

# Consultation response: official statistics

A report on the responses to the 2012 consultation of Ofsted official statistics

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In spring 2012, Ofsted consulted with users of our official statistics products. The consultation allowed Ofsted to learn who uses our official statistics and for what purpose. Users were asked to feed back to Ofsted their views on proposed changes to our official statistics.

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## Introduction

1. During spring 2012, we held an informal consultation about our official statistics products. The aims of the consultation were:
  - to learn more about who uses our statistics and for what purpose.
  - to gauge reactions to a set of proposed changes.
2. Ofsted uses consultation to listen carefully to the users of the services we inspect and regulate, and to all of our other stakeholders. Your views are crucial in helping us understand where we need to focus our work, what is going well and what is not.

## The consultation method

3. The primary method of gathering information was through an online survey hosted on the Ofsted website between Friday 25 May 2012 and Monday 2 July 2012. The survey sought responses to a range of open and closed questions, providing respondents with the opportunity to express their views in their own words. Awareness was raised through a number of channels, including an email to all Directors of Children's Services and some research organisations, and a note on the Royal Statistical Society noticeboard.
4. We received 118 responses, which provided some really helpful and detailed information about how our statistics are used. We now know more than we've ever known before about how external organisations use Ofsted statistical products.
5. In addition to the online survey, views were sought via email from the Department for Education, the National College, the Day Care Trust, The Centre for Research in Early Childhood, the National Childminding Association, 4Children, National Day Nurseries Association and some other organisations in the early years sector. Questions used were similar to those in the online survey.
6. The questions were also used in a focus group of principals of further education (FE) and skills providers to gauge their use of the FE and skills official statistics.
7. Finally, we gathered views from directors and policy development officials within Ofsted to ensure that these important and high-profile user groups were able to influence any change in the official statistics products.
8. This document sets out the responses received to the online survey and briefly summarises the additional feedback received. It identifies the changes made as a result.

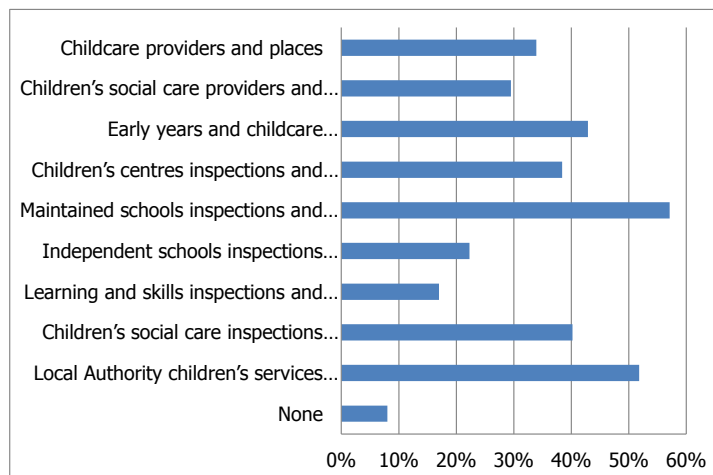
## Summary of findings

9. We received a very positive response to this informal consultation, giving broad endorsement to our official statistics releases and providing valuable information about why our statistics are important. The responses also provided helpful feedback on the proposed changes.
10. As a result of the consultation, a broad range of minor changes has been recommended. These include small changes to the frequency of some releases, reviews of content and, importantly, improvements to the accessibility and presentation of the statistics so that they can be found by a wider range of users. Some of the proposed changes, which were not received well, have not been taken any further.
11. Changes to frequency have been implemented and a schedule of release is available on the [Ofsted website](#).

## Findings in full

12. The online survey asked 18 questions (see Annex A), which were a mix of open and closed questions. No questions were compulsory so the number of responses varied by question.
13. The first section aimed to gather information about the use of Ofsted's official statistics, helping us to understand how the statistics are used and what is particularly valued.
14. Question 1 asked users which of the nine sets of official statistics published by Ofsted on a quarterly basis they were aware of. Question 2 asked which of these nine they had made use of, and question 3 asked for a description of how the statistics are used in the respondent's organisation.
15. Although all nine sets of official statistics are available in the same area of the Ofsted website, question 1 identified differing levels of awareness. The release that most respondents are aware of is the maintained schools inspections and outcomes release. The lowest levels of awareness were around FE and skills inspections and outcomes, and independent schools inspections and outcomes.
16. Among those that responded, over half had used the maintained schools inspections and outcomes release and/or the local authority children's services inspections and outcomes release.

