

**A code of  
practice for  
colleges  
being  
inspected**

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# Contents

Published by FEDA

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Registered with the Charity Commissioners

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ISBN 1 85338 509 3

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# Introduction

**T**his code of practice for colleges being inspected has been developed to complement the one for inspectors (published as part of *The inspectors' handbook*, FEFC, August 1998). We hope that the two

codes together will serve to make the inspection process and the expectations surrounding it more transparent to all concerned.

The code has two main sections:

- **Section 1** is in large part directly equivalent to the inspectors' code and should be read in conjunction with it. Where similar paragraphs are included, cross-reference to the relevant paragraph in the inspectors' code or other sections of *The inspectors' handbook* is indicated as follows:  
▶ **3.2**
- **Section 2** is about specific college roles and responsibilities relating to inspection. It covers the following: the principal, the governing body/clerk, the college nominee, managers and all staff. A final paragraph outlines what to do if things go wrong.

## The code in summary

**1** The purpose of inspection is to provide colleges with an external assessment of the quality of their performance, which will validate (or not) the college's self-assessment and will promote continuous improvement in the standards and quality of learning provided in further education. Colleges and the FEFC share responsibility for ensuring that inspections are an effective means of helping to secure quality improvement in the sector.

**2** Colleges will do all they can to ensure that the inspection process is carried out with impartiality, integrity and courtesy.

**3** Colleges will do all they can to ensure that all stages of the inspection process are undertaken objectively, according to an open and shared framework of practices and procedures, and avoiding bias or preconceptions.

**4** Colleges will do all they can to ensure that inspections result in honest and fair judgements.

**5** Confidentiality of the inspection process must be respected. Colleges share responsibility for this with the inspectorate.

**6** All those involved in inspection need to recognise that the role of nominee is a difficult and demanding one, and that it is essential to the success of the inspection.

**7** Colleges accept a joint responsibility with inspectors to resolve any difficulties quickly and constructively.

# 1. The code of practice for colleges

**1.** The purpose of inspection is to provide colleges with an external assessment of the quality of their performance, which will validate (or not) the college's self-assessment, and will promote continuous improvement in the standards and quality of learning provided in further education. Colleges and the FEFC share responsibility for ensuring that inspections are an effective means of helping to secure quality improvement in the sector.

▶ **3.1**

**2.** Colleges will do all they can to ensure that the inspection process is carried out with impartiality, integrity and courtesy.

▶ **3.2**

**a.** Colleges recognise that the inspection process is rigorous and demanding for college staff, students and managers, and for inspectors as well. Inspections should be planned, prepared for and carried out in such a way as to minimise disruption and stress, and maintain confidence and morale.

▶ **3.2a**

**b.** Colleges understand and accept the importance of independent and objective judgements that validate their self-assessments and help to identify strengths on which to build and weaknesses to be addressed.

▶ **3.2b**

**c.** All those involved in inspection, including college staff and inspection team members, have a right to be treated with respect and in a courteous and professional manner.

▶ **3.2c**

**d.** All those involved in inspections must try, so far as possible, to avoid allowing their position, personal opinions or work in other professional capacities to influence or undermine the inspection process.

▶ **3.2d**

**3.** Colleges will do all they can to ensure that all stages of the inspection process are undertaken objectively, according to an open and shared framework of practices and procedures, and avoiding bias or preconceptions.

▶ **3.3**

**a.** Colleges being inspected will provide the inspectorate with an honest and rigorous self-assessment report (SAR) that is comprehensive, evaluative and based on current evidence.

**b.** When the inspection team membership is identified, colleges will declare any potential conflicts of interest.

▶ **3.3a**

**c.** Colleges being inspected will provide the inspectorate with accurate documentation in advance of the inspection and in the base room, as indicated in *The inspectors' handbook* and confirmed at a planning meeting. They will do all they can to respond quickly to reasonable requests for additional documentation during inspection.

▶ **3.3d, pp13–16**

**d.** Colleges recognise that inspection judgements are based largely on the 'here and now', but context and progress may be taken into account. In relation to curriculum areas, for example, evidence of what has happened throughout the current programmes will be sought. Progress made since the last inspection or plans for the future will not affect grades, but context and progress made may be reflected in the wording of judgements or the commentary of the inspection report.

