



**Self-evaluation tool guidance:**

**Childcare agencies introducing and supplying childcare staff**

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## Introduction

**‘Self-evaluation is where a service ‘systematically examines itself, achievements, and processes to assess whether it is meeting its stated objectives and outcomes efficiently and effectively’.** ([Audit Scotland, 2012](#))

The purpose of our self-evaluation tools is to support services to assess how well they are doing against the key questions from our quality framework and highlight areas where they need to support improved outcomes for children. This guide will help you to do that.

Self-evaluation can be a powerful tool to identify what’s working well and to identify and support improvement. We want all services to undertake self-evaluation. Self-evaluation is best done by those who know services, and includes children who use them, their relatives and staff. When we refer to people who use services, this includes children, their relatives and may include other agencies who request placements on behalf of families.

This toolkit and guidance follow on from the work we have already undertaken in relation to self-evaluation and should be used along with the quality framework for your service type and [our guide to self-evaluation](#).

This gives a suggested step by step guide and information on:

- what self-evaluation is
- how to use self-evaluation
- carrying out your self-evaluation
- involving people who experience care and their carers.

The ELC Improvement team have developed a number of [bite-sized sessions](#) which you may find useful to view alongside this toolkit.

The quality frameworks are primarily designed to support services with self-evaluation. We worked with the services we regulate to build capacity for self-evaluation based on the [quality frameworks](#).

Self-evaluation is not done for our benefit. It is a process that your service leads on, so you should determine the frequency and focus of your self-evaluation. Well-led services know where they are performing well, and where they need to improve. You should use self-evaluation to inform where you need to target your efforts to support improvement. It is an ongoing process which supports continuous improvement, rather than being a one-off activity.

**Some services already have well-established and effective processes for evaluating their performance, and they should continue to use them.** We are not asking all services to use this tool, as other tools are available, however, we do want all services to recognise the value that self-evaluation has in supporting improvement and better outcomes for children.

Whichever tool you use, it should be linked to the quality framework for your service type and the Health and Social Care Standards, which set out what people should expect when using health, social care or social work services in Scotland.

This guide describes a process that can complement what you already do and gives advice and ideas about how existing processes can be used effectively. It embeds self-evaluation in the quality frameworks and will support you to evaluate your service.

We recognise that services are under significant pressure and have needed to adapt and do things differently.

On page 9 we have suggested some 'quick win options' to identify more immediate areas for improvement through self-evaluation that offer some alternative, short-term solutions and consider barriers that may be in place. This makes it easier to get started with self-evaluation and make improvements, even if you can only carry out elements of the process.

## Section one

### Core assurances

Experience has taught us that when things go wrong in care services, they often relate to key areas. Theory and inquiries into when care goes wrong have highlighted the areas that are important to monitor because these can be identified as early indicators of concern to people using services ([Scottish Government 2014](#), [Hull University 2012](#), [Francis Report 2013](#)).

These are the key areas considered during the registration process, and policies and procedures relating to them must be in place before a service is registered. Because we know, and research tells us, that these key areas are essential to a service being safe, we have called them ‘core assurances.’

This checklist of core assurances highlights what inspectors must look at on inspection. They help guide providers on the areas that are important to children’s safety and wellbeing. The core assurances span the entire framework, covering elements of several different quality indicators.

The list of core assurances can be found in this tool ([link to core assurance tool](#)), which includes a worked example to help you check that you are meeting all these core assurances and are able to evidence this.

## Section two

### The process

This self-evaluation tool is based around the key areas from our quality frameworks.

The key areas sit under each quality indicator as shown below.

<b>Key question 1: How well do we support children's care, play and learning?</b>	
Quality indicator	<b>1.1 Staff nurture and support children's care, play and learning</b>
Key areas	<p>This includes the extent to which children's rights are respected and promoted through the following key areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff who support children's wellbeing through compassionate and responsive care.</li> <li>• Personal planning which involves children and families and reflects their needs and wishes.</li> <li>• Play and learning activities are fun and are developed in partnership with children and their families.</li> </ul>

We want you to ask three self-evaluation questions for each key area:

- how are we doing?
- how do we know?
- what are we going to do now?

Each key area has several quality illustrations that provide a benchmark and guide to what you should look at when evaluating how well your service is performing.



## Quality indicator 1.1: Staff nurture and support children’s care, play and learning

This includes the extent to which children’s rights are respected and promoted through the following key areas.