**Figure 1: Responses to question 2: Which of Ofsted’s nine quarterly official statistics releases have you used?**



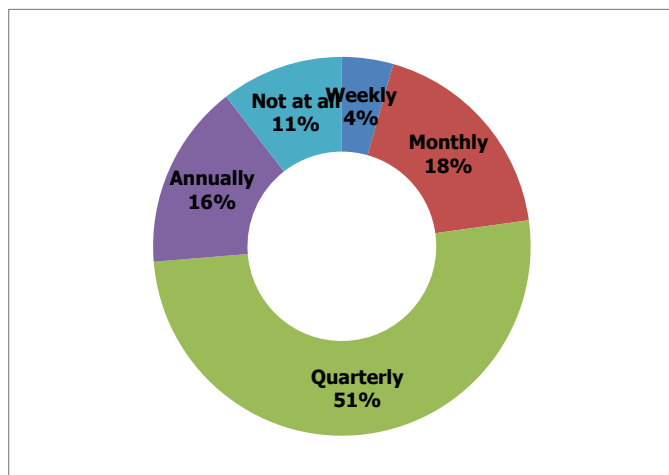
Number of respondents: 112

Responses sum to more than 100% because respondents could choose more than one response

N

17. Only 19 of the 112 respondents to this question had used the FE and skills inspections and outcomes release. Nine respondents had not used any release. Seventy two of these 112 went on to provide some information about how they use the statistics within their organisation , which provided a really valuable insight. Common themes included using the statistics for benchmarking against other areas of the country and tracking performance. A typical comment read ‘To better understand our own performance in context of wider national performance’.
18. Question 4 asked respondents how often they referred to Ofsted’s quarterly statistics. We received 114 responses to this question, with just over half (58) identifying that they used the statistics on a quarterly basis. A minority – 30 – used them more frequently. This indicates that releasing statistics quarterly is probably about right for most sets of statistics.

**Figure 2: Responses to question 4: How often do you refer to Ofsted’s official statistics?**



Number of respondents: 114

19. Questions 5, 6 and 7 asked respondents to choose the quarterly release they used most often; what they used most within the release; and what they used least. These questions were designed to provide Ofsted with more insight into the elements of the release users found most valuable and those that were not seen to be adding value. Fifty two respondents told us about what they used most in the release, while only 19 indicated what they made least or no use of.
20. Comments on usefulness ranged from 'it is all helpful' to identifying very particular elements, such as the provider-level datasets of all inspections and the aggregated totals around the overall effectiveness grade. It was clear that the local authority comparisons were valued by a number of respondents, as was the range of aggregated information about different judgements and the underlying data.
21. The 19 comments on things that were least or of no use did not identify any common themes, with some respondents using this as a further opportunity to say that everything is helpful. This provides a broad endorsement of the official statistics releases. It is very encouraging to us, as producers of official statistics, and indicates that large-scale change is not required to continue meeting the needs of those who responded to the survey.



22. Questions 8 and 9 asked, specifically, about the interactive elements of the release. These were originally conceived to enable users to look at results for any month within a quarter because financial year quarters do not align with the academic year and we thought users might want to aggregate numbers in this way. Of the 73 responses to question 8, over half (43) indicated that they use the interactive elements. Twenty eight respondents told us how they use the interactivity, with several indicating that they use them to identify local authority level data within the larger tables. There was no indication that monthly information about inspection outcomes was used or valued.
23. Questions 10-16 put forward some possible changes to the official statistics and asked respondents if they thought it would enhance their use of Ofsted publications.
24. Questions 10 and 11 focused on the idea of releasing monthly management information, without key findings, to provide more regular aggregate information about inspection outcomes. Of the 72 responses to this question, 44 indicated they would find this useful. However, the responses to the open question about how this could be used indicated that perhaps the distinction between official statistics and management information was not clear. It is also important to interpret the responses to this question in conjunction with the responses to question 4, which indicated that most users used the official statistics on a quarterly basis.
25. Questions 12 and 13 considered reducing the frequency of release for some sets of official statistics. The December quarterly releases follow only a few weeks after the November release accompanying HMCI's Annual Report. There was broad support for dropping the December release, with 57 of the 72 respondents to question 12 indicating that it would not negatively affect their use of the statistical releases.
26. Question 13 suggested reducing the frequency of release of official statistics about maintained schools to three times per year and all other releases to twice per year. Forty nine of the 69 responses to this question indicated that this would be sufficient to meet their needs.
27. However, the open text responses to both of these questions raised some significant issues. Respondents pointed out that December is the end of quarter 3 and, therefore, an important release. Ten of the 21 respondents who provided a text response stated explicitly that two releases per year wouldn't be sufficient to meet their reporting needs. Some felt that termly reports are too out of date.
28. The responses, as a whole, conveyed clearly that the quarterly releases are valued and that we should consider very carefully any reductions in frequency that go against this user demand. The data that would have been published in December as provisional are now published in their final form in March, meaning data are still released for all four quarters.

