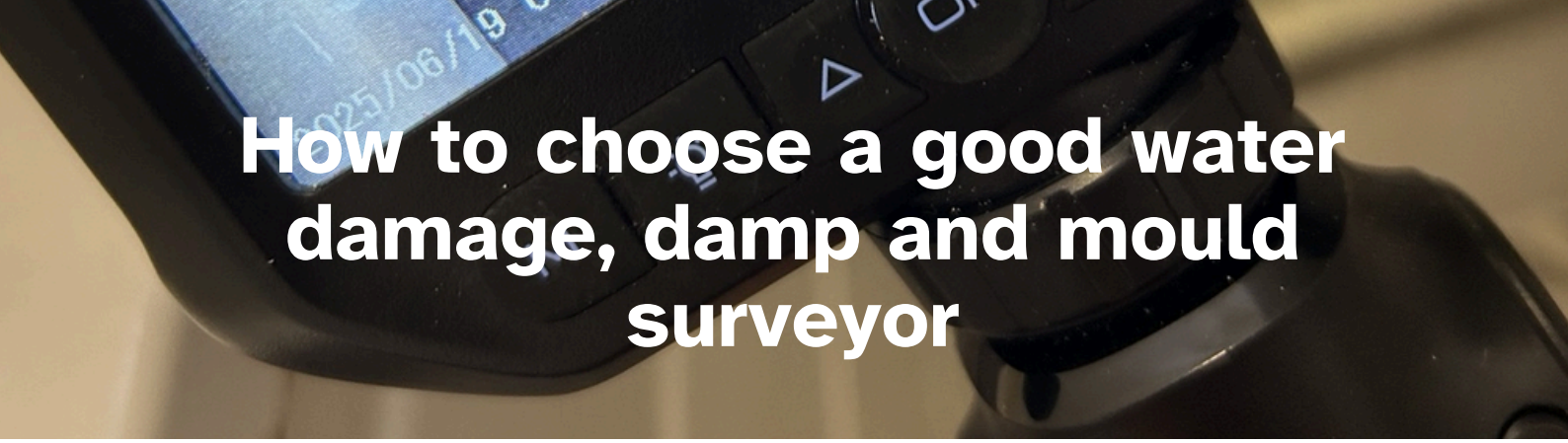


How to choose a good water damage, damp and mould surveyor

UK Centre for Mould Safety

BetterBritain

HOW TO CHOOSE A GOOD WATER DAMAGE, DAMP AND MOULD SURVEYOR
written by Lisa Malyon, founder of UKCMS

Welcome to your UKCMS guide to choosing an independent surveyor who will investigate the cause, assess the risk and give you clear, evidence-based advice.

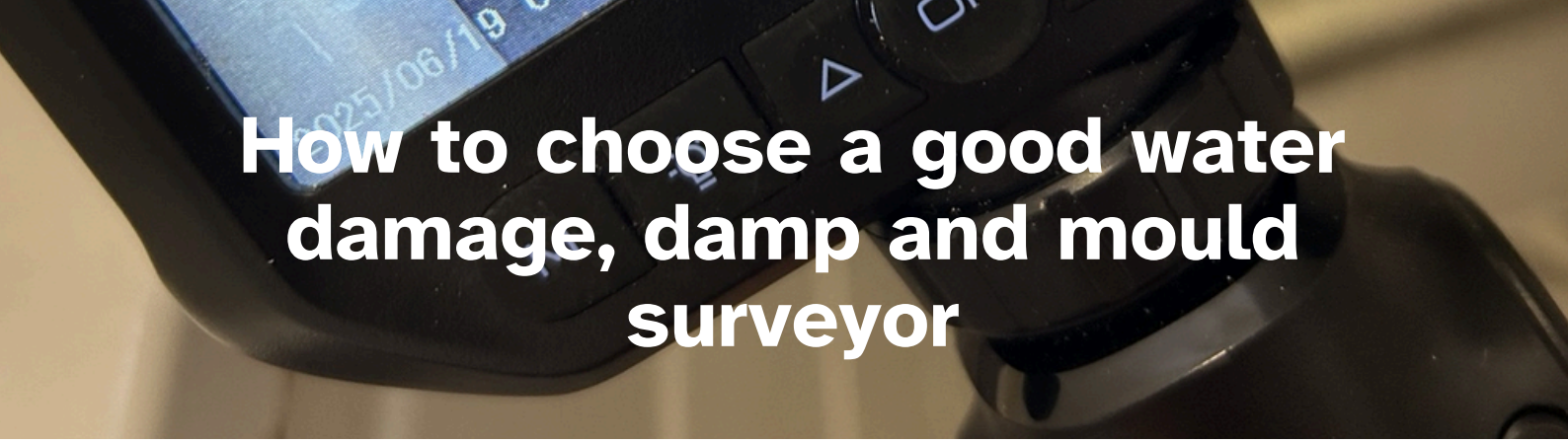
Searching for a mould surveyor, damp surveyor or mould inspection near you can produce a confusing mixture of independent building professionals, testing companies, damp-proofing contractors and businesses selling mould treatments. Mould surveyors are being asked to investigate problems that can affect a building, the people living in it and the cost of putting it right, yet mould surveying remains an unregulated area in the UK. Almost anyone can buy a moisture meter, call themselves a damp or mould specialist and begin offering surveys.