- Staff who support children’s wellbeing through compassionate and responsive care.
- Personal planning which involves children and families and reflects their needs and wishes.
- Play and learning activities are fun and are developed in partnership with children and their families.



This indicator focuses on how well children are nurtured and supported by staff who build strong relationships with them. Children’s care, play and learning routines are individual to their needs. It highlights the importance of skilled staff to promote children’s confidence to enable them to reach their full potential.

Personal planning reflects the needs of each child to improve their wellbeing and support positive outcomes. Staff recognise children’s current interests and curiosities and promote children’s right to play and have fun. It highlights the importance of placing the needs and interests of children at the centre of their play and learning.

### Quality illustrations for introductory and supply agencies

Very good	Weak
Children have opportunities to meet staff before they start caring for them to ensure they develop caring and nurturing relationships.	There are limited opportunities to meet staff before they begin caring for children.
The agency considers individual children’s needs and staff skills to ensure effective matches will have a positive impact on outcomes for children.	The agency does not always consider children’s needs, when matching staff with children and families.
	Some staff have limited skills and knowledge to care for children, including those with additional support needs.



After each quality indicator, there will be links to related best practice guidance documents under the key improvement resources section.

You will find links to worked examples at the end of this guide, showing how you could complete one of these key areas with some of the ways you could identify, connect, and evaluate your evidence. By the end of this process, you will have evaluated your service and will be able to develop an improvement plan.

### The three self-evaluation questions

When carrying out your self-evaluation you should ask these three questions about each key area.

1. How are we doing?
2. How do we know?
3. What are we going to do now?

### Self-Evaluation tool

Name of service:  
 Name of manager:  
 Date of self-evaluation:

**Key question**.....  Which key question are you evaluating?

**Quality indicator**.....  Which Quality indicator are you evaluating?

**1. Key area**.....  Which key area are you evaluating?

**How are we doing?**

Unsatisfactory	Weak	Adequate	Good	Very Good	Excellent

**How do we know?**

**What are we going to do now?**

### Question 1 - How are we doing?

This is the key to knowing whether you are doing the right things in the right way and whether, as a result, children are experiencing high-quality, safe and compassionate care that meets their needs, rights and choices. You can use good practice guides and the quality illustrations to make sure you are asking the right questions.

Unsatisfactory	Weak	Adequate	Good	Very good	Excellent



These evaluations are based on our six-point scale. Further information about each of these evaluations can be found within the [quality frameworks](#) and on our website.

This description should be easily understood by those who use your service, staff and relatives. Evaluate how your service is performing for each of the key areas in each of the key questions, using the above scale. Your evidence should include:

- feedback from staff, children, relatives and other stakeholders
- feedback on staff practice
- quality assurance activities
- benchmarking against good practice and the quality illustrations.

There is more detailed guidance including examples in 'Section 2, evidence gathering' on page 7.

### **Question 2 - How do we know?**

How have you arrived at your answer to question 1, 'How are we doing?' Answer this question using evaluative statements, based on the evidence you have gathered.

You should use the quality illustrations within the framework, the Health and Social Care Standards and good practice documents as benchmarks, which may also help you think about where improvements need to be made.

Look at the scrutiny actions and improvement resources in the quality framework to see some examples of where you may find other sources of evidence or good practice.

### **Question 3 - What are we going to do now?**

Understanding how well your service is performing should help you see what is working well and what needs to be improved. From that, you should be able to develop and prioritise plans for improvement based on effective practice, guidance, research, testing, and available improvement support. The ability to identify what is not working well, where improvements need to be made and developing a plan to address these is a strength. It demonstrates good leadership and management and is characteristic of an organisation that is committed to learning and developing to support the best outcomes for children.

By the end of the questions, you should be able to write your improvement plan. By answering each of the three questions you will have identified where your service is doing well and where you need to improve to support better outcomes for children and families using your service.

