

Response to the consultation on further education and skills inspections and outcomes: official statistics

This is a report on the consultation on the frequency and content of the further education and skills official statistics from September 2015.

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Introduction

Ofsted publishes official statistics of further education (FE) and skills inspections and outcomes on our website on a quarterly basis.

During summer 2014, we sought views on the frequency and content of the further education and skills official statistics. We proposed to reduce the frequency of publication of these statistics to twice yearly, supplemented with frequent management information releases. The consultation related only to the publication of statistics, not to how inspections are carried out or published.

The consultation ran between 11 August and 15 September 2014.

The consultation method

The consultation was published on the Ofsted website. Responses were collected by email and through online forms. No postal responses were received. A total of 22 valid responses were received and considered.

Summary of findings and next steps

We received a largely positive response to the consultation, with 73% of respondents agreeing with our proposal to reduce the frequency of the official statistics if they were supplemented by regular releases of inspection outcomes through management information.

As a result of the responses, we will reduce the frequency of our FE official statistics. In conjunction with this, we will publish monthly management information that will provide a frequent and timely snapshot of inspection judgements throughout the academic year (September to August) to date.

The last quarterly official statistics, which presented data up to the end of August 2014, were published in December as announced. From February 2015, we will begin the publication of monthly management information and bi-annual official statistics. These two publications will cover the periods September to February and September to August and will be published in June and December, respectively. The detailed schedule can be found on the Ofsted website at:

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted/about/statistics#forthcoming-publications.

The monthly management information will include provider-level data on all judgements reported by inspectors, such as those on the various aspects of apprenticeship and 16-19 provision, as well as a breakdown of subject area judgements. This will mean that users will be able to analyse the data by various criteria, such as provider type, region, local authority and time period. We will include a key findings section that will summarise the current position on the inspection of providers in the FE and skills sector.

However, because we intend this to be a snapshot of information and available as early as possible we will not include other information not directly reported by the inspection judgements, such as learner information, performance data and success rates or examples of good practice. We will, however, investigate whether some of this information can be added to the bi-annual statistical releases.

Findings in full

The survey contained a mixture of open and closed questions. No questions were compulsory so the number of responses varied by question.

Q1. We are considering reducing the frequency of FE and skills official statistics releases from four releases per year to two releases per year. If these statistical releases were supplemented with regular management information would this be sufficient to meet your needs?

Responses

There were 22 responses, of which 16 (73%) supported the proposal, three (14%) did not support the proposal and three (14%) did not know.

Comments

We received nine comments on this question. These included requests for:

- the management information to be as rich as possible
- or specific indicators to be included, such as the list of FE and private providers receiving a grade 3 or 4 judgement
- the inclusion of information for the current period, the previous period and the current latest grades.

Most comments were in favour of bi-annual statistical releases, with the caveat that we publish regular management information as proposed.

One comment specifically requested keeping quarterly statistical releases. However, users will be able to analyse published data for inspections carried out within a particular period by filtering the provider level data that will be published as part of each monthly management information release. As the data will be published monthly, information for a particular time period will be available sooner than at present.

Q2. If Ofsted reduces the frequency of official statistics to two releases per year, how frequently would you require management information to be released?

Responses

There were 21 responses, of which eight (38%) proposed once per month, four (19%) proposed once every two months and nine (43%) proposed once every three months.

Comments

We received seven comments on this question. Respondents stressed the importance of a regular and timely flow of management information to complement the reduction in the official statistical publication timetable. One respondent asked for more information on apprenticeships within different sectors, while another requested quarterly statistical releases as well as regular management information.

Q3. What would you like the management information to contain?

We received 16 comments with a wide variety of suggestion to this question, among which were:

- the importance of charts as a visual or pictorial aid
- grade breakdowns by subject area or types of provision
- performance data or success rates
- learner counts/size of provision
- full breakdown of inspection judgements.

Q4. Are there any charts that would be particularly useful to you?

We received 12 responses to this question. Suggestions included:

- information on inspection grades, particularly by subject area
- more information on the characteristics of the different types of provider
- more information on student/learner destinations
- separate analysis of sixth forms
- breakdown by size of provision
- breakdown by type of apprenticeship
- lesson observation charts
- regional analysis
- sector specific grades
- General further education/tertiary college effectiveness.

Q5. How useful are the current official statistics releases to you?

Responses

We received 17 responses to this question, of which six (35%) answered 'Very useful', seven (41%) answered 'Useful' and four (24%) answered 'Of some use'.

How could the current official statistics releases be improved?

We received eight responses to this question. The most common themes among the comments were:

- information on learner numbers/size of provider
- more breakdowns and graphs
- earlier publication of data
- the better reflection of delivery areas.

One respondent said that the key findings section lacked impact.

Q6. Do you have anything else you would like to add to this consultation?

Only one comment was received for this question. The respondent asked for the alerts service for publication of inspection reports to continue. This is a valuable service for our users and we will continue to alert users to our publications.

Information on those who responded to the consultation

Seventeen respondents were responding on behalf of an organisation. Thirteen responses provided the name of their organisation. The majority of these came from colleges or other FE providers. There were also two responses from government departments – the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the Department for Education (DfE). All but one of these named responses supported the proposal to reduce the frequency of the official statistics; the other named response answered 'Do not know' to the proposal.

The majority of respondents came from an FE and skills background and described their role as manager or teacher/educator.