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Official Statistics

# Further education and skills inspections and outcomes: methodology and quality report

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## Introduction

This document contains methodology and quality information relevant to the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills' (Ofsted's) 6-monthly release on further education and skills inspections and outcomes data.

You should read this document in conjunction with the background notes contained within the [statistical first release \(SFR\)](#) and accompanying tables. Those notes will include helpful information that is not included here.

## Methodology

The SFR contains data that has been sourced from inspections carried out by

Ofsted for all further education and skills providers in England, wholly or partly funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

It reports on the following.

### **In-year inspection outcomes for inspections carried out between 1 September and 31 August of the latest reporting year**

These are regardless of whether the provider has since closed or lost funding.

Tables and charts count the number of inspections that took place. A provider could be counted more than once, depending on the number of times they were inspected within the year.

We publish statistics each year, with a mid-year picture also published part way through the year.

### **The most recent, or latest, full inspection outcomes for all open and funded providers at a certain point in time**

These are regardless of when the inspection took place.

Tables and charts count the number of providers that have been inspected. Each provider can appear only once in the underlying data. If a provider is open and funded but has not yet been inspected, then they do not appear in this measure, though the underlying data does include them.

We publish statistics about the most recent inspection outcomes for all providers open and funded on 31 August each year, with a mid-year picture also published part way through the year.

## **Provider types covered**

We extract the inspection outcome data from Ofsted's administrative systems. Included in the table below is the full list of provider types covered by further education and skills inspections, which are therefore included in the release. We have separated provider types and groups to make the underlying data easier for users to aggregate. These groupings are also included within tables and charts in the SFR.

Provider type Provider group General further education college Colleges All further education and skills providers Sixth-form college Specialist further education college Independent specialist college Independent specialist colleges Independent learning provider Independent learning providers (including employer providers) Employer provider Local authority provider Community

learning and skills providers Not for profit organisation Specialist designated institution 16–19 academy converter 16–19 academies 16–19 academy sponsor led 16–19 free school Dance and drama college Dance and drama colleges Higher education institution Higher education institutions National Careers Service contractor National Careers Service contractors Prison and young offender institution Prisons and young offender institutions Prisons and young offender institutions

## Short inspections

On 1 September 2015, under the [common inspection framework](#), Ofsted introduced short inspections for providers previously judged good. Short inspections can either confirm that the provider is still good overall or that the lead inspector can choose to convert the inspection to a full inspection if:

- there is insufficient evidence to confirm that the provider remains good
- there are concerns that there is evidence that the provider may no longer be good (which may include concerns about safeguarding)
- there is sufficient evidence of improved performance to suggest that the provider may be judged outstanding

If a short inspection does not convert, the overall effectiveness of the provider remains unchanged from its previous inspection. No individual or sub-provision judgements are made. For example, this would apply in the case of:

- effectiveness of leadership and management
- quality of teaching
- learning and assessment
- and 16 to 19 study programmes

A decision to convert the short inspection does not predetermine the outcome of the full inspection, which will make the full set of graded judgements using the 4-point grading scale. At the end of the full inspection, a provider could:

- remain good
- improve to outstanding
- or decline to requires improvement or inadequate

When reporting on in-year inspections, we have included the following fields and labels in the 'data, tables and charts' file to help users identify short inspections:

- we have added an 'inspection type group' to the in-year data tabs to allow users to identify whether a provider received a full or short inspection
- if a short inspection did not convert and the provider remained good, we will record this in the inspection type group as 'Short inspection' and we will populate the overall effectiveness column with a '9'

- if a short inspection did convert to a full inspection, we will record this in the inspection type group as 'Full Inspection (short converted)' and we will complete the remaining columns as we would for a full inspection
- we have edited the titles on each tab to identify clearly whether the data shown includes the outcomes from full inspections only or full and short inspections combined

Short inspections have a minimal impact on the most recent inspection outcomes. Within the 'Most recent inspection data' tab, the most recent, or latest, full inspection outcomes are shown for each provider. This includes short inspections that converted to full inspections. Short inspections that did not convert to full inspections do not affect this tab because the provider's original overall effectiveness judgement remains good. We have included a table within the release to show the volumes of short inspections, the number that convert to full inspections and the resulting inspection outcomes.

