

Public Audit Forum

News Release

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A Paper by the Public Audit Forum

The Different Roles of External Audit, Inspection and Regulation: A Guide for Public Service Managers

Audit, inspection and regulation can make powerful contributions to improvements in the services provided to users, the Public Audit Forum said today.

The paper is designed to clarify the different roles of auditors, inspectors and regulators, to help public service managers understand how these different activities serve to protect public funds and help continuously improve the quality of public services. It provides working definitions of each activity and highlights the similarities and differences between them.

Sir John Bourn, Comptroller and Auditor General, Auditor General for Wales and chairman of the Public Audit Forum said: **“Across the public services, auditors, inspectors and regulators are committed to working together to avoid imposing unnecessary demands on public services in meeting their respective objectives. For example, the National Audit Office is currently working closely with the Audit Commission on complementary studies on care for the elderly. These two studies will provide a comprehensive assessment of government programmes while allowing audit teams to share information and insights from the national/local perspectives. And in our examination of the implementation of the National Probation Service’s information systems strategy we undertook joint visits with Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation.**

Sir Andrew Foster, Controller of the Audit Commission in England and Wales, said: **“In its strategy, the Audit Commission has committed itself to reducing the burden and maximising the benefit of regulation. We are about to report the first ‘comprehensive performance assessments’ of the 150 biggest local authorities in England, which, for the first time, will bring together auditors’ and inspectors’ judgements in a rounded way, and which will provide a basis for further joint work leading to less audit and inspection for high performing authorities. We are also joining up audit and inspection in Wales to meet the needs of the National Assembly. In the NHS we are working to support the creation of a unified inspection process through the new Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection and the Commission for Social Care Inspection.”**

Robert Black, Auditor General for Scotland, commented that: **The world of audit, inspection and regulation is complex and changing so this is a very timely and relevant paper. It highlights how audit, inspection and regulatory bodies are increasingly working together in order to share information and minimise overlaps and duplication. Audit Scotland has worked with various inspectorates to establish efficient joint working arrangements. Joint visits are now taking place to the benefit of all parties.**

John Dowdall, Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland, added: **Audit, inspection and regulation are important elements in the governance of public services. The independence of auditors, inspectors and regulators in the public sector from the bodies under review is crucial in ensuring that public bodies are accountable for their performance in terms of both stewardship of public money and the delivery of high quality services.**

Notes for Editors

1. The Public Audit Forum was established in 1998. It brings together the public audit agencies on a purely advisory basis to provide a focus for developmental thinking about public audit. It has a remit to build on the existing co-operation between the national audit agencies: to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of public audit, to provide a strategic focus on issues cutting across their work and to help develop broadly consistent approaches to public audit.
2. A key element in the Forum is a consultative forum which draws on the experience and expertise of public auditors, the bodies they audit, the auditing profession and the wider community.

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