▶ **3.3e**

**e.** Colleges recognise that inspections will normally follow the procedures for inspection outlined in *The inspectors' handbook*, unless there are sound reasons to justify any departures from the procedures. These will normally have been discussed and agreed in advance by the principal and the reporting inspector.

▶ **3.3f**

4. Colleges will do all they can to ensure that inspections result in honest and fair judgements.  
▶ **3.4**
- a. Colleges recognise the importance of evidence and will provide accurate information as agreed and requested.  
▶ **3.4a**
  - b. College staff will listen carefully to emerging judgements and offer additional evidence where appropriate.  
▶ **3.4b**
  - c. Colleges recognise that all organisations have weaknesses as well as strengths and will as far as possible create a self-critical, improving culture in which these are construed as opportunities for further improvement, for the benefit of students and staff alike.  
▶ **3.4c**
5. Confidentiality of the inspection process must be respected. Colleges share responsibility for this with the inspectorate.  
▶ **3.5**
- a. College managers will contribute to the confidentiality of the inspection process by not pressing inspectors to identify individuals (unless there is an issue of fraud, abuse or other breach of the law).  
▶ **3.5a**
  - b. College staff recognise that no discussion with an inspector can be 'off the record'.  
▶ **3.5c**
  - c. Colleges will not make public inspection grades before they have been published.
6. All those involved in inspection need to recognise the role of nominee is a difficult and demanding one, and that it is essential to the success of the inspection.  
▶ **3.6**
- a. All involved in the inspection should respect the college nominee's position and show appropriate tact and understanding.  
▶ **3.6a**
  - b. College staff must do all they can to avoid making undue demands on and unrealistic requests of the nominee.  
▶ **3.6b**
  - c. Principals must ensure that the nominee has the time and resources to undertake the role and have confidence in the judgement of the nominee.
7. Colleges accept a joint responsibility with inspectors to resolve any difficulties quickly and constructively.  
▶ **5.9, 6.16, 7.25, 7.13–7.21**
- a. During an inspection, if the college believes the inspectors' code is not being followed, the nominee or principal (whichever the college decides is more appropriate) will bring it to the reporting inspector's attention without delay.  
▶ **7.25**
  - b. The college will promptly bring to the attention of the reporting inspector any differences of opinion between it and the inspection team during the inspection; the college will expect to provide evidence to support its views.  
▶ **7.16**
  - c. If the college does not accept the feedback provided by the inspectors, the college will attempt to resolve this difference at the time with the inspector concerned and/or reporting inspector, providing additional evidence to support its position.  
▶ **7.15**
  - d. Colleges respect the importance of the inspection process and will not bring appeals lightly.
  - e. In the case of an appeal, colleges will recognise and follow the procedures set out in *The inspectors' handbook*.  
▶ **7.19–7.23**
  - f. Colleges will read the draft inspection report carefully on receipt, and will raise any factual inaccuracies promptly with the reporting inspector or the regional senior inspector in the case of the proof copy of the inspection sent to the college before publication.  
▶ **5.9**
  - g. Colleges will contribute to the continuous improvement of the inspection process by responding honestly and professionally to the evaluation questionnaires immediately after the inspection feedback and again on receipt of the draft inspection report.  
▶ **6.16**

## 2. Specific roles

**T**his section is about specific college roles and responsibilities relating to inspection. It is designed to be a helpful addition to Section 1, the code of practice for colleges. It covers the roles of: the principal, the governing body/clerk, the college nominee, managers and all staff. A final paragraph outlines what to do if things go wrong. Colleges may sometimes wish to vary slightly the allocation of responsibilities outlined below. In any case, we hope they will provide a useful starting point.

### Principal

#### Before inspection

- Liaise with the college and reporting inspector about the timescale, content, scope and process of the inspection.
- Take responsibility for ensuring that a rigorous process of self-assessment, including internal validation and final approval, is in place.
- Select and appoint a college nominee (who is senior enough to be able to perform the role effectively). The nominee must be someone with credibility, whose judgements are trusted and who has authority with staff and governors, interpersonal skills and stamina.
- Oversee the management of the internal planning for the inspection and ensure that appropriate internal and external meetings are set up.
- Ensure that corporation members are briefed and involved.
- Ensure that documentation/data required is available to the inspectorate on time.
- Prepare a focused opening statement for the inspection team.