That makes it difficult for homeowners, tenants and landlords to know who is competent. A professional-looking website, an impressive piece of equipment or membership of a trade body does not, on its own, demonstrate that someone understands mould, moisture, ventilation and building construction.

The quality of the investigation matters. If the source of moisture is missed, the mould is likely to return. If contamination is underestimated, occupants and contractors may be exposed unnecessarily. If the diagnosis is wrong, money can be spent on chemical treatments, damp-proofing systems, ventilation products or redecoration that never address the real problem.
This guide explains what a professional damp and mould survey should include, how an independent mould surveyor differs from a treatment salesperson, what should appear in the written report and what to ask before you appoint someone.

What is a professional mould survey?

A professional mould survey is an investigation of the building, its moisture conditions and the known or suspected contamination. Visible mould is evidence that conditions have supported fungal growth. The surveyor's job is to establish how those conditions developed, how far the problem may extend and what needs to change before the building can remain dry and healthy.
That requires more than pressing a two-pin meter against the affected wall. Moisture meters can be useful when the correct instrument and mode are used for the material being assessed, but a reading is one piece of evidence rather than a diagnosis.



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A competent mould surveyor considers the relationship between:

- the age, design and construction of the building;
- rainwater management, drainage and external defects;
- plumbing leaks, flooding and previous water damage;
- insulation, cold surfaces and thermal bridges;
- heating patterns and surface temperatures;
- ventilation, air movement and extraction performance;
- the amount and movement of moisture within the indoor air;
- visible and suspected concealed contamination;
- alterations that may have changed the way the building manages heat, air and water; and
- the health and vulnerability of the people who occupy it.

The conclusion should come from the evidence gathered across the property, rather than from one stain, one photograph or one meter reading.

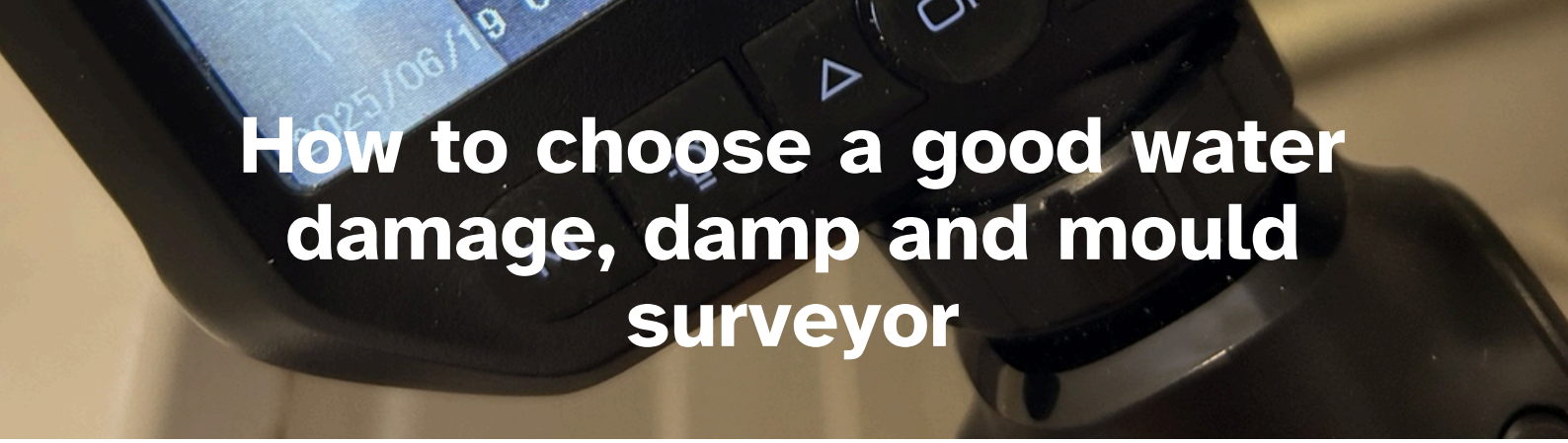
Why choose an independent mould surveyor?

