

REPORT:	Update on Audit and QA Activity	MONTH:	December 2018
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1) How much did we do?

This report provides an overview of audit activity for December, including the completion of audits against expectations, the growth in the number of auditors through the rolling training programme and other relevant quality assurance activity (e.g. dip samples).

Our expectation is that every Senior Manager, Manager and Advanced Practitioner undertakes 1 high quality core audit per month (unless they are otherwise moderating the audits of their colleagues). We now have a pool of 82 trained auditors and 16 moderators including two external (ex-Ofsted) moderators available for audit activity. As business usual we are expecting an approximate pool of 85 auditors and 26 moderators with a completion rate of 90%.

Due to exemptions (see below), 60 children were allocated for audit from across all teams in Children’s Social Care and the 11-25 Service. Three auditors were further exempted, which, alongside 4 completed audits that did not meet required standards when moderated, resulting in 53 audits completed to expected standards. (See Appendix 1 for a list of those with Exemptions, Late Returns, Nil Returns, and audits not meeting expected standards.) For December these 53 audits were completed and uploaded to children/young people’s records – the findings of which follow.

There were no formal dip samples undertaken in December.

2) How well are we doing?

This section summarises progress against the targets to grow our auditor and moderator capacity and progress, and learning from auditing and dip sample activity.

We have achieved our target of having 85 trained auditors in place by November 2018, though 3 have left GCC in December, and 3 became moderators. This represents continued growth in auditor and moderator capacity since October 17, notwithstanding 25 auditors and 3 moderators leaving GCC in the interim. Steve Hart will be training a small group of internal trainers in February 2019 who will take forwards the delivery of our auditor and moderator development on a rolling quarterly basis. This will enable us to sustain a good level of auditor capacity going forward.

Figure 1 charts the monthly rate of audit completion. This illustrates that as a proportion of available auditors, completion rates have been fairly static. The December completion numbers demonstrate continued growth in the volume of audits completed. Within this there were 12/82 exemptions granted (15%) that were not related to maternity or sick leave arrangements leading to a completion rate of 85%. This is marginally below the expected completion levels of 90%. The congestion effect within the system as a result of the Christmas break needs to be considered within this.

Fig 1. Audit completion rates: January – November 2018:

	Jan 18	Feb 18	Mar 18	Apr 18	May 18	Jun 18	Jul 18	Aug 18	Sept 18	Oct 18	Nov 18	Dec 18
Completed audits	32	23	24	27	25	40	27	26	28	46	45	57
No. of auditors	19	14	16	22	23	44	46	47	61	61	73	82
Overall Completion rate	168%	164%	150%	123%	109%	91%	59%	55%	46%	75%	62%	70%
Completion rate less non-operational* exemptions	Not measured										47/62 (76%)	57/67 (85%)

Note: December figures includes 4 completed audits not meeting standard

*** Non-operational exemptions include: extended leave, health reasons, or leaving GCC.**

Figures 2 and 3 below summarise the audit ratings. It is important to highlight that the audit methodology not only measures the quality of practice, but the impact of that practice for the child/young person. Better ratings are directly correlated to better outcomes for children.

There continues to be good and improving practice and outcomes for children evidenced through the work. It is encouraging to see continued momentum around Good practice (17%). Audited work that is deemed of Inadequate quality and that is failing to improve children/young people’s outcomes continues to be high (23%).

Fig 2. Audit ratings by month – percentages:

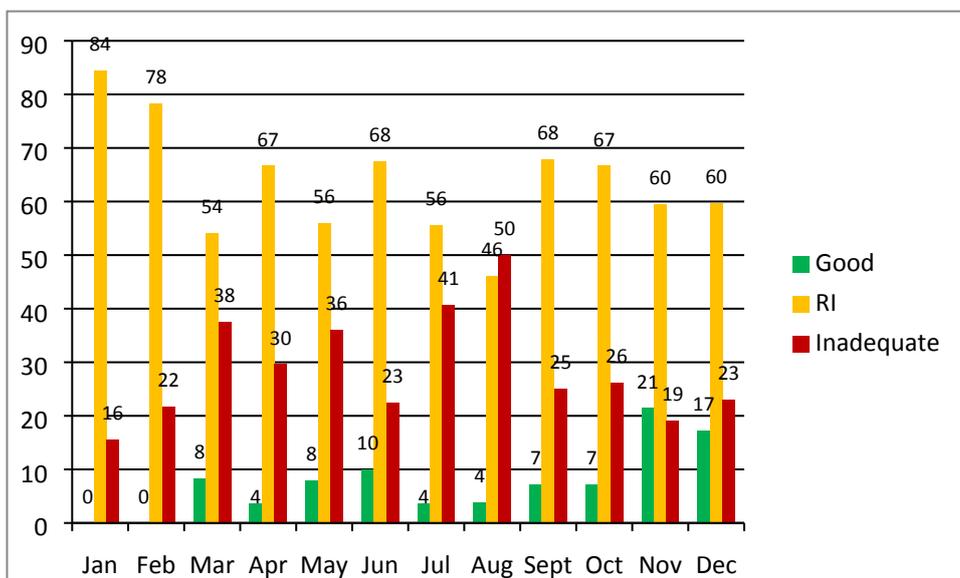
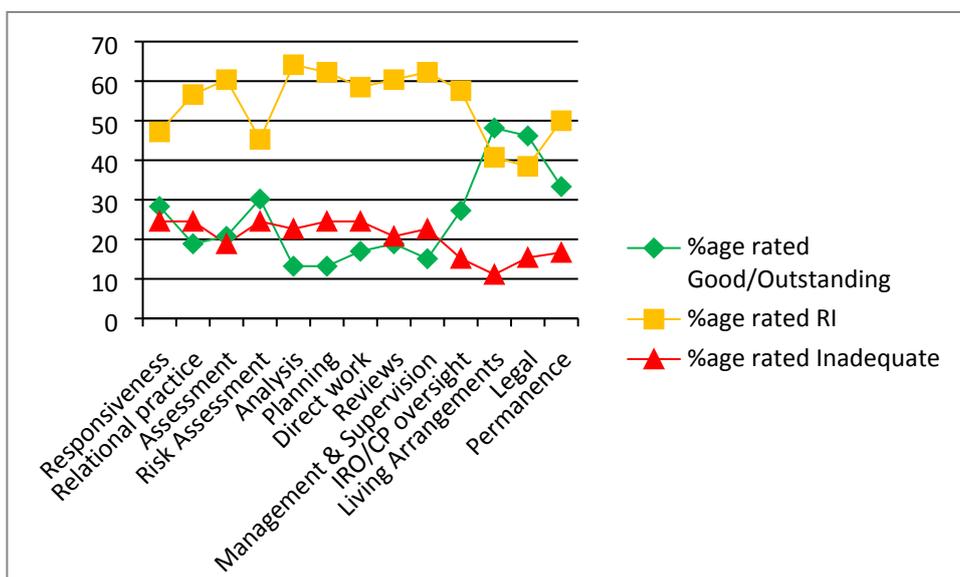


Fig 3. Audit ratings by month – actual numbers:

Month (2018)	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Good	0	0	2	1	2	4	1	1	2	3	9	9
RI	27	18	13	18	14	27	15	12	18	28	25	31
Inadequate	5	5	9	8	9	9	11	13	5	11	8	12

Fig 4. Profile of Practice identified through audit (as a percentage):



The following headline observations arise from **Figure 4** above:

- a) Good practice is variable across the areas measured. It is not yet consistent and pervasive across the areas of practice in the way that Inadequate practice appears to be.
- b) Responsiveness is almost equally Good (28%) as Inadequate (25%) which suggests a high degree of variance in the timeliness and proportionality of our responses to children and families. Within which we are still likely to encounter drift and delay, insufficient urgency and over-optimistic responses to risk.
- c) There is noticeably better practice in relation to Living Arrangements and Legal activity for our children becoming looked after, and those in care.
- d) Risk Assessment appears to be an improving area (30% judged Good), however, weakness in Risk Assessment remains a dominant feature in our Inadequate practices (25%). Linked to the findings above about Inadequate practice, where Risk Assessment is Inadequate it follows that our response to and reduction of risk remains insufficient. This therefore remains an area of priority focus.
- e) Assessments continue to be of variable quality.
- f) The quality of Analysis (13% judged as Good, 23% as Inadequate) continues to be an area requiring priority emphasis and improvement, as does Planning (13% Good; 25% Inadequate) and Direct Work (17% Good; 25% Inadequate). Reviews are slightly improved in comparison but also require attention (19% Good; 21% Inadequate).
- g) The quality of Management oversight and Supervision (15% Good; 23% Inadequate) continues to be an area requiring attention.

Alongside the feedback to social work practitioners and managers on the findings from file audits as a driver for development and learning, a tracker has been established to track any necessary actions and 'Children of Concern' (Inadequate). The latter fall into two categories:

Category 1: there are widespread or serious failures meaning that the child / young person is at immediate risk of significant harm and needs an urgent (same day) response from the Head of Service; with Director oversight.
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Category 2: there are widespread or serious failures meaning that the service offer/risk assessment is not appropriate to the needs of that child/young person.

