

Support and challenge for further education and skills providers that require improvement to become good or outstanding

This guidance sets out Ofsted's approach to supporting and challenging further education and skills providers that are judged to require improvement as set out in the *Common Inspection Framework for further education and skills 2012*. This guidance takes effect from January 2013.

Age group: 14+

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Introduction

1. This guidance explains how Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) will support and challenge further education and skills providers that are judged to require improvement in inspections from September 2012 in accordance with the *Framework for the inspection of further education and skills 2012* and the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*.¹
2. The arrangements whereby Ofsted supports inadequate providers to improve are already detailed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*. This involves a re-inspection monitoring visit after six to eight months and a full re-inspection after 12 to 15 months.
3. Further education and skills providers that are found to require improvement will be re-inspected within 12 to 18 months.
4. The Chief Inspector has set out his vision that: 'all providers must be at least good and this must be viewed as the minimum expected standard... Providers want the very best for their learners and I want Ofsted to play its part to the full in helping to achieve this.'²
5. This guidance sets out the contribution that Ofsted will make to helping providers that require improvement get to good or better.
6. In promoting improvement, Ofsted will work in collaboration with its key stakeholders, in particular the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS).

Strategies for support and challenge

Ofsted's general duty to promote improvement

7. Ofsted has a range of duties under Section 117(1) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. One of these is to perform its functions for the general purpose of encouraging improvement in the services it inspects and regulates. Inspection and regulation are Ofsted's principal ways of identifying strengths and weaknesses in the quality of provision and bringing about improvement. However, Ofsted is introducing additional challenge to, and support for, those providers that are not yet judged to be good.
8. All providers have a responsibility for ensuring that they provide a good quality of education and/or training for their learners. Senior managers together with

¹ *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills* (120061), Ofsted; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012

² *A good education for all: key changes for further education and skills providers* (120147), Ofsted; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/good-education-for-all-key-changes-for-further-education-and-skills-providers, which was sent to all learning and skills providers in June 2012:

the governing body, as appropriate, must determine the exact actions to take to improve the provider and how to access any necessary support. However, HMI will support and challenge the provider in this process.

9. As an important part of this, HMI will visit those providers that require improvement to provide support and challenge in making the progress necessary to be judged good or outstanding at their next inspection.

Initial visit

10. Where a provider has been judged to require improvement at the most recent inspection, an HMI will contact the provider's principal or chief executive to offer a visit to the provider by the HMI (the improvement HMI) at a mutually convenient time normally between 10 and 30 working days after the publication of the inspection report.
11. The improvement HMI will agree with the provider a suitable time for a visit.
12. In order to maintain a clear separation of roles, improvement HMI will not normally be one of those who carried out the last inspection. They will also not normally be one of those HMI who will carry out the subsequent re-inspection. The improvement visit is not an inspection. The re-inspection will occur 12 to 18 months after the inspection which found the provider to require improvement. The improvement HMI can request that the re-inspection be brought forward from the 12 to 18 months window. The provider will receive two working days' notice of the re-inspection.
13. The purpose of the improvement visit will be to:
 - discuss with the principal, chief executive or their representative the provider's areas for improvement as set out in the inspection report
 - discuss and agree the points of action that the provider will take and the timescales for doing so in order to address the areas for improvement and so improve to good or outstanding
 - discuss and agree other appropriate means of support and challenge that are available (see below).

After the visit

14. Within five working days of the visit, the inspector will send to the principal/chief executive a brief letter summarising the agreed priorities for improvement and other matters discussed at the visit. The feedback letter will not be published on the Ofsted website. Its purpose is to set out for the provider the points of action discussed to assist them with their improvement planning. The content of the letter will be checked for factual accuracy with the provider.
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Strategies for support and challenge to providers

15. The following is an indicative range of intervention and support strategies that the improvement HMI may choose to employ and/or recommend when visiting a provider. The strategies are not mutually exclusive and the list is not exhaustive. HMI may recommend other activities that suit the specific circumstances of the provider. HMI will be expected to use their time and available resources when supporting and challenging providers in a flexible way, within the overall available time to support the provider. The range of options may include:
- the HMI meeting with governors to explain, using Ofsted evidence, how the governing body can assist in ensuring that a provider moves from requires improvement to good
 - an invitation to leaders and managers from the provider to attend an Ofsted improvement seminar covering the range of common weaknesses as identified through inspection evidence; this is likely to include, for instance, improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and governance
 - accessing existing support offers such as those from LSIS (or where relevant the NCSL)
 - establishing stronger links with other regional or national providers to learn from their strengths, as well as to work together on shared issues
 - HMI offering to arrange a visit for senior leaders and governors to another provider
 - establishing links with LSIS (or where relevant the NCSL), for example to access support for reviewing governance or developing middle leaders and managers
 - leaders or managers attending a seminar led by HMI on a specific subject or aspect of best practice, drawing on Ofsted evidence
 - a further visit or visits by the HMI
 - a meeting between the HMI with other staff, or groups of staff in the provider to review progress against agreed action plans and/or to share good practice
 - HMI meeting with middle leaders and managers in the provider to discuss how teaching or training can be strengthened
 - joint observation of a particular subject or aspect by the HMI and senior/middle leaders.
16. Not all these activities will require a full day visit to a provider and some may need to take place in the evening. In some circumstances, HMI may agree to contact the provider by telephone to discuss progress against a particular issue.
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17. Senior HMI from Ofsted will liaise regularly with LSIS (and where relevant NCSL) to discuss ways in which greater improvement can be secured for providers or groups of providers.
 18. At each stage, HMI will confirm in writing agreed actions.
 19. Ofsted will keep its improvement activities under review to ensure that it provides the most appropriate challenge and support to providers requiring improvement.
 20. Ofsted provides a wide range of good practice cases studies on its website to help you with your improvement. This can be seen at:
<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/goodpractice>.
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