Ask how the surveyor is paid and whether they sell the work or products they are likely to recommend.

Some businesses offer a free or very cheap survey because the real purpose of the visit is to sell chemical injection, fogging, mould wash, specialist paint, ventilation equipment or a damp-proofing system. That does not automatically mean the advice will be wrong, but it creates a commercial interest that should be declared.

An independent surveyor is being paid to investigate and report. Their recommendations should follow the evidence, even when the answer is ordinary building maintenance, a plumbing repair or a change to an existing ventilation system rather than a product they can supply.

Where the surveyor also undertakes remedial work, ask for the investigation and proposed scope of works to be separated clearly. For larger or more complex projects, independent post-remediation verification should be considered so that the contractor is not marking their own work.



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What should happen before a damp and mould inspection?

A thoughtful investigation should start well before the appointment. The surveyor may ask about:

- when and where the mould first appeared;
- leaks, floods, plumbing problems or roof defects;
- previous repairs, cleaning or mould treatments;
- whether the problem changes with the weather or season;
- alterations, extensions, replacement windows and insulation work;
- heating and ventilation arrangements;
- odours or symptoms associated with particular rooms; and
- any occupants who may be at greater risk from exposure.

Depending on the case, the surveyor may also examine the property's age and construction, its Energy Performance Certificate, mapping, flood information and known alterations. This preparation helps them arrive with useful questions instead of treating every building in the same way.

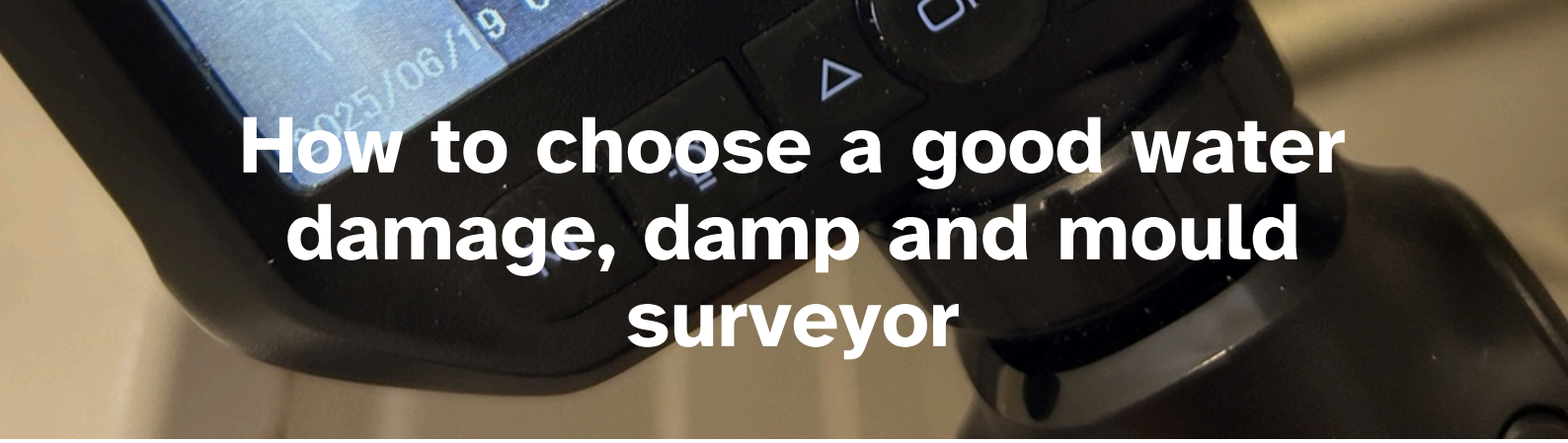
What should a good mould inspection include?

The exact scope will depend on the property and the problem, and no responsible surveyor should promise that every investigation will follow an identical script. The inspection should, however, be broad enough to test the possible causes.

An external inspection

Moisture found inside may have started outside. The surveyor should inspect accessible elevations and consider the roof, chimneys, flashings, gutters, downpipes, drainage, ground levels, brickwork, pointing, render, openings, joints, seals and later additions where these are relevant.

They should understand how water is intended to move away from the building and identify where that route has been interrupted. Several small defects may be more important than one dramatic-looking crack.