#### During inspection week

- Provide the opening statement to the inspection team.
- Be available throughout the week, but maintain an appropriate distance, yet also act as final champion for the college. (This can be problematic: there is often little that principals can do to facilitate the inspection process, especially at the beginning of the week; yet it is difficult to concentrate on anything else.)
- Establish the correct balance between being honest and objective and representing the best face of the college.
- Trust the nominee's judgement.
- Ensure awareness of and be alert to potential difficulties before they become serious.
- Request regular liaison with the reporting inspector to ensure that issues can be resolved before they become problematic.
- Maintain links with corporation members and ensure they are informed of progress during the week.
- Keep in regular contact with the nominee and agree an appropriate division of labour.
- Support managers – especially those most involved and those whose direct line manager is the nominee.
- Keep an ongoing log of any issues that might become problematic.
- Receive verbal feedback and interim grades and give initial response.
- Receive and evaluate feedback and exert appropriate influence.

#### After inspection week

- Check the accuracy of the draft inspection report carefully and thoroughly within the limited time available.
- Identify any problems and consider any necessary further action.
- Decide how to report interim results to the corporation and staff.
- Ensure that the inspection is evaluated seriously and contribute to the evaluation.
- Ensure that a post-inspection action plan is drawn up and implemented, monitored and evaluated.
- Consider issues to do with appeals or re-inspections, if relevant.
- Consider whether to apply for accredited college status if the college appears to have met the criteria.
- Ensure the momentum continues of self-assessment followed by further improvement.

## Governing body/clerk

### Before inspection

- Ensure that the college undertakes an annual rigorous self-assessment that is based on evidence, that is internally validated and that informs strategic and operational plans.
- Undertake your own self-assessment as part of the college's self-assessment process.
- Ensure that members generally, as well as specified individuals, are briefed about their role, the college and the inspection, e.g. the corporation as a whole and the chair of audit committee.
- Ensure that the corporation adopts a professional, objective and open-minded approach to the inspection and expects and encourages the college to do likewise.
- Through the principal, agree dates and times for meetings with inspectors.
- Through the principal, ensure documentation is well-organised and available.
- Through the principal, plan how to manage the communication of inspection findings internally and externally.

### During inspection week

- Seek additional briefings with the principal and/or nominee, if necessary, to prepare for specific meetings.
- Be alert to, and communicate to the principal, any potential difficulties as they arise.
- Attend any meetings as required.
- Claim only what can be shown by evidence.

### After inspection week

- Receive feedback from the inspection team robustly but with respect.
- Oversee the development of a college post-inspection action plan and its implementation.
- As part of this, consider how governance can be further improved and ensure action is taken to achieve this.
- Through the principal, ensure that interim grades and any college response to them are communicated effectively internally and, after the inspection report has been published, externally.
- Provide appropriate feedback and support to managers and staff.
- Ensure that the college's commitment to annual self-assessment and further improvement continues.

## Nominee

In all matters, and throughout the process, nominees need to exercise professional discretion.

### Before inspection

- Ensure that the college's annual normal self-assessment process will deliver a self-assessment report by the designated date, or amend the process if necessary.
- Contribute your views to the college and reporting inspectors about the scope of the inspection, but recognise that the decision is ultimately the inspectorate's.
- Work with the principal and the reporting inspector to ensure that a reasonable inspection timetable is agreed.
- Once the scope of the inspection and the timetable have been agreed, communicate them effectively to all staff.
- Draft *The college and its mission* section of the inspection report in consultation with the principal.
- Ensure that college documentation/data is accurate and available (especially retention and achievement data).
- Ensure all staff are briefed about what to expect during inspection, with special emphasis on what staff can expect if they are observed. Do not forget staff in curriculum and support areas that are not being inspected directly, who may be approached by inspectors looking at, for example, quality assurance or support for students.
- Ensure that staff understand that inspectors will have studied the college's self-assessment report in advance of the inspection, and that they will spend time seeking to validate (or not) the judgements made within it.
- Ensure that staff know about documentation requirements and timescales: what will be provided in advance; what will go into the base room; what will be provided during inspection week; and any additional information that might be requested.
- Ensure that the base room is prepared (that it is welcoming, with refreshments available etc.).
- Ensure that appropriate documentation, cross-referenced, is in the base room.
- Ensure that specified staff are available to assist the nominee during inspection week.



