



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

Probation service inspections

Guidance manual

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Contents

1. Statement of purpose and values	4
1.1. Statement of purpose	4
1.2. Values	4
1.3. Our mandate	4
1.4. Confidentiality	5
1.5 Expectations of inspection staff	5
1.6 Expectations of inspected bodies	5
2. Overview of probation inspection	6
2.1. Introduction.....	6
2.2. Standards for PDU inspections.....	6
2.3. Inspection principles.....	8
2.4. Summary of inspection phases	9
3. Phase I: Pre-fieldwork and planning	12
3.1. Inspection teams	12
3.2. Pre-fieldwork activity	12
3.3. Inspection announcements	15
3.4. Project plans.....	15
3.5. Planning meetings.....	15
3.6. Evidence in advance.....	18
3.7. Briefing by the regional senior leadership team.....	21
3.8. Questionnaires for Probation Service staff	22
3.9. Presentation by head of PDU.....	22
3.10. Preparing probation staff for inspection	23
4. Case cohort.....	24
4.1. Selecting the cohort	24
4.2. Case cohort identification.....	25
5. Schedules	26
5.1. Weekly schedules.....	26
5.2. Domain one meetings.....	27
5.3. Team meetings	29
6. Phase II: Fieldwork	30
6.1. Methodology.....	30
6.2. Guidance material	32
6.3. Inspection sites.....	33
6.4. IT access.....	33

6.5. Case records.....	34
6.6. Probation practitioner interviews	34
6.7. Seeking the views of people on probation	35
6.8. Alert processes	36
6.9. Meeting format	37
6.10. Closing the inspection fieldwork.....	37
6.11. Quality assurance	38
7. Phase III: Post-fieldwork	40
7.1. Ratings explained.....	40
7.2. Ratings panel meetings.....	43
7.3. Report writing.....	44
7.4. Feedback after fieldwork.....	44
7.5. HM Inspectorate of Probation ratings challenge process and complaints procedure..	45
7.6. Report publication	45
7.7. Action plans.....	45

1. Statement of purpose and values

1.1. Statement of purpose

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation is the independent inspector of probation and youth offending services in England and Wales. We set the standards that shine a light on the quality and impact of these services. Our inspections, reviews, research and effective practice products provide authoritative and evidence-based judgements and guidance. We use our voice to drive system change, with a focus on inclusion and diversity. Our scrutiny leads to improved outcomes for individuals and communities.

1.2. Values

Influential

We care about making a positive impact on the organisations we inspect and the individuals they work with.

Independent

We ensure that the judgements we make are supported by evidence and are fair and impartial.

Professional

We work in a respectful, transparent, professional way, listening to and sharing learning internally and externally.

Inclusive

We will work as 'one HM Inspectorate of Probation', valuing and respecting each other's viewpoint and skills, so that everyone feels a part of what we do.

Diverse

We are passionate about diversity and the value that comes through giving everyone a voice in our inspections and the chance to succeed in our organisation.

1.3. Our mandate

HM Chief Inspector of Probation's responsibilities are set out in the *Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000* (Section 7), as amended by the *Offender Management Act 2007*, Section 12(3)(a). This requires the Chief Inspector to inspect (Section 1) and report to the Secretary of State (Section 3) on the arrangements for the provision of probation services.

Under the *Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000* (Section 7(6)), the Chief Inspector is also required to inspect and report on youth offending teams, established under the *Crime and Disorder Act 1998* (Section 39), and bodies acting on their behalf.

We are the independent source of fair comment for ministers and the public on the effectiveness of the work of probation and youth justice providers.

We test the effectiveness of the provision and provide assurance. Critically, we make recommendations to identify and disseminate effective practice, challenge poor performance and encourage improvement. Our reports provide evidence-based intelligence for commissioners and providers. They are designed to play a key part in facilitating and encouraging improvement in effective service delivery.

1.4. Confidentiality

In group meetings and case interviews with practitioners, we provide an assurance that information shared will only be used in an aggregated form and will not identify individual staff members, unless immediate action is needed to protect an individual.

We will anonymise information before including it in any publications, but information is not treated as confidential. This extends to all information provided to us in writing or verbally by staff working for the inspected organisation or under contract to that organisation. We use all available evidence to help us make an inspection judgement. Similarly, information provided to us by stakeholders invited to contribute to the inspection is not treated as confidential.

1.5 Expectations of inspection staff

We expect all inspection staff to uphold the highest professional standards. In meeting this expectation, inspection staff will:

- be courteous and professional, treating staff from inspected bodies with respect
- uphold the inspectorate's values in all that they do
- approach inspections with integrity and evaluate evidence objectively.
- work with inspected bodies to minimise disruption, stress and bureaucracy as far as is reasonably practicable
- act on concerns about the safety of staff or people on probation promptly
- declare any conflicts of interest, whether actual or perceived, prior to undertaking work with an inspected body

1.6 Expectations of inspected bodies

We expect inspected bodies to be open and transparent, to maintain a positive working relationship with inspectors and inspection support staff, and to uphold the highest professional standards. In meeting this expectation, providers should:

- be courteous and professional, treating our staff with respect
- approach the inspection with integrity and be open, transparent and honest. This includes providing evidence – or access to evidence – that will enable the inspector to report honestly, fairly and reliably about their provision. It means not withholding or concealing evidence, or providing false, misleading, inaccurate, or incomplete information
- work with inspectors to take all reasonable steps to minimise disruption, stress and bureaucracy
- ensure the safety of inspectors while on their premises
- maintain constructive professional dialogue with the lead inspector and the inspection team
- bring any concerns about the inspection to the attention of the lead inspector promptly.

2. Overview of probation inspection

2.1. Introduction

The revised inspection programme for the Probation Service starts at the end of 2023.

Key changes include:

- introducing new regional standards
- inspecting and rating each region over a three- to four-year timeframe
- introducing updated probation delivery unit (PDU) standards
- publishing regional inspection reports in addition to individual PDU reports
- inspecting all PDUs in the region, before we complete a regional inspection
- extending PDU fieldwork to two weeks, with cases being inspected in the first week and meetings being held in the second
- extending regional fieldwork to two weeks
- rating desistance and public protection at regional level, based on PDU case inspection data
- rating court work and resettlement work at regional level, based on data gathered from inspected PDU cases
- inspecting and rating victim work and unpaid work, as part of the regional inspection.

We will also comment on the progress in implementing relevant recommendations from previous Probation Service inspections.

2.2. Standards for PDU inspections

Our standards are based on a set of principles that we think good probation services should meet to deliver high-quality probation practice. They are based on established models and frameworks, and are grounded in evidence, learning and experience. Our research shows a clear correlation between supervision that meets our quality standards and significantly better outcomes for people on probation, including lower reoffending rates¹.

The PDU inspection standards cover two domains. Domain one (organisational arrangements and activity) covers how well the PDU is led and managed, covering leadership, staffing, and services. Domain two (service delivery) covers the quality of work in individual cases; this includes how well individuals subject to a community sentence or post-release supervision are supervised.

Each standard is underpinned by key questions and prompts (Figure 1), which aim to be coherent, sufficiently comprehensive and balanced.

The relationship between domains

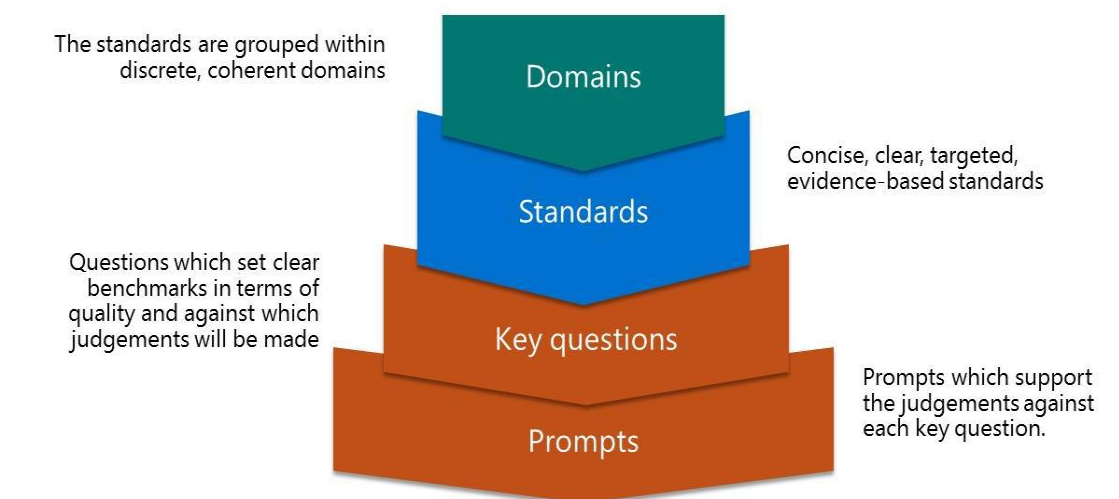
The domains are structured separately, to allow us to make judgements about specific areas of work. They do not operate in isolation; there is a relationship between them to assess

¹ HM Inspectorate of Probation (2023). Examining the links between probation supervision and positive outcomes – completion and proven reoffending. Research & Analysis Bulletin 2023/04. <https://hmiprobation.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/document/the-links-between-the-quality-of-supervision-and-positive-outcomes-for-people-on-probation/>

how well the Probation Service is applying its leadership and management to deliver effective probation services and outcomes.

For this inspection cycle, we have revised the questions and prompts in domain one to link more explicitly to the delivery that we inspect in domain two, and have also revised our expectations about diversity. These are reflected in our published rules and guidance.

Figure 1: The standards structure



This manual sets out the arrangements for the inspection programme, covering all aspects of the inspection process and methodology, as well as the roles, responsibilities and conduct of HM Inspectorate of Probation staff.

Regional inspection

The regional inspection includes regional domain one standards (organisational arrangements and activity) for leadership and staffing only. Additional regional domain two standards cover desistance, public protection, resettlement, unpaid work, court work and statutory victim work. The regional fieldwork, which takes place after the PDU inspections have been completed, covers the regional domain one standards, and includes an inspection of unpaid work and victim cases. It also explores the reasons for the ratings derived from aggregate data gathered from PDU inspections across the region, in respect of desistance, public protection, court work and resettlement.

Probation Reset

On July 1st, 2024, the Probation Service introduced operational changes under its 'Probation Reset' arrangements. These measures represent significant changes to service delivery with contact to individuals from the probation service being suspended where criteria are met. As an independent inspectorate we focus on the things that make a difference to the quality of work with individuals and we strive to inspect in a way that is fair and proportionate. Our underlying expectations about the quality of work have not changed and we continue to inspect against the evidence base and not against the implementation of operational arrangements.