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A room-by-room internal inspection

The surveyor should examine more than the wall with visible mould. A room-by-room inspection can reveal patterns involving cold surfaces, furniture position, water staining, building defects, ventilation, heating, insulation and air movement. Accessible lofts, subfloors and voids may also need to be considered.

Suitable environmental measurements

Useful measurements can include air temperature, relative humidity, humidity ratio, dew point and surface temperature. Outdoor readings provide an important reference for comparing the moisture load inside the building.

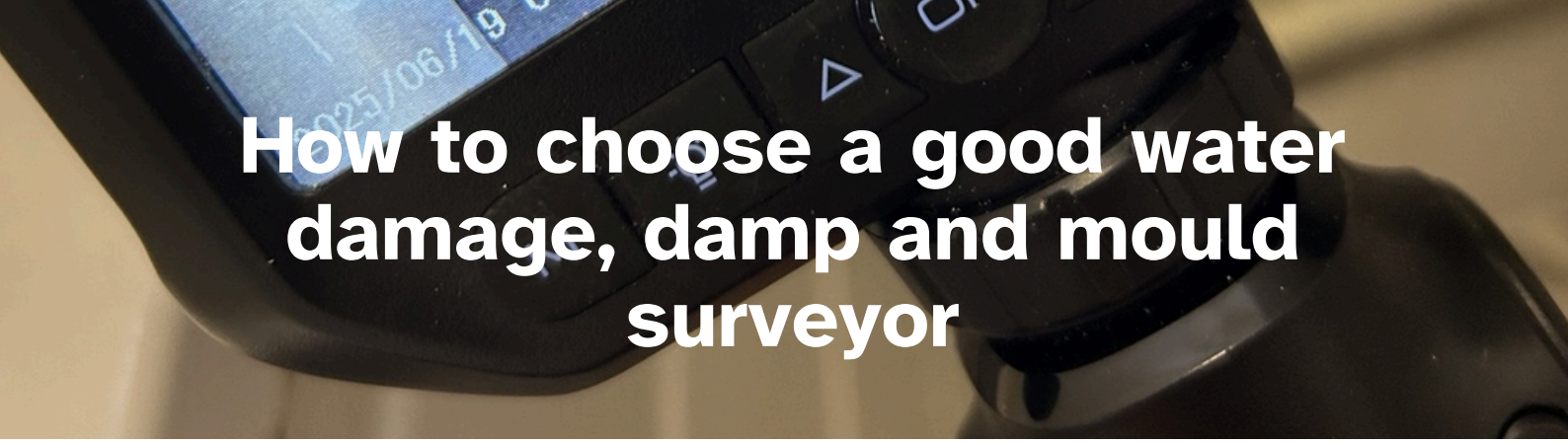
Readings should be allowed to stabilise and then interpreted in context. A single relative-humidity reading cannot establish the long-term cause of mould, while a coloured thermal image cannot, by itself, prove that a surface is wet.

Moisture investigation

The surveyor should select equipment that is suitable for the material and explain whether a result is quantitative or comparative. Moisture mapping is often more informative than an isolated reading because it helps show the distribution of moisture and directs further investigation.

Ventilation assessment

Seeing or hearing a fan does not prove that it is extracting effectively. A good surveyor considers the type of system, airflow, ductwork, external termination, background ventilation and the route by which replacement air reaches the room. Where performance is central to the diagnosis, extraction may need to be measured.



