

Inspection of voluntary adoption agencies

Consultation outcome and next steps

This report gives a summary of the responses to Ofsted's 'Inspection of voluntary adoption agencies' consultation. It sets out the changes we are making as a result.

The report also sets out what we learned from the pilot inspections. These tested a single inspection model and the reduced notice period.

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Corporate member of
Plain English Campaign
Committed to clearer communication

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Introduction

1. This report sets out the responses to our 'A single inspection of voluntary adoption agencies' consultation. Between 10 July and 4 August 2017, we sought views from interested parties through an online consultation and webinar. We piloted the proposals with two voluntary adoption agencies (VAAs).
2. The sector has been positive about our proposals for a new approach to the inspection of VAAs. This report summarises the issues raised in the consultation and how we will address them.
3. Before we started the consultation, we had extensive discussions with the sector over an 18-month period. We believe that the new approach to inspecting VAAs will:
 - help simplify the inspection landscape before regional adoption agencies are fully operational
 - support greater consistency in how we inspect VAAs
 - reduce the burden of inspection
 - result in a comprehensive assessment of the agency as a whole
 - support VAAs to deliver services flexibly
 - improve the focus on the quality of what is delivered for children and adults rather than organisational structure.
4. We would like to thank all those who provided feedback during this consultation and who took part in our pilot inspections.

Consultation proposals

5. We consulted on the following proposals for changes to the inspection of VAAs:
 - all VAAs will receive one inspection in a three-year period and one overall judgement irrespective of the number of premises they use
 - the notice period for the inspection of voluntary adoption agencies is reduced from 10 working days to two working days.
6. The full consultation proposals can be found at:
www.gov.uk/government/consultations/a-single-inspection-of-voluntary-adoption-agencies.

How we consulted

7. We received a total of 30 responses, of which 21 were from VAAs and nine were from local authorities and other interested parties.

8. We also hosted a consultation webinar with VAA representatives. This was after the online consultation closed and allowed us to discuss some of the initial feedback and provide greater detail on how the single inspection approach might work in practice.
9. Pilot inspections took place (November 2017) in two VAAs. We appreciate their time and input.
10. The findings in this report are based on responses to the online questionnaire, consultation webinar and the pilot inspections.

Consultation feedback and actions

Proposal 1: The inspection of VAAs

Summary of proposal

11. We proposed that:
 - all VAAs will receive one inspection in a three-year period and one overall judgement irrespective of the number of premises they use.
12. We asked:
 - Do you agree with the principle of a single inspection of VAAs, irrespective of the number of premises used?
 - Do you agree or disagree that a single inspection of VAAs that have more than one premises will support agencies to:
 - deliver services that are flexible for children and adult users
 - improve the focus on the quality of what is delivered to adults
 - reduce duplication for providers
 - lead to a more proportionate inspection programme?
 - What opportunities and challenges do you feel will result from a single inspection of those VAAs that have more than one premises?

What people told us

13. The majority of respondents (77%) agreed with the principles underpinning the single-model approach. The issues highlighted by respondents who did not support the proposal (10%) and who did not know (13%) were about the independence of branches and the potential for good or weak provision to be missed.
14. A significant number of respondents agreed that the single model would improve inspection focus (60%), reduce duplication (83%) and be more proportionate (80%). Ten per cent of respondents disagreed and 30% did not know whether the single model would improve focus.

15. Respondents raised queries about:
 - how the single inspection model would promote access to services, look at local need and highlight inconsistent provision
 - how different offices would be inspected.
16. In summary, the positive aspects of the single model included:
 - improving consistency
 - simplifying the inspection process
 - saving time and reducing the burden of inspection
 - assisting organisations in using their resources wisely
 - allowing a focus on service users and enabling agencies to respond to local need
 - helping to identify good practice
 - supporting service improvement and innovation.
17. In summary, respondents questioned:
 - how inspectors would coordinate and sample work across different premises
 - whether inspectors would obtain a true picture of the organisation in the timeframe available
 - whether inspectors would understand individual issues facing branches when evaluating the organisation as a whole. In particular, larger agencies were worried that this would affect the overall judgement.
18. In addition to the formal consultation, we held a webinar (9 August 2017). This was well attended: 11 providers from VAAs took part.
19. As part of the webinar, we included interactive poll questions. A significant majority of the respondents to the poll agreed with the principles underpinning the single inspection (67%) and agreed with reducing the notice period from 10 days to two days (67%). Participants' views overall reflected the online consultation. In particular, they highlighted the need to ensure that a full picture of the VAA would be captured under the single inspection model. Representatives also pointed out the need to ensure that variation across premises would be seen in a local context.

