

A Framework for Evaluating the Quality of Services and Organisations (Overarching Framework)

Background

Since its introduction by HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) in 2006, the *Framework for Evaluating the Quality of Services and Organisations* (known as the *Overarching Framework*) has provided a common structure for the integrated evaluation of services across the public sector. Adapted from the business excellence framework used by the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM), the *Overarching Framework* was updated in 2012 by Education Scotland. Since then, all new quality frameworks created by Education Scotland in collaboration with partners from across a range of education and training sectors take account of this framework.

Structure

The *Overarching Framework* is organised under six high-level themes which enable systematic evaluation of the quality of services across ten interrelated key areas. Strengths and areas for development in one key area may originate in or effect the quality of provision, practice or outcome in other areas.

The *Overarching Framework* is generic. It does not assume a particular organisational structure, type or size. It can be used in its entirety as it stands or be adapted so that Quality Indicators (QIs) and sub-elements reflect the purpose of individual organisations and meet the specific needs of their stakeholders or aspects can be selected and adapted. Adapted QIs can also be used selectively for external scrutiny, validation or endorsement. The framework or its adaptations can also be used in conjunction with a number of other quality models and awards.

The six high-level themes in the Overarching Framework

The six high-level themes focus first on the demonstrable outcomes and impact of the organisation or service, and then look at the factors which contribute to these.

What key outcomes have we achieved?

Key Area 1 Key performance outcomes

How well do we meet the needs of our stakeholders?

Key Area 2 Impact on service users

Key Area 3 Impact on staff

Key Area 4 Impact on the community

How good is our delivery of key processes?

Key Area 5 Delivery of key processes

How good is our operational management?

Key Area 6 Operational leadership

Key Area 7 Staffing

Key Area 8 Partnership and resources

How good is our strategic leadership?

Key Area 9 Leadership

What is our capacity for improvement?

Key Area 10 Capacity for improvement

The commitment, inputs and work of the organisation or service outlined in Key Areas 5-9 contribute to the outcomes identified in Key Areas 1-4.

Key Areas 1-9 contain indicators and measures, each with themes which focus on specific aspects of the area being evaluated.

Key Area 10 outlines the aspects to be taken into account when judging the degree of confidence that the service being evaluated has the capacity to continue to improve.

Using the Overarching Framework

The *Overarching Framework* provides a systematic structure for **self-evaluation or self-assessment**. By looking at outcomes and impact, evaluators can identify key issues for further exploration, observation and analysis using the tools provided across the *framework*. In other words, it helps them to diagnose the drivers of the strengths and causes of the weaknesses demonstrated. Finally, those using the framework are encouraged to arrive at an evaluation of the overall capacity for improvement of the service or organisation.

The *Overarching Framework and sector-specific frameworks* remain firmly based on the principle that the most effective way of improving standards of service is to use a combination of rigorous evidence-based self-evaluation alongside independent external inspection. QIs drawn or adapted from those in the *Overarching Framework* would, in most public sectors, form the core of the set of QIs used for external scrutiny. Beyond this, scrutiny activities might focus on specific key areas or themes within QIs. The selection would depend on decisions taken if scoping activities highlighted specific areas which required further exploration. Scoping might consider, for example, the impact of self-evaluation by the service being reviewed, themes suggested by the service itself, and evaluations and evidence from other recent inspections, reviews or audits, including analysis of stakeholders' views. In this way, quality frameworks developed for different services or organisations can be used as part of a proportionate, intelligence-led approach to evaluation, which builds on the outcomes of self-evaluation.

The framework has been designed to be used at more than one level within the structure of an organisation or service. For example, it can be used at the level of:

- strategic leadership across a broad range of services or establishments;
- operational management of a coherent group of services or establishments within a broader structure; and
- an individual establishment or the delivery of a specific service.

This means that evaluations made at an operational level, and the evidence on which they are based, can contribute to evaluations at a strategic level.

The framework can also be used thematically by extracting key QIs or elements from QIs to enable a focus on a specific area of work. It might be, for example, that an organisation wants to take a close look at ensuring equity through its arrangements for compliance with legislation and how this translates to its services leading to improved outcomes for users of its services. Another organisation might want to focus on impact on staff and the effectiveness of staff development arrangements. Evaluation can be carried out using a six-point scale, although it is not always necessary to do this.

The six-point scale

When the six-point scale is used to grade QIs, it is mainly used for the purpose of national and/or local benchmarking across a number of establishments. In education, an evaluation can be arrived at in a range of contexts. Awarding grades using a quality scale will always be more of a professional skill than a technical process. To assist this, the following general guidelines are applied.