## More information

Official statistics on further education and skills inspection outcomes have a time delay between the end of the reporting period and the publication cut-off date of 1 calendar month. We try to ensure that we publish most of the inspection reports carried out within the reporting period in order to minimise bias. For instance, the inspection reports of those providers judged inadequate undergo additional moderation checks. There may therefore be a longer time period between the inspection and the publication of the inspection report in these cases.

Under exceptional circumstances, Ofsted may withhold/withdraw publication of an inspection report. Outcomes of withheld or withdrawn inspection reports are not included in any of the datasets.

If statements are made about whether inspection outcomes have declined or improved, they are referring to the most recent overall effectiveness outcomes compared to the previous inspection, unless otherwise stated.

We also use data in this release to update [Ofsted's DataView tool](#).

## Relevance

Ofsted regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. We release official statistics to promote reform and improvement across government through increasing the transparency of the work that Ofsted does.

Data in this official statistics series is from inspections carried out under part 8 of the [Education and Inspections Act 2006](#).

## Communicating with users

The aggregation of data for official statistics allows us to communicate to users the key data and messages from inspection outcomes, for example, at different geographical levels and within sub-types of provider. The official statistics draw out the important messages and communicate these in an understandable way appropriate for a wide range of different users. Users are able to interpret and manipulate the data published for their own purposes.

Specific users and uses of the data include:

- media outlets using the key findings from our statistical release to inform the public about the quality of further education and skills providers across the country
- allowing users to track movement in the further education and skills sector and monitor the quality of provision available at a national level and across provider types
- helping identify areas of weak performance. This informs policy development within the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Education and Skills Funding Agency, and the Department for Education to address issues and implement strategies to mitigate them
- Ofsted staff using inspection profiles to inform inspection framework development and underpin policies to improve standards. The important messages within the official statistics contribute towards the findings in Her Majesty's Chief Inspector's Annual Report to Parliament

You can find more contextual information about further education and skills in England and Ofsted's inspection activity within the release.

We generate the [data included in the release](#) by Ofsted's inspection process and it is therefore administrative data.

## Meeting user needs

In 2014, Ofsted held a [consultation on the further education and skills official statistics](#). This proposed that we reduce the frequency of the statistics from quarterly to twice-yearly, supplemented by regular management information. The majority of responses supported this change and the proposal was accepted.

We held a further consultation between 30 June 2016 and 29 July 2016, asking users to comment on 2 possible changes to the official statistics release:

- a change to the methodology for aggregating the ‘all further education and skills providers’ figure to include National Careers Service (NCS) contractors and higher education institutions
- excluding providers that have ceased to be funded or closed as at 31 August from the most recent inspection outcome statistics

As a result of the consultation, we implemented both of these changes.

We made a number of essential changes to the further education and skills inspections and outcomes official statistics from 1 September 2015. This was to accommodate changes caused by the common inspection framework and changes resulting from a database migration. We have included details of the changes resulting from the introduction of the common inspection framework elsewhere in this document, as well as within the [consultation document published on 30 June 2016](#).

In 2018, the National Statistician published new [guidance covering management information and official statistics](#).

We welcome feedback about our statistical releases. If you have any comments, questions or suggestions, please contact the Further Education and Skills, Data and Analysis team at [FEandSkillsData@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:FEandSkillsData@ofsted.gov.uk).

## Coherence and compatibility

The tables and charts within the release compare inspection outcomes over the past several years. There have been a number of framework changes since the first release of statistics and we have reflected these in the publications. The overall effectiveness grade has remained comparable across the different frameworks. Other sub-judgements and provision judgements are, if possible, mapped across frameworks when changes occur. This is explained in more detail below.

