

Engagement with Ofsted

A report on the responses to consultation

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 requires us to carry out our work in ways that encourage the services we inspect and regulate to be user focused. In response to this duty, a new user and stakeholder engagement strategy has been developed. The development of this strategy has been shaped by consulting with a wide range of Ofsted's users, providers and stakeholders between February and June 2008. This report outlines the responses to the consultation.

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Introduction

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 requires us to carry out our work in ways that encourage the services we inspect and regulate to be user focused. In response to this requirement, a new user and stakeholder engagement strategy has been developed, which sets out how we will encourage and promote user engagement as a driver for improvement and how we will listen to our users, providers and stakeholders.

The user and stakeholder engagement strategy has four main aims:

- to actively encourage engagement as a driver for improvement
- to provide users and stakeholders with clear, coherent and consistent messages
- to make best use of people's time by seeking their views, engaging them in decisions and sharing information
- to make use, at a strategic level, of information, feedback and market intelligence gathered from contact with users and stakeholders.

The development of this strategy has been shaped by consultation with a wide range of Ofsted's users, providers and stakeholders between February and June 2008. This report outlines the key findings of the consultation and the actions that Ofsted has taken, or will take, as a result.

Background to the consultation

1. The rationale for this consultation was to ensure that our new engagement strategy meets the needs of our large and diverse body of users, providers and stakeholders. These have been grouped into the following three categories:
 - users – individuals who use, or could use, the services we inspect and regulate specifically children and young people, parents and carers, adult learners and employers
 - providers – those organisations that provide the services we inspect and regulate, such as schools, childminders and adult education training providers
 - other stakeholders – including our partners who support the delivery of inspection services; commentators who scrutinise these services from an external perspective and other inspection and regulatory bodies; government departments and agencies.

The consultation

2. The objective of the consultation was to improve the way we listen to, communicate with, and consult our users, providers and stakeholders. The consultation comprised a number of different consultation methods, including omnibus surveys, focus groups, telephone interviews and a web-based survey. In total, 3,521 individuals and representative organisations gave their views about their experiences and expectations of engagement with Ofsted. Further details of the consultation methodology and breakdown of responses are provided in the annex on pages 8–11.

Key findings

3. Consultation highlighted the need to:
 - **Raise awareness of Ofsted's wider role.** Although over 75% of those surveyed had heard of Ofsted, very few were familiar with Ofsted's wider remit over and above the inspection of schools and the inspection and regulation of childcare.
 - **Raise awareness of how individuals can engage with Ofsted.** Just over a third of those surveyed knew how they could engage with Ofsted in and around inspections. But nearly two-thirds did not.
 - **Reduce potential for digital exclusion.** Just under a third of the UK adult population (15 million adults aged 16 years and over) claimed not to have access to the internet – this is likely to include a high proportion of socially excluded audiences.
 - **Tailor methods of engagement to the audience.** Children, young people, parents, carers and adult learners had a strong desire to be better informed about engagement mechanisms available to them during and outside of the inspection process. It was noted that these mechanisms should be tailored to need, be age and audience appropriate, wide-ranging and involve all users.
 - **Demonstrate the value of engagement.** Children, young people, parents, carers and adult learners were all keen to see their feedback presented in inspection reports or letters after the inspection. This helps to demonstrate the importance of feedback and shows that views have been clearly represented.
 - **Manage and monitor engagement activities effectively.** The findings of desk-based research and telephone interviews highlighted the need for adequate preparation, managing expectations, tailoring engagement techniques, using relevant questions and gaining the trust and consent of those taking part.
 - **Improve navigation features and content of the Ofsted website.** The web-based survey highlighted the need for additional or enhanced search features to improve navigation of the website. In addition, many people who responded to the survey requested that the design and information on the site be reviewed.

What Ofsted intends to do next

4. As a result of this consultation, Ofsted is committed to:
- Improve understanding of Ofsted's extended remit and how people can give their views to Ofsted during and outside inspection. In response to this commitment we are developing a communications plan to inform the public of Ofsted's wider role, and explain how they can make their views heard.
 - Ensure that consultations and feedback are accessible to all of Ofsted's service users, providers and other stakeholders. To achieve this we have:
 - published consultation guidance for staff based on best practice and outlining minimum requirements for all consultations including the commitment to include some form of face-to-face engagement as part of every consultation
 - developed a dedicated consultation section on our website, including a consultation calendar so people can see what Ofsted will be consulting on, how and when and the results of all consultations
 - established quality assurance processes to review consultation plans
 - developed questions to seek feedback from respondents about whether they found the consultation process accessible
 - published accessibility guidance for staff.
 - Ensure details of those taking part in consultations are monitored wherever possible to assess impact on different equality strands. To achieve this, we have:
 - included equalities monitoring as part of the consultation process in order to establish whether we are gathering views from all sections of society;
 - established processes to evaluate the impact and reach of our consultations.
 - Develop activities to reach those at risk of exclusion as part of a strategy to improve inspectors' engagement with users. To achieve this, we are:
 - developing training activities for inspectors around user involvement and specifically those users who are seldom heard.
 - Use feedback from the web survey to prioritise and **make improvements to the Ofsted website as part of Ofsted's intelligence and information** strategy. To achieve this, we are:
 - making immediate quick-fix improvements to the website
 - working with users to help develop and test changes to the functionality and content of the Ofsted website.