### During inspection week

- Facilitate effective communication between the college and the inspection team. (This is the key to being a successful nominee.)
- Establish the right balance between being honest and objective and representing the best face of the college.
- Establish a continual open channel of communication with the principal and, via the principal, with the chair/clerk of the corporation.
- Use your presence in the base room to establish constructive relations with the inspection team and gather background information about their emerging judgements.
- Recognise and seize opportunities to provide additional evidence.
- Manage the presentation of additional evidence to the inspection team (for instance, that it is presented at the right time during the week etc.).
- Be pro-active if problems arise: intervene, discuss and seek constructive solutions.
- Keep in touch with curriculum areas being observed, identify any emerging issues and intervene if appropriate.
- Consider carefully before asking to accompany an inspector on an observation. (Nominees have the right to participate in all aspects of inspection, except grading, but the need for confidential feedback to staff also needs to be remembered.)
- Recognise that inspectors rehearse issues before arriving at firm judgements. This can seem overly negative around the middle of the week: be prepared for it.
- Listen carefully to emerging judgements and challenge when you know alternative evidence exists. (Select which issues to challenge with discretion.)
- Ensure additional evidence is acquired speedily. (Many nominees have specified staff to help them with this.)
- Receive informal verbal feedback and make notes.
- Use discretion throughout.
- Monitor implementation of the inspectors' code and the code of practice for colleges (see Section 1), and raise any issues sensitively with the reporting inspector.

### After inspection week

- Write up all notes immediately and check them with managers in preparation for formal feedback from the reporting inspector the following week.
- Ensure that staff are informed of interim grades and key strengths and weaknesses, in accordance with the plan agreed beforehand.
- Contribute constructively to the accuracy check.
- Ensure that the post-inspection action plan is developed with arrangements for monitoring.
- Contribute to the evaluation of the inspection.
- Continue to keep staff informed of developments.



## Managers

Bearing in mind the normal college planning and review cycles, the inspection preparation schedule and the date of inspection week, managers need to do the following:

### Before inspection

- Contribute to the development of a self-critical, improving culture.
- Ensure that colleagues have easy access to evidence to inform judgements.
- Coordinate the development of a rigorous self-assessment report with judgements based on evidence (to the college's format and within a given timescale).
- Contribute to the validation of the college's self-inspection report.
- Attend briefings, familiarise yourself with inspection requirements, and brief colleagues for whom you are responsible.
- Ensure that all staff understand their contribution and its effect on others' performance; for example, the effect on the schedule of preparing audiovisual aids.
- Provide the nominee with any documentation required in the required format and within timescale.
- Ensure that documentary evidence is available, in good order and readily accessible (anticipating what might be needed during inspection week – marked students' work, for example).
- Ensure that timetable information is accurate.
- Take responsibility for alerting the nominee in good time about any issues that will need clarification with inspectors.
- Take responsibility for alerting the nominee in good time about any internal difficulties.
- Communicate effectively with partners outside the college – such as franchisees, TECs, the Careers Service – about the inspection.
- Ensure that students are briefed about what to expect during inspection week.
- Think through the implications of the focused agenda, particularly for your own area of the college.
- Manage the diary for inspection week.
- Familiarise yourself with the college and inspectors' codes of practice.

### During inspection week

- Be available, within reasonable limits, for planned contact with the inspectors.
- Anticipate and respond effectively to concerns of staff.
- Manage staff, as agreed within the college, during inspection week.
- Critically evaluate the emerging judgements and provide additional evidence where appropriate.
- Ensure that the inspectors, the nominee and other relevant managers are briefed about any potential difficulties that could affect the outcomes of inspection (bearing in mind the many other demands on the nominee's time).
- Speedily provide additional information reasonably requested, or refer the request to the appropriate source.
- Set up meetings as requested with identified groups; for example, groups of mature students.
- Communicate any unexpected changes in the week (such as staff absence or timetable changes) to the relevant inspector. It may also be appropriate to report this information to the nominee if, for example, the change is major.
- Communicate any sensitive staff issues to the inspector and/or the nominee.
- Listen carefully to verbal feedback and make notes.
- After verbal feedback has been given, communicate provisional grades and key strengths and weaknesses to staff within the agreed college framework and inspection guidance.
- Identify with the nominee any potential areas for appeal, with supporting evidence, in the context of the inspection timetable.