The improvement plan should include:

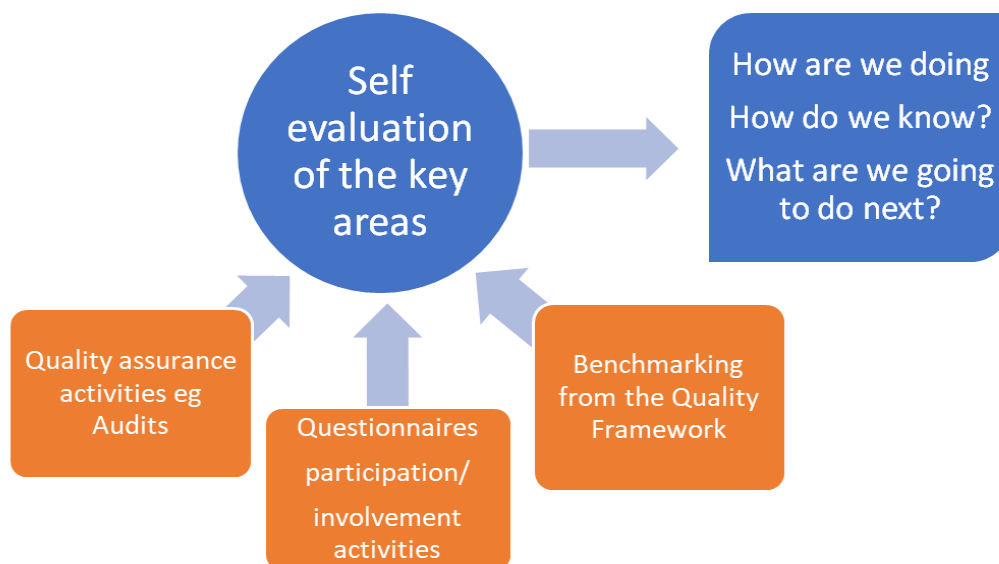
- the actions
- who will carry them out
- a timetable
- a review of what was achieved or where further action is required.

This tool should be used as part of your service's normal participation and quality assurance work. Remember, you are not undertaking this for the Care Inspectorate. You are doing this to help improve outcomes for people using your service. Where our scrutiny activities show us that a service has used self-evaluation to identify and plan to address areas for improvement, we would usually regard this as a management strength. Where we identify areas for improvement that you are not aware of, or for which there is no improvement plan in place, this is likely to affect the evaluations we make.

## Section three

### Evidence gathering for self-evaluation

Aim: to enable people to give their view on how the service is performing in a range of different areas in a measured way.



When gathering evidence as part of your self-evaluation, you will need to involve staff, children and the families using the service, you may also include other organisations who request placements for families. Some of this evidence could include questionnaires, but there are other means of consulting with people that you might also want to consider, including focus groups or simply taking the time to talk to people to get their views on specific issues. You should take different communication needs into account and use any appropriate communication tools when consulting with people using the service. AbilityNet provides some [helpful advice on different communication aids](#).

By asking people to evaluate an area using a scale, you can measure how you are doing in a more systematic way. By repeating these questions, and the process at a later date, you will be able to measure your progress. Breaking down the key areas for self-evaluation into smaller, more specific questions will help you build a picture of how you are performing across the whole key area.

## Example

'In September 2023 we found that only 25% of people felt that communication with the agency was good. This was identified as an area where we needed to make improvements and incorporated it into our action plan. We decided to provide a monthly newsletter for parents and carers, and we increased our use of social media and our digital app so that we could make sure that people using the service were kept up to date with what was happening in the service. In April 2024 we completed the self-evaluation again and this time we found that 80% of people felt that communication was either good or very good. This showed us the impact that the improvement activities had made to people.'

At the end of this document, we have provided links to templates for questionnaires, with examples of questions that may be useful to elicit feedback under each of the key areas. The questionnaires are based on the illustrations in the framework. We would suggest getting feedback from children and families who use the agency, staff and other stakeholders, such as agencies who request care on behalf of families, or those with regular input to the service. People should have the option to remain anonymous or give their details if they would like a response to any comments or issues they have raised. You should also set a clear deadline for responses and offer alternative ways for people to respond or receive information, for example through email, post or in person. You should tailor these questions so that they suit your service.

There is no expectation that you would use all these questions in one questionnaire as they are suggestions which may help you focus on areas you have decided to focus on. This includes making adjustments to how the questions are presented to support communication, for example using talking mats, pictures or symbols.



Image: <https://goboardmaker.com/>

These questionnaires are only one way of gaining feedback. You could consider things such as focus groups, team meetings or service events as opportunities to gather feedback. You should also consider how you will receive feedback directly from children. For older children this might be through an online survey or as part of your routine feedback on staff. For younger children you may wish to use a simplified questionnaire using pictures and/or ask for parents to request feedback or evaluate on their behalf as part of your usual quality assurance activities.