Excellent	An evaluation of excellent applies to services which are a model of their kind. An evaluation of excellent represents an outstanding standard of provision which exemplifies very best practice. It is characterised by professional understanding which is being shared to support system-wide improvement. It implies that very high levels of performance are sustainable and will be maintained.
Very good	An evaluation of very good means that there are major strengths. There are very few areas for improvement and any that do exist do not significantly diminish the service user's experience. An evaluation of very good represents a high standard of provision and is a standard that should be achievable by all. There is an expectation that the organisation will make continued use of self-evaluation to plan further improvements and will work towards improving provision and performance to excellent.
Good	An evaluation of good means that there are important strengths, yet there remains some aspects which require improvement. The strengths have a significantly positive impact on almost all service users. However, the quality of service users' experiences is diminished in some way by the aspects in which improvement is required. It implies that the organisation should seek to improve further the areas of important strength, and also take action to address the areas for improvement.
Satisfactory	An evaluation of satisfactory means that the strengths within this aspect of the service's work just outweigh the weaknesses. It indicates that service users have access to a basic level of provision. It represents a standard where the strengths have a positive impact on service users' experiences. However, while the weaknesses are not important enough to have a substantially adverse impact, they do constrain the overall quality of service users' experiences. It implies the organisation needs to take action to address areas of weakness by building on its strengths.
Weak	An evaluation of weak means that there are important weaknesses within this aspect of the organisation's work. While there may be some strengths, the important weaknesses, either individually or collectively, are sufficient to diminish service users' experiences in substantial ways. It implies the need for prompt, structured and planned action on the part of the organisation.
Unsatisfactory	An evaluation of unsatisfactory means there are major weaknesses within this aspect of the organisation's work which require immediate remedial action. Service users' experiences are at risk in significant respects. In almost all cases, this will require support from senior managers, or, in some cases, at corporate level, in planning and carrying out the necessary actions to effect improvement. This may involve working alongside other staff or agencies in or beyond the organisation.

About the six high-level themes

Evaluations of the quality of impact in these key areas will take into account direct observation together with quantitative and qualitative data, including evidence of stakeholders' views. Please refer to Appendix 1.

What key outcomes have we achieved?

Key Area 1 focuses on the overall performance of an organisation or service in relation to its key purposes. This area provides a structure for organisations and services to use when evaluating their success in delivering demonstrable, high-quality and improving outcomes for the users of its services. In schools or early learning and child care centres, for example, this would include children's and young people's attainment and achievement levels. In publicly funded colleges, it could include trends in learner retention or successful post-college destinations.

It also helps an organisation to evaluate whether its own strategic priorities, aims and targets have been achieved, including those locally, regionally or nationally determined within its own context. Finally, it helps organisations or services to evaluate whether they are fulfilling its statutory duties, meeting legislative requirements and following appropriate codes of practice. Evidence of demonstrable outcomes would include trends over time and other aggregated data which provides indications of the success of a service or organisation in maintaining or improving the quality of the service it provides both overall and in comparison with similar services/organisations.

How well do we meet the needs of our stakeholders?

Key Areas 2, 3 and 4 focus on the impact on key groups of stakeholders of the organisation's delivery of its key processes. Stakeholders include those who are in direct receipt of the service, for example, learners within education establishments, together with those who support them and who also have a significant interest in the delivery of high-quality services, such as, parents and families. Stakeholders also include the staff within the organisation. Their motivation, satisfaction and contribution to the development of the organisation is of considerable importance if the service is to operate effectively. Evaluations would draw upon the views of staff together with other information, such as rates of staff absence or turnover. Finally, stakeholders might include members of the community. These stakeholders include those from the immediate local community on whose lives and experiences the service has a demonstrable impact or who make a contribution to the services provided such as community learning and development partners working alongside schools to deliver activities for young people and employers working closely with education partners in the delivery of training. They also include the wider regional, national and international community. For example, staff may be actively involved in working groups, influencing national practice or collaborating with others to share learning and innovative practice.

How good is our delivery of key processes?

Key Area 5 focuses on the work of the organisation or service in relation to its key functions, in particular the delivery and development of the services it provides, by itself or in partnership with others.

In education and training, delivery of services relates mainly to the quality of provision in education and training establishments. An integral aspect of service delivery is consultation with services users and other stakeholders about their individual needs and how these are being met.

As with the other Key Areas, issues arising from Key Area 5 may originate or effect issues in the other Key Areas. For example, they may signal issues with staffing (Key Area 7) or strategic leadership (Key Area 9). Issues in Key Area 5 will also have a direct impact on the performance outcomes in Key Area 1. In short, evidence of the effectiveness of the organisation's key processes will be seen in the impact they have on stakeholders and in its overall performance.

How good is our operational management?

Key Areas 6, 7 and 8 focus on the operational management activities necessary to ensure effective service delivery and to deliver best value. Evaluative activities in this area include the organisation's arrangements for developing and updating policies, for involving its stakeholders, for operational planning, for managing and developing staff, for managing finance, information and resources and for developing productive partnerships. Strengths and areas for development in these areas will normally effect the quality of the key processes delivered (Key Area 5), their impact on stakeholders (Key Areas 2, 3 and 4) and the performance of the organisation as a whole (Key Area 1).

How good is our strategic leadership?

Key Area 9 focuses on the strategic leadership and direction of the organisation or service in relation to its key functions. This area looks at an organisation's vision and aims and the expression and delivery of its aspirations by means of strategic planning with its partners. This area considers the quality of leadership and direction at strategic level, but also at other levels, for example within teams and organisational units or for specific projects.

