards: particularly depending on the individuals that run the inspections. (Headteacher)

Because it is not a standardised measure – inspectors use their own biased judgements not based on policy to make judgement... Do inspectors even understand the FP – one I spoke to last week didn't know what sustained shared thinking was, so I have little faith I'm afraid. (Other educational professional)

Some stakeholders felt the differences between individual inspectors is a consequence of their different levels of experience, particularly in lacking *recent* experience:

A growing significant number of inspectors have no real comprehension of the challenges facing schools today. Also, there appears to be no congruence between teams. (Governor)

The quality of inspectors is far too variable for Estyn to have real impact in terms of improvement. In some cases, it is far too long since they were educational practitioners themselves. Inspectors use inspection to indulge their own personal opinion and appear to prize process and bureaucracy rather than impact. (Other educational professional)

Quantitative data focused - Stakeholders often mentioned the reliability of Estyn inspections is impaired by the over-focusing on quantitative data. Stakeholders mentioning this are concerned that focusing too much on data and not enough on the 'bigger picture' is not producing an accurate reflection of a school's performance:

Because Estyn reports are less reliable, they focus far too much on data and less on the actual quality of provision – how reliable is data? How can improvements be based on captured data especially at KS1-3 which is widely unreliable or isn't really quality or peer reviewed? (Teacher)

Because they don't see the bigger picture. It is all about data and nothing about the quality of the provision. They will accept any fiddling of the data by schools. Their presence creates more issues and does not solve problems. (Teacher).

It didn't feel like a pleasant experience designed to help schools improve. The effect on pupils and teachers was that data drove everything. It was no longer about children achieving their best but about meeting targets impossible for many. Children learned that their best wasn't good enough as did teachers and schools. It is big stick mentality. Constructive criticism is valued – but only if it is balanced and has an understanding of the children not merely their scores. (School)

2.3 Why does Estyn inhibit improvements to the quality of education in Wales?

Those who believe Estyn inhibits improvements to the quality of education in Wales were then asked to explain why they have this opinion. Of the 81 stakeholders who shared this opinion just 48 gave justifications for these views. These justifications can be summarised as:

- Limits creativity
- Reliability
 - Quantitative data focused
 - Consistency
 - Snapshot
- Stress
- Overly Critical

Limits Creativity

Several stakeholders believe Estyn inhibited improvements to the quality of education by limiting creativity in the classroom. Stakeholders feel schools are often more concerned with meeting Estyn requirements than developing new ways and methods of teaching pupils. This is perceived to have a particularly *adverse* effect on students' learning experiences:

It makes schools and teachers scared to try new things and forces them to do things that are not right for the pupils. (Teacher)

Estyn removes focus from teaching children and so often, teachers do or are asked to do what they think Estyn will want to see. (Parent/Teacher)

Teachers are forced to work toward pleasing Estyn instead of developing skills of the children in their care. (Teacher)

Schools are too focused on jumping through hoops to please Estyn and less focused on child development. Much of what schools do around supporting pupils' well-being and social development are not valued through inspection and so often gets neglected. (Parent)

Reliability

Similar to those who believe Estyn is not at all important for improving the quality of education in Wales, those who believe education improvements were inhibited by Estyn are also concerned about the reliability of Estyn inspections. Many of the reasons provided for this perceived unreliability are also similar.

Quantitative data focused – Some stakeholders believed the reliability of Estyn reviews is impacted by Estyn's emphasis (and perceived reliance) on quantitative data. Examples of this were:

Results driven not a true reflection of the hard work done in schools. (Teacher)

I believe that the inspection procedure doesn't give a true picture of what is happening within a school (and in education generally)- for both pupils and staff. I also believe that schools are so driven by the data produced as a result on an inspection that they are forced to focus on the performance indicators that give favourable results (e.g. attendance, etc...). (Teacher/ Other educational professional/ Interested member of the public).

Estyn are only interested in certain things, often relying on data and not interested in the children behind the data. (Governor/Teacher)

They focus on paperwork and make too many judgements on quantitative data. Schools spend far too much time worrying about meeting Estyn accountability rather than dealing with the moment in time and that's Estyn's fault because they create that climate. (Other educational professional)

Consistency – Several stakeholders mentioned there is inconsistency between inspection teams, as inspectors are perceived to emphasise different factors. Stakeholders feel this leads to contradictory messages and inconsistent results:

Estyn inspections are incredibly inconsistent and depend on your team of inspectors. (Governor/Teacher).

Lack of consistency between teams. Contradictory messages. Messages in conflict with curriculum proposals. (Interested member of the public)

There is a distinct lack of consistency in how inspections are carried out with providers. In many cases this inconsistency is not addressed sufficiently through the annual update training. (Local Authority)

I have been shocked at the lack of professionalism I have observed from Estyn and would suggest that training is urgently required with regard to adhering to a code of ethics, and making unbiased judgements based on a broad range of accurate, current data. (Teacher)

Snapshot – As discussed above some stakeholders suggest that Estyn inspections are much too brief, and that visiting a school for a few days does not produce an accurate picture of what that school is like on a daily basis:

You can't judge a school from spending a few days there. (Governor/Teacher)

There is no way in the space of 5 days a school can show all the fantastic work and best practices which are taking place, it is a whistle stop tour... (Teacher/Other educational professional/Interested member of the public.)

Differently from other critical stakeholders these respondents suggest that brief inspections benefit schools who are better at preparing for the inspections than others:

In visiting a school currently Estyn doesn't see the true picture of education as it happens on a daily basis. The success of an inspection depends solely on the headteacher's ability to prepare for an 'exam'. (Teacher)

Schools can often 'put on a show' and because of the short time Estyn are in a school, some things can also be missed. (Headteacher)

Estyn obtains snapshots of performance at given points within a cycle. Organisations prepare for this snapshot and some do really well because they 'play the game'. (Other educational professional)

Stress

Many teachers who believe Estyn inhibits improvements in the quality of education suggest teaching staff are placed under a large amount of pressure prior to and during inspections. Stakeholders believe this stress is caused by the anxiety of an inspection and the increased workload around inspection times:

Puts unnecessary pressure on the teaching profession. (Governor/ Teacher)

The pressure brought on by a week of inspection is bad for teachers' wellbeing. (Governor/Teacher)

They create huge pressures that impact on the health and well-being of teachers. The inspection system consistently sets schools up to fail and created huge workload pressures that do not contribute to pupil development. (Teacher/Other Educational Professional/interested member of the public).

Schools come under huge stress during inspections and this hinders rather than supports their work. (Parent)

Overly critical

Many stakeholders who believe Estyn inhibits improvements suggest this is caused by Estyn being overly critical and not offering advice as to how improvements can be made. The stakeholders who feel Estyn is overly critical and judgemental are predominantly teachers and other school staff members. Some examples of this opinion are:

They are first to criticise but do not offer ways to improve. (Teacher)

Any 'inspectorial' system is in its nature isn't a supportive system where guidance for development can be imparted. How many times do we hear inspectors respond to schools' questions around 'how?' with 'that's not our role' (Headteacher)

During our recent inspection, we found the process to be extremely judgemental with little insight and guidance on recommendations. (Teacher)

The inspection regime also fails to reward the vast amount of work teachers do in supporting pupil social development and also fails to recognise the huge improvements children make even if they do not reach arbitrary targets. The very notion of this style

of inspection continuing risks any potential wins the new curriculum may provide being lost. (Teacher)

Some stakeholders feel Estyn is in a good position to share best practice. However, they do not feel this is always done:

They appear to be a group of self-important individuals who get carried away with their own importance. They hide behind their repeated claims that their job is not to advise. They have the privilege of seeing the best practice in schools and should be made to publish a coherent written scheme of work for schools as a minimum starting point. Innovation and creativity could then be provided by experienced teacher to enhance and enrich. (Headteacher)

Some stakeholders went so far as to suggest that Estyn inhibits the sharing of best practice between schools as it creates a culture of competition between schools:

The data-driven and insensitive nature of the last inspection format has restricted curriculum growth and teacher independence. It has also created a culture of competition between schools that has inhibited sharing of good practice rather than encouraging it. (Headteacher)

Estyn have created a barrier to schools wanting to share their best practice. (Governor/Teacher)

A small number of stakeholders went further, and suggested that, as a result, Estyn does not offer value for money or that it should be abolished:

Remove them [Estyn]. For green and yellow school, they are a waste of time and money. (Headteacher)

Too many people writing reports. We need the money to put staff with children. (Headteacher)

We can't afford all of these civil servants. We are at risk of spending so much money on measuring and monitoring there will be little left for the actual practice to be monitored. (Headteacher)

It needs to be disbanded altogether. We cannot afford this idiotic waste of money. We cannot afford to keep paying for hotels and meals and travelling expenses. We cannot afford to continue paying for the "Estyn Stone" that is the amount of weight I was once told by an Inspector that people gain on joining Estyn due to the fine living provided by the public purse! (Headteacher)

Yes, disband Estyn. (School)

3. Perception of the value of Estyn’s different activities

Stakeholders to the call for evidence were asked how much they value a range of activities that Estyn routinely undertakes. The main activities identified in the call for evidence were:

1. School inspections
2. Local authority and consortia inspections
3. Thematic reports
4. HMCI's Annual Report
5. Identification and dissemination of good practice

3.1 Familiarity with Estyn activities

It is useful to note from the outset that stakeholders are not necessarily familiar with all these activities (Table 2). Similarly, levels of familiarity vary by type of stakeholder (Table 3).

‘Other outputs’ attracted the fewest responses, and according to Table 3 these are most likely to be referred to by stakeholders from the FE and HE sector. This might suggest that these responses largely refer to activities Estyn undertakes in the post-compulsory education sector, including inspections of teacher education.