This means that we remain focused on the things that make a difference to the quality of probation work. We have not changed our standards or the key questions that sit beneath them and in all cases we continue to focus on engagement, desistance and keeping people safe. For most cases where contact has been suspended, we have however adjusted some

of the prompts that sit under the key questions. We have either reduced the number of prompts that we ask, replaced existing prompts with new ones or left the prompts unchanged. Where we have left the prompts unchanged, we have revised our guidance to ensure that it is relevant to cases where contact has been suspended.

This is captured by two distinct sets of domain two standards for our PDU inspections. Both sets of standards include four standards each on assessment, planning, intervention and reviewing. Most cases where contact has not been suspended are inspected against our core standards (marked through the standards framework with the prefix 'PC' (PDU core) and most cases where contact has been suspended are inspected against our adjusted standards marked by the prefix 'PA' (PDU adjusted).

Cases that will be inspected under our PDU adjusted standards are where:

- there was PSS only from the date of release, or
- there was a formal licence period of eight weeks or less from the date of release

Given the reduced contact that cases inspected under the adjusted standards will have, we are particularly interested in the exit planning and referrals that we see in these cases. Our expectations are set out in the Case Assessment Rules and Guidance. We also recognise that the operational guidance has set criteria for the reinstatement of contact. We are mindful of this in our expectations but where reactive management to a change in circumstances identifies a need for further action, we expect that to be taken. This is because we are inspecting the quality of practice rather than compliance with the operational policy. Given the hypothesis that work delivered in the early stages of intervention is likely to be more impactful we also expect to see appropriate delivery of work in the first third of the supervision period.

We have not raised or lowered our expectations of the quality of probation work. So, our ratings continue to follow the established four-point scale and we include within those ratings, cases where contact has been suspended. We continue to publish the scores that underpin our ratings and the detailed narrative describing our findings continue to be presented in our reports.

Further detail about the standards and additional supporting documents can be found on the HM Inspectorate of Probation website².

2.3. Inspection principles

How we inspect

We assess quality in the round, rather than either the specifics of a process or the use of any particular tool, document or process. The wording of our key questions and prompts reflects this.

More information can be found at:

<https://hmiprobation.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/about-us/our-inspections/>

What we judge

² <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk>

We decide on a rating based on what and how an organisation is delivering and the outcomes achieved. We also acknowledge effort that delivers current performance in the report narrative. We are interested in the impact that the inspected body is having now, and we do not make judgements about how policy and practices may influence future impact.

Our standards include a decision rule for awarding an 'Outstanding' rating for leadership at regional and PDU levels. A limiting judgement also applies to leadership, whereby inspectors are required to review diversity arrangements if an 'Outstanding' rating for leadership is being considered. In domain one, a small number of prompts act as hurdles; these are detailed in the domain one rules and guidance, available on our website³. There is one hurdle in domain two: 'where we find insufficient assessment of child safeguarding issues, our inspectors must make an 'insufficient' judgement for assessment of harm'.

How we score domains

In domain two (PDU inspections), each key question about case assessment and management is integral to effective service delivery for that case, linked to the core purposes of probation. Sufficient attention therefore needs to be given to all of them. The rating that can be achieved for each standard is set at the lowest percentage score achieved at key question level within the standard, when data from all the cases in the PDU is aggregated. Under each key question is a set of 'prompts', which influence judgements in individual cases about whether the key questions have been met. There are also additional information-only questions that do not influence judgements on the key questions.

At a regional level, aggregate data from the PDU inspections provides the scores for the regional desistance and public protection standards. Data gathered during PDU inspections related to court work and resettlement is the basis for rating those standards. A separate cohort of unpaid work requirements from across the region is inspected to provide the data for the regional rating for unpaid work. Finally, statutory victim work is inspected in all eligible cases from the PDU inspections. The same principle applies as for PDU inspections: the rating for each standard is set at the lowest aggregate percentage score (of cases reaching a satisfactory quality standard) achieved at key question level.

Domain one is different, at regional and PDU level, in that there is a greater range of key questions. So, a deficiency against one key question does not necessarily override strengths in the others and a qualitative judgement is made on the appropriate rating.

2.4. Summary of inspection phases

The inspection consists of three phases:

- Phase I: Pre-fieldwork planning and preparation
- Phase II: Fieldwork
- Phase III: Post-fieldwork.

Phase I: Pre-fieldwork planning and preparation

Regional inspection

The pre-fieldwork phase begins at least six weeks before the first PDU fieldwork, with the announcement of the regional inspection and notification of the first PDUs to be inspected in the region. At this point, we issue documentation to assist with planning and preparation, and announce the inspection on social media. A planning meeting (held on Microsoft Teams)

³ <https://hmiprobation.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/about-us/our-inspections/inspection-documentation/>

and a briefing by the regional probation director (RPD) take place before the first PDU fieldwork starts. The regional lead inspector reviews written evidence submitted in advance by the region, and prepares a briefing for the PDU lead inspectors. This summarises findings about the evidence gathered at regional level, to inform the PDU inspections of the regional context.

PDU inspections

The pre-fieldwork phase begins six weeks before the fieldwork in the first PDU, when the regional lead inspector announces the dates of the earliest PDU fieldwork. At this point, we issue documentation to assist with planning and preparation in the first PDUs to be inspected, and announce the inspection on social media. The lead inspector for each PDU inspection holds a planning meeting three weeks before the PDU fieldwork. In larger regions, we announce the locations and dates of PDU fieldwork in up to three batches.

Phase II: Fieldwork

PDU inspections

During the first PDU fieldwork week, the inspection team inspects all the domain two cases. Normally, fieldwork in different PDUs within a region takes place in different weeks. Meetings with individuals and groups of staff in the PDU are scheduled for the second fieldwork week.

Regional inspection

After the fieldwork in the final PDU in the region, an inspection team completes an inspection of unpaid work and victim cases drawn from across the PDUs. That work is normally completed over a single week, although this may be extended in larger regions. There is then a gap of at least one week for the regional lead inspector to review the data from the domain two case inspections. The regional lead inspector and deputy hold meetings with individuals and groups of staff, to assess the region against the regional domain one standards, and better understand the reasons underpinning the scores for regional standards derived from the aggregated PDU case data. The head of inspection programme may also attend those meetings.

Phase III: Post-fieldwork

PDU inspections

On completion of the fieldwork, the lead inspector prepares ratings proposals and summarises evidence and key findings for the HM Inspectorate of Probation internal ratings panel meeting. Ratings proposals are quality-assured with the head of programme before the ratings panel, to ensure that they reflect the evidence from the inspection and are consistent across inspections.

The PDU ratings panel normally takes place within two weeks of the PDU fieldwork. The panel is normally chaired by the chief operating officer and includes the lead inspector and the head of programme. The Chief Inspector may also attend. The deputy lead inspector and assistant inspectors attend if available. The panel ensures that ratings reflect fully the balance of the evidence, and that they are sufficiently consistent across inspections. A summary of the ratings panel decision is sent to the inspected body a few days after the panel has been held.

Following the ratings panel, the lead inspector prepares an inspection report, which is submitted to the inspected organisation approximately four weeks after the inspection

fieldwork, for checking factual accuracy before publication. We aim to publish the report eight weeks after the end of the PDU fieldwork, once factual accuracy checking is complete.

Regional inspection

On completion of the regional fieldwork, the lead inspector for the region prepares ratings proposals and summarises evidence and key findings for the ratings panel meeting. Ratings proposals are quality-assured with the head of programme before the ratings panel, to ensure they reflect the evidence from the inspection and are consistent with the judgements in other inspections.

The regional ratings panel normally takes place within two weeks of the regional fieldwork. The panel is normally chaired by the chief operating officer and includes the lead inspector and the head of the inspection programme. The Chief Inspector may also attend. The deputy lead inspector attends if available. The panel ensures that ratings fully reflect the balance of the evidence, and that they are sufficiently consistent across inspections. A summary of the ratings panel decision is normally sent to the inspected body during the week after the panel has been held.

Following the ratings panel, the lead inspector prepares an inspection report, which is submitted to the inspected organisation approximately five weeks after the inspection fieldwork, for checking factual accuracy before publication. We aim to publish the report nine weeks after the end of the regional fieldwork, once factual accuracy checking is complete.

Welsh language scheme

In accordance with the *Welsh Language Act 1993*, HM Inspectorate of Probation has adopted the principle that it will treat the Welsh and English languages equally when carrying out inspections in Wales. HM Inspectorate of Probation has a Welsh Language Scheme that sets out how we deliver services in Welsh.

More information about the Welsh Language Scheme can be found on our website⁴:

⁴ <https://hmiprobation.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/contact/diversity-and-inclusion/welsh-language-scheme/>

3. Phase I: Pre-fieldwork and planning

3.1. Inspection teams

The inspection team for the regional inspection consists of:

- regional inspection lead inspector
- regional inspection deputy lead inspector
- information and data team
- administrator operations (inspection)
- head of programme
- Serious Further Offences (SFO) quality assurance inspector.

The inspection team for each PDU inspection consists of:

- PDU lead inspector
- PDU deputy lead inspector
- information and data team
- administrator operations (inspection)
- head of inspection programme.

3.2. Pre-fieldwork activity

Before the inspection is announced, the information and data team collates key documents and background information to support the regional lead in planning the inspection. The administrator operations starts to prepare the inspection.

After the inspection announcement, the probation region submits the evidence in advance using Microsoft Teams, and confirms meeting dates and interviews with key staff members and stakeholders.

Background information – regional inspection

The information and data team provides the lead inspector with an information pack of published regional information, including:

- performance information for each PDU and region
- numbers of service users supervised in the community at period end
- proven reoffending statistics
- segmentation data
- recorded crime rates
- population estimate
- local labour market
- workload measurement tool
- Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) data by region.

The regional inspection lead inspector analyses this information before the RPD briefing and fieldwork planning meeting.

Probation service information at a national level

Periodically, HM Inspectorate of Probation reviews national Probation Service activity. This review is designed to support the regional and PDU inspections. We do not make judgements about sufficiency as part of the review, nor do we rate the Probation Service at that level. Instead, the review asks questions about how the arrangements and activities at national level work. The purpose of the review is to set the context for and enable a consistent approach to regional reviews and PDU inspections through analysis of the national Probation Service functions.

The functions of the review are to:

- help explain the reasons for our findings at regional and PDU level
- help target recommendations at the right level
- collect data and information to inform our annual report.