29. Question 14 put forward a proposal to stagger releases through the year by reporting on different periods for different remit areas. While 43 of the 66 respondents said this would not negatively affect their use of the statistics, the open text responses raised important issues around comparability across releases and concerns that this would lead to a reduction in frequency. Users pointed out that 'the timing of the releases has to make sense' and that 'it can be slightly confusing that releases for different subjects cover different time periods'. This proposal was not adopted.
30. Question 15 suggested stopping the analysis of the latest inspection outcomes of closed provisions. Fifty eight of the 70 respondents to this question supported this idea, with the open text comments indicating that this information was not widely used.
31. Finally, question 16 proposed dropping Table 1 from each inspections and outcomes release. The table shows the number of inspections carried out and the information is largely duplicated elsewhere in the release. While this also attracted support, with 60 of the 71 respondents indicating it would not negatively impact on their use of the statistics, six respondents took the time to highlight the usefulness of this information, with one indicating that they would need to generate this themselves if it wasn't provided. This proposal was not adopted.
32. Questions 17 and 18 provided an opportunity for respondents to feed back any further comments about our statistical releases and to say more about the organisation that they work for. Seventeen respondents provided further feedback. As well as reiterating their endorsement for much of the official statistics release programme, they identified other areas for improvement around presentation, content and accessibility. Fifty respondents chose to indicate the organisation that they work for, many of which were in local government. This helpful overview assists with interpreting the results of this survey as well as knowing more about who is using the statistical releases. This will allow us to target our core users in future consultations.

## **Additional feedback**

33. As noted above, a number of organisations were approached directly for input into this informal consultation because they had contributed when Ofsted expanded its official statistics outputs in 2010. In addition, senior managers within Ofsted were consulted because they are regular and important users of the official statistics.

34. Largely, their views echoed those gathered through the online survey. Some additional issues were raised, such as:
- combining the early years providers and places publications with the relevant inspection outcomes publication - this would lead to a loss of timeliness in publishing providers and places statistics but may have benefits for describing the whole sector
  - adding additional breakdowns into the statistics, for example private and voluntary childcare or the reference number of the headteacher in a school, to increase the power of the possible analysis
  - the continuing importance of school statistics in particular to be available for a whole academic year
  - including local authority statistical neighbours for comparisons
  - clear signposting on the Ofsted website, appropriate labelling of release files and generally improving the accessibility so that people can find what they want, when they want it
  - the practicalities of producing the statistical releases in an environment of diminishing resources and the need to identify where things can be slimmed down or produced more efficiently.

## The way forward

35. All the findings were combined and considered alongside an analysis of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests for statistics since 2010, an analysis of web statistics about the official statistics releases and a review of any financial constraints to develop a set of recommendations. The following have been agreed.
- Quarterly releases will be retained for maintained schools, FE and skills, early years and childcare, children's centres, children's homes and local authority children's services inspections and outcomes.
  - The frequency of official statistics releases about independent schools inspection outcomes will be reduced to two per year, although the implementation of the new inspection framework may lead to an additional release.
  - The frequency of official statistics releases about children's social care (except children's homes) inspection outcomes will also be reduced to two per year.
  - The frequency of official statistics releases about registered childcare and children's social care providers and places will be reduced to two per year.
  - An official statistics release covering initial teacher education inspections and outcomes will be introduced.