When these changes have happened, we have alerted users via updates in the official statistics introduction and methodology sections of the main findings document. When we have implemented changes to inspection frameworks or methodological changes to improve the output, we have added guidance to footnotes and the main findings document for easy access.

Inspection outcomes data presented in provisional official statistics releases will match the data shown in [DataView](#). If we publish inspection reports after the final publication date included within a release, we will reflect the inspection outcomes within the next provisional official statistics release. If we have published all inspections within the reporting period, we will mark the statistics as final.

There is no comparable data published by other producers of Official or National Statistics for further education and skills inspections in England.

Inspections are carried out:

- in Scotland by [Education Scotland](#)
- in Wales by [Estyn](#)
- in Northern Ireland by the [Education and Training Inspectorate \(ETI\)](#)

Ofsted also produces regular management information on the outcomes of further education and skills inspections. The management information is not directly comparable with the official statistics due to a difference in methodology. The official statistics allow an additional month after the reporting period has ended for inspection reports to be published.

Several third parties provide interactive tools displaying publicly available Ofsted inspection judgements. Third parties appear to collate these by using advanced computer techniques to harvest information from published inspection reports. Ofsted cannot comment on the quality of these datasets.

Framework changes have an impact on the comparability of data and reporting over time. The change in judgements and considering the effects of these means that between frameworks there may be breaks or changes in the way we report certain judgements.

## The common inspection framework

We introduced the [common inspection framework](#) following the 'better inspection for all' consultation. This consultation initiated various changes to the way Ofsted inspects providers.

We designed the common inspection framework to bring together the inspection of different education, skills and early years settings to provide greater coherence across different providers that cater for similar age ranges. We have therefore standardised inspection judgements to apply across all remit areas.

The framework was accompanied by an [inspection handbook](#). This set out how inspectors made each of the inspection judgements and reflected the needs and expectations for each type of setting.

The framework included a key judgement on 'personal development, behaviour and welfare'. Analysis of this judgement only represented inspections since 1 September 2015. It did not provide a comprehensive view of the quality of provision nationally.

The [previous inspection framework](#) ran between 1 September 2012 and 31 August 2015.

## Frequency of inspection

We do not inspect all providers with equal regularity. We take a proportionate risk-assessed approach to inspection, as indicated in our inspection frameworks. The result of this is that the further education and skills providers inspected in a particular reporting year are unlikely to be representative of all providers within the sector. This will also affect the comparability of inspection outcomes between years.

[We inspect providers that were previously judged to be less than good in their most recent inspection more frequently than good providers.](#)

As of 1 September 2015, previously good providers receive a short inspection approximately every 3 years. Short inspections and how they are included within the data are described above in the methodology section.

Users need to be particularly cautious if comparing outcomes from 2015 to 2016 or later with previous years. Before 1 September 2015, all good providers received a full inspection no later than the fifth reporting year. This included cases where they continued to provide the same standard of education

Most further education and skills providers previously judged to be outstanding at their most recent inspection are exempt from routine inspection and will not be inspected unless Ofsted has concerns about them. This can include concerns identified through risk assessment, a complaint, a serious safeguarding incident or concerns about the standards of leadership and management. If we refer to risk-assessed inspections within this statistical release, it may also include a small number of compulsory inspections of non-exempt outstanding providers

Comparisons between provider types should be treated with caution. This is due to the different inspection frameworks used over the past 10 years and the variation in the number of providers included within the different groups

New providers are usually inspected according to a fixed cycle. In most cases, the timing of this inspection is not determined by performance data of the provider.

## Comparing inspections over time

Comparability between years of the most recent inspection outcomes for further education and skills providers has been affected by the following.