Eurochild has a helpful [participation toolkit](#) that may help you to increase children's participation in self-evaluation.

## Quality assurance activities

**Aim:** To check quality and provide more robust evidence about performance across key areas of the service.

There are a number of quality assurance activities that can contribute to your self-evaluation. You should have in place different processes and systems to ensure good care and support for people, and these can be used to inform your self-evaluation.

Key question 2, 'How good is our leadership and staffing?', in the quality frameworks talks more about quality assurance with examples of what very good (and weak) practice may look like and where you can find more information. Ways of assuring quality include using audits and involving children and their families.

Your quality assurance processes should help you identify areas for improvement, as well as areas that are working well. This information can then feed into the self-evaluation as evidence for your assessments of where you are at.

### Example

If you are looking at how well you are performing in relation to personal planning. You could use the [personal plan guidance](#) from our Hub as a benchmark. You may have asked specific questions about personal plans in a questionnaire to children and families. Were there specific areas which families identified as strengths or areas where they didn't feel included? You may have already audited training, was this identified as a priority? Did staff attend any training you have provided, is this discussed during supervision/team meetings to check understanding? Have you completed observations of staff practice in relation to personal plan records and did they follow the guidance? Have you identified any practice concerns?

### Quick win options

In order for the self-evaluation process to be meaningful and useful, the same general process should be followed. We appreciate that services may struggle with the idea of something new being introduced at this point in time. With that in mind, we have suggested a summary version of the process that will support those who have extremely limited capacity but will still offer some of the benefits of undertaking the process.

This is a temporary option as way of engaging with the process and beginning an improvement journey, with the expectation that this is a starting point only.

## Barriers

- I don't have the resources to support people using the service to complete questionnaires or hold focus groups.
- I don't have time to send out questionnaires to family members and there are working parents who don't have time to complete surveys or take part in focus groups.
- I don't have time to send out and collate all that information because this is a large service, and we are already short staffed.
- We haven't been carrying out our usual quality assurance processes due to being short staffed.
- People using the service / relatives are unhappy with aspects of the service which are out with our control, for instance, access to the service rules, government restrictions.
- The self-evaluation is too much work, I don't have time to do this.
- It is difficult to carry out meaningful participation activities with children, especially those who are very young. Relationships can be key as staff caring for children may be more attuned to their needs and wishes.

## Alternatives

- Prioritise the completion of the core assurances as this will help highlight any key issues and areas for concern.
- Focus on one key area at a time, they don't have to all be completed together.
- Use your existing quality assurance systems to monitor the standards of care.
- If there is an issue you already know about within the service, try using the format of the self-evaluation to address it. For example, answering the second and third questions: 'How do we know?', how did the issue come to your attention), and 'What are we going to do now?', how are you going to address the problem? You can start an improvement plan from here just filling in the boxes with the information you already have.
- Use information you already have. You may have recently completed involvement activities, received feedback from staff, stakeholders or people using the service. There may have been recent audits or incidents where key information has come to light that needs addressing, for instance, drop off and collection procedures to ensure children's safety or the need for key information in personal plans to be updated.
- Use question of the week on closed groups on social media like 'WhatsApp' for the staff team.
- Email all staff a questionnaire and set up a shared file where completed questionnaires can be saved into. Set a deadline.
- Set up an electronic survey using a software platform such as Survey Monkey or Microsoft forms, which can also collate responses for you.
- During the normal course of your day, take time to ask people using the service who you meet some simple questions relevant to the key area you are looking at (use examples from the questionnaires). Just remember to ask people the same thing and make a note of what you asked them for future reference.