### After inspection week

- Respond constructively to staff concerns.
- Contribute to the college's evaluation of the inspection.
- Motivate staff to use the inspection findings as a baseline for further improvement.
- Contribute to the college action plan.
- Take responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the post-inspection action plan.
- Contribute to the college's decision about whether to apply for college accreditation.

## All staff

### Before inspection

- With your team, contribute to the rigorous self-assessment of designated areas, based on current evidence.
- Identify areas for improvement and contribute to the implementation of the action plan.
- Ensure that you are familiar with the FEFC inspection framework, *Validating self-assessment* (circular 97/12, FEFC, 1997) and read some recent inspection reports.
- Keep informed through briefings, meetings and staff development sessions to ensure that you understand what the inspection will entail and how it will affect you in particular.
- Understand what procedure to adopt if you are concerned about anything during inspection week. Your nominee will advise you on this.
- Ensure that your paperwork, files and planning are in good order and up to date, and that information is easily accessible if required. Your college nominee will advise on what should be in the base room and what should be kept in the curriculum area.
- Prepare any documentation that is required in advance on time and ensure it is accurate (e.g. timetables, with special emphasis on the accuracy of room allocations).
- Consider the focused agenda in relation to your role and your part of the college.
- If your area is not being inspected directly, understand how the inspection may affect you, your team and your students.
- If appropriate, brief your students so that they know what to expect during inspection week.
- If any unexpected changes occur (e.g. to room allocations) ensure that the designated person is informed in advance.
- Be familiar with the inspectors' code and the code of practice for colleges (see Section 1) regarding inspections.
- Try to see inspection as an opportunity to confirm your own assessment of performance in order to improve further.

### During inspection week

- Understand that not every piece of evidence will necessarily have been read before your first meeting with inspectors, particularly on the first day.
- Understand that specialist inspectors may need access to additional evidence or documentation (for example, marked students' work within a curriculum area), and that these may be retained for a day or two.
- Remember that inspectors are judging the effectiveness of learning (rather than the teachers themselves).
- Do not try to produce uncharacteristic lessons!
- Recognise that any feedback given to you by inspectors at the end of observations will be oral and brief, and will not include the grade.
- Receive feedback immediately or shortly after observations.
- Attend punctually any meetings requested with inspectors, and contribute honestly and constructively.
- Arrange any meetings with students requested by inspectors, and ensure that students are briefed.
- Claim only strengths for which there is evidence.

### After inspection week

- Receive feedback and consider its implications for your work.
- Contribute to the college evaluation of the inspection as requested.
- Contribute to the post-inspection action plan and ensure its implementation.

# What to do if things go wrong

## All staff

- Communicate any concerns or changes calmly, quickly and objectively to your line manager, the college nominee, or the inspector, as appropriate.
- Provide additional evidence quickly and within the specified time schedule.
- Ensure all relevant parties are involved and/or informed.

# Acknowledgements

**T**he code's development has been coordinated by FEDA in collaboration with the AoC. Members of an invitation seminar, held in December 1998, commented on an early draft of Section 1 and helped draft the sections on roles and responsibilities. Seminar members are listed below. They were selected to represent key roles in the inspection process and were asked to contribute on the basis of their various perspectives. We are grateful for their contributions. Since then, the overall code has been developed and has been seen once more by:

- those present at the seminar
- members of FEDA's Quality Forums
- members of AoC's curriculum and quality committee.

This version incorporates their comments, for which we thank them.

We now want to share our work with the sector generally. If you have any comments please address them in the first instance to: Stella Dixon, FEDA, Citadel Place, Tinworth Street, London SE11 5EH.

## Invitation seminar members

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Teresa Cooper, FEFCW (representing FEFCW)

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Denise Fielding, Thurrock College  
(a cross-college manager)

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Sandra Lawrence, Hastings College (a college nominee)

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Denis McEnhill, FEFC (representing the FEFC inspectorate)

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Judith Round, Highbury College (a college principal)

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Ursula Russell, Henley College, Coventry  
(a chair of governors)

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Joanna Tait, Bishop Auckland College (a college principal)

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Judith Norrington, AoC

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Stella Dixon, FEDA

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