### Consultation

Following a consultation carried out in July 2016, there was a change to the methodology for aggregating the 'all further education and skills providers' figure



to include National Career Service contractors and higher education institutions. As a result, the 'all further education and skills providers' figure as at 31 August 2016 and onwards will not be comparable to previous years.^

## **Changes to methodology**

It has also been affected by a change to the methodology to exclude providers that had ceased to be funded or closed during the reporting year, from the 31 August statistics. We backdated this change and applied it to the statistics as at 31 August 2015. Therefore, the most recent inspection outcomes for the different provider types and groups are comparable from 31 August 2015 onwards but are not comparable before this date.^

## **Independent specialist colleges and dance and drama colleges**

Before 1 September 2015, we included independent specialist colleges within the 'colleges' group, along with general further education colleges, sixth-form colleges and specialist further education colleges (which specialise in agriculture and horticulture or performing arts). We took the decision to remove independent specialist colleges from the 'colleges' group and to report on them separately from 1 September 2015. We adjusted historic data published in the statistics to take account of this change.

Before 1 September 2015, Ofsted inspected dance and drama colleges at course level, with 1 dance and drama college potentially receiving multiple judgements for the different courses they delivered. We would have published one of these judgements as a proxy for overall effectiveness in the underlying data and tables. Ofsted now makes a judgement on the overall effectiveness of dance and drama colleges. This change makes the judgement comparable to other providers and therefore we will include dance and drama colleges from 1 September 2015 onwards in the aggregation for 'all further education and skills providers'. The previously published proxy for overall effectiveness is not comparable to the new judgement. We have removed this from the underlying data to prevent inappropriate comparisons.

## **Accuracy and reliability**

### **What this release reports on**

## **The most recent inspection outcome for all open and funded further education and skills providers**

Funded providers include providers that are marked as being in receipt of funding within the dataset taken from Ofsted's systems as at the end of the relevant reporting period. There may be a delay between changes to a provider's funding status and Ofsted being informed.

## **Inspections that have taken place during the reporting year**

We give the cut-off date for the publication of the reports included in the publication. Providers that have yet to be inspected are included within the underlying data but are not included as part of the aggregated statistics. If we have published an inspection report but subsequently withheld this, then this will not be included in inspection outcomes. If the inspection report is published after the cut-off date given for the release, the inspection judgement will not be included. These will appear in later releases, after publication.

## **Moderating reports**

Ofsted moderates all inspection reports when a provider is judged to be inadequate. This may result in us publishing some inspection reports after the publication cut-off date required for inclusion within the provisional release. In addition, if there are concerns that we may require further evidence to secure the inspection evidence base, this will delay publication of an inspection report. [See details of these procedures.](#)

## **Other reliability information**

This release does not include the inspection outcomes of maintained schools and academies, independent schools or providers of early years provision. These are included in separate releases. [See details of other releases.](#)

We extract inspection outcomes data from Ofsted's administrative systems. Errors in recording inspection outcomes may affect the quality of the source data. We have put in place a number of appropriate systems to minimise the risk of reporting error.

Until April 2015, Ofsted used a document scanner as a means of validating the outcomes entered into our systems of inspections carried out under section 5 of the Education Act. In September 2015, Ofsted introduced a new administrative system. We carried out thorough checking throughout the data migration process from the old to the new system to ensure that inspection data was transferred accurately. Since September 2015, we have extracted inspection outcome data from the new administrative system.

As part of the data migration, we identified and corrected 1 missing inspection and a small number of missing key judgements. The revised data is available in the official statistics published since September 2015.

Technical production of the publications may also result in manual errors. We use a rigorous data quality assurance procedure with the aim of minimising the risk of reporting error. If we discover an error within the document, we place a note on the website and upload a corrected version of the document as soon as possible.

[See more information on the issues relating to the use of administrative data](#)

We publish revisions in line with [Ofsted's revisions policy for official statistics](#). For more information about the policy, visit the Ofsted website.

## Timeliness and punctuality

We currently publish data twice a year. This includes details of inspections that have taken place and been published in the relevant period. To ensure that data is as timely as possible, each release includes the most recent possible full month of inspections.

We publish data at 9:30am on the date pre-announced in the [publication schedule](#). You can also find information on any delay in publication on the publication schedule.