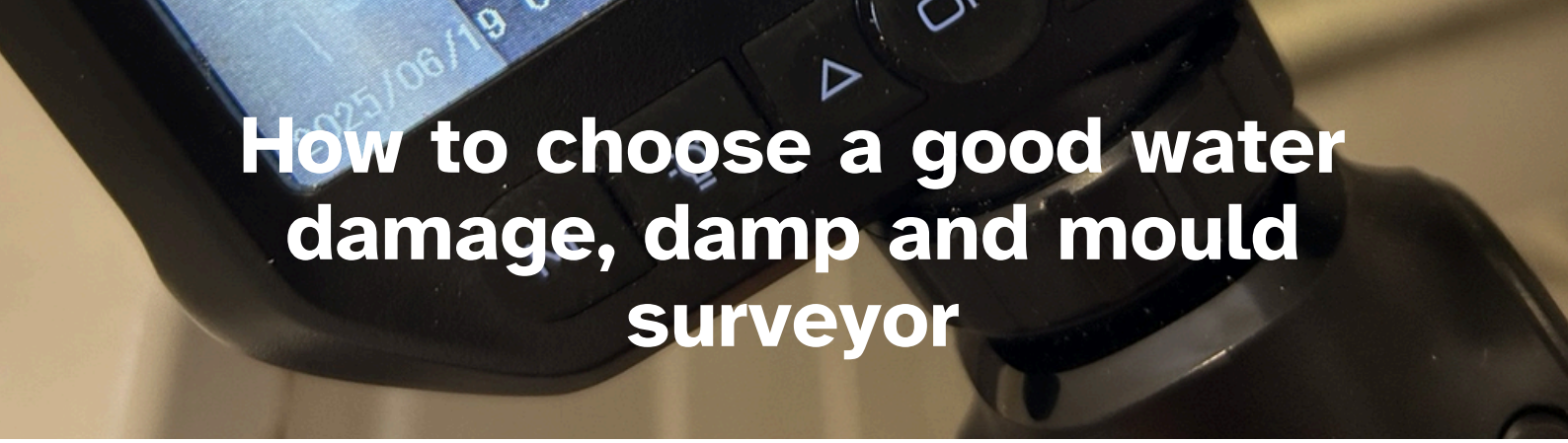
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What should be included in a mould survey report?

A good report should allow the reader to understand what was inspected, what was found and how the surveyor reached their conclusions. It should normally include:

- the surveyor's instructions and the scope of the inspection;
- relevant property and occupancy information;
- the inspection date, weather and any other important conditions;
- clear photographs and the locations of significant findings;
- the instruments and investigation methods used;
- recorded measurements with units, rather than unexplained colours or labels;
- an explanation of what the readings mean and their limitations;
- identified and suspected moisture sources;
- the likely extent of visible and concealed contamination;
- conclusions that link the evidence to the diagnosis;
- immediate precautions where they are needed;
- prioritised recommendations to correct the moisture source;
- recommendations for the physical removal of mould contamination;
- a clear scope for any further investigation or remedial work; and
- limitations, exclusions and areas that could not be accessed.

The recommendations should deal with both halves of the problem: the water or moisture conditions that allowed growth and the fungal contamination already present. Simply advising the occupant to clean, heat the home, open windows, wash mould off or apply mould-resistant paint is not an adequate response where the building, a leak, ineffective ventilation or contaminated materials require attention.



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Warning signs to look out for

Exercise caution where a surveyor:

- diagnoses rising damp or condensation from a brief visual inspection;
- relies heavily on one moisture-meter reading without explaining the material or meter mode;
- inspects only the visible patch and does not consider the outside of the building;
- blames “lifestyle” without measuring, investigating and considering building defects;
- assumes that an operating fan is an effective fan without assessing airflow;
- claims that thermal imaging can see mould or moisture through a wall;
- recommends sampling but cannot explain the question it will answer;
- promises to kill, sterilise or eradicate all mould and spores;
- recommends bleach, fogging, spraying or painting as the complete solution;
- sells a standard treatment before establishing the cause and extent;
- gives a quotation but no reasoned written report;
- cannot provide relevant training, insurance or examples of comparable work; or
- refuses to explain how the evidence supports the diagnosis.

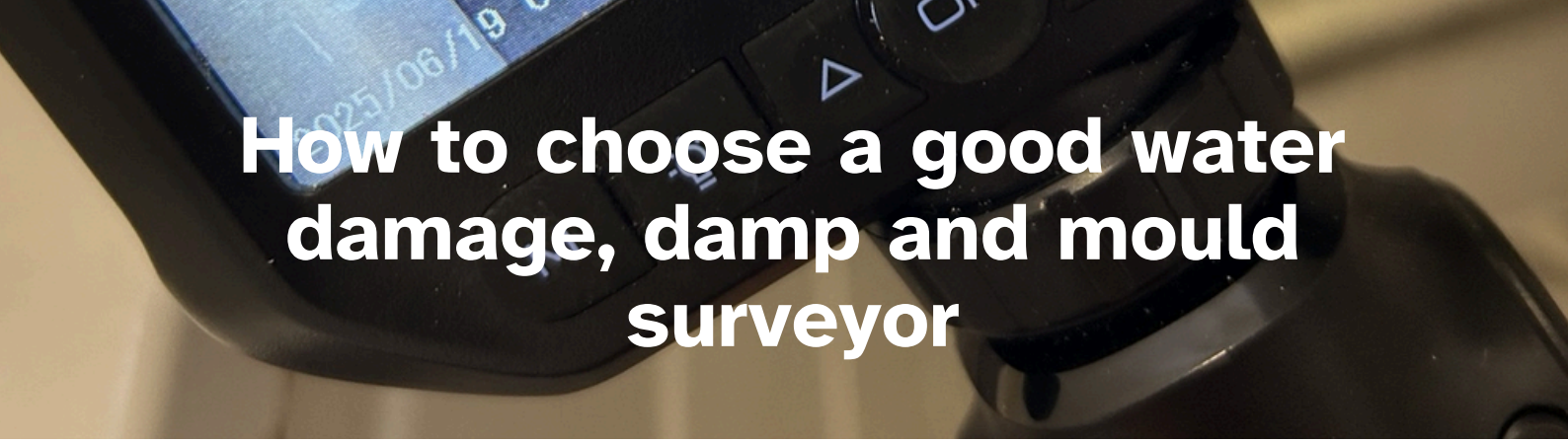
The UKCMS directory helps you to avoid poor quality surveys.