Table 2. Familiarity with key Estyn activities

	Very familiar	Slightly familiar	Not aware of	n
School inspections	85.8%	13.2%	1.0%	394
Local authority and consortia inspections	49.9%	43.9%	6.2%	385
Thematic reports	63.9%	28.4%	7.7%	391
HMCI's Annual Report	55.0%	35.9%	9.2%	382
Identification and dissemination of good practice	65.0%	29.8%	5.2%	386
Other outputs	27.8%	26.7%	45.5%	176

Table 3. Very familiar with Estyn activities by response category

Very familiar with...	School inspections	Local authority and consortia inspections	Thematic reports	HMCI's Annual Report	Identification and dissemination of good practice	Other outputs
Schools, headteachers and teachers	94.0%	46.2%	65.6%	53.1%	68.6%	18.3%
Governors	88.5%	56.0%	44.0%	40.0%	50.0%	7.7%
FE and HE organisation	75.0%	60.0%	100.0%	83.3%	66.7%	75.0%
Trade union	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Other educational professional	79.5%	62.4%	73.0%	70.2%	73.9%	46.0%
Interested member of the public	40.0%	20.0%	40.0%	40.0%	40.0%	0.0%
Other organisation	77.3%	72.7%	72.7%	59.1%	59.1%	38.5%
Parents/carers	61.9%	10.0%	19.0%	20.0%	25.0%	12.5%
Local authority or regional consortia	75.0%	75.0%	75.0%	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%

3.2 Importance of Estyn activities

Overall, stakeholders believe that the identification and dissemination of good practice is amongst the most important Estyn activities (Figure 6). This is followed by inspections of schools, local authorities and regional consortia. However, these latter activities also attract the most criticism in terms of inhibiting improvements in quality, highlighting the polarising effects of inspections amongst stakeholders. It appears that HMCI Annual Reports are regarded as the least important (although they are not frequently regarded as inhibiting improvement).

Figure 7 shows the percentage of responses identifying Estyn activities as being very important for improving the quality of education in Wales by five main response groups. As before, this shows key differences between stakeholders – school practitioners are the least likely to say that Estyn inspections, thematic reports and the HMCI annual report are very important. In contrast, governors, parents/carers and other organisations generally have higher regard for these activities.

Figure 6. Importance of Estyn activities for improving the quality of education in Wales

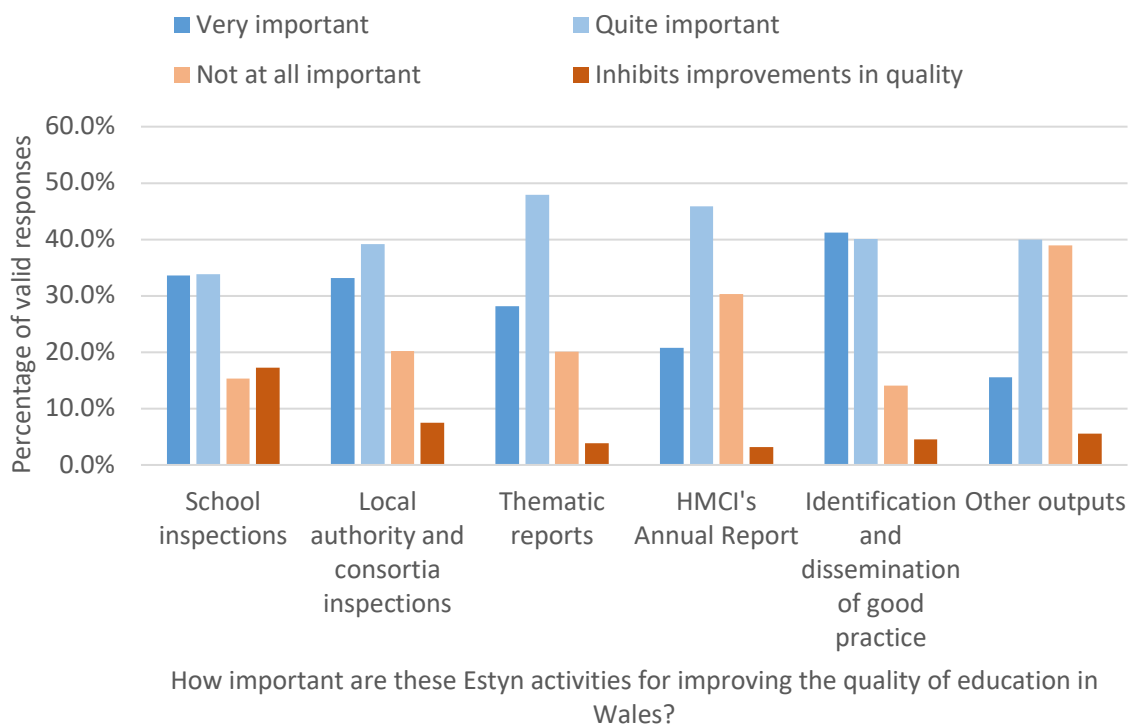
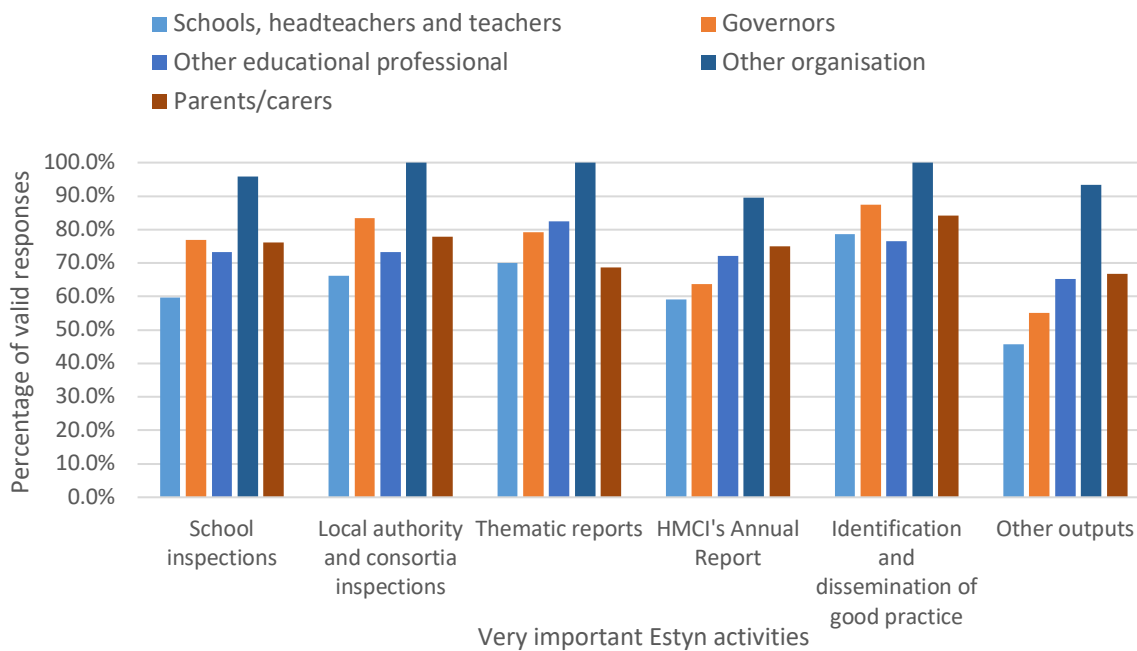


Figure 7. Percentage of stakeholders who regarded Estyn activities as very important for improving the quality of education in Wales, by main response groups



Generally, there is much greater support for the identification and dissemination of good practice by Estyn, and by most groups. However, it might be important to note here that other educational professionals (including, perhaps, academic researchers) do not regard this Estyn activity as valuable as other groups, possibly reflecting concerns about the evidence-base of this good practice.

3.3 School inspections

Stakeholders were asked to provide an example from their own experience of school inspections - there were 246 responses to this question. We present these examples according to the level of importance respondents gave to school inspections.

Very Important

Of the 134 stakeholders who believe school inspections are very important for improving the quality of education experienced by young people in Wales, 86 gave further explanations for this. Reasons for thinking school inspections are very important for improving the quality of education include:

- The ability to improve and develop a 'best way forward'
- Inspectors are supportive
- The ability to share best practice

Several stakeholders mentioned that Estyn's school inspections are important because they help make schools aware of their weaknesses. As a result of this schools are given an opportunity to improve and to develop a 'best way forward'. Some examples of this included:

Identified areas of improvement in our last school inspection have been addressed and have been important in school improvement. (Teacher)

Yr argymhellion a roddwyd i'r ysgol yn sgil yr arolwg a yrrodd gynllun gwella'r ysgol am y ddwy flynedd ganlynol a sydd yn parhau yn bwysig yn ymdrechion yr ysgol i barhau i wella a codi safonau.

The recommendations made to the school as a result of the inspection drove the schools' improvement plan for the following two years and it continues to be important in the schools efforts to continue to improve and raise standards. (School)

For example, an Estyn inspection recently outlined a recommendation to improve the provision for children to develop their skills in the outdoor environment. The improvements have had an impact on children's physical development, literacy, numeracy skills and creative development. (Other educational professional)

A few stakeholders mentioned that the supportive nature of the inspectors is specifically what helps schools improve:

I have been the Headteacher of two different schools who have been inspected within the last 5 years. On both occasions the inspection team put a great deal of effort into understanding the context of the schools and the progress that pupils made from their starting points. Estyn validated our self-evaluation in a way that was rigorous and fair.
(Headteacher)

As a former Headteacher, my experience was of an inspection team who felt it their role to ensure the school was equipped with a clear understanding of current performance, the areas required to continue improvement and with a clear understanding of maximising pupil progress. However, this not the case consistently.
(Trade Union)

Some stakeholders who report that school inspections are very important mentioned the benefit of sharing good practice:

As an ex-classroom teacher and as an LA advisor the inspection process ensures that good practice is acknowledged and celebrated as well as providing ways forward to further progress and develop. (Other educational professional)

The independent and external review of performance provides direction for improvement and highlights good practice for sharing across the sector. (Further Education Provider)

Quite important

Of the 135 stakeholders who believe school inspections are quite important for improving the quality of education experienced by young people in Wales, 83 gave further explanations for this. These responses are more mixed than the responses from people who believe school inspections are very important. Although it is again recognised that school inspections help schools identify their weaknesses and improve on them, responses also suggested that:

- Inspectors don't behave in a manner considered acceptable
- Inspections generate high levels of stress
- Schools are given poor inspection reports without good reason

The responses of people who feel school inspections help schools to improve by making them aware of their strengths and weaknesses are similar to the responses of those who feel school inspections are very important for improving the quality of education of young people. Some examples of this view included:

The inspection supported the school self-evaluation and helped to move the school forward by reporting the strengths in specific departments which helped the school improve the consistency in teaching. (Headteacher)

Fair overall. Generally, inspectors looking to highlight good work and provide useful areas for improvement. (Headteacher)

However, many of these responses also outlined what they believe the weaknesses of school inspections are. Many stakeholders mentioned they are not happy with the behaviour of some the inspectors who had visited their schools. Some examples of this view are provided below:

From experience over three Estyn inspection, it is sadly very driven by the team, especially the Lead inspector. At time it is has a complete devastating effect on a school due to the manner it has been conducted in, as opposed to a challenging but supportive mechanism. (Headteacher)

Again, it is important that an organisation such as Estyn exists, to help and support schools by identifying areas of good practice AND concern, but my recent experience with Estyn has made the children feel quite fearful. They found our inspection team rude (parents came to us and said that one inspector ignored children and did not bother to clap during assemblies!). Children felt they were not 'doing very well'. This came solely from the learners. Teachers spent most of the time trying to boost the children up again. All the Lead Inspector had to do was smile at them and show a little enthusiasm. (Teacher)

Many stakeholders mentioned the amount of stress that inspections generate. Stress is perceived as affecting all members of staff, and sometimes the pupils. Many of the responses mentioning stress were written by teachers. Some examples of responses which mention stress were:

In my experience of an Estyn inspection, the team were at loggerheads, which meant that the strains within the team were felt throughout the inspection process. This made staff uneasy, and as an unnatural situation anyway – this added to the stress staff were under. Staff worked extremely hard to ensure this did not affect the children within our care. (Teacher)

The inspection process is very stressful and often not helpful in helping schools move forward. (School)

Too much stress on everyone. From pupils to headteachers. System of inspecting needs to change. Inspectors should also have recent experience of teaching. (Parent/Teacher)

One stakeholder mentioned that their view of school inspections was affected because their school had been given a poor inspection, which they believed was unfair:

As a parent I have not been made aware of my inspections. However, I do take an interest when the report is published. My children's school in particular at one point was marked down due to them not having a full time, dedicated head master. Which as a parent was frustrating as this was through no fault of the school, as it was a new school and sharing a head master with another school. The lower classification had no reflection on the education that was being provided by the teachers. But the lower classification I felt was not an appropriate reflection of the school. (Parent)

Not important

Of the 61 stakeholders who believe school inspections are not at all important for improving the quality of education experienced by young people in Wales, 38 gave further explanation for this. Reasons for thinking school inspections are not at all important for improving the quality of education included:

- They do not aid improvement
- Lack of consistency between inspection teams
- Inspections are too data-driven

Some stakeholders felt that school inspections are not at all important because they do not help schools improve. Stakeholders feel inspections are more focused on finding faults than helping schools to progress. Some examples of this view were:

Although we received a positive inspection, the inspection told us very little about what we could do to improve, other than bland recommendations. (School)

It felt like a grilling to catch us out rather than an opportunity to celebrate good points and ideas to work with schools to move forward and improve positively. (School)

Our experience was very negative and did nothing for the improvement of the school or staff morale. It was critical of standards against a set of statistics that were at best questionable. The resulting report and use of data was not understood by parents and created a great many problems for the Governing Body staff and children without any support for improvement. (Headteacher)

Some responses also highlighted the inconsistency between inspection teams:

I have been inspected as a school Head and been a peer inspector. I have found the approaches of each team to be very different and whilst they were all professional and courteous in approach, their application of evidence was very different. (Headteacher)

Lack of consistency in school inspections can be demoralising. A school I was involved with was a victim of this. It was clear that using the Estyn guide lines we should have

been given a higher grade. This was not constructive as staff felt undervalued.
(Governor)

Inspectors seem to have their own agendas. Focus is on keeping Estyn happy, rather than being free to focus on the children... How long have inspectors been out the classroom? (Teacher)

A few stakeholders believe school inspections are not at all important because they focus too much on data and not enough on human experiences. Stakeholders felt this resulted in unreliable inspection outcomes:

All they were interested in was the comparison data with other schools whilst assuming they would make no progress. I cannot as a professional help all schools become above average! As this is impossible. Equally another inspector stated that the pupils in the class were not high ability despite me telling him they had literacy difficulties. Inspection needs to become more personal and supportive rather than a stick to beat school staff with. (Teacher)

My school seemed to be judged on GCSE results mainly. Demoralizing for staff and pupils. (Teacher)

Inhibits improvements

Of the 69 stakeholders who believe school inspections inhibit improvements in the quality of education, 40 gave further explanations for this. Reasons for this included:

- They are punitive rather than supportive
- Inspectors don't behave in a manner considered acceptable
- Inspections are too data-driven

Some stakeholders believe school inspections place a large amount of stress on schools because they are punitive in nature rather than supportive. Stakeholders felt that school inspections do not provide enough support to improve. Examples of this were:

My children's school was inspected, a rather austere occasion when we met with the inspectors as parents. It made one feel immediately defensive and under threat as it was more like an experience of some higher court officials arriving to hear justification as to why everything was already perceived as being excellent and looking to find fault. I have also worked with many schools over the years and seen fine headteachers crumple under the pressures put upon them from inspections and the administrative work which has taken them away from the teaching arena completely. Again, the process gives the sensation of being examined and scrutinised for faults, rather than

an approach where the school could be in charge and put forward areas which they might feel the need for help. (Parent)

It is a punitive model that inhibits confidence. The comprehensive sector is getting away with scandalous poor practice and primary schools are being crushed by the current regime and associated workload. (Headteacher)

Having had a recent inspection, that proved to be completely unfair and demoralising rather than focusing on what we believe to be the right course for our children and our school, we are no having to move in different direction. (Teacher)

Estyn inspection has not helped our school to move forward. School staff dip after an inspection because of the emphasis and pressure experienced. Estyn do not have the capacity to assist moving schools forward. Making a judgement does not support a school to improve. (School)

Another reason given by some stakeholders to explain why they believe school inspections inhibit improvements in the quality of education is that they are not happy with the behaviour of some the inspectors who had visited their schools. Examples of this were:

Inappropriate makeup/members of team, no recent relevant school/phase experience, lack of understanding of basic child development, no understanding of Foundation Phase philosophy, principles and practice. Poor judgements regarding pedagogical approaches. Spoke to each other in Welsh during feedback to Chair of Governors – we are an English medium school with 85% EAL [...] Ignorance, astounding lack of understanding of our multi-cultural society. (Headteacher)

Rude inspection teams who did nearly exactly the opposite to what they should be doing. During the Monday meeting with staff, everyone was told that any 'interviews' or discussions would take place where the staff member felt more comfortable and where their evidence was. This was not carried out and teachers were denied the opportunity to show evidence. A lead inspector who intimidated people and fed back the wrong information. A lead inspector who took the opinions of 2 parents, but ignored the other 80 odd parents in attendance... A team leader who bullied his own team - our staff witnessed one of the team members with tears in her eyes after leaving a meeting with lead inspector, and it was clear to all what had happened, bringing down staff moral even further. (Teacher)

Some stakeholders felt the data-driven nature of Estyn inspections inhibit improvements in education. This is because the stakeholders felt Estyn is not producing reliable inspection reports. Some examples of this view were:

As a maths teacher within a successful department, our recent inspection had a detrimental affect on our GCSE results due to the distraction of having to prepare

needless paperwork to make us look better than we are. We had less time to spend on preparing our pupils for their exam. (Teacher)

Emphasis on “evidence” for everything pressures teachers in to additional paperwork and file keeping thus distracting from what is important, i.e pupils. I’m not sure how much emphasis isn’t based on data but so much of it is based on lie. I know first-hand that schools over level their pupils and increase their percentage of pupils receiving age appropriate levels and outcomes thus rendering the banding system a pure joke based on fiction. (Teacher)

During the past 6 years there has been a massive over-reliance upon data. Quartiles have influenced decisions no matter what the observed practice within classrooms. This regime has given rise to the current debate around ‘unintended consequences’; yet this ‘blame’ has been focused towards schools without any questions of Estyn’s role/influence in all this. Attendance quartiles have heavily influenced judgements around Wellbeing, regardless of wider positive practice within this aspect of inspection...This variation and lack of consistency creates insecurity and confusion. This does not promote collegiate discussion and open self-evaluation. (Other organisation)

3.4 Local authority and regional consortia inspections

Stakeholders were asked to provide their views about local authority and regional consortia inspections. There were 164 responses to this question. It is important to note that most of the responses were focused on schools’ experiences of being inspected by the Local authority and/or regional consortia, rather than the local authority and regional consortia’s experiences of Estyn inspections. For this reason, most of the responses were omitted during the data analysis. Almost all of the stakeholders, who agreed that local authority and regional consortia inspections are very important or quite important for improving the quality of education in Wales identify the need to monitor local authorities and regional consortia and to hold them to account. For example:

Estyn holding Consortia to account is vital. They are responsible for school improvement. They should be working in tandem to carry out inspections of schools. (Headteacher)

Local authorities are providing advice to schools and therefore have an even greater accountability. They should therefore be inspected more thoroughly, especially with the amount of money many of the challenge advisors and practitioners get. (Teacher)

These are the organisations who have a better overview of education in the area. Estyn should be checking they are assisting and delivering correct funding and advice to promote learner progress. (Teacher)

Unfortunately, it appears that local authorities / consortia do not always follow the right path and it is important that Estyn are able to rein them in and prevent them from putting unnecessary pressure on schools. (Interested member of the public)

There are two main ways stakeholders feel that local authority and consortia inspections are not at all important or inhibit improvements to the quality of education. These are:

- Does not aid improvement
- Distraction

Some participants believe that these kinds of inspections are not at all important or inhibit improvements to the quality of education because they do not seem to make a difference to how these organisations do things:

I was part of a local authority that was inspected. I don't think it improved our overall provision or support that we provided to schools. It did make us think about what we did and why we did it though...as well as catching the impact of our support. (Other Educational Professional)

Inspection of LAs has not made the difference required in Wales. The improvement conferences held in 2016/2017 were a better way of judging the work of a range of services. Estyn are not able to judge LAESCYP services effectively due to the variation in services provided by each LA. Too much time is spent testing the detailed knowledge of schools through Local Authority LINK visits and insufficient time is devoted to the strategic work of the LA. (Local Authority or Regional Consortia)

Two stakeholders also mentioned that a weakness of local authority and regional consortia inspections was that the inspections are a distraction, and interfere with their usual work of school improvement:

My answer is based on the pressure for LAs and consortia to dance to the tune of Estyn. This can be a huge diversion from more meaningful improvement work. (On Behalf of School)

Consortia again can focus too much on providing paper heavy evidence for Estyn and fail to focus on the key role of school improvement. (Other Educational Professional)

3.5 Thematic reports

Stakeholders were asked to provide examples from their own experience to illustrate their views about their perceived importance of Estyn's thematic reports – there were 180 responses to this question. As before, we distinguish these responses according to how important stakeholders thought these thematic reports are.

