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Official statistics
Methodology: Further education and skills inspections and outcomes as at 28 February 2021

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Introduction

This document contains methodology and quality information relevant to 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 Additional file (release) and accompanying tables. These notes will include helpful information that is not included here.

Methodology

The statistical first release contains data that has been sourced from inspections carried out by Ofsted in the further education and skills providers in England, which is grouped by funded:

- the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)
- in the case of adult education, a mayoral or combined authority or the Greater London Authority
- the apprenticeship levy

It reports on the following:

> In year inspection outcomes for inspections carried out between 1 September and 31 August of the relevant reporting year.

There are regardless of whether the provider has since closed, stopped delivering or changed funding.

Tables and charts count the number of inspections that took place. A provider could be inspected more than once, dependent on the number of times that 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 providers publicly funded and delivering education, training or apprenticeships receive an Ofsted's systems at a certain point in time.

There are inspections 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 publicly funded and delivering education, training or apprenticeships but has not yet been inspected, then it does not appear in the release. Though the underlying data does include it.

We publish statistics about the most recent inspection outcomes for all providers publicly funded and delivering education, training or apprenticeships. We publish 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 inspection and assessment. Ofsted inspects all of these provider types and provider types and groups in the underlying data release for users to aggregate. These groupings are also included within tables and charts in the statistical first release.

Traineeship courses and traineships can no longer be carried out as a stand-alone the introduction of the education inspection framework (EIF).

All further education and skills providers

Provider type	Sub-provider type
General further education college	Colleges
Sixth form college	Colleges
Specialist further education college	Colleges
Independent learning provider	Independent learning providers (including employer providers)
Employer provider	Independent learning providers (including employer providers)
Local authority provider	Adult community education providers
Institute of adult learning	Adult community education providers
16 to 19 academy (converter)	16 to 19 academies
16 to 19 academy (sponsored)	16 to 19 academies
16 to 19 free school	16 to 19 academies
Higher education institution	Higher education institutions
Independent specialist college	Independent specialist colleges
Dance and drama college	Dance and drama colleges
Prison and young offender institution	Prison and young offender institutions

Short inspections

On 1 September 2019, under the common inspection framework, Ofsted introduced short inspections. Short inspections are carried out to ensure that providers are still on a path that provides a high standard of provision and that the lead inspector can choose to extend 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, or that it may be outstanding or exceptional
- there is sufficient evidence of exceptional performance to suggest that the provider may be judged outstanding

If a short inspection does not extend, the overall effectiveness of the provider remains unchanged from its previous inspection. No individual or sub-provision judgements are made. The lead inspector will report on:

- effectiveness of leadership and management
- quality of education
- behaviour and attitudes
- education programmes for young people

A decision to extend the short inspection does not pre-determine the outcome of the full inspection. The lead inspector will carry out all relevant judgements using the 4-point grading scale. At the end of the full inspection, a provider could:

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

When reporting on in-year inspections, we have included the following fields and dates in the data, dates and fields, for to help users identify short inspections:

- we have added an 'inspection type group' to the in-year data table to allow users to filter short inspections from full and other inspection types
- if a short inspection did not extend and the provider remained good, we also include this in the inspection type group as 'Short inspection' and we will populate the 'inspection outcome' field with 'Good'
- if a short inspection did extend to a full inspection, we will record this in the inspection type group as 'Full inspection (short converter)' and we will complete the inspection outcome field with the relevant outcome
- we have defined this data so we can easily identify quickly whether the data should 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 data. Ofsted's systems will record a short inspection as the most recent inspection if no full inspection has taken place in the previous 5 years. This includes short inspections that extend to full inspections. Short inspections that did not extend to full inspections do not affect the 5 year rule. Ofsted's systems will record the previous full inspection as the most recent, if there has not yet been a full inspection. We have included a field in the release to show the volume of short inspections that have taken place, the number that extend 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 calendar months. This is because we need to allow providers sufficient time to carry out their reporting period have reports that are published and are reflected within our statistics. The inspection reports of those providers judged inadequate go through a quality assurance process. This process can take up to 6 weeks to complete between the inspection and the publication of the inspection report in these cases.

Under exceptional circumstances, we 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, we will only do so if we can make a fair comparison between outcomes compared with the previous inspection. Unless otherwise stated.

We also use dates in the release to update Ofsted's Dashboard tool. The Dashboard tool allows users to see the most recent inspection outcomes for providers' inspection judgements that we are proposing to remove in the data release exercise. Dashboard and Ofsted's systems will not updated until we have received any feedback on the proposed changes.

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 inform the public about how to provide either and improvement across government through increasing the transparency of information about providers.

Data in this official statistics is based on 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 messages about the quality of education and skills provision, and the outcomes for learners, levels and within sub-groups of provider. The official statistics show what the key messages and communicate these in an understandable way appropriate for a wide audience. We also use data to interpret and manipulate the information into formats that are useful for our stakeholders.