Probation Service policies and guidance that apply at a national level are provided on a routine basis to HM Inspectorate of Probation by the Effective Practice and Service Improvement Group (EPSIG). We review national policies, to provide an overview and briefing to support all regional reviews and PDU inspections. The information provided by EPSIG includes the following:

Leadership:

- His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) business plan
- national leadership strategy/HMPPS leadership code
- HMPPS leadership model
- national reducing reoffending strategy
- Ministry of Justice outcome delivery plan
- community safety partnership framework
- court strategy
- people on probation engagement strategy
- senior leadership team terms of reference
- HMPPS race action plan
- HMPPS diversity, inclusion and belonging strategy
- business continuity planning
- Probation Service corporate risk register
- target operating model
- national standards
- sentence management policy framework
- national performance and quality strategy
- national research framework
- case recording policies.

Staffing:

- probation workforce programme strategy

- recruitment and retention strategy
- unified tiering model
- people survey
- HMPPS Our People Plan
- equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging strategy and action plan
- unified tiering model
- probation learning strategy
- reward and recognition policy
- competency-based framework
- learning strategy and pre-qualifying routes
- countersigning and line management framework
- core quality management framework
- touchpoint/blended supervision framework
- performance management framework
- wellness and wellbeing strategy
- guidance on reasonable adjustments.

Services:

- female service user strategy
- resettlement strategy
- integrated offender management strategy
- national information-sharing agreements with service providers.

Additional background information

The regional lead inspector also reviews the following information:

- relevant operational assurance reports, which are shared by the Performance Assurance and Risk Group (PAR) following the announcement of the inspection
- relevant information from the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, covering the previous 12 months
- information from the regional contract management teams, including a list of commissioned rehabilitation service providers, contract areas, values and performance data.

We do not need regions or PDUs to provide this information in their evidence in advance submission.

Information about SFO investigations

HM Inspectorate of Probation routinely quality-assures a sample of SFO reviews, including the quality assurance feedback and agreed action plans. The SFO quality assurance inspector will identify the key learning themes and actions required, relevant to the region. They meet the performance and quality leads in the region to discuss how the learning has been implemented. They also produce a summary of findings for the regional inspector, to inform regional and PDU inspections.

3.3. Inspection announcements

Regional inspection

Each regional inspection is announced six weeks before the first PDU fieldwork begins. The announcement is made by the regional lead inspector to the RPD or the most senior manager available. It is also announced on social media.

This includes:

- announcement of the regional inspection
- a brief overview of the inspection
- confirmation of the locations and fieldwork dates of the first batch of PDUs to be inspected (in regions with seven to 12 PDUs, we will announce the locations and dates of PDU fieldwork in two batches; for the largest regions, we will announce the PDU inspections in three batches)
- the provisional timing of regional inspection fieldwork
- allowing the RPD to identify the link senior manager for the inspection
- confirmation of the date and time of the initial regional planning meeting
- providing the region with instructions on how to access the relevant channel in Microsoft Teams

3.4. Project plans

There are separate project plans for the regional and PDU inspections. The project plans provide the Probation Service with details of the key timescales and activities required, from pre- to post-fieldwork.

The project plan for the regional inspection is sent to the region at the beginning of the week following the regional announcement.

Separate project plans are produced for each PDU inspection and are provided immediately after the PDU fieldwork locations and dates are announced.

The single point of contact (SPOC) for the region should check the key dates and raise any issues with the HM Inspectorate of Probation administrator operations in the first instance. The SPOC should ensure that all relevant staff involved in the inspection planning processes are familiar with the project plan.

Blended inspection approach

Most of our inspection work is completed on-site, except the regional inspection of unpaid work and statutory victim work, which will normally be completed remotely. Some PDU case inspections may also be completed remotely; we will discuss this with the region at the regional planning stage.

3.5. Planning meetings

Initial regional planning meeting

The initial regional planning meeting takes place remotely, normally on the Tuesday of the week following the announcement. This may be a one-to-one conversation between the lead inspector and the SPOC, or it may involve others.

Optional attendees include:

- the RPD (to hear an overview of the briefing purpose and requirements)

- the HM Inspectorate of Probation head of programme and the inspection administrator
- the HM Inspectorate of Probation PDU lead inspectors, if available
- the heads of PDU for the first batch of PDUs to be inspected
- others identified by the Probation Service region who need to be involved in the planning and preparation, if required, for support or absence cover for the SPOC.

The regional lead inspector chairs the meeting and covers the following:

- an outline of the inspection methodology in more detail, explaining the regional and PDU domains and methodology
- cohort process for PDU inspections and regional inspection of unpaid work
- evidence in advance and data required, for the regional and PDU inspections, including submission dates
- HM Inspectorate of Probation Microsoft Teams channel and how to obtain access. Section 3.6 sets out the information required from the region and PDU
- local processes for SFO investigations
- arrangements for the regional planning meeting and the RPD briefing
- arrangements for consulting people on probation
- regional court services arrangements
- regional unpaid work arrangements
- questionnaires for staff in the region, including arrangements for publishing survey data
- post-inspection staff feedback surveys
- information for staff and people on probation
- approach to inspection fieldwork (on-site, remote or blended)
- confirmation of key dates for regional fieldwork.

The planning meeting is documented, and a copy issued to the SPOC, by the HM Inspectorate of Probation administrator and any other relevant people.

Regional fieldwork planning

The regional lead inspector will keep in touch with the SPOC while the PDU fieldwork is ongoing. The regional fieldwork planning meeting normally takes place on the Monday, three weeks before the regional fieldwork. It may simply be a one-to-one conversation between the lead inspector and the SPOC, or it may involve others.

Optional attendees include:

- the HM Inspectorate of Probation administrator operations
- the HM Inspectorate of Probation head of programme
- others identified by the Probation Service region who need to be involved in the planning and preparation, if required, for support or absence cover for the SPOC.

The regional inspector chairs the meeting and covers the following:

- confirmation of the regional inspection team

- confirmation of the regional inspection meetings and other inspection activity, and the agreed schedule (a list of standard meetings is provided for all inspections; the planning meeting provides the opportunity to request additional meetings during the fieldwork)
- confirmation of the arrangements for inspecting unpaid work and victim work
- confirmation of a final telephone planning meeting, after the PDU fieldwork has been completed, to agree the final list of meetings required
- discussion of any issues arising from the evidence in advance
- a request for any further information/evidence identified following analysis of evidence in advance and the RPD briefing
- access to information technology (IT), rooms and buildings where on-site activity is taking place.

The planning meeting is documented, and a copy issued to the SPOC, the HM Inspectorate of Probation administrator and any other relevant people.

PDU fieldwork planning meeting

The PDU fieldwork planning meeting normally takes place on the Wednesday, three weeks before the PDU fieldwork.

Required attendees:

- PDU lead inspector
- head of PDU (and deputy, where applicable)
- SPOC.

Optional attendees include:

- the HM Inspectorate of Probation administrator
- the head of programme
- the deputy lead inspector
- others identified by the PDU who need to be involved in the planning and preparation, if required, for support or absence cover for the SPOC.

The PDU lead inspector chairs the meeting and covers the following:

- confirmation of the inspection team
- offices where the case assessments may take place
- probation practitioner interviews and scheduling in fieldwork week one
- confirmation of the meetings required during fieldwork week two (a list of standard meetings is put forward for all inspections)
- a request for any further information/evidence identified following analysis of evidence in advance
- access to IT, rooms and buildings where on-site activity is taking place
- arrangements for seeking views from people on probation
- confirmation of arrangements for sharing details of the selected cohort and the case inspection schedule
- discussion of any issues arising from the PDU evidence in advance.

The planning meeting is documented, and a copy issued to the SPOC, by the HM Inspectorate of Probation administrator and any other relevant people.

All correspondence between the inspected organisation and HM Inspectorate of Probation should be addressed to the mailbox probationinspections@hmiprobation.gov.uk.

3.6. Evidence in advance

The region and each inspected PDU submit evidence in advance in relation to the relevant domain one inspection standards and key questions that apply. All domain one evidence should be uploaded into Microsoft Teams to a specific channel set up by HM Inspectorate of Probation. As part of the planning meeting, the lead inspector provides more detailed guidance about the specific evidence requested.

Inspectors review the evidence in advance as part of the assessment of the region or PDU against domain one standards, and to identify relevant topics to be followed up during the fieldwork.

Information on organisational structure and office locations (region and PDUs)

This is provided electronically to the HM Inspectorate of Probation administrator after the regional inspection has been announced. It should be sent to the mailbox probationinspections@hmiprobation.gov.uk by the dates indicated in the announcement letter and should not be uploaded into Microsoft Teams:

- regional organisational structure chart, including the names of regional managers and their primary office base, contact details and strategic responsibilities
- PDU organisation structure charts for every PDU in the region, including names of PDU managers/their primary office base, contact details and responsibilities
- details of regional and PDU office locations, with an indication of any specific office locations where it would be preferable to hold meetings with staff, managers and other key stakeholders
- details of court locations
- the availability of key regional staff for the second and third weeks of the regional fieldwork and any diversity considerations that we may need to be aware of

The following should be sent by each PDU to the mailbox probationinspections@hmiprobation.gov.uk by the date provided during the initial regional planning meeting, and should not be uploaded into Microsoft Teams of all probation practitioners in the PDU for the week of the PDU fieldwork.

Evidence for regional and PDU domain one inspection standards

The region and each inspected PDU submit evidence in advance in relation to the relevant inspection standards that apply. All domain one evidence is uploaded into the relevant channel on Microsoft Teams. We send an invitation to that channel to the SPOC for the inspection, and anyone else as requested by the Probation Service.

We request separate sets of evidence in advance in respect of the region and each PDU. In each case, we have agreed with the Probation Service sets of documents that provide the most relevant evidence in connection with the domain one questions and standards. The regional lead inspector discusses this process in more detail at the initial regional planning meeting.

Submission of domain one evidence in advance

- The SPOC, or a designated individual, uses Microsoft Teams to upload evidence in advance. Under each standard, we have agreed a small number of documents for submission with EPSIG and heads of performance and quality. We ask that the SPOC only submits these documents. If any are not available, they should state this in the narrative section. If items are submitted using Microsoft Teams that are not listed, the inspector may not take them into account.
- In addition to providing documentary evidence in advance, the SPOC should use the regional or PDU narrative document to give a succinct summary of the current position in relation to each regional standard.
- If the region or PDU has no available evidence for a particular question, it is better not to submit material that does not inform our standards. The regional or PDU narrative document should be used to explain if suggested evidence is not available, or if alternative evidence has been submitted.
- We allow time to build the evidence set before it is formally submitted. The lead inspector explains the final date for submission, and after that date any further evidence uploaded may not be considered.
- There are different evidence in advance submission dates for the regional and the PDU inspections. This is explained at the regional planning meeting.
- Once submitted, the evidence in advance is made available to the inspection team.
- The lead inspectors may request additional evidence as the inspection progresses. This should be submitted by email.