Very important

Of the 101 stakeholders who believe thematic reports are very important for improving the quality of education experienced by young people in Wales, 54 gave further explanations for this. Reasons for why thematic reports are perceived to be very important for improving the quality of education include:

- The ability to share good practice.
- A source of information to aid improvements.

Most of the responses mentioned that thematic reports are important because they enable good practice to be shared between education providers. For example:

Within the reports they summarise good practice as well as shortcomings enabling school leaders to compare their own schools with best practice. (Headteacher)

Opportunity to share good practice between schools. (Teacher)

Having received a thematic inspection, the feedback was worthwhile - very positive experience. Thematic reports are regularly used e.g. to identify best practice which can be shared with staff. (On behalf of school)

Maent yn linnell fesur pwysig i ysgolion ac yn cynnig enghreifftiau o arfer dda yn nhyb Estyn.

They are an important gauge for schools and offer examples of good practice in Estyn's opinion. (On Behalf of School)

These are very useful and give an insight into best practice. These provide useful information as part of a school's research into school improvement. These allow improving schools to link with high performing schools to share good practice. It supports self-improvement through school to school working. (Other Education Professional)

Some stakeholders mentioned that thematic reports provided them with specific knowledge, which as a result enabled them to improve. Examples given of this include:

Have used thematic reports to inform my own practice and professional development as a class and leadership level. (Teacher)

We have used a number of the reports to provide very useful benchmarking data for action planning. (FE / HE Organisation)

Very useful for identifying potential areas to develop within own context. (Teacher)

Quite important

Of the 171 stakeholders who believe thematic reports are quite important for improving the quality of education experienced by young people in Wales, 88 gave further explanations for this. Reasons for thinking thematic reports are quite important for improving the quality of education are similar to the reasons given by stakeholders who believe that thematic reports are very important. There are largely two reasons given for this:

- The ability to share good practice
- A source of information to aid improvements

Examples of how thematic reports are important for sharing good practice include:

They help a school to identify its own strengths and developments based on good practice and signpost schools to good practice. (Headteacher)

If a school has done something which is genuinely ground-breaking then it is an excellent way of disseminating good practice. (Teacher)

Rwyf yn defnyddio adroddiadau thematig er mwyn 'dwyn' syniadau newydd ac effeithiol er mwyn gwella'r ysgol.

I use thematic reports to 'steal' new and effective ideas to improve the school (On behalf of school)

A wider perspective with good practice shared plus there are recommendations for all sectors. These reports can identify good practice that schools can use to improve themselves. We find them useful and current. (On Behalf of School)

They do give a flavour of what is seen as excellent practice across Wales. However, there is a limiting judgement here in that you are only considering excellent practice in Wales, whereas we may be coming too insular and ignoring good practice in England. (Governor)

The case studies within the Thematic Reports can be very useful. This sharing of good practice is a good thing. By having a clearly defined and manageable focus, discussions are more effective. With clear and focused expectation, resulting self-evaluation and reflection is meaningful. (Other organisation)

Examples of stakeholders mentioning that thematic reports are important for gaining new knowledge include:

It is good to read about an area you are trying to address (Headteacher)

Some are very informative, others are not. (Headteacher)

They can often give good advice and guidance in a pertinent area. This can lead to developments in your own school's practice as they can give you a 'way in'. (Teacher)

It offers examples of sector leading practice in many areas. (Teacher)

Stakeholders who believe thematic reports are quite important also highlighted main criticisms of them, most notably:

- Reports are too frequent
- Reports are too broad in scope

Some stakeholders mentioned the reports are released too frequently which does not give them appropriate time to read the reports and to act on them. Examples of this include:

Too many reports and too few focus sufficiently on strategies to improve outcomes for students (Headteacher)

Too many and too frequent. Hard to keep up. (Headteacher)

These have greatest impact when schools are given time to consider the reports in their own contexts with partner schools. However, there is little time give to embed such changes and schools are quickly moved onto the next theme to bring about improvements. Impact is often at surface level and not a deeper embedded level. (Headteacher)

One stakeholder explained they felt that thematic reports are too broad in their scope, which makes them less valuable than they could be:

I do read all of the thematic reports, some are very useful. The scope is a bit too wide and a sharper focus would be more useful. My school has been part of a thematic report. I didn't feel that it was a particularly useful process. (Headteacher)

Not important

Of the 72 stakeholders who believe thematic reports are not important for improving the quality of education, 33 gave further explanations for this. These could be summarised in the following three ways:

- Reports are too broad in scope
- Reports are not useful
- Not enough time to review the reports

Most stakeholders who feel the thematic reports are not at all important reported this was because the reports are not of much use. The reasons given for this varied, ranging from how practical they are to how informative they can be:

The reports do not set out activities and plans for schools to model and use in their own setting (Headteacher)

Mostly not new thinking – promotes the culture of sector leading (which is a ridiculous model if you consider the implications of this for sharing good practice) – focus of the system should be on outcomes and work back to excellent practice – we have no idea how well we are doing as there is no accountability. (Headteacher)

Again, on reading these, as a teacher, you understand that the content is rarely a true reflection and quite often you know that it was produced by someone who is just trying to further their career. (Teacher)

They generally only relate to the schools that write them. (On behalf of school)

Waste of time – who reads them? (Headteacher)

One stakeholder mentioned they did not have enough time to read the reports and to act on them:

Time to review the reports is limited and does not impact of the practice at local level. (On behalf of school)

Inhibits improvements

Of the 14 stakeholders who believe thematic reports inhibit improvements to the quality of education, only five gave further explanations for this. These primarily focused on the evidence-base on which the reports are based. For example:

Usually only involve schools recently inspected so limited in scope (Headteacher)

Schools are using these to build a curriculum on a bed of sand. Trying to second-guess the system and to put "everything in place for Estyn". This is clearly a system that's gone wrong. Schools no longer have trust to do what is best for their settings. Local advisers saying don't change anything yet, wait for the pioneer schools. Where is the clear advice? Where is the clear direction? (Headteacher)

They are based on a limited amount of research and carried out by inspectors who have little recent classroom experience (Teacher)

What's the baseline though??? (Other education professional)

3.6 HMCI's Annual Report

Stakeholders were asked to provide an explanation for their views about HMCI's Annual Reports. In total 147 responses to this question were given. As before we discuss these depending on how important stakeholders perceived these annual reports to be.

Very important

Of the 72 stakeholders who believe HMCI's Annual Reports are very important for improving the quality of education in Wales, 39 gave further explanations for this. The three main explanations for their importance are:

- Allows for the up-to-date, key messages to be disseminated to all education providers in Wales
- Useful to have access to an overview of education performance in Wales
- Allows for them to compare their own performance with other schools

Many participants mentioned that the HMCI's Annual Report is a good way to disseminate up-to-date, key messages to all education providers in Wales. Not only is this seen as ensuring all providers are given the information which allows them to improve, it is also seen as ensuring these messages are delivered *consistently* across Wales:

Identifying trends, key messages, areas of concern. (Headteacher)

Find it extremely helpful, focuses on current issues. (Headteacher)

A very clear and attractive summary of key messages and evidence. Very accessible. (Teacher)

This report is very useful as it identifies 'hot topics' – the areas of strength and weakness from all primary inspections. We use the report as Senior Leaders to self-check our own processes. A good example would be the focus on the impact of professional development and teacher research in the 2015/16 report. We made some changes our CPD offer and we know that we need to support staff in a more structured way around a small-scale research projects. (On behalf of school)

This report highlights what is good and what is wrong with education. It gives school leaders and others the right messages pointing them in the right direction. (Interested member of the public)

Ensure professional teachers and headteachers receive an unbiased strategic view of standards across Wales. (On behalf of school)

Several participants who believed the HMCI's Annual Report is very important for the improvement in quality of education in Wales noted this was because it is useful to have access to an overview of education performance in Wales. For example:

Creates a 'picture' of overall sector performance. Useful to compare within and between sectors. (Governor)

The report provides a comprehensive annual overview of national standards across all phases and stages. (Other educational professional)

This gives an important overview of the strengths and areas for development across the whole of Wales and a guide to key factors for schools. (On behalf of an organisation – regional consortium)

The report provides excellent information on the progress of schools, LA's and Regional consortia and in particular key information on the effectiveness of school governance. (Other organisation)

Receiving information about the performance of other schools was mentioned by some participants as also being useful, as it allows for them to compare their own performance with other schools. For example:

We used the section on curriculum from the last report to assess the quality of our curriculum and make improvements. (On behalf of school)

Useful to compare within and between sectors. (Governor)

This is a very useful document, which outlines strong practice. This can support a school with an evaluation of its own practice as part of its own internal review. (Other Education Professional)

The annual report reflects the outcomes of inspections across Wales which can be used to bench mark your own authority. I use this in my own role and compare the data with our own authority data. (Other education professional)

Quite important

Of the 159 stakeholders who believe HMCI's Annual Reports are quite important for improving the quality of education, 55 gave further explanations for this. Many of the reasons given by stakeholders are similar to those who feel these Reports are very important. These reasons include:

- A good way of disseminating key messages
- Useful to receive an overview of performance in Wales

However, stakeholders also identified some of the negative aspects of the Annual Reports, such as:

- The report can be overly critical
- Things change too quickly so there isn't enough time to implement the guidance
- Certain aspects need to be reviewed

Examples where stakeholder said the Annual Reports can be overly critical include:

Good benchmark of overall quality. However always begs the question why so little achieve excellent and so many require follow up. Either indicates a flawed assessment process or a poor system with expectations set too high. (Headteacher)

Some previous ones before the present incumbent had been overly critical in tone. (Headteacher)

A few stakeholders mentioned the timing of Reports being an issue:

Once again there is little time to consider and implement improvements before new improvements are being requested. (Headteacher)

Mini videos to convey key messages on social media would be good – no one has time to read the report – it's huge! (Teacher)

And some participants felt with some changes the Annual Reports could be more useful, such as their timing and how they are presented:

Found the focus on professional learning this year particularly useful. However, I do question the value of making comparisons between different cycles when expectations change regularly and the random approach to calendaring inspections. The report does seem to take a very long time to generate, 5 months after the last inspection in the July – would be of greater benefit if it could be issued before the start of the new academic year in order to have any influence within the next academic year. This is also reflected in the length of the time post-inspection it takes for the report to be published. (Other Educational Professional)

