

Hints and tips for auditing August 2022

The following “hints and tips” have been extracted from learning materials that were used as part of an auditing training module, which was delivered to children’s social care staff across July and August 2022. This information has been reproduced for internal use and circulation with permission from the trainer.

1. **Audit is a dynamic process... (not one size fits all).** This model enables ‘you’ the auditor to exercise professional curiosity and explore the child’s case, leading to a set of summary judgements and an overall judgement (professional judgement of you the auditor/SW manager) so it is clear to the reader how effective social work intervention is NOW and what difference this has made to improve outcomes for the child NOW.
2. The **child’s story section is particularly important** in the dynamic audit process to set the scene... this is your opportunity to accurately describe the unique set of circumstances including the child’s history which becomes more detailed in the last six months to fit the scope of the audit... use dates so there is a clear timeline. It is not possible for the audit to explore every aspect of the child’s case so you must determine the most important factors for the individual child at THIS POINT in their life journey using your knowledge and experience... this is a skill which requires the auditor to ‘top slice’ all the information to draw out and sharply **focus on the most important things** (‘Blink’ Malcolm Gladwell 2007). Your description of the facts is the ‘point-in-time’ when service outputs and outcomes for the child are captured in the audit so the most important aspects of the child’s life ‘right here right now’ are subject to robust scrutiny and challenge Balance practice deficits against outcomes for child. **Always put the subject child at the centre of the audit.**
3. This is an evidence-based audit... findings are underpinned by a mix of quantitative (data, empirical evidence) and qualitative (where you the auditor exercise your professional judgement based on ‘best fit’) (Ofsted ILACS Dec 2021) factors seen through the critical eye of a suitable qualified and experienced SW manager who is independent from the case management decisions.
4. Use dates so **evidence is convincing**, such as the date an assessment was completed, and state the obvious that the assessment was completed within the required time scale so there is no ambiguity. Use the rule of **triangulation** where possible such as to confirm the frequency standard is met for supervision... state the date when the last three sessions took place so evidence is convincing. This evidence does not support a good summary judgement on its own it would need to underpin effective practice and improved outcomes for the child to do this.
5. Practice the rule of triangulation so qualitative findings stand-up to scrutiny and challenge... provide **three pieces of evidence to support each summary judgement**. These must stem from the description of the facts provided in the child’s story section. There must be read across from the child’s story so the reader is convinced you are exploring **the most important presenting issues in the child’s life ‘right here right now’** and that you are arriving at evidence based judgements on what difference social work intervention is making to improve outcomes for the child NOW.
6. **Description is not evaluation...** Description states the facts and belongs in the child’s story. You must **exercise professional curiosity** so the reader is convinced you have explored the most

important aspects of the child's circumstances and to what extent the SW intervention has made a difference including drawing out gaps, drift and delay appropriately to underpin your judgement on the four point judgement scale. Evaluation is made up of three constructs... the subject area, evaluative words/phrases and an example of the child's lived experience which stems from the child's story... such as, 'arrangements for... are effective.... leading to? For example, make your judgement clear from the outset... 'The SW knows the child well...' how do you know... ask yourself so what difference this has made?

7. The **importance of** underpinning judgements based on the **outcomes for the child**... use the audit template to explore outcomes across the range such as health, safety, education, positive contribution and in the case of Care Leavers Economic wellbeing (ECM outcomes DfE 2005).
8. Summary judgements... evaluative sentences made by you in the audit sections must support the summary judgement... using the rule of three balance the number of pieces of evidence to support your summary judgement. This is not an exact science... the rules are if statutory requirements are not met it cannot be good. This could in fact drive the judgement down to inadequate... it depends on the extent of the deficit and the adverse impact on the child. You must decide what to give the most weight to and state why based on the outcome for the child! See the big picture in the context of social work caseload... capacity to complete the social work task... individual averse to systemic failure. There must be good read across from one summary judgement area to the next... sections must not contradict each other. For example, reporting good management oversight when you have identified gaps or drift and delay in the progress of the case does not stand-up to scrutiny. For example, what is the adverse impact of an RI summary judgement in the assessment section, on the quality of plans or an RI summary judgement in the Planning section on Reviews and so on? **Beware... inflated judgements!** Pitch your evaluation in the context of the prompts provided in the template.
9. When making your summary judgement think about prioritising your three pieces of evidence to reflect your judgement. For example if the summary judgement is RI state the deficit areas first.
10. Making an outstanding judgement... ensure this relates to practice that is exemplary not that which is required to meet statutory requirements or would be routine to meet practice standards.
11. Inadequate judgements relate to inputs and outputs that 'fall below the line' so for example risk posed to the child is not managed at a safe level or CP concerns remain and it is your judgement there is no discernible difference.
12. **No matter how good the social work practice is audits always lead to at least one recommendation to stretch social work practice**... social work practice improvement is discussed and progress tracked in supervision to demonstrate improvement (Learning Cycle (Kolb 1984).
13. Adopt an active writing style! Passive writing lacks clarity... leads to more words... look at an Ofsted report!¹ This is an evidence based audit so don't use words like... 'appears' or 'I wonder'. Be definitive in your assessment so judgements are evidenced using triangulation.

¹ A guide to Ofsted's writing style can be found here:
[Guide To Ofsted House Style \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/guidance/producing-an-ofsted-report/section-5)

14. **Do not set hares running...** do not raise a new issue for the first time in the evaluation... it must be signposted in the child's story and once issues are raised run with these to draw out findings so there is a natural conclusion or identify the gap or missed opportunities and raise a recommendation. Professional curiosity demonstrated through speculation must be progressed to a natural conclusion. The audit process is not supervision. The **audit** is focused on the 'here and now' and **is not a place for crystal ball gazing...** i.e. what might happen!!!
15. Explain abbreviations the first time they are used.
16. The auditor's summary to support the overall judgement must pull through the evidence from previous summary sections so it is clear what the auditor has given most weight to when determining the overall judgement. Do not introduce new issues for the first time in this section. Give weight to the difference SW intervention has made, distance travelled and outcomes for the child. Do not describe... be evaluative, answer the question 'so what' and make it clear 'how you know' so the narrative is sharply focused.
17. Ensure feedback from parents influences audit actions and ensure findings reach the SW to help influence the shape practice (Learning Cycle (Kolb 1984).
18. **Recommendations... must be 'standalone'**, start with a verb and sharply focused on the gap input/output/outcome. Make sure that the number of actions raised at the end of the audit is consistent with the overall judgement. Actions must be SMART.... What needs to happen by whom, by when!