Strengths and areas for development in leadership will reflect the extent to which leaders make a difference to the quality of outcomes achieved by the organisation as a whole and by the impact on service users and other stakeholders. Finally, this area looks at the how an organisation secures improvement in its services, through consultation with partners and through development and innovation. This includes how organisations apply the findings of self-evaluation to bring about improvement.

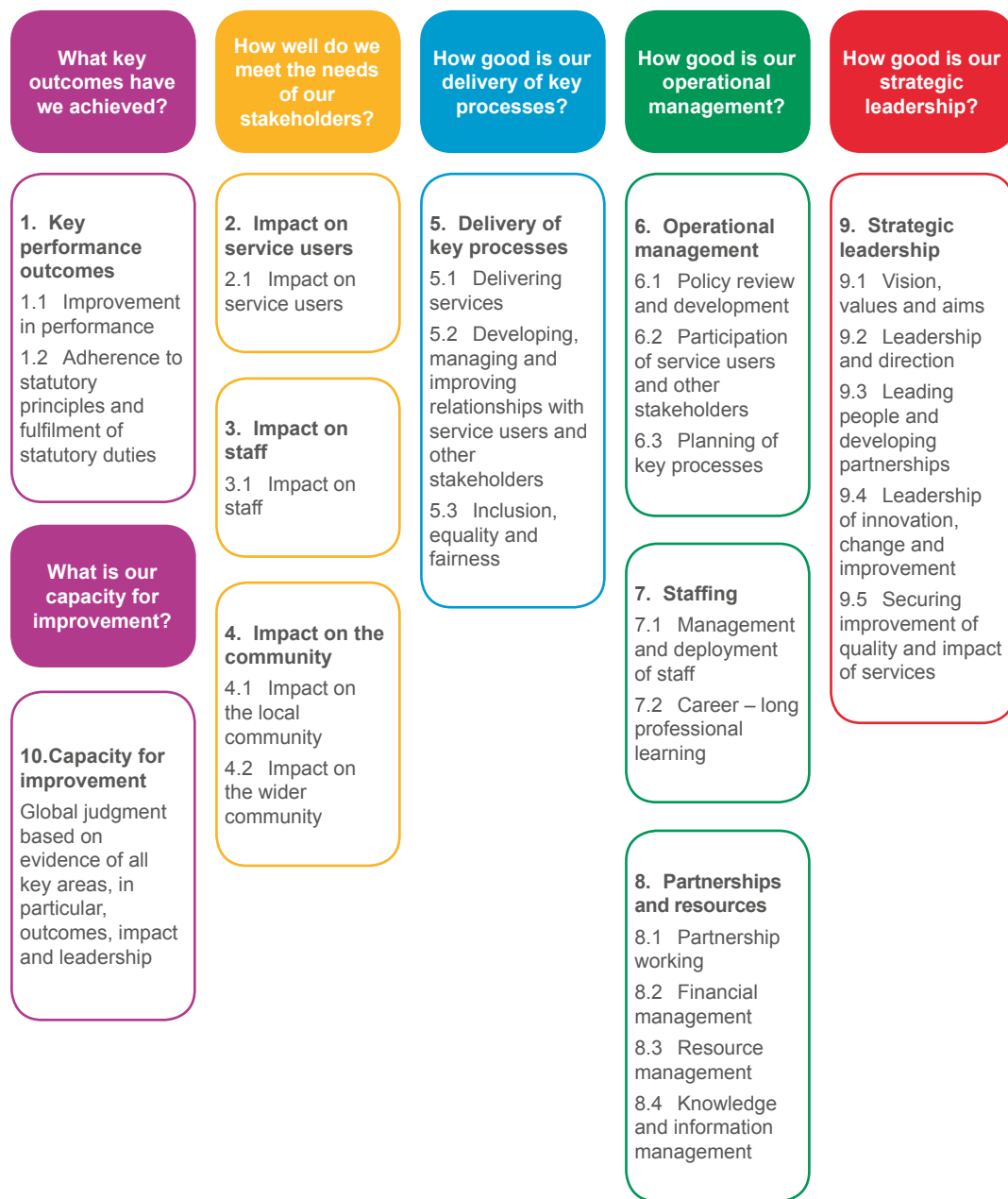
What is our capacity for improvement?

Judgment of an organisation's capacity for improvement takes into account all the evaluations arrived at in Key Areas 1-9. The organisation's focus on improvement and its track record in bringing about improvement are particularly important, as is the accuracy of its self-evaluation, which is used as the basis for planned improvements. The judgment about capacity to improve also takes into account any significant aspects of the organisation's internal or external context, for example, impending retirements of senior staff, plans to restructure or significant changes in funding. The judgment is based on an evaluation of the past, but more importantly, uses this to look to the future.

Judgments of a service or organisation's capacity for improvement could be expressed in terms of a degree of confidence that it has the capacity to continue to improve. This allows the organisation to affirm its view that it is heading in the right direction but also acknowledge those areas which need to improve or be monitored more rigorously.

Appendix 1

The Framework for Evaluating the Quality of Services and Organisations, (Overarching Framework)



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