The messages that come out of the HMCI Annual Report can, again, be of use to the education sector, however, there appear to be a few issues that inhibit the potential impact. Firstly, the media always seek to find the negative message within the report with which to present conflict between the profession and Estyn e.g. – Teaching the worst aspect of Wales' education system. The way in which Estyn and the HMCI present findings needs to be considered as they should be seeking to provide a steer to the profession and not add to the criticism the media like to portray. Secondly, care needs to be taken when presenting broad messaging based upon relatively questionable samples of evidence e.g. Special sector can vary quite considerably year

on year as the sample of schools is relatively low, resulting in single school performance having a disproportionate influence on the overall sector picture (rather like percentages of schools' performance with small cohorts of pupils). Finally, the HMCI Annual Report does not always seek to dig more deeply into the reasons why a finding has emerged. For example, the 'Teaching the worst aspect of Wales' education system' finding did not explore why professional learning for teachers had declined – funding pressures, over-burdened policy change etc. (FE and HE Organisation)

Not important

Of the 105 stakeholders who believe the HMCI's Annual Reports are not that important, 46 gave further explanations for this. There were two key reasons why stakeholders believe they are not at all important:

- The impact/value of the reports is questionable
- They are not widely read

Several stakeholders believe the Reports are not at all important because they feel they do not have any impact on how things are done:

Some useful headlines but not sure of impact. (Headteacher)

I have never seen an Annual Report, and have been teaching for a long time, so I am unaware of any impact. (Teacher)

Again, not made aware of the findings at school level so has little impact on classroom practice. (Teacher)

It does not have the necessary impact at grass roots level to improve the quality of education in children. A good read for facts and figures. (Governor)

Turgid, low impact. (Other Educational Professional)

Gives an overview but really this is more of a public exercise rather than a valuable piece of work. (Other Educational Professional)

Not sure how useful this is, contains a lot of obvious statements/or platitudes. (Other Educational Professional)

Many other responses to this question mentioned they do not read the Reports and/or are not familiar with the Reports. Examples of this were:

With current workload pressures very little people I know take the time to read the document. (Headteacher)

No school I know reads these reports. (Teacher)

These are not utilised by many schools I know. (Governor)

I am aware that an Annual Report is published, but as a governor nor as a parent have any idea what information they contain. It would be interesting, in my view, to conduct an exercise to ascertain value for money with regard to these reports, the thematic reports etc. How much impact do they have compared to how much it costs to undertake/publish them etc. (Governor)

And one stakeholder suggested that the reports and further details could be made more accessible:

There's a lot of useful information in there but how many teachers read them? Where is the opportunity to interact with what is said? Why are there no hyperlinks to videos, websites etc. Why are we not all emailed a copy? Where can we respond and challenge what is said in a professional dialogue? Search for the Annual Report today on 5th December 2017 brings up 2015-16 as the most recent. Why so long in this day and age? (Teacher)

Inhibits improvements

Of the 11 stakeholders who believed HMCI's Annual Reports can actually inhibit improvements in the quality of education experienced by young people in Wales, just four gave further explanations for this view. The main reason given was that these stakeholders do not think the findings of the Reports are reliable:

It does not give a full and honest picture of education in Wales just a snapshot of what they have seen. (Teacher)

It's only primary schools which have enough inspections in a year to be credible – you can't summarise something different every year with a small sample for it to actually mean anything. Should be a 3 year report or something like that – with more sample to say something meaningful. (On behalf of school)

3.7 Identification and dissemination of good practice

Stakeholders were asked to provide an example from their own experience to help illustrate their views about Estyn's identification and dissemination of good practice. There were a total of 178 responses to this. These are discussed according to whether stakeholders thought this activity was important or not.

Very important

Of the 146 stakeholders who believe Estyn's identification and dissemination of good practice is very important for improving the quality of education, 81 providing further explanations for this. Almost all of these recognise the inherent value of this activity, and many acknowledge the particular role and position Estyn has in being able to identify what they regard as best practice. For example:

This is what schools want. Share and celebrate the good stuff so that we can see things that work well and things that may fit in with our priorities. Let us continue to make links with other schools and work together to improve standards as a profession rather than grade schools and pit them against each other in inspections. (Headteacher)

The regular bulletins make good reading and encourage you to consider how practice can be adapted. They also encourage to visit other schools to see the practice in action. (Headteacher)

Estyn identify best practice case studies through the judgement of excellence on quality indicators. Providers then produce a case study highlighting the best practice that enabled an excellent judgement to be made. These case studies are then made available to all on the Estyn website. This enables scrutiny of best practice being undertaken in other providers is something that we follow up on where we feel improvements can be made by e.g. visits to other providers. (Further education provider)

However, some of these stakeholders acknowledge that Estyn could do more to improve this part of their work, particularly in relation to providing examples of what does not seem to work and how to encourage facilitation of best practice beyond the simply the reporting of it:

I think schools are so time limited and cover is such a challenge, that these reports can be a way to learn of what others are doing without having to visit the school itself. I think it would be helpful if they were more balanced though. I think because it links to public image, many schools are not forthcoming about the setbacks they may have faced if the challenges with implementing their initiative. This can make it hard to replicate. (Teacher)

This is a role that should be the main purpose of Estyn but one which appears under-developed. Recognising what works well in schools and that it is worth sharing is a key role for the inspectorate, however, simply noting it and requesting the schools to provide a case study example is only part of the process. The current system appears to continue to be perpetuate a 'competitive' school v school approach – 'this good practice school will need to show the other poorer schools how to do this well' – when the real picture of schools across Wales suggests that nearly every school does something worth sharing... A better approach would be for Estyn to facilitate schools' ability to share what they do across existing networks more easily. During inspection,

or thematic report processes, Estyn could encourage schools to identify those things worth sharing and encourage every school to do so across existing networks. Part of a school's inspection judgement could include how well they share what they do well – this could be a particular encouragement to those schools who have maintained high performance and good or better inspection outcomes consecutively. (Trade Union)

Quite important

Of the 142 stakeholders who believe Estyn's identification and dissemination of good practice is quite important, 62 provided further reasons for this. Several of the responses share similar views to those who said this is very important. However, most of these responses suggested ways that Estyn could do more to improve their identification and dissemination of good practice, most notably:

- The advice is context specific and cannot always be applied
- There isn't enough detail to replicate the practices
- Information regarding best practice is disseminated too frequently
- Needs to be evidence based

Some stakeholders mentioned they are unable to use the good practice as it is often context-specific and not always relevant to their institution. Examples of this are:

There is a risk here that "good practice" is in the eye of the beholder and experiences of regional consortia do not reflect the good practice that Estyn publicise – and the risk that school X's good practice is copied by school Y (who do not understand the process behind the practice) and the impact is limited or negative. (Teacher)

Often good practice papers have helped shape our own practices. The downside can be when the case studies are used as transplantable models. Instead, caution should be advised and more of an emphasis placed on schools having the autonomy to structure good practice to specific context. (Teacher)

Credaf bod rhannu arfer da yn allweddol mewn un ffordd, ond wrth ddarllen dogfennaeth Estyn, byddai dim modd ailadrodd cysyniadau o'r fath ar lawr y dosbarth gan nad ydyn nhw'n realistic I nifer o sefyldiadau addysg oherwydd e.e cyllid, nifer staff, anghenion arbennig disgyblion ac ati. Byddai'n well gwario'r arian sy'n cael ei wastraffu ar greu'r adroddiadau hyn ar gyrsiau neu adnoddau diriaethol ar gyfer hyrwyddo arfer da.

I believe that sharing good practice is key in one way, but when reading Estyn's documentation, such concepts could not be repeated in the classroom because they are not realistic for a number of education settings because of, for example, finances, staff numbers, special needs of pupils etc. The money wasted on creating these reports

would be better spent on courses or resources for promoting good practice. (Other educational professional)

One stakeholder mentioned they have had difficulties in replicating the good practice because not enough detail was provided to allow them to do so:

While some reports are useful there is often not enough detail to replicate practice. Some schools are asked to produce reports when other schools have just as good practice that is not recognised. (Headteacher)

Some stakeholders mentioned that information regarding best practice is disseminated too frequently which makes it difficult to keep up with. Some stakeholders believe that before they have had a chance to attempt to implement the good practice, new advice would be provided:

I think it's important but at times there are so many being published that it's difficult to prioritise which will have the biggest impact on your own setting. To introduce things effectively takes time. (Headteacher)

Case studies are useful but again tend to be too frequent. (Headteacher)

One stakeholder believes that good practice should be more evidence-based if Estyn want education providers to find it more useful:

Mae'n bwysig os oes tystiolaeth tu ol l'r ymarfer da. Weithiau mae polisiau yn cam lywio'r gwaith o godi safonau. Er enghraifft roedd y pwyslais cryf ar bresenoldeb fel prif ddanghosi ydd lles yn gwbl gamarweiniol a di-angen. Rwyf o'r farn I hyn wneud cam a lles plant.

It is important if there is evidence behind for the good practice. Sometimes policies missteer the work to raise standards. For example, the strong emphasis on attendance as a major welfare indicator was completely misleading and unnecessary. I am of the opinion that this is the step and welfare of children. (Parent/Carer)

Not important or inhibits improvements

Of the 50 stakeholders who believe Estyn's identification and dissemination of good practice is not at all important for improving the quality of education experienced by young people in Wales, 25 gave further justifications for this. Of the 16 stakeholders who believe Estyn's identification and dissemination of good practice inhibits improvements, nine of these gave further explanations for these views. The comments from both groups are very similar and tend to use the following three arguments:

- The advice is context specific and cannot always be applied
- There isn't enough detail to replicate practices
- Needs to be evidence based

Some stakeholders mentioned that good practice examples provided by Estyn are too context-specific, which means they are unable to apply the practice in their own settings. For example:

Dylan Williams paraphrase, everything works somewhere, nothing works everywhere. (Teacher)

Not enough detail on initiatives and very specific individual schools, not always able to use them to improve outcomes in a different school. (Teacher)

Learning communities are unique. It is very rare to find a 'one size fits all' this why 'good practice' is not universal. The over examination of children and young people is so damaging. The drive to 'learn for the test' is outrageous. Not nearly enough attention is given to a variety of ways in which children and young people learn and the skill that some schools have in addressing that. Year groups are exactly that. No attention seems to be given by the inspectorate to innovations to address matters of e.g. timetabling, pupil's learning maturity (except as a disability model) or distance learning. There can be no comparison between outcomes of inspection. The most successful models, that is those education systems that turn out well adjusted, aspirational young people who are not frustrated by trying to be that which they are not are to be seen in other countries, notably Finland and Denmark. (Teacher)

Some mentioned that even if they want to apply the good practice examples to their own settings they are unable to do so because there is not enough detail provided:

Nid yw'r gwaith "rhannu" yn ddigon manwl I wneud unrhyw wahaniaeth.