The regional lead inspector uses the evidence in advance to start to assess against the regional standards and to identify relevant topics to be followed up during the fieldwork.

Suggested evidence in advance

Below we make the suggestions below about documents that would meet our requirements under the relevant questions and standards. The regional lead inspector will ask for additional evidence as the PDU fieldwork progresses.

Suggested regional evidence in advance:

R 1.1 Leadership

- Regional reducing reoffending strategy
- Regional engaging people on probation strategy
- Regional equality, diversity and inclusion strategy, including analysis of disproportionality
- Regional risk register
- Regional quality improvement plan

R 1.2 Staffing

- Regional workforce strategy
- Workload planning and prioritisation strategy, including diversity analysis across staff grades, recruitment and retention

R 2.1 Public protection

- Overview of information-sharing arrangements with local police forces and children's social care

R 2.2 Desistance

- Overview of services and interventions available

R 2.3 Court work

- Overview of local court arrangements

R 2.4 Unpaid work

- Regional unpaid work strategy and delivery arrangements

R 2.5 Resettlement

- Regional resettlement strategy and delivery arrangements

R 2.6 Victim work

- Overview of regional victim contact arrangements

Suggested PDU evidence in advance:

P 1.1 Leadership

- PDU delivery plan, if one exists; if not, information provided through the head of service context-setting presentation
- Performance dashboard
- Regional Outcomes and Innovation Fund (ROIF) commissioned services
- PDU structure, spans of control and lead responsibilities
- Local partnership arrangements – the key partners, with names and contact details
- Risk register – if there is not one at PDU level, evidence of how this is overseen at a regional level
- PDU improvement plan
- People on probation engagement plan
- PDU Performance service level measures

P 1.2 Staffing

- Staff training needs analysis – by PDU
- Staff training completion rates

P 1.3 Services

- People on probation needs analysis, including diversity factors
- Commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS) providers and referral rates, capacity and completions
- Directory of services – overview of services available
- Resettlement implementation plan and monitoring of resettlement services in PDU

- Court liaison arrangements in PDU/sentencer feedback

Organisational data spreadsheet

An organisational data spreadsheet is sent to the region with the inspection announcement letter. This document requests a range of data, including the region's budget, staff profile, caseloads and services. We request this to allow us to:

- triangulate evidence against the data collected from other sources, including probation practitioners, on matters like caseload and staff engagement
- ensure that we collect contextual data on the inspection of domain one in a consistent way across different services
- support further, national-level, research and analysis of the factors underlying high-quality probation provision, to advance our understanding of effective practice.

We ask that the data is produced at a regional level and broken down into data for each PDU in the region. Where data is not available, or does not meet our specifications exactly, the spreadsheet allows this to be explained.

In larger regions, we ask for the data for PDUs in the second or third batch of PDU inspections to be produced at a later date.

Evidence in advance narrative templates (regional and PDU inspections)

These documents are to be used to give a succinct summary of where the region or PDU sees its current position in relation to the relevant sections of the inspection standards and key questions.

Deadline for submitting evidence in advance

All regional evidence in advance, including the organisational data spreadsheet and the regional evidence in advance narrative template, is uploaded into Microsoft Teams by the Monday, three weeks before the first PDU inspection fieldwork.

Evidence in advance for each PDU, including the PDU evidence in advance narrative template, is uploaded into Microsoft teams by the Monday, three weeks before the first PDU fieldwork week.

3.7. Briefing by the regional senior leadership team

Before the first PDU fieldwork, the RPD and senior leadership team give a briefing to enable HM Inspectorate of Probation to understand the regional context.

This should encompass an overview of regional functions, including equality and diversity, resettlement, unpaid work, statutory victim work, court work, interventions and desistance, commissioning, public protection and corporate services.

The date and time of the briefing will be agreed during the initial regional planning meeting. The regional inspector is accompanied at this meeting by at least one of the following: the Chief Operating Officer, the Head of Programme or the deputy lead inspector. PDU lead inspectors may also attend if available. The Chief Inspector may also observe this or attend site visits to other parts of the inspection.

Guidance on the briefing

Content:

The briefing by the senior regional leadership team should:

Provide an overview of the regional context and structure to enable HM Inspectorate of Probation to gain an understanding of the region. This should encompass an overview of regional functions, including equality and diversity, resettlement, unpaid work, interventions, statutory victim work, commissioning, public protection and corporate services.

Outline the key achievements within the region

Outline the key challenges faced by the region

The briefing should relate to the regional inspection standards, to support the inspection team's regional inspection. We would like to hear from key regional senior staff at this meeting, to allow discussion of their specific regional responsibilities, achievements and challenges. This may reduce the need for specific meetings during the regional fieldwork.

Any specific examples or evidence should relate to work carried out within the 12 months prior to the inspection. The briefing should not be regarded as a substitute for the evidence in advance submission and should not repeat written evidence already submitted.

Arrangements for the briefing:

The briefing should normally take up to 90 minutes, followed by a further 30 minutes for questions and discussion.

An electronic copy (Word, PowerPoint or PDF) of the briefing should be provided to the regional inspector.

3.8. Questionnaires for Probation Service staff

We provide information leaflets for all Probation Service staff, which contain a link to our questionnaire. We ask for them to be circulated to all staff in the region. We use questionnaires to seek the views of staff on key aspects of service delivery. This includes questions about organisational leadership, staffing resource, and the availability of services for people on probation. Completion of the questionnaires is voluntary.

The staff questionnaire opens on the Monday after the regional inspection is announced. We ask PDU staff to complete the questionnaire no later than the Friday, two weeks before inspection fieldwork in their PDU; for regional staff, the deadline is two weeks before the regional fieldwork. Data from the questionnaires is analysed and provided to lead inspectors ahead of the PDU and regional fieldwork.

Data generated from completed questionnaires helps to inform our judgements about PDUs and the region; data will be published and comments may be referred to in the published inspection reports. By completing the questionnaire, regional staff and practitioners are consenting to HM Inspectorate of Probation processing their personal data. We will not identify any individual as the source of this information.

3.9. Presentation by head of PDU

As part of the PDU planning meeting, we ask for a presentation of **up to 30 minutes** from the head of PDU, covering the following:

- leadership priorities and delivery model
- overview of staffing, including a focus on staff engagement and training and development
- what separates the PDU from others in the region
- outline the key challenges faced by the PDU

- the impact of organisational leadership on the quality of service delivery
- overview of quality improvement plan priorities relating to public protection in response to previous inspections
- overview of local innovation – potential for inspectors to plan to see/visit innovative projects during the fieldwork.

3.10. Preparing probation staff for inspection

We interview probation practitioners to allow them to clarify and add context to the case records, as well as to provide a learning opportunity for them. This is most useful if they feel able to be open and honest about their work. Feedback from practitioners is that perceived pressure to prepare cases for inspection is unhelpful and can increase stress. It can also result in 'wasted' effort, as preparation often focuses on issues that are not central to the inspection standards. To avoid this, we ask managers to minimise preparation before the fieldwork week.

4. Case cohort

4.1. Selecting the cohort

PDU domain two cases

We inspect community sentences (community orders and suspended sentence orders) that have a rehabilitation activity or accredited programme requirement, and cases starting post-release supervision (licence and post-sentence supervision cases). In post-release cases we also inspect the work of community practitioners before release, to ensure resettlement was smooth and safe. Cases where Probation Reset has been used to suspend supervision are still included in the cohort. We may exclude the following cases:

- cases where the same person has more than one sentence in the eligible period
- cases where the order or licence terminated within seven days of commencement
- cases where there is a current SFO investigation, serious case review, child practice review or other similar investigation.

We inspect cases where the community sentence or post-release supervision began in two separate weeks in the period between 26 and 33 weeks before the PDU fieldwork. We look at the proportion of female and high or very high risk of serious harm cases in this eight-week window, and choose two weeks that best reflect these overall proportions, ensuring that we select one week from the earlier part of the specified period, and one from the later part. We ensure that no individual practitioner has more than three cases selected for inspection. We inspect a minimum of twenty cases in each PDU, so, exceptionally, we may choose three weeks if required to meet that minimum number. We allocate inspection resources based on the number of cases in the identified cohorts.

Following our consultation about inspecting cases where Probation Reset is applied, we have introduced an adjusted set of standards that apply to all PSS only cases, and any licence cases where contact is suspended **up to and including eight weeks** after release. All community sentences, and licence cases suspended **after** the eight-week point are be inspected under the core standards, and we expect to see delivery front-loaded to minimise the impact of the period where contact is suspended. Domain two ratings are based on data from both sets of cases.

We recognise that because our cohorts are derived from commencements, the proportions of female and high or very high risk of serious harm cases may not always match the overall proportions in the whole caseload for the PDU, because of the different sentence lengths for different categories of case.

Regional domain two cases

Victim work cases

Where a domain two case is identified during PDU inspections as being eligible for statutory victim contact, with an eligible victim living in the inspected probation region, the victim work in that case is followed up during regional fieldwork.

Unpaid work cases

In each region, as part of the regional fieldwork, we inspect a cohort of unpaid work requirements starting in a specific week, between 26 and 33 weeks before the regional fieldwork. In PDU domain two cases, we match the proportions of high or very high risk of serious harm cases and of women in the commencement window.

4.2. Case cohort identification

We use standard nDelius reports, which are available to the Probation Service, to identify PDU domain two and regional unpaid work cases. Before the fieldwork is announced, we identify the commencement weeks to be used in the individual PDU and produce the list of cases in each PDU cohort. This may include cases that have been transferred into or out of the PDU; we inspect these cases, which are restricted to the work delivered by the PDU.

We ask the PDU for details on the availability of probation practitioners, as part of the planning for the fieldwork. We arrange interviews with practitioners to match their availability, and share the proposed fieldwork schedule, including details of the individual cases to be inspected, with the SPOC on the Monday, two weeks before the PDU domain two fieldwork.

Before the regional fieldwork, we identify the commencement week to be used for unpaid work requirements, and produce the list of relevant cases. We request details of probation practitioner availability for unpaid work and victim liaison staff, to arrange interviews to match their availability. We share the proposed regional domain two fieldwork schedule, including details of the individual cases to be inspected, with the SPOC on the Monday, two weeks before the regional domain two fieldwork.