## Improvement planning



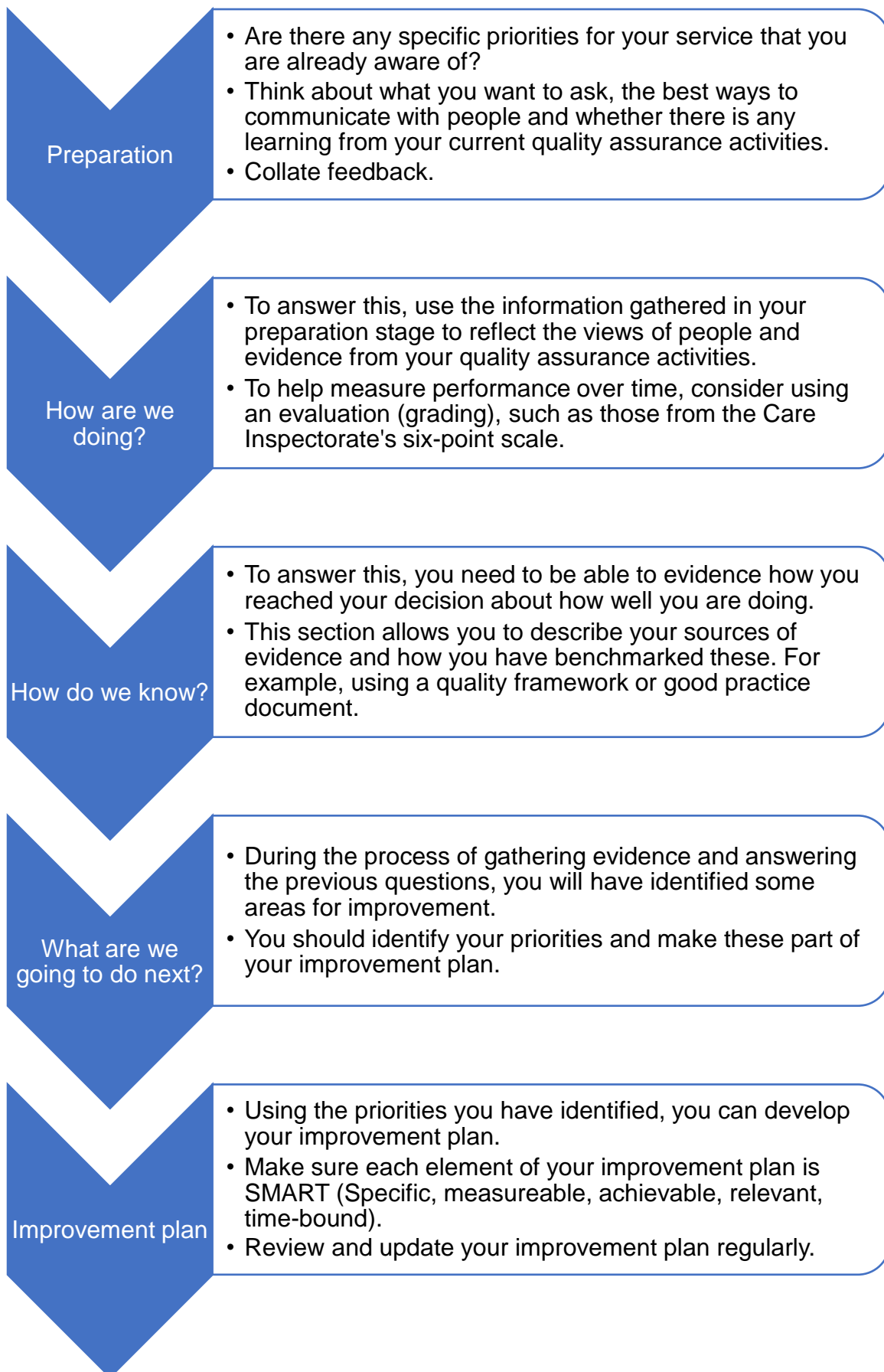
Improvement planning is part of the wider self-evaluation and quality assurance cycle. These are not one-off activities and to identify what improvements are required and what improvement actions are working, there needs to be ongoing self-evaluation and review. The timescales for this are up to your individual service and depend on where you are in your improvement journey. For services needing to make several improvements that are essential to improving outcomes for people, more regular reviews would be required to ensure that the service continues to move forward, and changes can be made where things are not working.

All our quality frameworks include a key question that evaluates ‘how good is our leadership’. This key question recognises the importance of good quality assurance and improvement activities, including:

- quality assurance, including self-evaluation and improvement plans, drive change and improvement where necessary
- leaders are responsive to feedback and use learning to improve
- leaders have the skills and capacity to oversee improvement.

[Our guide to self-evaluation](#) directs you to other resources, such as our [model for improvement](#) and gives more information on the process of planning improvements.

## Summary process





## Templates and examples

Core assurances (worked example and tool)

Example questionnaires for:

- [Children / relatives](#)
- [Staff](#)
- [Improvement plan template](#)
- [Self-evaluation tool template](#)
- [Worked example of self-evaluation tool](#)