Checklist: questions to ask a mould surveyor

Use this checklist before you book and keep a copy of the answers. The UKCMS directory has already done the hard work for you - check ‘Verified Professionals’ in your local area.

<u>Competence and accountability</u>

- What training and qualifications do you hold in mould, moisture, buildings and ventilation?
- How much experience do you have with properties of this age and construction?
- Have you investigated cases of a similar size and complexity?
- Do you hold professional indemnity and public liability insurance for this work?
- Can you provide a sample report with the client’s details removed?
- Are you listed with an independent professional or competence-based directory, and what checks were completed?



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Independence

- Is the survey fee separate from any remedial work or products?
- Do you sell chemical treatments, coatings, ventilation systems or damp-proofing work?
- Will you declare any commission, referral fee or commercial relationship?
- Can another competent contractor use the scope of works in your report?
- Who will verify that remediation has been completed properly?

Scope of the inspection

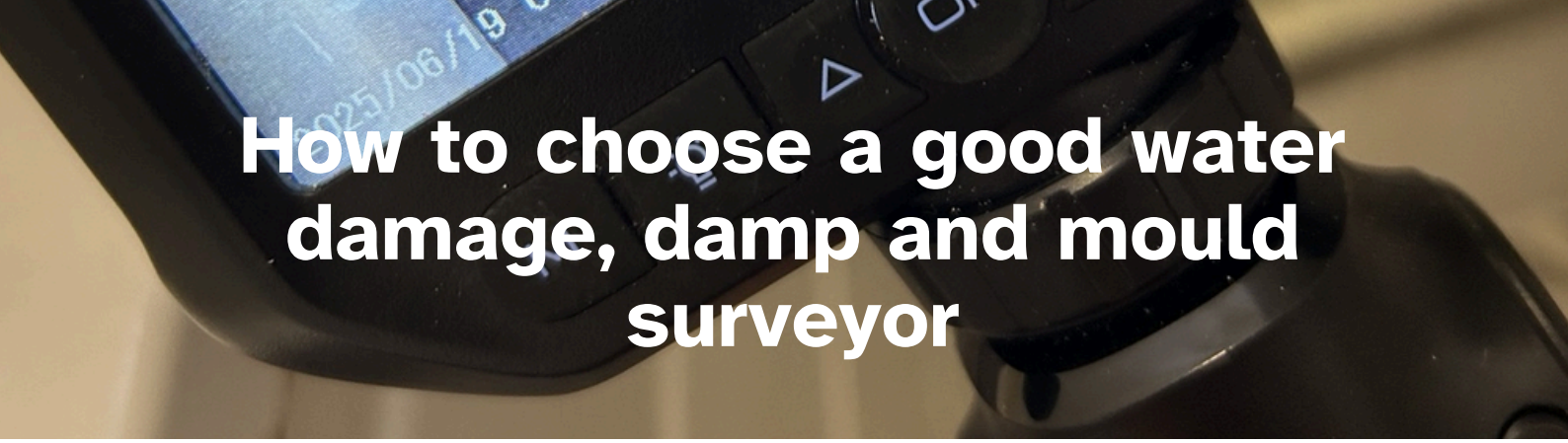
- Will you inspect the whole property, including the exterior where accessible?
- Will you investigate the source of moisture as well as the visible mould?
- Will you assess heating, insulation, ventilation and air movement where relevant?
- Will you take outdoor and indoor environmental readings?
- Will you assess accessible voids or explain where further investigation is needed?
- How long do you expect the site inspection and subsequent analysis to take?