Of those audits uploaded to children's records in December, 12 were deemed to be Children of Concern. A further 2 Children of Concern were identified amongst those audits that did not meet the standards required to be uploaded; so in total there were 14 identified this month. One of these was a Category 1, which has de-escalated as such under Director approval, with continued Head of Service oversight.

Including these 14 Children of Concern from December, there are currently 29 Children of Concern on the tracker. 3 of these Children have been on the log from August, 5 from October, and 7 from November, indicating insufficient action to de-escalate the concerns as needed for these children.

3) What action have we taken as a result of December QA activity?

A key element within our quality assurance programme is to ensure that there is an effective and timely response to identified actions to address issues impacting on children and young people and drive organisational learning. The Practice Learning Team maintains an action tracking log for all actions from audit, which is shared with the Heads of Service on a regular basis. There are currently 479 ongoing actions from previous audits (including December). 175 (37%) of which are within timescale, and 304 (63%) are overdue. All overdue actions are regularly communicated to managers and senior managers.

The refreshed audit tool is now in operation. Alongside this we have introduced an impact measurement tool that will be distributed 6 weeks after each audit return to measure the impact of audit on improving the quality of practice amongst audit recipients, and the impact of audit on children/young people. This will first be sent out in mid-February with results being reported on in the February QAF report.

Under direction from the DCS, all exemptions from completing audits are now to be authorised by the respective operations directors.

We have realised that though we are improving engagement rates of practitioners and managers in audit, we have more work to do to improve ownership and value for the audit methodology amongst participants. We have therefore dedicated a substantial portion of the Extended Managers Meeting in February 2019 to this, are reinforcing the strengths-based intent of the audit approach at every opportunity, and offering individual and small-group coaching support to auditors and moderators when needs are presented. In addition to this we undertook a survey exercise with auditors and moderators leading to the following insights:

- a) Nearly all respondents reflected on time pressures in relation to audit amidst competing operational demands.
- b) Most respondents valued the child-centeredness of the new approach and the learning opportunities it presents.
- c) They reported feeling well-supported and developed through the process of becoming auditors and moderators.
- d) There is a general recognition that we are not completing actions to demonstrate the benefit to children and young people from audit that we know they can deliver.
- e) More is needed to develop greater consistency in auditing.
- f) Morale can be damaged when audits are not undertaken or in a strengths-based fashion or received in a non-defensive way.

More detail on the findings from this survey is available in Appendix 2.

4) How well are we engaging Social Workers and Managers in audits?

Of the 57 audits completed (including those not deemed admissible) 53 were completed with a social worker (93%) and there were legitimate reasons for not doing so in the other 4 instances (e.g. worker had recently left GCC). Most audits are now undertaken by team managers in their own areas thereby increasing the participation of managers in the audit. In December 42 (74%) managers were included. 8 children/young people were contacted, 19 had been unsuccessfully attempted, and 30 were not applicable due to age or circumstances. 26 parents chose to give their views during the audits, it was deemed unsuitable to contact 9 and 22 were unsuccessfully attempted.

5) What is the impact of our audit actions on outcomes for children and young people?

The timely closure and oversight of audit actions and oversight promotes improved outcomes for children. Whilst this is improving circumstances for some children and young people, at present, we continue to have too many overdue actions on the audit action and Children of Concern trackers, and this has risen from the November QAF report.

While the newly initiated impact measurement methodology described in '3' above offers an opportunity for impact reporting, we have yet to wait the necessary 6 weeks to gather this feedback in so cannot yet report on this routinely.

6) Conclusions

1. The conclusions of this report are not dissimilar from those in November. In order for the organisation to be lifted from an overall rating of Inadequate, we need to see action set to move the monthly audit ratings to no more than 8% Inadequate. To this end, QA activity has highlighted the following:
 - a) An urgent need to agree threshold definitions, and reset the organisational approach to identifying, responding to and reducing risk. Work will be needed to include the partnership in this but this will need to run in parallel as will need longer to embed.
 - b) Work needed with our team management group to understand the barriers to management grip and to introduce the necessary solutions to overcome these. In addition to this, an important reflection is that in general most audits meet the standards set which suggests a reasonable degree of 'Good' management/leadership insights into practice quality and the expectations of practice standards. That this is not yet leading to overall improvements in the quality of practice further begs the question as to the barriers

and conditions that are preventing these managers from effecting improvement.