The "sharing" work is not detailed enough to make any difference. (Headteacher)

The descriptions on the website (written by schools) are brief and the outlines do not necessarily support the strength of the school as we are generally inclined to underplay the school's work. It would be more effective to have events where practice is shared with many schools setting out stalls and allowing other schools to move round and chat to practitioners on the aspects that Estyn have highlighted. (Headteacher)

A few responses mentioned that examples of good practice need to be more evidence-based before they are willing to implement such practices in their own settings:

Can be very subjective and limited to recently inspected schools. Has to be much broader in terms of evidence base. (Headteacher)

Again, this is based on little evidence. (Teacher)

3.8 Other Estyn activities

Stakeholders were also asked to provide examples of their experience of any other of Estyn's activities. There were 68 responses to this question. These other activities included:

- Events and conferences
- Peer inspections
- Research papers

We discuss each of these other activities and the feedback they generated in turn.

Events and conferences

Several responses mentioned events and conferences as being a useful activity provided by Estyn, particularly as a useful way of disseminating information. For example:

The good practice event was generally very good and gave some good indicators of the way forward for schools in the light of Successful Futures. (Headteacher).

The recent showcasing of the excellent work around Wales can support school improvement. The importance of celebrating what is excellent. (On behalf of a school)

Estyn's stakeholder events and input at conferences and events has been particularly useful for the sector to identify common areas for improvement and plan collaborative quality improvement activities. (Other organisation)

Estyn input at conference and training events is useful. The vision of Estyn is really good and the HMI staff are highly skilled. (On Behalf of a Primary School)

Their presence at the NTFW events is very important and this direct involvement with provides a unique forum for professional discussion. (FE and HE organisations)

Peer inspections

Peer inspections are also seen as beneficial, particularly in terms of the way they help develop more detailed capacity and insight for practitioners. For example:

Training as a peer inspector and visiting another school to be a peer inspector provided invaluable insights into targeting various aspects of the schools' provision. (On behalf of a school)

The annual training for peer inspectors sharpens schools focus and is very valuable as a reflection tool. (On behalf of a school)

Training and development for peer inspectors and for FE leaders are very useful in supporting all providers and helping them to develop strong quality assurance. This opportunity is both developmental and supportive and enables sharing of both good and more variable practice. (On behalf of an organisation)

Estyn needs peer inspector training is also underpinned by the sharing of good practice. This is a highly valued mechanism in the education sector in Wales. Numerous staff have engaged in inspections and learnt a great deal from the process which they have been able to bring back and introduce into their own curriculum or business support areas. (FE and HE Organisations)

Peer inspector model very valuable to share good practice and help schools become more reflective. (Headteacher)

Opportunity to be a peer inspector (HT/DHT both active) provides really good training and helps our own school to develop. Ironically both HT and DHT feel they gain more to develop own school from completing an inspection than from own school being inspected. The process of our own school being judged is too high stress and stakes. Whatever grade awarded is there for 6+years! (On Behalf of Primary School)

Research papers

A small number of stakeholders mentioned the benefit of Estyn's Research Papers:

Estyn has written papers about their support of and work with Pioneer schools which has been valuable for the development of the new Curriculum as Estyn have a wide range of experience and knowledge of Best Practice to share with Pioneer schools and non Pioneer schools through cluster work. (On behalf of a school)

Mae llawer o deynuddiau a dogfennau ymchwil yn helpgar iawn wrth ystyried materion perthnasol fel man cychwyn (Teacher)

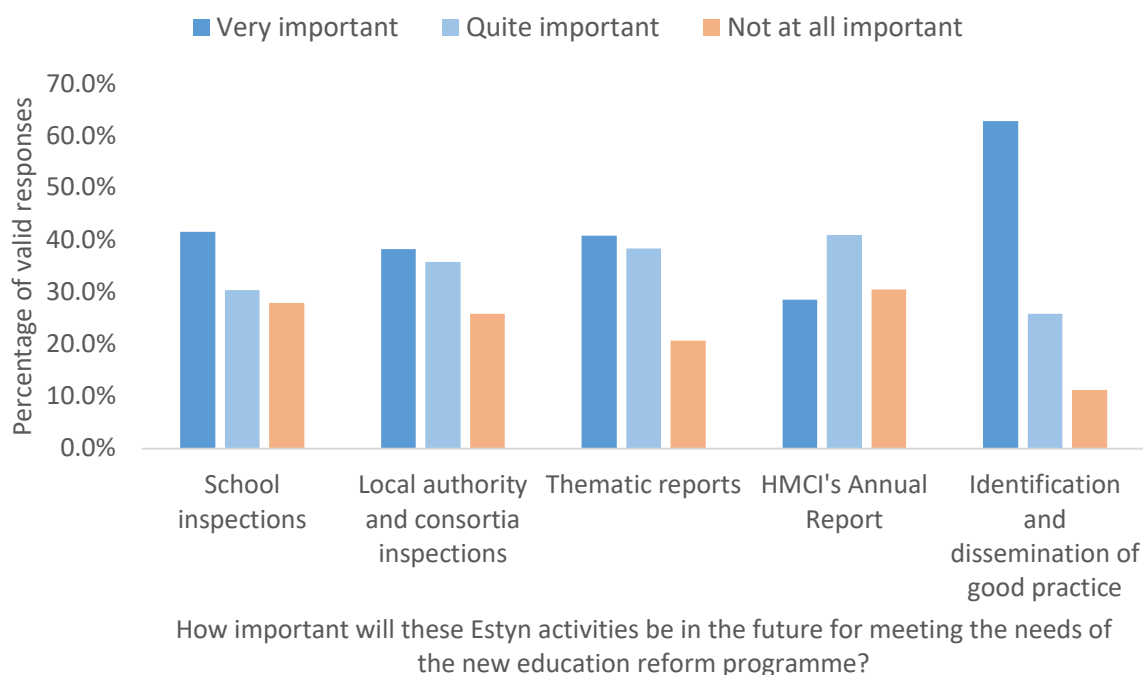
Many of the research materials and documents are very helpful when considering relevant issues as a starting point (Teacher)

4. Estyn and Wales' Education Reform Programme

Stakeholders were asked about the importance of various Estyn activities for meeting the future needs of the education reform programme in Wales. Overall, the identification of good practice, followed by Thematic Reports are generally regarded as being the most important activities Estyn currently undertakes for meeting future needs (Figure 8). The least important of Estyn's activities for meeting future needs are the HMCI's Annual Reports, followed by school inspections and local authority and regional consortia inspections. Nevertheless,

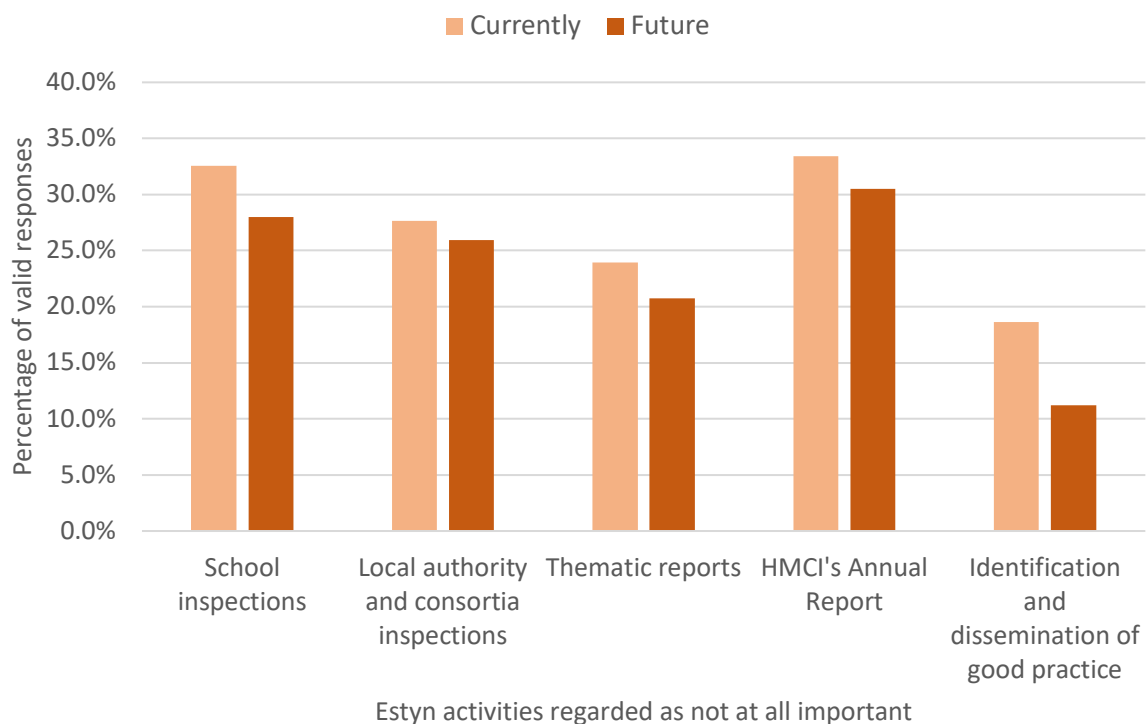
41.6% of responses still indicated that school inspections will be very important for meeting the future needs of the new education reform programme in Wales.

Figure 8. The importance of Estyn activities in the future for meeting the needs of the education reform programme in Wales



Figures 9 and 10 illustrate the levels of importance given to various current Estyn activities with their importance for the future. Figure 9 compares the number of responses that suggest these activities are not important and Figure 10 compares the number of responses that suggest these activities are very important. In all cases more stakeholders report that these various Estyn activities will be important in the future than the number of stakeholders who currently think they are. The identification and dissemination of good practice is one area where there is significantly greater support for the new education reform programme than there is currently. There also appears to be greater support for school inspections for the future than there is currently. This gives some indication of the areas where both the role of Estyn is important for meeting the needs of the education reform programme but also where many stakeholders feel improvements in these activities could be made.