Equipment and evidence

- What instruments are likely to be used, and what does each one measure?
- Are the instruments maintained and calibrated appropriately?
- Will moisture readings be interpreted for the materials being tested?
- If thermal imaging is used, how will any anomaly be checked?
- If sampling is proposed, what question will it answer and how could it alter the advice?

The report and next steps

- Will I receive a full written report rather than a quotation or certificate?
- Will the report include photographs, readings, units and the locations tested?
- Will it distinguish confirmed findings from suspected causes or areas needing further investigation?
- Will it explain both how to correct the moisture source and how contamination should be removed?
- Will recommendations be prioritised so I know what needs to happen first?
- Will the surveyor discuss the report and answer reasonable questions afterwards?



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How the UKCMS Directory helps

The UK Centre for Mould Safety was established to raise standards in a sector where members of the public can otherwise find it difficult to judge competence.

Professionals applying to the UKCMS Directory are asked to provide evidence of relevant qualifications, insurance and recent project experience. The purpose of the directory is to help users identify practitioners who have supplied evidence against the entry requirements; it does not remove the need to discuss the scope of your particular survey before appointing someone.

If you are searching for a mould surveyor near you, use the UKCMS Directory to look for professionals covering your town, city or region, then use the checklist above to discuss the proposed scope. The nearest surveyor is not necessarily the most suitable: relevant competence, independence and experience with your type of property should carry more weight than distance alone.

Directory users should still ask the questions in this guide. Check that the individual's experience matches the property, the suspected source and the scale of the contamination. A complex water-damaged building, a home occupied by a medically vulnerable person or a dispute requiring expert evidence may need a different level of expertise from a small, straightforward investigation.

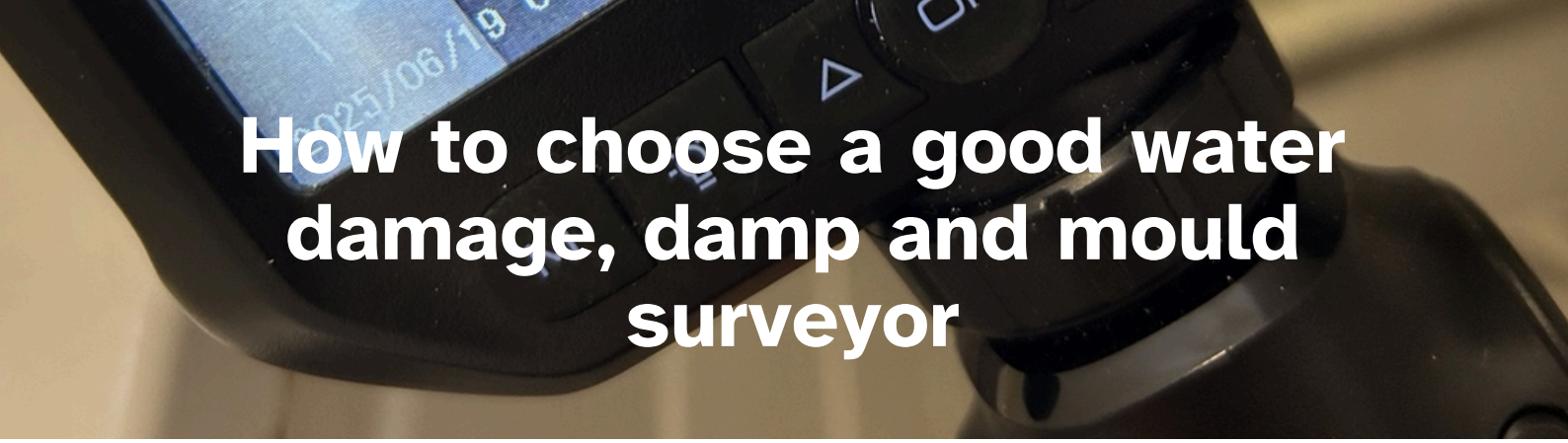
Frequently asked questions about mould surveys

What is the difference between a damp survey and a mould survey?

A damp survey usually concentrates on the presence, source and effect of excess moisture in a building. A mould survey must also consider fungal contamination, possible hidden growth, occupant exposure, safe removal and the controls required during remediation. In practice, a thorough damp and mould survey should connect the moisture investigation with the extent and management of the contamination.

When should I arrange a mould survey?

Consider professional advice when mould keeps returning, affects more than a small and readily managed area, follows a leak or flood, may be concealed within the building, has spread through more than one room, or is affecting a home occupied by somebody with an increased health vulnerability. A survey may also be appropriate before buying a property, planning remediation or challenging an inadequate diagnosis.