- Monthly publications of management information will be introduced for maintained schools to reflect the early findings of the new/revised inspection frameworks.
  - Management information publications may also be used to supplement official statistics releases when there is particular interest in an area, for example at the beginning of a new inspection framework.
  - Information on warning notices will be brought into the maintained schools inspections and outcomes release.
  - To improve the completeness of the provisional statistics without compromising on timeliness, the summary statistics will include judgements that are still in moderation. This will allow the timely release of more representative data and avoid further accusations of releasing misleading statistics. These will not be included in provider level data sets.
  - The contents of the official statistics releases will be reviewed, taking into account the views gathered during the informal consultation, with the aim of streamlining, where possible.
  - The final releases of official statistics, which are published after the first provisional releases and contain the full and final data, will be slimmed down.
  - The accessibility and presentation of the statistics releases on the Ofsted website will be reviewed and improved. We now publish the latest maintained schools data only on the landing page for maintained schools inspections and outcomes. Previously published data are available on a complementary archive page.
36. Although there is no large-scale change included here, this still represents an ambitious programme of work at a time when resources are tight. Therefore, it will take some time to implement all these changes. The changes to frequency have already been pre-announced on the Ofsted website on the 'Schedule of release of official statistics'.<sup>1</sup>
37. A working group has been established within Ofsted to tackle other recommendations so that changes can be implemented over the coming year. These will be advertised within the releases themselves.

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<sup>1</sup> *Schedule of release of official statistics*, Ofsted, March 2014;  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/schedule-for-release-of-official-statistics](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/schedule-for-release-of-official-statistics).

## Annex A

Questions used in the online survey:

1. Ofsted currently publishes nine sets of official statistics on a quarterly basis. Which are you aware of (please tick all that apply)?
  - a. Childcare providers and places
  - b. Children's social care providers and places
  - c. Early years and childcare inspections and outcomes including actions and recommendations
  - d. Children's centres inspections and outcomes
  - e. Maintained schools inspections and outcomes
  - f. Independent schools inspections and outcomes including regulation compliance
  - g. Further education and skills inspections and outcomes
  - h. Children's social care inspections and outcomes
  - i. Local authority children's services inspections and outcomes
  - j. None
2. Of these sets of quarterly official statistics, which have you used (please tick all that apply)? [Code set as for Q1]
3. We would like to know how you use the statistics within your organisation so that we can better identify and meet user needs. Please describe how you use the statistics currently. If you don't use them, please describe how you might use them in future. [Open text response]
4. How often do you refer to Ofsted's quarterly official statistics?
  - a. Weekly
  - b. Monthly
  - c. Quarterly
  - d. Annually
  - e. Not at all
5. Please select the quarterly release you use most often. [Code set as for Q1]
6. What do you make most use of within the release? [Open text response]
7. What do you make least or no use of within the release? [Open text response]
8. Most releases are interactive so that users can easily access summary statistics for individual months within the quarter and for individual local authorities. Do you use these interactive elements? [Yes, No]
9. If you do use the interactive parts of the release, please can you describe how you use them and what you use them for. [Open text response]

10. We are considering the release of monthly management information, without key findings, to provide more regular aggregate information about inspection outcomes. This would not be quality assured to the same levels as official statistics. Would this be useful to you? [Yes, No]
11. How might you use the monthly management information? [Open text response]
12. We are proposing to drop the December releases of inspection outcomes official statistics because they follow so soon after the November release accompanying HMCI's Annual Report. Would this negatively affect your use of the statistical releases? [Yes, No]
13. Going further, we are considering reducing the frequency of official statistics releases to three releases per year for maintained school inspections and outcomes, and twice per year for all other releases. These releases would contain more analysis and insight than the current quarterly releases. Combined with monthly management information, would this be sufficient to meet your needs? [Yes, No]
14. We are proposing to stagger the releases through the year by reporting on different periods for different remit areas. Would this negatively affect your use of the statistical releases? [Yes, No]
15. We are proposing to stop the analysis of the latest inspection outcome of closed provision. Would this negatively affect your use of the statistical releases? [Yes, No]
16. We are proposing to drop Table 1 in the inspection outcomes official statistics (this shows the number of inspections carried out) because the information is largely duplicated elsewhere in the same release. Would this negatively impact your use of the statistics? [Yes, No]
17. Please provide any additional comments, data requirements or feedback that you have not already mentioned. [Open text response]
18. It will help us to understand more about our users if we know something about our survey respondents. Please indicate in the box below which organisation you work for and the capacity in which you use Ofsted's statistics. [Open text response]