- Establish stronger links with representative organisations and use these groups to act as intermediaries between Ofsted and those they represent. From this we plan to:
 - develop a stakeholder database which will help improve our communication with stakeholders.
 - Regularly review our user and stakeholder strategy to ensure it is effective and reflects best practice in its implementation.
5. As a result of the consultation we amended and published a new user and stakeholder engagement strategy, including the following:
- A pledge to avoid a “one-size-fits-all” approach and to work hard to reach as many people as possible within available resources by using a combination of methods
 - A commitment to use focus groups to engage with those whose circumstances make them vulnerable or hard to reach through other methods
 - A consultation promise specifying what people can expect from consultation - including making consultations accessible to all and ensuring that all major consultations incorporate some form of face to face consultation
 - A commitment to ensure that those we inspect and regulate are themselves user focused
 - A definition of preferred engagement methods for each user group.

Annex

A. Analysis of responses to omnibus surveys

A number of questions about engagement with Ofsted – both in general and during inspection – were included in two omnibus surveys conducted during February and March 2008.

In total, 1,661 adults and 382 children and young people aged 7 to 16 across a representative sample of the population responded to these surveys in home interviews.

| Area of questioning | Adults (1,661) | | Children (382) | |
|---|-----------------------------|-----|----------------|-----|
| | Response | % | Response | % |
| 1. Had heard of Ofsted | Yes | 80% | Yes | 46% |
| 2. Knew Ofsted was involved in school inspection | Yes | 48% | Yes | 69% |
| 3. Knew Ofsted was involved in inspection/regulation of childcare | Yes | 5% | n/a | |
| 4. Agree Ofsted has a positive impact | Agree strongly/ slightly | 52% | n/a | |
| 5. Agree Ofsted helps make schools better | n/a | | Agree | 70% |
| 6. Agree know how to make their views known to Ofsted | Agree strongly/ slightly | 28% | Agree | 31% |

B. Analysis of responses to focus groups

Eighteen focus groups took place with children and young people, parents and carers and adult learners between March and June 2008. The groups took place in a mix of rural and urban locations – in London, Bristol, Nottingham and Manchester. In total, 132 people gave their views on:

- whether and how differently they wish to engage with Ofsted during and between inspections
- the most effective mechanisms for engagement, the barriers to effective engagement and how the value of input could be demonstrated

- specific suggestions relating to specific aspects of Ofsted inspection policy and processes.

Attendance at these focus groups comprised:

- 52 parents and carers
- 50 children and young people
- 26 adult learners.

C. Analysis of responses to web survey

A total of 1,338 individuals or organisations took part in a web-based survey which was launched on the Ofsted website in March 2008.

- 462 childcare providers
- 412 schools
- 94 parents and carers
- 81 local authorities
- 19 children and young people.

We also received 270 responses from individuals who either chose not to categorise themselves or belonged to groups that were too small to be segmented. The percentage of positive responses ('very good', 'fairly good' and 'yes') for each question is shown in the tables below.

| Question | % of positive responses |
|--|-------------------------|
| 1. Ofsted is good at keeping people informed about its role | 64% |
| 2. Ofsted is good at keeping people informed about changes to the way it works | 54% |
| 3. Ofsted is good at keeping people informed about its findings from inspections | 78% |
| 4. I know how I can make my views known to Ofsted | 58% |
| 5. Ofsted listens to the views of people who use services, like children, parents and learners as part of the inspections they carry out | 55% |
| 6. Ofsted inspections have a positive impact on children and learners | 50% |
| 7. Providers make improvements because they know an inspector | 69% |

| 8. How often, if at all, do you visit the Ofsted website? | % of positive responses |
|---|-------------------------|
| At least once a month | 50% |
| At least once a week | 24% |
| At least once every three months | 16% |
| At least once a year | 6% |
| Daily | 2% |
| Less often or never | 2% |

| 9. What is your main reason for visiting the website? | % of positive responses |
|---|-------------------------|
| To read individual inspection reports | 71% |
| To access forms I need for my inspection/ regulated setting | 61% |
| To read published thematic reports or research | 50% |
| To find out about Ofsted and how inspections work | 38% |
| To read press releases | 34% |
| To find out what Ofsted can do for me as a service user | 23% |
| To take part in consultations | 16% |

| 10. How would you rate Ofsted's website on the following factors? | % of positive responses |
|---|-------------------------|
| Usefulness of information available | 81% |
| Ease of navigation through different parts of the site | 72% |
| Timeliness and accuracy of information | 70% |
| Ease of finding information | 64% |

| 11. Are there any functions which you would like to see on our website but which are currently not available? | Number of suggestions * |
|---|-------------------------|
| Searching for inspection information | 62 |
| Searching by postcode/ county/ region/ area | 61 |
| Searching for reports/ publications | 48 |
| Searching for providers | 17 |
| Searching by grades/ ratings | 4 |
| Searching by criteria/ topic | 4 |

(*) Includes the most common suggestions.

| 12. What else could be done to improve the Ofsted website? | Number of suggestions * |
|--|-------------------------|
| Improve search facilities/ navigation | 81 |
| Improve design/ layout | 46 |
| Add suggested topics/ information content | 25 |
| Improve speed | 17 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Add interactive facilities – comments section/ blogs | 11 |
| Review language/ terminology | 8 |

(*) Includes the most common suggestions.

D. Details of expert organisations

Representatives from the following eight organisations took part in telephone interviews during April and May 2008. Along with desk-based research, this informed best practice consultation and communication methods, in particular, with seldom heard groups.

- Afasic
- British Association of the Teachers of the Deaf
- British Dyslexia Association
- Learning and Skills Council
- Mencap
- Refugee Council
- Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists
- The Children's Society (Disability Advocacy Project).

We would like to thank them and all those who gave us their views.