5. Schedules

5.1. Weekly schedules

PDU fieldwork weeks

There are normally two fieldwork weeks in a PDU inspection. During the first fieldwork week, the lead inspector and a team of assistant inspectors review the identified domain two cases. In Wales, Welsh-speaking local assessors are also part of the team for the first fieldwork week. The lead and deputy lead inspectors use the second fieldwork week to conduct domain one meetings. Exceptionally, in the largest PDUs, the lead inspector and teams of assistant inspectors will spend two weeks reviewing the domain two cases, followed by a single week of domain one fieldwork. The PDU is issued with a provisional schedule for domain one meetings, interviews and observations, and domain two case inspection interviews on the Monday, two weeks before the first PDU fieldwork week. The schedule sets out the times of the probation practitioner interviews, which normally last 60 to 90 minutes, plus any meetings, observations or other interviews, and whether the interviews will be online, using Microsoft Teams, or face to face.

Any requests for changes to the proposed fieldwork schedule are raised by the SPOC by the Monday of the week before the fieldwork at the latest, and are resolved by the lead inspector. The SPOC also identifies any cases for potential exclusion at this point, for example any subject to SFO or other reviews; the lead inspector confirms any such exclusions. If a probation practitioner is not available during the fieldwork week, the lead inspector and the SPOC agree on whether a suitable substitute is available. If not, the case will be inspected by a file-read. Late changes in availability may also be resolved by inspecting the case as a file-read.

At the start of the second fieldwork week, the PDU lead inspector shares headline data on the rating of the PDU domain two standards. This enables meetings during the fieldwork week to fully explore the reasons for the ratings.

Regional fieldwork weeks

There are normally three fieldwork weeks in each region, once all the PDU fieldwork has been completed. During the first week, inspections of domain two unpaid work and victim work cases are completed; this work is completed remotely. For unpaid work cases that remain open at the time of the fieldwork, short interviews using Microsoft Teams are scheduled with the relevant probation practitioner. For victim liaison cases, inspectors first review the cases, and then, if there has been pre-release victim activity, they arrange a short interview with the victim liaison officer using Microsoft Teams. There is then normally a gap of two weeks for the lead inspector to review the data from all PDU inspections and the regional domain two cases. There are then two fieldwork weeks, during which the lead and deputy lead inspectors complete interviews and meetings related to domain one and to the reasons underpinning performance against domain two standards. The probation region is issued with the final schedule for regional domain two fieldwork two weeks before the fieldwork. The final schedule for the domain one fieldwork is issued during the week before that fieldwork. The schedule identifies the times and attendees of meetings, interviews and observations.

At the start of these fieldwork weeks, the regional lead inspector shares headline data about the rating of the regional domain two standards. This enables meetings during the fieldwork weeks to fully explore the reasons underpinning the ratings.

5.2. Domain one meetings

Planning the schedule for domain one meetings takes place during the pre-fieldwork phase, for PDU and regional inspections. The lists of core meetings below set out meetings that the inspectors may require during inspection fieldwork, but final decisions about the meetings required will be made by the individual lead inspectors.

Outline schedules are sent out following the announcements of the regional and PDU inspections, indicating the days and times when inspectors are available for meetings. Some meetings are fixed in the schedule; for others, the Probation Service has the flexibility to identify when it is most convenient to hold them.

Depending on the geography of the probation region or PDU being inspected and the agreement on whether a blended inspection approach is appropriate, some meetings may be scheduled to take place by telephone or Microsoft Teams. Depending on the individual arrangements in the region, it may be that one individual covers more than one of the tasks/roles outlined in the list of core meetings. In that case, we need to schedule only one meeting with that person. Similarly, if the role identified is covered jointly by two or more people, the organisation can schedule them both/all to attend.

For meetings with groups of staff, the optimum number of attendees is between six and ten.

The schedule templates indicate when meetings should take place and whether they will be held face to face or on Microsoft Teams, with the lead inspector having flexibility to make changes. We will consider having some meetings with a combination of face-to-face and Microsoft Teams participants; however, we will do this only in exceptional cases, as we have found that this approach is not ideal, particularly for larger meetings with up to ten participants.

The list below sets out the core meetings we wish to cover routinely. Other meetings may be arranged either during the planning meeting or as the fieldwork progresses.

Regional inspection – potential meetings

The purpose of these meetings is to gather evidence to support judgements about the regional domain one standards, and to understand the reasons underpinning the regional domain two ratings, which are based on case inspection data. In addition to a meeting with the RPD, some of the meetings listed below are likely to be required.

Meetings with subject leads about individual regional functions

Where appropriate, additional specialists can be included in meetings to give inspectors a more detailed understanding of these areas of work and how they contribute to regional ratings.

Leadership:

- RPD
- head of operations
- equalities lead.

Staffing:

- human resources and workforce planning lead
- learning and practice development lead.

Domain two standards:

- head of public protection
- head of community integration
- head(s) of interventions and commissioning
- head of unpaid work
- court lead, including enforcement hub
- Offender Management in Custody/resettlement lead
- strategic lead for victims
- external partnerships and service providers
- performance and quality lead (meeting with HM Inspectorate of Probation SFO quality assurance inspector)
- regional lead for performance and quality
- unpaid work staff
- victim liaison staff
- resettlement/short sentence teams

PDU domain one scheduling

Inspectors plan the schedule for domain one during the pre-fieldwork phase. The list of core meetings below sets out the standard meetings that inspectors will require during the PDU inspection fieldwork.

An outline schedule is sent out once the PDU fieldwork dates are announced, indicating the days and times that inspectors are available for meetings. Some meetings are fixed in the schedule; for others, the inspected organisation has the flexibility to identify when it is most convenient to hold them.

Depending on the geography of the PDU being inspected, and the agreed approach to blended inspections, some meetings may be scheduled to take place by telephone or Microsoft Teams. Depending on the individual arrangements in the PDU, an individual may cover more than one of the tasks set out in the list of core meetings. In that case, we need to schedule only one meeting with that person. Similarly, if the role identified is covered jointly by two or more people, the organisation can schedule them both/all to attend.

For meetings with groups of staff, the optimum number of attendees is between six and ten.

The schedule templates indicate when meetings should take place, with the lead having the flexibility to make changes.

The fieldwork starts with a meeting between the lead inspector, deputy lead inspector and head of PDU on the Monday afternoon of the fieldwork, to understand the context of the PDU. This meeting may include discussion of leadership arrangements, staffing resources, local arrangements to deliver interventions (including commissioned services) and links between the PDU and the region.

This list below sets out the core meetings that we wish to cover routinely. Other meetings may be arranged either during the planning meeting or as the fieldwork progresses.

PDU inspections – potential meetings

Meetings with individuals and groups of staff

The purpose of these meetings is to evidence how the operation of the domain one standards of leadership, staffing and services is seen from different perspectives in the hierarchy of the organisation:

- head of PDU (and deputy, if applicable)
- middle managers
- probation practitioners
- administrative staff.

Other meetings

At the PDU planning meeting, the lead inspector will discuss how to arrange meetings to cover the following areas of work, if such roles exist at PDU level:

- public protection/MAPPA lead(s)
- dynamic framework or commissioned rehabilitation service providers
- local forum for people on probation (if this exists)
- women's services
- business manager
- interventions facilitators.

NB: if these roles do not exist at PDU level, these individuals will be interviewed as part of regional fieldwork.

5.3. Team meetings

The lead inspector will advise on appropriate arrangements for HM Inspectorate of Probation team meetings and gathering feedback during the fieldwork phase. A meeting room may be required for this purpose, for up to twelve members of staff; no IT access is required in this room.

6. Phase II: Fieldwork

6.1. Methodology

Domain two: service delivery (PDU inspections)

Domain two focuses on the quality of practice. We examine tasks that relate to the supervision of people on probation – specifically, assessing, planning, implementing and reviewing. We also look at court work in cases where a pre-sentence report has been prepared; this data is not used as part of the PDU rating, but is aggregated across the region to provide the regional rating. We also identify resettlement cases that are eligible for statutory victim contact. These are followed up during the regional fieldwork to provide the regional rating. The lead inspector and a team of assistant inspectors complete case inspection. The case inspections take place during the first fieldwork week. The 'Case cohort' section of this manual provides more detailed information about the case selection process and exclusion criteria.

Case inspections include reading and assessing relevant information available through electronic records and tools, such as the national case management system, nDelius, the violent and sexual offenders register, OASys assessments, the victim database and any other tools used for offender assessment and planning. The Probation Service is asked to provide access to other documents relevant to the case – for example, minutes of MAPPA, multi-agency risk assessment conference and professionals meetings.

We undertake interviews with the probation practitioner for each case. These involve discussions about assessing, planning, implementing and reviewing in relation to the selected case, and about the outcomes achieved. Practitioners are also asked about their experience of workloads and services, as these have an impact on the management of the selected case. Where the allocated practitioner is unavailable, a remote interview can be arranged, or an interview held with a suitable replacement.

Case inspectors use all sources of evidence to formulate their assessment of the case, including case records and any interview with the probation practitioner.

As part of our case inspections, we also gather other data about the cases and the services they received, to develop an understanding of emerging issues and support our further analysis and research. These questions do not influence inspection judgements.

Data on court work and resettlement is gathered during the PDU inspections. It does not influence PDU ratings, but aggregate data across all PDUs in a region generates the regional ratings for these elements of work.

Dealing with cases that should have been excluded

Occasionally, during fieldwork, it becomes apparent that a case on the schedule should have been excluded at an earlier stage. This can be a difficult situation, particularly when the practitioner has attended for interview by the time an inspector realises that the case should have been excluded. In these cases, the inspector has a brief conversation with the practitioner to let them know that the case should not have been selected for inspection, but will not have a detailed discussion about the case. Under the cohort approach, we do not require substitute cases in these circumstances.

Domain one (PDU): organisational arrangements and activity

In domain one, the lead inspector and deputy lead inspector focus on leadership, staffing, and services. The regional inspector provides a briefing to the PDU lead inspectors, informed

by the findings from the national and regional evidence in advance. During the pre-fieldwork period, the lead inspector assesses additional evidence in advance submitted by the PDU, and staff questionnaire data, identifying any gaps or areas for clarification in the evidence for the standards and key questions.

At the start of the fieldwork week, the lead inspector shares the headlines of the ratings based on the case inspections. The fieldwork weeks include meetings where further evidence can be gathered and provide an opportunity to triangulate evidence and information. Inspectors are looking for evidence of the impact of organisational delivery on the quality of work in cases inspected in domain two. Feedback is also sought from people on probation. The lead inspector arranges a brief 'keeping in touch' call with the head of PDU and/or SPOC at the end of each day, to share information about the progress of the inspection and follow up any new lines of enquiry.