- c) The timeliness of visits to establish the safety of children and young people needs to improve markedly; and these visits need to be better used with purposeful direct work leading to improvements for children and young people.
 - d) The practice fundamentals of Assessment, Analysis, and Planning (and the continuity between these) needs to be improved.
2. Though we have received encouraging feedback on the quality of our auditing we remain unable to routinely and systematically demonstrate the impact of this activity on children's lives. This urgently requires the timely completion of audit action and the removal of children from the Children of Concern tracker by effectively attending to their needs.
 3. We are seeing improvements in audit completion rates as a result of considerable pressure and the need to have exemptions approved by directors. This pressure needs to be maintained until audit is seen as business usual.
 4. The above needs to be balanced against the unanimous feedback from the auditors and moderators that their primary challenge in the audit approach is the finding of time to audit to the expected standard amidst operational demands.
 5. Though there is some growth in the moderator pool, there is continued pressure on the development of the moderator pool, wherein new auditors need more time to develop to allow prospective moderators to be identified.

7) Recommendations

Taking account of the learning from the volume and outcomes of our QA activity during December 2018, the following recommendations are made:

1. Children's Services Leadership to work with the wider management group to agree and implement a 3 month action plan seeking to reduce the current Inadequate practice to 8%. This will need to include as a minimum:
 - Rapid review of the Inadequate practice from the last 3 months to frame fuller insights into causal or maintaining factors in this practice.
 - Service-wide clarity on threshold definition and implementation of an agreed model of identifying, responding to, and reducing risk.
 - Work undertaken by operational leads with team managers to understand and respond to the underpinning challenges that hinder team managers exercising grip.
 - Prioritisation of undertaking timely and purposeful visits that effect change.
 - Work with Heads of Service to revise and launch tailored Essentials training interventions on a team/locality basis.
2. Deploy the impact measurement tool and include results in ongoing QAF reports. But this is secondary to SLT direction and grip to ensure the suitable removal of Children from the Children of Concern tracker and resolution of overdue audit actions.
3. Continued emphasis on strengths-based auditing, coaching for auditors and moderators; and undertake a recall event for auditors at the Extended Managers' Meeting in February 2019. This will be undertaken with an appreciative enquiry and collaborative solution-focused approach. Exemptions to continue to be signed-off by the respective operations director.
4. Use the monthly standing item on the Leadership Team agenda to report on audit completion, action tracking, and progress against recommendations from dip samples and audits.
5. Continued funding to be available for external moderator support, whilst we develop our pool of moderators.

Appendix 2 - Feedback on audit from auditors and moderators December 2018

<p>Pro's (what's gone well, what're the greatest benefits, what good can you see, etc.)</p> <p>Child Centred:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Real benefit to looking in depth at a child's experience/journey. - Improving our ability to think contextually about the child and the impact of our interventions. - Improves our consideration of children not in crisis that demand most of our attention. <p>Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They have supported our understanding of what 'Good' looks like. - When done inclusively and restoratively it offers a chance for direct dialogue and learning during the audit – doing 'With' not 'To' or 'For'. - Opportunity to identify good practice, areas of concern, or practice to strengthen. - Can be used with immediate effect in supervision. - Auditors enjoying the feedback discussions with workers following audit. - Auditing the practice within one's own team has given an improved understanding of workers' practice as well as their own as leaders within the team. - Has offered auditors and moderators a new skills set and approach. <p>Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They are challenging us to improve our recording of the good work that we do. - They provide a fresh pair of eyes offers a different perspective on our service to a child/family. - An opportunity to reflect on actions to date and what needs to change. - The audits are Evidence-based – they are therefore much more objective and hold-up to scrutiny. - Auditors and moderators have welcomed the support available from moderators, the Practice Learning and QA teams. - Slowly... audits are becoming embedded in our practice. - When we do something with them they demonstrably lead to improved outcomes for children. 	<p>Cons (what's difficult, what don't you like, what do you want changed, etc.)?</p> <p>Time:</p> <p><i>The pressure to have time to complete audits was the most consistent point of feedback across the group.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is hard to find the time in an environment that feel time poor. - "There is pressure from senior managers to use the time protected for audit for other priorities." - The form was too lengthy but has recently improved. - Writing up is where the most time is taken – we need to know how little we can write while still producing a good audit. - There are often challenges getting hold of parents, children, CP/IRO's etc which adds a lot of time to the process. - <p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Incomplete audit actions – we can't see the impact from audits if actions aren't completed. - Actions being too process-driven. - Too many actions set and not all realistic/manageable. - Actions not written in a way that will lead to direct improvements for the child. - Need a way of effectively sharing audit findings each month. <p>Consistency:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It's demanding to maintain objectivity in auditing 'your own' work. This was easier when auditing across teams. - Inconsistent message of what's expected from auditors/moderators. <p>Morale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can be demoralising if work is evaluated as not yet good. - Damaging if audited/moderated from a perspective of high criticism-low warmth. I.e. an absence of encouraging, constructive, strengths-based thinking/language. - Even when feedback is given in a manner intended to be helpful, this has been met with defensiveness from some workers/managers making for a difficult experience.
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