We allow 1 calendar month after the end of the reporting period as the cut-off date for the inclusion of published inspection reports. This is to allow time for the publication of the majority of inspections that have taken place within the reporting period. The production stage for this release includes extracting and cleaning the data, drafting findings, quality assuring all outputs and uploading the information onto the GOV.UK website.

We announce publications via social media. We give pre-release access in accordance with the [pre-release to official statistics order \(2008\)](#).

You can find the list of post holders granted pre-release access as a separate document accompanying each release.

## Accessibility and clarity

We publish our releases in an accessible format on the GOV.UK website. The information is publicly available and there are no restrictions on access to the published data. Each release includes outcomes from Ofsted inspections that we have subsequently published. The data is for keeping users informed of the

progress of the inspection framework and of changes in the further education and skills sector.

Underlying data in an accessible format accompanies each release to allow users to perform their own analysis. Users may use and re-use this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the [Open Government Licence](#).

This underlying data consists of provider-level files in Excel and is available in the 'data, charts and tables' file.

## **Performance, cost and burden on respondents**

There is no respondent burden in relation to these statistics. This is because data is a by-product of Ofsted's inspection process. The only cost involved is the internal resource involved in collating the release.

## **Confidentiality, transparency and security**

All data releases follow [Ofsted's confidentiality and revisions](#).

## **Glossary**

16 to 19 academies

These are state-funded, non-fee-paying schools independent of local authorities that cater for pupils aged 16 to 19.

## **Community learning and skills providers**

Community learning and skills providers include local authorities, charities, voluntary, not-for-profit companies and community organisations, specialist designated institutions and community interest companies. Their provision is diverse in character and aims to meet the needs and interests of a wide range of communities. Courses include:

- those that lead to a qualification
- programmes leading to qualifications while in employment, such as apprenticeships
- provision for informal adult learning
- provision for social and personal development

Community learning and skills providers were previously categorised as adult and community learning providers.

## **Dance and drama colleges**

Colleges that specialises in delivering dance and drama courses.

## **General further education colleges**

General further education colleges offer a range of education and training opportunities for learners aged from 14 years upwards, including adults. They include tertiary colleges, which specialise in land-based education and training.

## **Higher education institutions**

If higher education institutions, such as universities, offer further education courses and/or level 4 or 5 apprenticeships, these are subject to inspection by Ofsted.

## **Independent learning providers (including employer providers)**

Independent learning providers are companies that provide government-funded education. The category includes employer providers who only offer government-funded training to their own employees.

## **Independent specialist colleges**

Independent specialist colleges provide education and training for students with complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities, whose learning needs cannot be met by their local college or provider.

## **National Careers Service contractors**

The National Careers Service provides information, advice and guidance for those aged 13 and over across England. The service is delivered in 12 geographical regions by area-based prime contractors and a national contact centre by 1 national contractor.

## **Prisons and young offender institutions**

Ofsted carries out inspections in prisons and young offender institutions in partnership with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP). Ofsted inspectors evaluate the quality of education, skills and work in prisons and young offender institutions. [Inspection reports are published by HMIP](#).

## **Sixth-form colleges**

A sixth-form college is an educational institution where students aged 16 to 18 typically study for advanced school-level qualifications, such as A levels, or school-level qualifications such as GCSEs.

## **Specialist further education colleges**

Specialist further education colleges are colleges that specialise in the provision of agricultural, horticultural or art, design and technology courses.

## **Instructions for printing and saving**

Instructions may vary depending on which browser you use, such as Internet Explorer or Google Chrome, and the type of device you use, such as an iPhone or laptop.

You will find your print and save options in your browser's menu. You may also have other options available on your device. The instructions for mobile and tablet devices will be specific to their make and model.

## How to search

Click on **Ctrl + F** on a Windows laptop or **Command + F** on a Mac

This will open a search box in the top right-hand corner of the page. Type the word you are looking for in the search bar and press enter.

Your browser will highlight the word, usually in yellow, wherever it appears on the page. Press enter to move to the next place it appears.

## How to print a copy of the guidance

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