We also seek evidence on the PDU's progress in addressing relevant recommendations made by HM Inspectorate of Probation during previous Probation Service inspections. This does not directly influence the PDU's rating during the current inspection, but contributes to the judgement under the regional leadership standard (R 1.1.4 (e)) about action taken in response to inspections.

Domain two: service delivery (regional inspections)

Domain two focuses on the quality of service delivery in specific areas. Aggregate data from all cases inspected in PDUs across the region is analysed to provide a regional overview of the quality of work to support desistance and public protection. In all cases where a pre-sentence report was prepared in a PDU domain two case or an unpaid work case, we inspect the quality of that report, and analyse data at a regional level. We inspect a separate cohort of cases with an unpaid work requirement starting during a specified timeframe before the regional fieldwork, and rate the quality of that work. Aggregate data from all resettlement cases inspected in PDUs across the region is analysed to provide a regional overview of resettlement work, covering pre-release work and activity to support reintegration. Finally, in any case eligible for statutory victim contact in the PDU inspections, we follow up and inspect the quality of work with victims.

The case inspections take place remotely during the first regional fieldwork week. The 'Case cohort' section of this manual provides more detailed information about the case selection process and exclusion criteria.

Case inspections include reading and assessing relevant information available through electronic records and tools, such as the national case management system, nDelius, the violent and sexual offenders register, OASys assessments, the victim database and any other tools used for offender assessment and planning. The Probation Service is asked to provide access to other documents relevant to the case – for example, minutes of MAPPA, multi-agency risk assessment conference and professionals meetings.

As part of our case inspections, we also gather other data about the cases and the services they received, to develop an understanding of emerging issues and support our further analysis and research. These questions do not influence inspection judgements.

Regional inspection: organisational arrangements and activity

As part of the regional inspection, the regional inspector gathers evidence about the regional standards for leadership and staffing. During the pre-fieldwork period, the lead inspector assesses in advance the evidence submitted by the region, and data from the staff questionnaire, identifying any gaps or areas for clarification in the evidence. After the PDU inspections are completed, the regional lead inspector receives the aggregate data from the

PDU inspections, and identifies any further gaps in evidence or areas for clarification. Meetings during the fieldwork weeks allow further evidence to be gathered and provide an opportunity to triangulate evidence and information.

We also seek evidence on the progress that the region has made in addressing relevant recommendations made by HM Inspectorate of Probation during previous Probation Service and thematic inspections.

At least two weeks after the final PDU inspection, the regional lead, along with a deputy lead inspector and, where necessary, the head of probation inspection programme, hold regional inspection meetings to gather evidence on the domain one standards and investigate the reasons for the domain two ratings based on data from PDU inspections and regional domain two. The region will have received all PDU data and ratings by that point.

The lead inspector arranges a brief 'keeping in touch' call with the RPD and/or SPOC at the end of each day, to share information about the progress of the inspection, and follow up any new lines of enquiry.

6.2. Guidance material

We have developed guidance on each domain. This explains how evidence should be assessed and how to form judgements against key questions and standards. The purpose of the guidance is to provide advice, and to promote consistency and a shared understanding of the required expectations. The guidance material is separated into the following documents:

- domain one: rules and guidance
- domain two: the case assessment rules and guidance (CARaG).

Purpose of the domain one rules and guidance

The domain one rules and guidance explain how evidence should be assessed. At the PDU level, the guidance also explains how judgements should be formed against key questions and standards. The purpose of the guidance is to provide advice, clarity and a consistent understanding of the required expectations. The rules and guidance are based on international and national probation standards and rules, and our own standards and benchmarks. As such, they outline approaches that set high standards to assess quality.

Role of the rating characteristics

The rating characteristics indicate what will guide a lead inspector to recommend a specific rating at PDU level. They provide a framework to support the lead inspector's recommendation, rather than being a checklist; we do not expect every characteristic to be present for the corresponding rating to be given.

The characteristics for 'Good' and 'Requires improvement' are closely aligned to the key questions and prompts in the standards framework.

The characteristics for 'Outstanding' capture whether the organisation is:

- innovative and creative
- forward-looking and proactive
- open and transparent
- supportive, empowering and inclusive
- agile and responsive

- collaborative and outward-looking.

The characteristics for 'Inadequate' capture whether the organisation is:

- solely reactive
- defensive and blaming
- characterised by division and conflict
- unresponsive
- inward-looking.

Purpose of the domain two CARaG

The domain two CARaG is a comprehensive set of published rules and guidance to be followed by inspectors in their assessment of cases. The CARaG promotes transparency and consistency in our inspection of cases. Inspection staff should use the appropriate CARaG as a reference document when assessing a case.

The CARaG provides guidance on the key questions and prompts. It is updated regularly, to ensure that it remains consistent with any changes that we make at standard, question and prompt level and so that it remains linked to evidence. The CARaG also contains links, where relevant, to more detailed guidance about specialist areas.

The relationship between domains

The two domains are structured separately, to allow us to make comments and judgements on specific areas of work. The domains do not operate in isolation; there is a relationship between them. Some of the questions and prompts in domain one link explicitly to the delivery that we inspect in domain two. The rules and guidance and rating characteristics reflect this. In making judgements about some of the prompts and questions in domain one, we will consider how we have seen this demonstrated in practice in domain two.

6.3. Inspection sites

During the pre-fieldwork phase, we identify the inspection sites for PDU and regional inspections (if there is to be on-site fieldwork) and allocate the inspection teams to specific offices.

We understand that private office space may not be available at all inspection sites for the whole fieldwork phase. The region or PDU may allocate the team to a desk in an open office with access to private interview rooms, in accordance with the timings on the schedule, where interviews can take place with probation practitioners.

On arrival, the region or PDU gives an induction to the building, including a health and safety briefing. Inspection staff need access to fobs, and information on opening and closing times.

6.4. IT access

HM Inspectorate of Probation staff have access to various criminal justice IT systems, including OASys, nDelius and the victim case management system. To comply with the General Data Protection Regulation, inspectors access only cases identified on case sample lists, or additional cases by arrangement with the inspected organisation.

6.5. Case records

Inspectors access case records held electronically in OASys and nDelius; we expect all relevant documents in the case to be uploaded to nDelius. In relevant cases, inspectors may access the victim case management system.

6.6. Probation practitioner interviews

As part of our assessment of a PDU domain two case, the inspector interviews the probation practitioner for that case. This interview provides an opportunity for the case to be discussed in more detail as part of our domain two assessment, and to gather evidence for domain one. Inspectors provide an introduction and overview to help the probation practitioner understand the process of the inspection. The interview includes constructive feedback to the probation practitioner, delivered in a productive and sensitive manner to encourage reflective discussions. Details of the interview, including any judgements made about a case, are not discussed with line managers unless there are serious concerns about the case (prompting an 'alert' to be raised – see below). Feedback provided to practitioners will focus on key strengths and areas for improvement of the work they have undertaken personally. The inspector will not necessarily provide an overview of the judgements they have made of the work completed in the case. Individual cases are not given an overall rating; data from all cases on each of the separate key questions is aggregated to arrive at the service-wide ratings for the individual standards.

For unpaid work cases inspected as part of the regional fieldwork, remote interviews are set up using Microsoft Teams with practitioners in open cases. We provide an information sheet with the invitation, to explain to unpaid work staff what the interview will cover.

For statutory victim work cases, inspectors check whether there has been active pre-release work in the case; if so, they make direct contact with the Victim Liaison Officer to arrange a remote interview to discuss the case.

If the allocated practitioner is not available, we ask at the planning stage that another suitable person, with a sufficient understanding of the case, attends the interview. That would normally be the practitioner's line manager or supervisor, although in some circumstances another colleague with knowledge of the case may be suitable. If practicable, the inspector will contact that person before the interview, to check how much they know about the case. If they have little knowledge of the case, a telephone/remote call during the scheduled interview slot may be arranged as an alternative, to avoid unnecessary travel. If no alternative is available, the case is assessed based on the written material alone (as a file-read). If the substitute is the practitioner's line manager or supervisor, it may be appropriate to provide them with the feedback that would have been given to the practitioner in person. As the conversation is about a case that belongs to the organisation, there is no conflict of confidentiality. However, if the substitute is not in a supervisory role to the practitioner, no feedback should be given.

We are sometimes asked if the second person can attend the interview with the current probation practitioner. Our preference is to interview the current practitioner alone, with the following exceptions:

- where there has been a recent change of probation practitioner and the previous one can add something useful to the assessment of the case
- where a second person has played a key role in the delivery of an intervention
- where the probation practitioner is very new to the role (for example, a new trainee) and needs support from a colleague.

Inspectors will ask the second person to leave the interview before giving feedback to the practitioner.

6.7. Seeking the views of people on probation

HM Inspectorate of Probation has a strong commitment to engaging with people on probation and those with lived experience of probation supervision and to incorporating those views and experiences into our inspection process.

Since the unification of probation services in June 2021, we have incorporated several different methods for obtaining the views and experiences of people on probation into our methodology. We have also consulted widely on our approach and considered a number of views, including those from individual people on probation and wider forums representing their views.

Means of consultation

Each inspection may include a number of different approaches to collect and review the perspectives of people currently on probation and those with previous lived experience of probation.

Text survey

We identify all people who began probation supervision during the eight-week period from which the inspected cohort was chosen. Before the PDU fieldwork, we contact them by text message to say that they will be invited to complete a short online survey asking for their views about being supervised. Completion of the survey is voluntary. If an individual does not have access to a mobile telephone, we ask the probation practitioner to communicate the same message to them using whatever means of communication they prefer.

For inspections in Wales, the survey is also available in Welsh. We will work with the Probation Service to find alternative means of engaging with individuals who might find a text message survey or focus group difficult. The survey includes an option for those completing it to request a follow-up telephone interview and/or to be considered for inclusion in a focus group during the inspection.

Focus groups

During the PDU fieldwork, we will undertake a focus group with people on probation and include in this individuals who may have expressed a wish to be involved following their completion of an online survey or have indicated an interest to their probation practitioner etc. We will also ask the PDU to identify any individuals who have been engaged as people on probation representatives as part of its engaging people on probation (e-pop) strategy and ensure they are invited to attend. We work with the PDU during the planning stage of the inspection to identify any other groups of people on probation who might help us build a picture of their experiences.

Visits to specialist services

During planning we will talk to PDU leaders about any other specific groups of individuals whose view we might usefully include in our discussions. This might include women on probation, others with specialist needs or the experiences of people on probation who are Black, Asian and minority ethnic or have substance misuse issues.