Our response

20. We piloted the proposal with two VAAs in order to gain an understanding of the single model approach and the likely impact of a shorter notice period. We piloted our approach in a smaller VAA that has a single premises and in a large national VAA that has a significant number of additional premises. After the

pilots, we held discussions with representatives from each pilot agency to gain their views on the inspection experience. They also gave us written feedback.

21. During the pilots, the concern that larger agencies may be disadvantaged by the single model was not an issue. Inspectors demonstrated that they were able to take account of the unique nature of service delivery in responding to local need. Inspection findings were balanced, fair and proportionate. They reflected the range of work carried out, including across the larger multi-site VAA. To ensure that we always maintain this fair and proportionate response when we begin using the model, we will provide training and guidance for inspectors.
22. Pre-inspection communication between the lead inspector and the VAA was seen as central to preparing for the inspection. This also supported the effective deployment of the inspection team on multi-site inspections and the inspection programme.
23. In the pilots, it was challenging to sample cases across a range of premises. As a result, we have increased the number of on-site inspection days.

Proposal 2: notice period of inspection

Summary of proposal

24. We proposed that:
 - the notice period for the inspection of voluntary adoption agencies is reduced from 10 working days to two working days.
25. We asked:
 - Do you agree that the notice period for the inspection of voluntary adoption agencies should be reduced from 10 working days to two working days?

What people told us

26. The majority (57%) supported reducing the notice period from 10 days to two days. Respondents recognised that a reduced notice period would bring VAAs in line with other inspections and ensure that services are seen as they currently operate.
27. Those who disagreed (33%) or did not know (10%) felt that the reduced notice period would: cause anxiety, impact on small organisations in planning for inspection, limit the availability of staff, and limit service users' involvement and participation in the inspection.
28. Some respondents felt the reduced notice period would reduce costs for branches due to a streamlined process or that the single inspection may result in reduced fees because we would be inspecting the organisation as a whole as opposed to individual branches.

Our response

29. From April 2018, VAAs will have two working days' notice of inspection. We consider this the minimum notice required to support an effective inspection. This will align notice periods with the majority of Ofsted's inspections and help lessen the demands on providers and staff in preparing for inspection.
30. In the pilot inspections, inspectors were able to speak with children and young people and adoptive parents across a wide geographical area, particularly where there were planned events. Despite this, we learned from the pilots that a reduced notice period gives inspectors fewer opportunities for face-to-face meetings with children and adoptive parents and means that they are more likely to contact them by telephone where possible.
31. Improved information at the pre-inspection stage alongside increased inspector days on inspection should increase the opportunity for children and young people and adoptive parents to fully participate in the inspection. We will continue to monitor their participation and contribution as part of the wider ongoing review of the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF).
32. VAAs expressed concern that some important staff may not always be present during inspections. At the start of the inspection, we will make clear what information inspectors will need to assist the inspection. This should ensure that providers are able to provide their best evidence.
33. The data information template did not help the VAA to pull together the large amount of data that national agencies hold during the short notice period. We will work with providers to create a new data template that is easy to use and helps them to quickly share and use information.
34. The Department for Education (DfE) is responsible for the social care Fees and Frequency of Inspections Regulations 2015.¹ The DfE's consultation on the fee structure in 2018/19 closed on 7 December 2017. It is now in the process of finishing its consultation exercise for the financial year 2018/19 fee structure, which will be enacted from 1 April 2018. The DfE is committed to a broader review of the Regulations to make the fee structures more equitable. These would include reviewing fees in respect of all SCCIF remits (including VAAs) by looking at the current distinction between small and large settings and considering applying a more proportionate and transparent approach. Any proposed changes would be subject to consultation by the DfE and would not come into force until April 2019.

Next steps

35. We will use the new approach to inspecting VAAs from April 2018.

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/551/made.

36. We will publish supporting guidance by 31 March 2018.
37. Inspectors will be trained in the new inspection model ahead of implementation.
38. We will review the implementation and impact of the single inspection model by April 2019 as part of the ongoing review of the SCCIF.



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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted
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