Specific users and uses of the data include:

- media outlets using the findings from our statistical release to inform the public about the quality of further education and skills providers across the country
- allowing users to travel to inspection to further education and skills providers to monitor the quality of provision available at national level and across provider groups
- providing data to the Department for Education, the Education and Skills Funding Agency, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Office for Students, the Department for Education to address issues and implement strategies to mitigate risks
- Ofsted staff using inspection profiles to inform inspection teams of the most recent and underpin policies to improve standards. The important messages within the statistical first release are also used in the Ofsted Annual Report and the 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 through Ofsted's inspection process and it is therefore administrative data.

Meeting user needs

We have compiled these statistics in line with the Code of Practice for Statistics.

In November 2020, we published a consultation on changes to the publication of further education and skills inspection outcomes. We published the response to this consultation in June 2021 and we plan to review the inspection history for around 50 providers that come back in to funding and started delivering again after a period of not being funded. We will publish the outcomes of this review and we welcome feedback on requirements and has received feedback.

We also proposed the following changes to provider types and groups:

- remove 'not-for-profit organisation' as a provider type and accurately those ESF providers as 'independent learning providers'
- include specialist designated institutions in the colleges group
- remove community learning and skills as a provider group
- include 'independent specialist colleges' as a provider group

The majority of respondents agreed with the proposals to remove 'not-for-profit organisations' as 'independent learning providers' and this has been implemented. We have also included specialist designated institutions in the colleges group. The proposed changes, however, have caused the provider type 'adult community education institution' to 'adult learning institution' and included it in a 'new' adult community education providers group. We have also included 'adult community education' as a fully funded provider. A full list of the provider types and groups, shown above.

We have compared these statistics with relevant, if you have any comments, questions or suggestions, contact the Further Education and Skills, Data and Analysis team at FTSandDataQuestions@ofsted.gov.uk.

Coherence and compatibility

The tables and charts within the release compare inspection outcomes over the past 5 years. We have made the data available for inspections in 2015 to 2016 onwards in tables and we have reflected these in the publications. The overall effectiveness grade has remained comparable across the different frameworks. Other sub-judgements have changed and we have made changes to the data we collect when changes occur. The inspection framework most dated below.

When these changes have happened, we have darker users through updates in the official statistics publication and methodology sections of the main release document. When we have implemented changes to inspection frameworks or inspection data collection, we have made the data comparable with previous years and the main findings in the release.

Inspection outcomes data presented in provisional official statistics releases each month in 2020 to 2021 and 2021 to 2022 are comparable with the data in the previous years data included within a release, and will reflect the inspection outcomes data in the provisional official statistics release. If we have published inspections within the reporting period, we will include the statistics as final.

There is no comparable data published by other producers of official or national statistics. We have compared the data with inspections in England.

Inspections are carried out:

- in Scotland by the Education Scotland
- in Wales by Estyn
- in Northern Ireland by the Education and Training Inspectorate

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. We do not publish the management information. The official statistics allow an additional level of quality the reporting process to be published 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 search functions on our website. Ofsted does not publish inspection data. Ofsted cannot comment on the quality of these datasets.

Framework changes have an impact on the comparability of data and reporting over time. We have made changes to the inspection framework in 2019 to 2020 and between frameworks there may be breaks or changes in the way we report certain judgements.

Education inspection framework

We introduced the EIF in September 2019 following a consultation.

The framework was accompanied by an inspection handbook. This sets out how inspectors made each of the inspection judgements and reflected the needs and expectations of a wide range of education.

The impact of the changes to the EIF judgements are as follows:

- overall effectiveness: this judgement is broadly comparable across all frameworks from September 2019 to 2020 onwards
- effectiveness of leadership and management: this judgement is broadly comparable across all frameworks from September 2019 to 2020
- quality of education: this judgement was introduced in September 2019 and is not comparable with earlier frameworks. As a result, analysis of this judgement will only include inspections from September 2019 and will not provide a comparable view of the quality of education nationally
- behaviour and attitudes: this judgement was introduced in September 2019 and is not comparable with earlier frameworks. As a result, analysis of this judgement will only represent inspections since September 2019 and will not provide a comprehensive view of the quality of behaviour and attitudes nationally
- personal development: this judgement was introduced in September 2019 and is not comparable with earlier frameworks. As a result, analysis of this judgement will only represent inspections since September 2019 and will not provide a comprehensive view of the quality of personal development.

The previous inspection framework ran between 1 September 2015 and 31 August 2019.

Frequency of inspection

We do not inspect providers with equal regularity. We take a proportionate risk-based approach to inspection. We inform providers of inspection at least 6 weeks. Ofsted offers a full free further education and skills provider inspection to providers that requiring 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, providers that are new to the sector and providers that are inadequate.

As of 1 September 2019, previously good providers normally receive a full inspection within 5 years. Short inspections and free offers are included within the data and discussed above in the methodology section.

Users need to be particularly careful in comparing outcomes from 2015 to 2016 onwards with earlier years. This is because Ofsted's inspection programme has been more responsive to risk than the 100% inspecting year. This included some where we continued to provide the same standard of education.