We might also talk to people on probation who are subject to specialist activity, including unpaid work and groupwork activity or services provided by a commissioned rehabilitation company. These discussions are undertaken informally but focus on similar key issues as the

surveys and focus groups. We work with the PDU to provide us with information about such activity but request that they do not make any changes to the normal timing or location of projects to accommodate inspectors. In some cases, inspectors may wish to speak to individuals before a groupwork programme begins or during a break, and will liaise with providers to ensure that this does not disrupt the group.

Informal discussions

During fieldwork inspectors also seek opportunities to gather feedback from offices and waiting areas, where appropriate, speaking to people on probation who are attending for appointments. Under these circumstances, we ensure that we do not affect interview schedules but work around them. If there is limited time available, we make arrangements to follow up the interview by telephone, if the individual is happy for us to do so. We also work with PDU leaders to help us identify the best times and places to undertake such contacts

Use of evidence from people on probation

We use information from people on probation to help triangulate our findings and to inform our views about, and judgements of, probation services. In some cases, we also use information to inform our lines of enquiry, particularly in relation to Organisational arrangements and delivery (domain one). The weight given to the views expressed depends on their context and how widely they are felt. The views of people on probation may be incorporated into all sections and aspects of our reports.

6.8. Alert processes

Individual alerts

During case inspections where we identify a significant actual or potential risk of harm to other people, or to the individual on probation concerned, or where there is organisational practice that requires immediate attention, we have a responsibility to act on our concerns. The following procedures provide all inspection staff with an effective and consistent mechanism for tackling serious situations that require immediate attention.

An alert encompasses practice, or practice omissions, that require immediate remedial action to be taken (usually by the organisation responsible for the case) to reduce or contain an identifiable, significant and imminent risk.

Inspection staff should ask themselves:

- What might happen if no action is taken?
- How serious is the risk?
- When might it happen (that is, how imminent is it)?

If we are concerned that there is a danger to life and limb, an incident from which recovery will be difficult or impossible, or that an offence has taken place or is taking place (for example, fraud), then we need to act.

Through the individual alert process, we are seeking assurance, confirmed by evidence, that actions have been taken. We do not manage the risk directly. The deputy lead inspector's role is to make sure that the organisation (or third party) responsible for the case takes sufficient action to address the concerns.

Any incidents recorded through the individual alert system may inform the inspection findings or recommendations.

Organisational alerts

The organisational alert procedure, which could apply at PDU or regional level, provides all inspection staff with an effective and consistent mechanism for tackling situations of identifiable, systemic, significant and imminent risk that require immediate attention. Organisational alerts are not designed to address general poor practice, even if this is on a large scale.

The purpose of the organisational alert procedure is to assist inspected bodies to address issues of identifiable, systemic, significant and imminent risk where this has not otherwise been done. The fact that an organisational alert has been raised will be described in the published inspection report.

Advice to probation practitioners in other situations

Where a case does not meet the threshold for an alert, case inspectors may offer advice to the practitioner as part of their feedback, but any such advice does not constitute an instruction, and no feedback is required from the practitioner or others.

6.9. Meeting format

Ideally, meetings with groups of staff should consist of six to ten people; in larger groups, some participants could be overlooked, while smaller groups might not generate sufficient diversity of views. Where possible, representatives from different work locations should be included. Staff should be of the same grade (or doing the same role), and should not be included in groups with their line managers or senior managers. If attendees are not of the expected role or grade, inspectors may advise them that their attendance is not required. Certain topics might require consistency in other areas, such as gender, age and ethnicity.

Meetings with groups last normally between 45 and 90 minutes. We prefer face-to-face meetings unless travel distances make that difficult. Face-to-face meetings should take place in a space that is private, not subject to interruptions and with sufficient comfortable seating. Remote meetings are conducted using Microsoft Teams. The inspected organisation is responsible for identifying the best location for meetings to take place, and for ensuring that there is good representation from staff.

6.10. Closing the inspection fieldwork

The fieldwork weeks for all inspections begin on Monday afternoon and end on Friday, usually between 12pm and 2pm.

On the final day of fieldwork, for PDU and regional inspections, the lead inspector:

- ensures that all fobs/security passes have been returned
- meets the head of PDU or RPD to give a brief summary of inspection findings
- explains the process for confirming ratings for standards and the overall rating for the PDU or region, and the process for writing and submitting the draft report
- discusses the process if there are factual inaccuracies in the draft report
- explains the process for challenging ratings
- highlights key dates and next steps for improvement plans and publication of the provisional final report
- explains that the head of probation inspection will contact the SPOC or RPD after publication of the regional report to get their general feedback on the conduct of the inspection.

6.11. Quality assurance

The HM Inspectorate of Probation Quality Assurance (QA) Strategy aims to ensure the quality and consistency of judgments across all inspection programmes. It focuses on our ambition to maintain high-quality inspection and providing assurance that judgments are sound, evidence-backed, and made by trained inspectors. It aims to ensure high standards in inspection practice, judgements, reports, data integrity, and support programme development.

Quality Assurance framework

The Inspectorate's Quality Assurance Framework is a comprehensive guide outlining the standards and expectations for new and current HM Inspectors (HMIs) and Assistant Inspectors (AIs). The framework details the induction process before beginning inspections, the professionalisation process, real-time inspection QA, ongoing quality assurance benchmarks, and expectations for operational support. The framework incorporates a feedback loop for individual and organisational learning, and outlines data integrity check processes and responsibilities within the QA function.

The guiding principles of our quality assurance framework are:

- Quality assurance must be consistent, comprehensive, proportionate, and equitable
- The regularity of quality assurance activities should be transparent
- Additional assurance is applied where external factors might influence judgments
- Clear accountability is established for quality at different inspection stages
- We balance on-site and off-site quality assurance requirements
- All inspection domains are subject to quality assurance
- Assurance is a collective responsibility within the organisation, not solely dependent on a single lead.

Staff induction

A robust induction for new inspectors at the Inspectorate is crucial as it lays the foundation for their future effectiveness and confidence in their roles. New inspectors receive a comprehensive corporate induction, ensuring a strong understanding of the organisational culture and expectations. Additionally, they will be provided with supplementary reading materials to enrich their knowledge base before commencing core skills training. This approach ensures they are well-prepared and equipped with the necessary information and context to excel in their training and subsequent inspection responsibilities.

Certificate in Inspection Skills

The HM Inspectorate of Probation Certificate in Inspection Skills (certificate) programme is tailored to develop thorough inspection competencies among inspectors. It integrates foundational training, practical experience, and advanced skill development. The curriculum begins with an induction, advancing through specialised training modules, practical case assessments, and role-specific tasks. This progression ensures inspectors are not only versed in theoretical knowledge but also adept in applying these skills in diverse inspection scenarios. The programme's overarching goal is to elevate the standard of inspection practices, ensuring both consistency and quality across the board. The Certificate programme is externally accredited by Skills for Justice Awards, and we are subject to annual external quality assurance visits to ensure the integrity of the programme.

The implementation of the certificate in inspection skills programme standardises the training and assessment of all HMIs and AIs to a high level over time, with new recruits

prioritised. This programme ensures consistent inspection skills through assessment by an accredited body, provides trained assessors and internal quality assurers, supports staff in working to clear standards, and assures inspected bodies of the quality of inspection work.

Routine Quality Assurance

The Certificate is a structured programme designed for new inspectors to gain the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding to competently undertake their duties. There is a high level of support and knowledge transfer in the first 12 months to ensure high standards of inspection practice. After completion, inspectors engage in regular quality assurance as part of a developmental process, aimed at maintaining the integrity of inspection data and fostering continuous learning. This supportive approach involves routine quality assessments across both domain one and domain two, and the victims' standard, ensuring inspectors are consistently growing and enhancing their skills.

Benchmarking

Benchmarking is a crucial aspect of maintaining high-quality standards in the Inspectorate. It provides an opportunity for all inspectors to have their work quality assured, offering insights into general knowledge and practice levels. This process helps identify areas for improvement and ensures consistency in inspection methodology. We ask inspected services to assist us with providing access to training cases, to support benchmarking.

7. Phase III: Post-fieldwork

7.1. Ratings explained

Domain one ratings

The two domains for inspections are structured separately, to allow us to make comments and judgements specific areas of work. The domains do not operate in isolation; there is a relationship between them. The questions and prompts in domain one link explicitly to the delivery that we inspect in domain two.

Domain one ratings are proposed by the lead inspector for each standard. They will be a single judgement, using all the relevant sources of evidence.

PDU domain one rating characteristics indicate the issues to be considered to guide a lead inspector to recommend a specific rating. They provide a framework to support the lead inspector's recommendation, rather than being a checklist; we do not expect every characteristic to be present for the corresponding rating to be given. For standards 1.1 and 1.3 there are significant links at standard level to what we see in domain two. In recognition of this, there are two decision rules, six pieces of decision guidance and one limiting judgement which make links between ratings from domain two and domain one.

Similarly, regional domain one rating characteristics provide guidance to the lead inspector to recommend a specific rating. Because of the links between leadership and domain two performance, there is a decision rule, three pieces of decision guidance and a limiting judgement, to guide decision-making. The characteristics for domain one ratings are closely aligned to the key questions and prompts in the standards framework.

Inspectors review the progress that has been made against relevant previous Probation inspection recommendations. They rate this progress but do not use it to influence ratings directly; instead, it will form a short standalone narrative in the report.

More detailed information can be found in the probation inspection domain one rules and guidance on the website⁵.

PDU domain two ratings

Domain two ratings are based on the results of the inspection of individual cases. Ratings are awarded for each of the four case supervision standards and for the quality of court reporting and are based on consolidated results (at key question level) of all cases inspected.

For each key question, the answers to a number of supporting prompts are considered when making the judgement at key question level. While often the answer at key question level reflects the balance of answers to the underpinning prompts, that is not always the case. Occasionally, a negative answer to a single prompt would be of sufficient concern to outweigh the influence of the answers to the other prompts at key question level. For example, if a probation practitioner had failed to identify a significant factor related to risk of harm, that might result in a negative answer at the key question level for questions relating to keeping other people safe, even if other strengths were identified in respect of the other prompts.

The rating for each standard is aligned to the banding at the key question level where the lowest proportion of cases were judged to be sufficient, as we believe that each key

⁵ <https://hmiprobation.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/about-us/our-inspections/inspection-documentation/>

question is an integral and equally important part of the standard. For a PDU to be rated as 'good' on our assessment standard, for example, we must be satisfied that the quality of work being done to engage with people on probation during the assessment; to accurately identify and assess all the factors underlying offending behaviour; and to identify risks of harm to others are **all** sufficient, as we (and, we believe, the public) regard all of them as equally and separately important. Therefore, if we rate three key questions as 'Good' and one as 'Inadequate', the overall rating for that standard is 'Inadequate'.