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How much does a mould survey cost in the UK?

There is no meaningful single price for every mould inspection. Cost depends on the size and construction of the property, the extent of the problem, the time required on site, whether concealed areas need investigation, whether sampling is justified and the detail required in the report. Ask for a written scope and compare what is included rather than selecting a survey on price alone. A short sales visit and a whole-building pathology investigation are not equivalent services.

The UKCMS offers a price checking service - once you have a quote feel free to contact us and we can check if the price is reasonable.

Does a mould survey include mould testing?

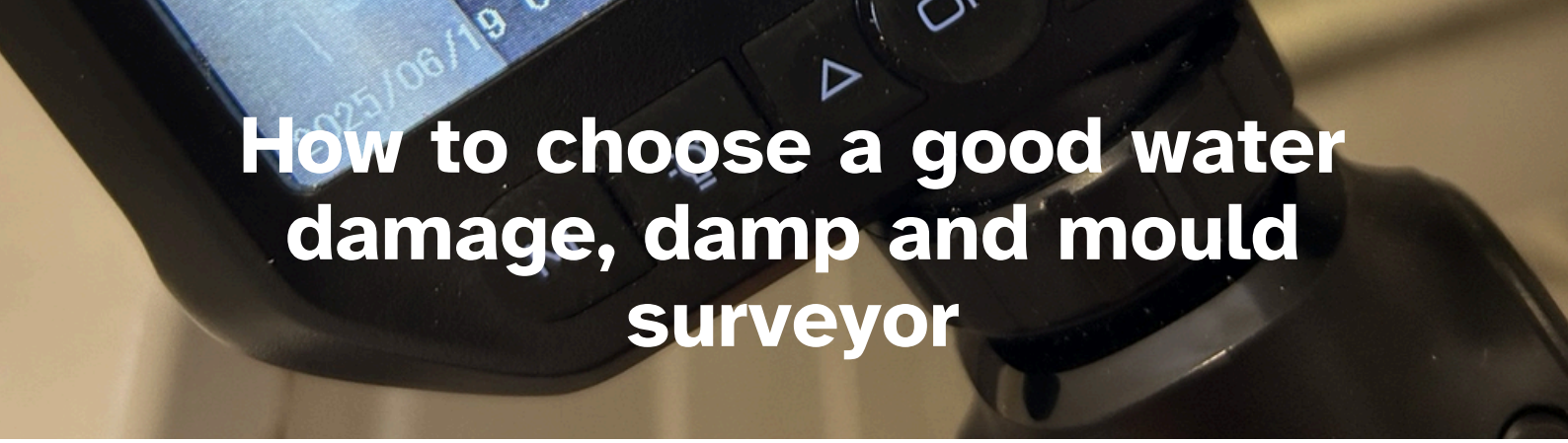
It may, but testing should not be automatic. A competent surveyor should first inspect the building and define the question that sampling needs to answer. Air, surface or dust sampling can support certain investigations, but laboratory results do not replace moisture investigation, building inspection or professional interpretation.

Can a mould survey find hidden mould?

This depends on the type of survey and whether it is invasive or not. Non-invasive inspections cannot guarantee that every concealed area is free from contamination. A good surveyor can identify patterns and risk indicators associated with hidden mould, inspect accessible voids and recommend targeted opening-up or further investigation where the evidence justifies it. The report should state clearly which areas were inaccessible.

Should a landlord arrange an independent damp and mould survey?

Where the cause, extent or required work is unclear, an appropriately scoped independent survey can give the landlord and resident a documented evidence base for action. The investigation should consider defects, leaks, heating, insulation, ventilation, moisture conditions and contamination rather than attributing the problem to occupant behaviour without adequate evidence.



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Is a free damp survey the same as an independent survey?

Usually not. A free survey is often part of a contractor's sales process and may be limited to deciding which of the company's treatments to quote for. Ask who pays the surveyor, what the inspection includes and whether you will receive a reasoned report that another contractor can use. Free does not necessarily mean poor, but the commercial relationship and limitations should be transparent.

The question a good survey should answer

The purpose of a mould survey is not to give a name to a stain or sell the fastest treatment. It is to explain why mould has been able to grow in this particular building, establish what else may have been affected and set out a defensible route to correction and removal.

A good surveyor will be able to show you the evidence, explain its limitations and connect each recommendation to a finding. If they cannot explain why the mould is there, they are not yet in a position to tell you how to stop it returning.