Until January 2021, most further education and skills providers previously judged to be good or better were not inspected. Ofsted's inspection focus during this period was on the worst-not inspected unless we had concerns about them. Providers judged outstanding were inspected every 4 years. Providers judged good were inspected every 5 years on average. We have published information on whether these providers were inspected in the initial short or full inspection in the further education and skills handbook.

Comparisons between providers have to 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 inspected within the different groups.

Newly, directly and publicly funded providers usually receive a monitoring visit within 18 to 24 months of their first full inspection. Ofsted does not rate the outcome of this visit, this visit is not determined by performance data of the provider. These providers will normally receive their first full inspection within 24 months of the publication of their first monitoring visit. Ofsted will normally inspect these providers within 18 months of the publication of their monitoring visit. Ofsted normally receive a full inspection within 24 months of the publication of their first full inspection. Ofsted will normally inspect these providers at least every 4 years. Ofsted's inspection of these providers without carrying out a monitoring visit, when appropriate.

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 and August 2019, there was a change to the inspection of 16 to 19 academies and free schools. Inspections of these providers figure to include National Career Service contractors and Ofsted inspection institutions. As a result, the 'all further education and skills providers' figure as of 31 August 2019 and onwards will not be comparable with previous years.

Changes to methodology

The methodology was changed to exclude providers that had ceased to be funded or closed during the reporting year, from the 31 August statistics. We made this change to ensure that the data reflected the list as at 31 August 2019. Therefore, the most recent inspection outcomes for all providers publicly funded 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. We included dance and drama colleges within the performing arts. We took the decision to remove independent specialist colleges from the 'colleges' group and to report on these separately from 1 September 2015. We also included dance and drama colleges within the 'dance and drama colleges' group.

Before 1 September 2015, we inspected dance and drama colleges at a lower rate than other providers, which has caused fluctuations in the number of inspections as a proportion of the total. We have included a field in the release to show the volume of dance and drama colleges inspected from 1 September 2015 onwards to the proportion of all further education and skills providers. The previously published proxy for overall effectiveness, 'all inspections', has been removed. We have removed this from the underlying data to prevent inappropriate comparisons.

Accuracy and reliability

What this release reports on

The most recent inspection outcomes for all further education and skills providers publicly funded and delivering education, training or apprenticeships received an Ofsted's systems

The data in the release includes providers that are marked as being in receipt of funding within the release 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

The data in the release includes all inspections that have taken place in the publication. Providers that are not in the release in a year could be inspected within the reporting year but not included as part of the aggregated statistics. If we have published an inspection outcome, we will include it in the release. We will include it in the most recent inspection outcomes. If the inspection report is withdrawn or withheld, we will not include it in 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 a publication date being moved to months after the publication cut-off date required for inclusion within the provisional release. In addition, if there are moderations, we may need to update the provisional data in the release. We publish this and add a description of an inspection report. See details of these exceptions.

Other reliability information

The release does not include the inspection outcomes of maintained schools and academies, independent schools or early years providers. These are included in other official statistics publications.

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 inaccurate data.

Technical production of the publications may also result in manual errors. We as a matter of course check all figures in the release against the underlying data. We do not publish any. If we discover an error within the document, we publish a notice on the website and upload a corrected version of the document as soon as possible.

See more information on the issues specific to the year of statistical data.

We publish revisions in line with our revisions policy for official statistics.

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 the data on the Ofsted website and on GOV.UK. We publish the data on a Friday. We also publish the data on an annual basis in the Ofsted Annual Report.

We aim to publish the data at the end of the reporting period as the cut-off date for the inclusion of published inspections. This is to allow time for the publication of the majority of inspections that have taken place within the reporting period. The publication of inspection reports can take up to 6 weeks after the inspection. This is for the moderation, quality assurance and publication process to be completed.

We ensure publications through Ofsted's social media accounts. We also release access in accordance with the Pre-release to Official Statistics Order (2008).

You can find the list of publishers granted (pre-release access), as a separate page accompanying each release.

Accessibility and clarity

We publish our releases in an accessible format on GOV.UK. The information is publicly available and there are no restrictions on access to the published data. Each release includes a technical note, which describes the methodology and quality information for the data, for keeping users informed of the purpose of the inspection information and how it is collected and processed.

Underlying data in an accessible format and a comprehensive each release allows users to perform their own analysis. Users may use the underlying data to produce charts and tables. Ofsted keeps free of charge to any firewall or modem, under the terms of the Open Government Licence.

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

Performance, cost and burden on respondents

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Performance, cost and burden on respondents

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

Confidentiality, transparency and security

All data releases follow Ofsted's confidentiality and revisions policies.

Prisons and young offender institutions

Ofsted carries out inspections of 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. HMIP publishes inspection reports.

We carried out inspections of prisons and young offender institutions under the common inspection framework until 31 January 2020.

The EIF was introduced for inspections of prisons and young offender institutions taking place from 1 February 2020.

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