Lowest banding (proportion of cases judged to be sufficient at key question level)	Rating (standard)
Minority: <50%	Inadequate
Too few: 50–64%	Requires improvement
Reasonable majority: 65–79%	Good
Large majority: 80%+	Outstanding ☆

In the example below, the scores for two of the key questions under the assessment standard fall into the 'Good' band, but as the score for the final key question is in the 'Requires improvement' band, the overall standard is rated as 'Requires improvement'.

Assessment

Requires Improvement

A 1 S	Does assessment focus sufficiently on engaging the person on probation?	#	%
	Yes	30	75%
	No	10	25%
A 2 S	Does assessment focus sufficiently on the factors linked to offending and	#	%
	Yes	28	70%
	No	12	30%
A 3 S	Does assessment focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	#	%
	Yes	24	60%
	No	16	40%

Overall PDU rating

Straightforward scoring rules are used to generate the overall PDU rating. Each of the seven standards is scored on a 0–3 scale, in which 'Inadequate' = 0; 'Requires improvement' = 1; 'Good' = 2; 'Outstanding' = 3. Adding these scores produces a total score ranging from 0 to 21, which is banded to produce the overall rating, as follows:

- 0–3 = Inadequate
- 4–10 = Requires improvement
- 11–17 = Good
- 18–21 = Outstanding.

We do not include any weightings in the scoring rules. The rationale for this is that all parts of the standards framework are strongly linked to effective service delivery and positive outcomes, and we have restricted ourselves to those that are most essential. Our view is that providers need to focus across all the standards, and we do not want to distort behaviour in any undesirable ways. Furthermore, the underpinning evidence supports including all standards/key questions in the rating, rather than weighting individual elements.

Regional ratings

Leadership:

The regional leadership standard is rated in the same way as the PDU domain one standards. The lead inspector proposes the rating; it is a single judgement, using all the relevant sources of evidence. Regional domain one rating characteristics provide guidance for the lead inspector and the ratings panel.

Staffing:

The starting point for the regional staffing rating is an aggregated rating for staffing from all the PDUs in the region (P 1.2.2). For each PDU, the rating is scored on a 0–3 scale, in which 'Inadequate' = 0; 'Requires improvement' = 1; 'Good' = 2; 'Outstanding' = 3. Adding these scores produces a total score, which is banded based on the number of PDUs in the region, to produce the aggregate PDU rating for staffing, as follows:

Number of PDUs in region	Rating – PDU aggregate			
	Inadequate	Requires improvement	Good	Outstanding
5	0 – 2	3 – 7	8 – 12	13 – 15
6	0 – 3	4 – 9	10 – 15	16 – 18
7	0 – 4	5 – 12	13 – 20	21 – 24
8	0 – 4	5 – 12	13 – 20	21 – 24
9	0 – 4	5 – 13	14 – 22	23 – 27
11	0 – 5	6 – 16	17 – 27	28 – 33
13	0 – 6	7 – 19	20 – 32	33 – 39
18	0 – 9	10 – 27	28 – 45	46 – 54

The lead inspector proposes a regional rating for staffing based on the aggregated PDU rating. This is moderated by qualitative evidence for standard R 1.2.1, covering regional staffing arrangements, taking into account how close the score above is to the rating boundary.

Desistance and public protection:

The regional standards for desistance and public protection, court work and resettlement are derived from aggregate case data from all the PDU inspections in the region. The scores for these elements of work are added up from every case inspected during PDU inspections. Scoring mechanisms used to generate the regional ratings are the same as for PDU domain two; the rating for each standard is aligned to the banding at the key question level where the lowest proportion of cases were judged to be sufficient.

Unpaid work and victim work:

A separate cohort of cases with an unpaid work requirement is inspected as part of the regional fieldwork. Victim work is inspected in all cases identified from the PDU inspections as eligible for statutory victim contact. Scoring mechanisms used to generate the regional ratings are the same as for PDU domain two; the rating for each standard is aligned to the banding at the key question level where the lowest proportion of cases were judged to be sufficient.

Court work:

During PDU domain two case inspections, court reports are inspected where they have been completed in the case. That data is not used as part of the PDU rating, but is aggregated across the region and used to rate court work at regional level. As there is a single key question, the rating for that key question drives the rating for the standard.

Resettlement:

During PDU domain two case inspections, resettlement work is inspected in relevant cases. That data is not used as part of the PDU rating, but is aggregated across the region and used to rate resettlement at regional level. As there is a single key question, the rating for that key question drives the rating for the standard.

Overall regional rating

As for PDUs, straightforward scoring rules are used to generate the overall regional rating. Each of the eight standards is scored on a 0–3 scale, in which 'Inadequate' = 0; 'Requires improvement' = 1; 'Good' = 2; 'Outstanding' = 3. As for PDUs, we do not include any weightings in the scoring rules. Adding these scores produces a total score ranging from 0 to 24, which is banded to produce the overall rating, as follows:

- 0–4 = Inadequate
- 5–12 = Requires improvement
- 13–20 = Good
- 21–24 = Outstanding.

7.2. Ratings panel meetings

The ratings panel for PDU and regional inspections normally sits on the Friday of the week after the final fieldwork (week +1). Prior to the ratings panel, the head of the probation inspection programme reviews the proposed ratings and evidence with the lead inspector. The panel normally consists of the Chief Operating Officer (who chairs the panel and records its decision), the lead inspector, Head of Probation Inspection Programme and Deputy Head of Probation Inspection Programme. The Chief Inspector and deputy lead inspector may attend, if available; the Head of Policy and Standards and Head of attend some ratings panels.

The lead inspector for the PDU or region presents the proposed ratings to the panel in a structured way and in line with the following principles and processes:

- The panel discusses the extent to which the PDU has made progress on relevant recommendations from previous HM Inspectorate of Probation inspection reports (Probation Service and thematic inspections).

- The panel checks that the ratings for domain one are evidence-based and balanced, and in line with published HM Inspectorate of Probation rules and guidance.
- The panel considers the validity, source and impact weighting of each piece of evidence for domain one and determines whether the rating proposed by the lead inspector is appropriate, taking into account the impact of changes to our domain one standards, and the requirement to make links between domains one and two.
- For regional inspections, the panel decides whether to moderate the indicative rating for staffing (derived from aggregate PDU ratings), in the light of qualitative evidence about regional staffing.
- The panel makes sure that ratings are applied consistently across inspections.
- The panel provides a level of protection and challenge for the lead inspector.
- The panel focuses only on ratings at standard level and key findings, and does not quality-assure other aspects of the inspection.

Following the ratings panel, the chair of the panel completes the rating panel summary. By the end of the week following the ratings panel (week +2), the administrator sends the PDU or region a copy of the summary of the ratings panel meeting, which includes the agreed ratings.

Also, during week +2, the lead inspector contacts the head of PDU or RPD to explain the decision of the ratings panel.

7.3. Report writing

As the public products from inspection, it is important that PDU and regional reports are well presented, credible and accessible to the intelligent lay reader. Equally, to drive improvement in practice, the report needs to present the information required by the technical audience. We use a shorter report format in PDU inspections, with the intention of making the content accessible to a broader audience. A longer format is used for regional inspections, given the breadth of work to be covered. Alongside the reports, we also publish a data workbook, which sets out all the data from inspected cases, surveys, and contextual data. Reports contain a short narrative, explaining the progress made against recommendations from previous inspections. Reports may also identify areas of particularly effective or innovative practice that inspectors feel are worth sharing with other PDUs or regions.

The lead inspector is allocated two weeks to complete the first draft of the PDU inspection report, and three weeks for regional inspection reports, including presenting their judgements to the ratings panel.

The following processes are then carried out to finalise the report:

- initial editing (checking on grammar, house style, etc.)
- structure, accuracy and quality check by the chief operating officer (strategic editing)
- review by the Chief Inspector
- factual accuracy checking by the PDU or region
- statistics checking by the data and information team.

7.4. Feedback after fieldwork

The PDU lead inspector offers to provide feedback to PDU staff, including managers, practitioners and support staff, at a time to be agreed with the PDU. The purpose of

providing feedback at this stage is to help staff in the PDU understand the findings of the inspection, to provide an opportunity to ask questions, and to support the PDU to develop its practice before the report is published. Regional or national staff do not normally attend this meeting.

Similar arrangements are made by the regional lead inspector for giving feedback to regional staff following the regional inspection.

7.5. HM Inspectorate of Probation ratings challenge process and complaints procedure

We are committed to ensuring that our processes are transparent and fair, and of a professional standard. This includes handling complaints proficiently, in an open and rigorous way, investigating the matters raised thoroughly and replying as quickly as possible to any concerns raised with us.

Organisations can make a complaint if they are dissatisfied with the way in which we carry out, or fail to carry out, our business. This includes the quality of our work or the way we work, including the conduct of the organisation or of individual members of staff. It can also include issues with our inspection judgements. Our complaints policy can be found on our website⁶.

While our formal complaints policy covers any issues that organisations may have with the findings of our inspections, the expectation is that these are dealt with informally, negating the need to invoke the formal complaints policy.

There is therefore an opportunity to raise such issues at the factual accuracy check. Providers are discouraged from raising such issues when they receive the initial ratings panel summary, as they are not in possession of the more detailed evidence base that supports the inspection ratings, which will be covered in the full report. The chief operating officer is the final decision-maker on any matters of factual accuracy and/or challenge to inspection ratings.

We aim to address any concerns or dissatisfaction as early as possible, preferably before they are escalated to a formal complaint. If an organisation is not satisfied with the response from the chief operating officer concerning a challenge to ratings, it can then invoke the formal complaints procedure. This will need to be supported with new evidence. We will not reconsider solely on the basis that our judgements are disappointing to the organisation.

7.6. Report publication

We aim to publish PDU reports eight weeks after the end of the fieldwork, and regional reports nine weeks after the end of the fieldwork. Reports in Wales require at least an additional two weeks to allow for translation.

7.7. Action plans

The inspected region liaises with PAR to agree a regional action plan to address the recommendations in the regional report, which may include national recommendations, as well as those specific to the and region. We expect the action plan to be in place within two months of the publication of the regional report. The Regional Executive Director writes to

⁶ <https://hmiprobation.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/corporate-document/complaints/>

the Chief Inspector of Probation following completion of all the PDU inspections in the region, to outline key actions to be taken.