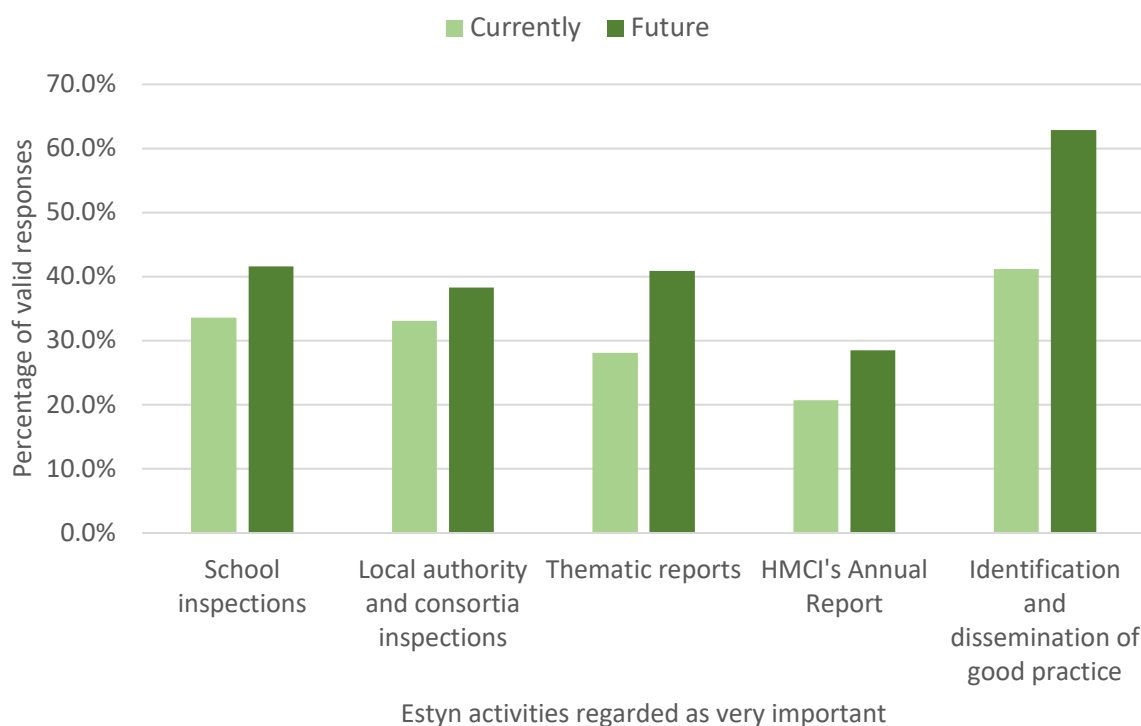
Figure 9. Percentage of responses regarding Estyn activities as not at all important, currently and for the future



Stakeholders were also invited to discuss how Estyn could best contribute constructively to a reformed education system in Wales. There were 231 responses to this question, most of which can be summarised in the following four ways:

- The opportunity to adjust to the new curriculum
- Estyn adopting a more advisory, supportive role which encourages the sharing of good practice
- Inspectors should have recent and relevant training
- Inspections should be broader in scope – Less focused on quantitative data

Figure 10. Percentage of responses regarding Estyn activities as very important, currently and for the future



In response to this question some stakeholders mentioned that they should have the opportunity to implement and adjust to the new curriculum before being inspected again by Estyn:

A stop to inspections, at least during the period the new curriculum is implemented would be the first reform that is required. Schools need the confidence that they can implement the new curriculum as planned and not be punished within an inspection cycle for that. (Teacher)

Take a step back! The new curriculum will take time to be fully embedded. Schools need to be given time to trial, plan and be creative without fearing an inspection. Schools will not be on board with the curriculum changes until Estyn and WG take a step back from assessment and accountability. (Teacher)

Others felt that Estyn has a key role to play in supporting schools whilst they introduce and adapt to these reforms:

I think Estyn needs to be helping schools to plan and implement the new curriculum. I think schools are very nervous about taking risks because of a lack of confidence as to how Estyn will receive innovative or creative approaches. I think this is also true of exam boards for secondary schools. (Teacher)

With all of the expertise in school improvement within Estyn, could we not have a period of 1-2 years to work alongside schools constructively in helping them improve their cultures and practices in order to be ready to deliver a new curriculum through the re-professionalisation of teaching? There is enough knowledge in the system to be able to identify which schools are finding the concept of subsidiarity more challenging than others. Then when a new inspection cycle recommences, inspection teams would have a lot more credibility if they have been an instrumental part of moving our system forward rather than swooping in to judge before swooping out.
(Parents/ Other education professional)

A large number of stakeholders are interested in Estyn taking on a more advisory, supportive role to encourage the sharing of best practice between schools. There is also general consensus for this amongst most types of stakeholders. Examples of this included:

Celebrate the successful parts and suggest areas to improve and how they can improve. During an inspection a member of staff was told that they need to improve a certain part of their lesson but when asked for advice was told that they cannot advise that is not their job. (Teacher)

By facilitating the sharing of good practice between schools but by reducing the over burdensome judgemental nature of the system. Currently, schools are bogged down in trying to prove how effective they are whereas they should be placing all of their energy into improving provision and outcomes. A poor judgement and the overwhelming follow up process leaves a trail of disappointed and demoralised staff who then struggle to deliver to the best of their ability. (Headteacher)

The role of ESTYN could be to have a body of research that it shared quickly with other schools through shorter, more focused visits with far less paperwork, and a focus on what makes a difference. This can then be disseminated through events for schools and stakeholders so that everyone becomes aware of what works and how it can be applied to their situation. (Headteacher)

I think that Estyn should be allowed to help schools improve not just by highlighting weaknesses but by pointing them in the right direction by giving them examples.
(Other educational professional)

By identifying schools where best practice is observed and encouraging schools to share. (Teacher)

Estyn needs to be able to champion best practice. They should be able to offer advice and point schools towards best practice. This is not however to promote one particular way of doing things. (Regional Consortium)

Several stakeholders, particularly educational professionals, mention that, in order for Estyn to contribute constructively to a reformed education system, Estyn inspectors should have

recent and relevant teaching experience. This is considered to be an important way of improving the reliability of the inspections:

In a supportive role, having inspectors who are currently working in schools and given a terms secondment to work as an inspector. To be able to make a judgement from experience of actually teaching. (Teacher)

By involving actual teachers in inspection and not just people with no recent involvement in schools. (Parent/Teacher)

Use inspectors who:

1. have a genuine love of education

2. Possess experience of leadership in a wide variety of schools- not just leafy suburb schools.

3. Have recently and relevant experience of planning and delivering the 'new' curriculum.

4. Inspectors to attend a sabbatical in school every two years. (Governor)

ESTYN staff to be seconded back into schools to update their knowledge and understanding of current, significant reform changes. (Other educational professional)

Some stakeholders feel that in order for Estyn to contribute constructively to a reformed education system, inspections need to be broader in their scope. Suggestions for how they could be broadened, however, were varied. Some examples included:

...there have been best practice papers written based on visits from inspectors into schools that have been very shallow in an observational capacity (one lesson observation and a meeting with the SLT). These best practice papers then go on to become established methods and stop progress in other schools. (Teacher)

Make sure they take into account a school's context before providing judgments. Value ALL and engage with all levels of school leadership – Children, LSA, Teacher, Middle Leader, SLT, Headteacher. (Teacher)

I think Estyn need to be more aware of how schools run day to day, 'on the shop floor' so to speak. They need to work closer with the county's challenge advisors in order to understand the bigger picture rather than the snapshot they see over a couple of days. I think there needs to be a better consistency between inspecting teams and better construction of teams. The inspectors need to understand what modern day teaching is like. (Welsh Medium Primary Schools)

Generally, stakeholders feel that widening the scope of inspections would prevent the inspections from being overly-focused on quantitative data and enable more people to have their voices heard in the inspection process:

The views of parents and other stakeholders using a discussion format. The views of the pupils, again using a discussion format. (Teacher)

Estyn does need to include the views and opinions of ALL parents – not just the ‘chosen ones’. (Parent)

Get into schools. Listen to parents between inspections. (Parent/Other educational professional)

Work very closely with school leaders during inspection process, particularly peer inspectors. More emphasis on peer reviews – ensuring there is consistency in the process and that there is trust in the system/professionals. (Headteacher)

Ensure that the children are not actually forgotten in the process, and that children are not just numbers and data to track. (Teacher)

Some stakeholders also feel that less focus on data would allow Estyn to recognise the different backgrounds and contexts that pupils came from, and to take this into consideration when undertaking their inspections. This, some stakeholders feel, would allow Estyn to adopt an approach which is focused on the progress of a school:

Estyn has already started to look more at wellbeing and less on data. Estyn needs to understand that schools are all working with different children, the new curriculum is far more skill based and less measurable on outcomes – Estyn is working to recognise this. The case studies they have published in the past will now be more useful for schools struggling with implementation of the Foundation Phase etc. (Other educational professional)

By supporting and not merely judging education establishments and practitioners. Be realistic; move towards value added progress; don't judge merely upon data and standardised tests. Value opinions of teachers to shape the curriculum- enable them to be creative and innovative but provide clear and consistent outcomes against which they will be assessed or monitored. (Teacher)

By ensuring that the outputs and outcomes which are measured reflect the whole child and not just their academic achievement. Children spend so much of their waking life in school that it is essential that Estyn inspectors understand the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences on the ability of a child to access education. The emphasis on attendance, punctuality and exam results which we have seen in the past can sometimes mean that schools are not able to meet the needs of pupils who have had a hard start in life. (The National Adoption Service)

5. Final remarks

Stakeholders were invited to provide any other additional information they felt was relevant to this call for evidence. Of the 505 valid responses 168 stakeholders offered additional comments. Most of these final comments are reiterations of previous points made by themselves or others. However, the most common conclusions from this were:

- Inspectors behaviour and inconsistencies between inspection teams
- Estyn being overly critical and unsupportive
- Inspections being overly focused on quantitative data
- The importance of Estyn providing opportunities to share good practice
- The importance of Estyn remaining independent and impartial
- The stress which inspections place on teaching staff

Rather than repeat many of these points, this final Section highlights some of the topics or issues that have not been highlighted above. Three additional themes mentioned by stakeholders are:

- Additional Learning Needs
- The role of external organisations
- Opportunities to appeal

Additional Learning Needs

A number of stakeholders mentioned the importance of Estyn in ensuring students with additional learning needs are appropriately supported. Suggestions for how this could be improved included:

Estyn need to be fully involved as a voice for the children in school who have special educational needs they can do this by reviewing all and knowing how children are being supported and if the standard is of good quality. (Parent)

By making inclusion a key indicator of school performance, by looking how and why so many ALN children end up out of mainstream education. Helping change the mid set of schools that they cannot cater for such a 'small' group of children as they have to think of the majority. (Parent/Carers of children with additional needs)

I would like to see ESTYN gleaning information directly from parents using a random sampling system. I would like to see less emphasis on attendance and more on health/wellbeing of the child. I would like to see a workable inclusive system and not one that segregates pupils with SEN/ALN into units (stfs)... I would like to see more 'disabled' people represented within ESTYN as they carry out inspections (out of interest, how many ESTYN inspectors have SEN/autism etc...?). I would like to see

ESTYN working with local authorities and schools on developing flexi-education for those pupils who cannot attend f/t for medical reasons. I would like to see ESTYN calling for statutory guidance on delicate issues. such as bereavement and the management of continence issues within the school system. (Teacher)

Estyn also needs to look very closely at how children with SEN are being supported. They should look at each child's statement or IEP and interrogate to find out if the provision matches the statement or IEP. Estyn should speak to all parents in the school who have children with SEN. This information should be used to assess the school's competency and commitment to ensuring all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential. (Parent)

The need to ensure that the new curriculum is accessible to learners with ALN. This is of particular importance given the emphasis on cross-curricular study. For example, if a learner has difficulties in accessing lessons around language, it is important that all cross-curricular activities take account of access requirements. This will ensure that the learner does not miss out on other subjects because of difficulties faced in one particular area of learning... In addition, the need to ensure that the move towards "progression steps" does not exacerbate a culture of low expectations for learners with ALN. (Third Sector Organisation)

We know from various research that there are a group of children with atypical neuro-development due to either Autism or early childhood trauma who are not currently being served well by any part of the education system in wales and who as a result are being educated at home without scrutiny or support. This situation must be addressed in future. (Other Organisation)

External organisations

A few stakeholders mentioned that Estyn should be doing more to work with external organisations, and to help schools link to appropriate organisations if this is required. Examples of this included:

Estyn could also assist schools in establishing new relationships with important external organisations that also impact positively on pupils. Given what they should see and the information they will gather in the peer-led approach suggested above, particularly where national policy is delivered effectively with the assistance of other sectors e.g. Mental Health support for pupils via a health initiative or organisation, Estyn should be better placed to help establish such positive connections. It is important that the trust in the profession talked about by politicians and Welsh Government is also shown by the inspectorate in the way in which they operate in future, or the desired policy aspirations cannot be easily met by schools. (Trade Union)

In Wales (as in the rest of the UK) there is a big problem with the science and engineers 'talent pool', and this not helped by the diversity problem in these careers, particularly in terms of the number of girls and women studying and working in engineering and the physical sciences. I would like to see Estyn work with bodies with expertise in gender, such as Chwarae Teg and the Institute of Physics, to look at how Estyn inspections could include best practice in gender equality... (Other educational professional)

PACEY Cymru has been working with Estyn around their role in relation to the inspection of childminders. Legislation does make provision for Estyn to inspect childminders, but there are challenges in how they might usefully inspect provisions with very small numbers. We are aware of the work Estyn are in the process of developing around joint-inspections of non-maintained settings with CSSIW. PACEY Cymru feel that it is therefore timely to consider how childminders are funded to deliver education can be included within future joint-inspection arrangements. We are keen to work closely with Estyn and CSSIW as this develops to support opening up opportunities for childminders specifically in relation to the Childcare offer in Wales and the funded education element of this to support sustainability of setting and better outcomes for children in their care. (Childcare and Early Years Umbrella Organisation)

Opportunities to appeal

Finally, due to the public nature of Estyn's inspection reports, a small number of stakeholders suggest that there should be some kind of appeals process, allowing schools to contest what they may regard as unfair decisions:

Old framework not fit for purpose but things slowly improving. Estyn do provide independent oversight of education in Wales BUT no appeals process for schools against judgements. (Headteacher)

If judgements are to remain then there needs to be an appeals process. Too much power given to Estyn in such circumstances. Schools are accountable therefore there also needs to be an independent scrutiny committee here schools can appeal if Estyn judgements differ significantly to that of Consortia. (Headteacher)

An appeals mechanism would be a good idea. (Other education professional)

Other observations

Finally, we make two observations on issues or points that are either not raised or do not receive much attention from stakeholders.

The first is that only a very small number of stakeholders cite the importance of Estyn inspections with regard to either parents' understanding of their school(s) or their choice of schools for their child. Just one parent said they thought the Estyn inspection reports are useful for this purpose:

As a parent I would follow the advice on what school to send my child (Parent)

But conversely two parents said they found Estyn reports unhelpful – one suggesting that their focus would better be spent on the monitoring of governor bodies, local authorities and regional consortia. The other suggesting that the resource spent on inspections would be better used in schools and on practitioners' professional development:

As a parent I am concerned about whether or not my child is happy at school, whether he is well behaved and whether he, as an individual, is making good academic progress. I make judgements about these matters from observing my child, speaking to other parents and from information I receive from the school. The results of an inspection report would not influence my choice of school or make me view my child's school differently, particularly as the reports are only published every five or six years. The content of the report may well be outdated within a very short period of time - changes to staff, different cohorts of children can obviously influence the performance of the school and so the findings of an inspection report are only a snapshot in time. As a parent governor I acknowledge that the school needs to be accountable, but there is a rigorous process of data collection in place. Parents hold the school to account regarding their own children's progress, the governing body are a body who challenge the school and to the local consortia also challenge the school. It seems that Estyn could provide a much more effective role and provide better value for money by monitoring the effectiveness of the bodies that already hold schools accountable - governors, LA, Local Consortia. (Parent/Governor)

Not many parents that I know even read the Estyn reports. The recommendations in the reports I have read seem superficial and don't always reflect what is commonly known about a school's performance. The key factor in improving the quality of education experienced by young people is, in my view, the calibre of the class teacher and the quality of the resources within the school. I imagine that the inspection process is very expensive one to run. As a parent I would rather this money was spent on ensuring that the teachers within our schools have high quality training and that my child has access to good quality and up to date resources and experiences. (Parent/Governor)

The second observation to make is that very few stakeholders mention or discuss a radically different role or approach for Estyn. As we have seen, some stakeholders do reference the new curriculum, but only to suggest that inspections should be mindful of the challenges

facing schools in introducing the new curriculum. No stakeholders suggest that the new curriculum requires a different accountability system. This may be, in part, because many stakeholders acknowledge that accountability already exists alongside other various mechanisms or processes within the education system, whether they are within schools, between schools or between schools, local authorities and regional consortia. But it may also reflect how few stakeholders have considered what kind of accountability system Wales needs in the future as it embarks on a radical overhaul of the school curriculum and assessment. Similarly, none of the stakeholders make reference to the accountability systems of other countries, suggesting that there is very little knowledge and understanding of how different accountability systems (including that in Wales) function and perform.

Appendix – Call for Evidence Questions

- Q1** Are you responding to this as an individual or a group?
- Q2_1** Are you are a ... parent of a child at school?
- Q2_2** Are you are a ... a governor?
- Q2_3** Are you are a ... a headteacher?
- Q2_4** Are you are a ... a teacher?
- Q2_5** Are you are a ... other education professional?
- Q2_6** Are you are a ... interested member of the public?
- Q2_7** Are you are a ... a student or pupil?
- Q3** Please specify the nature of the group?
- Q4** Is the organisation a ... - Selected Choice
- Q4_10_TEXT** Is the organisation a ... - other? – Text
- Q5** Overall, how important do you think Estyn is for improving the quality of education in Wales?
- Q6** Why do you think Esytn is important for improving the quality of education in Wales?
- Q7** Why do think this Estyn is not at all important for improving the quality of education in Wales?
- Q8** Why do you think Estyn inhibits improvements in the quality of education in Wales?
- Q9_1** To what extent are you familiar with the following Estyn activities and outputs? - School inspections

- Q9_2** To what extent are you familiar with the following Estyn activities and outputs? - Local authority and consortia inspections
- Q9_3** To what extent are you familiar with the following Estyn activities and outputs? - Thematic reports
- Q9_4** To what extent are you familiar with the following Estyn activities and outputs? - HMCI's Annual Report
- Q9_5** To what extent are you familiar with the following Estyn activities and outputs? - Identification and dissemination of good practice
- Q9_6** To what extent are you familiar with the following Estyn activities and outputs? - Other outputs
- Q9_6_TEXT** To what extent are you familiar with the following Estyn activities and outputs? - Other outputs – Text
- Q10** How important are Estyn's school inspections for improving the quality of the education experienced by young people in Wales?
- Q11** If possible, please provide an example from your own experience of school inspections:
- Q12** How important are Estyn's local authority and consortia inspections for improving the quality of the education experienced by young people in Wales?
- Q13** If possible, please provide an example from your own experience of local authority and consortia inspections:
- Q14** How important are Estyn's thematic reports for improving the quality of the education experienced by young people in Wales?
- Q15** If possible, please provide an example from your own experience of thematic reports:
- Q16** How important is the HMCI's Annual Report for improving the quality of the education experienced by young people in Wales?

- Q17** If possible, please provide an example from your own experience of the HMCI's Annual Report:
- Q18** How important is Estyn's identification and dissemination of good practice for improving the quality of the education experienced by young people in Wales?
- Q19** If possible, please provide an example from your own experience of Estyn's identification and dissemination of good practice:
- Q20** How important have Estyn's other outputs been for improving the quality of the education experienced by young people in Wales?
- Q21** If possible, please provide an example from your own experience of Estyn's other outputs:
- Q22** How important do you think school inspections will be in the future for meeting the needs of the new education reform programme?
- Q23** How important do you think local authority and consortia inspections will be in the future for meeting the needs of the new education reform programme?
- Q24** How important do you think thematic reports will be in the future for meeting the needs of the new education reform programme?
- Q25** How important do you think the HMCI's Annual Report will be in the future for meeting the needs of the new education reform programme?
- Q26** How important do you think the identification and dissemination of good practice will be in the future for meeting the needs of the new education reform programme?
- Q27** How do YOU think Estyn can best contribute constructively to a reformed Welsh education system?
- Q28** Do you have any other comments you would wish to make about Estyn's role for the future?