

# Support and challenge for further education and skills providers

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This guidance sets out Ofsted's approach to supporting and challenging further education and skills providers that are judged to require improvement as set out in the *Common Inspection Framework for further education and skills 2012*.

**Age group:** 14+

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## Introduction

1. This guidance explains how Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) will support and challenge further education and skills providers that are judged to require improvement in inspections from September 2012 in accordance with the *Common Inspection Framework for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*<sup>1</sup> and the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*.<sup>2</sup>
2. The arrangements whereby Ofsted supports and challenges inadequate providers to improve are detailed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*.
3. Further education and skills providers that are found to require improvement will be inspected again within 12 to 18 months (providers found to require improvement from September 2014 will be inspected again within 12 to 24 months).
4. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector has set out his vision that: 'all providers must be at least good and this must be viewed as the minimum expected standard... Providers want the very best for their learners and I want Ofsted to play its part to the full in helping to achieve this.'<sup>3</sup>
5. This guidance sets out the contribution that Ofsted will make to helping providers that require improvement get to good or better.
6. Ofsted improvement activity also reflects Government's express desire to see rapid improvement in the sector as set out in '*Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills*' (2013)<sup>4</sup>.

## Strategies for support and challenge

### Ofsted's general duty to promote improvement

7. Ofsted has a range of duties under Section 117(1) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. One of these is to perform its functions for the general purpose of encouraging improvement in the services it inspects and regulates. Inspection and regulation are Ofsted's principal ways of identifying strengths and weaknesses in the quality of provision and bringing about improvement. In

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<sup>1</sup> *Common Inspection Framework for further education and skills: for use from September 2012* (120062), Ofsted; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120062](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120062).

<sup>2</sup> *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills* (120061), Ofsted; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120061](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120061).

<sup>3</sup> *A good education for all: key changes for further education and skills providers* (120147), Ofsted; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120147](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120147).

<sup>4</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/rigour-and-responsiveness-in-skills](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rigour-and-responsiveness-in-skills).

addition to these functions Ofsted will provide bespoke support and challenge for those providers that are not yet judged to be good.

8. All providers have a responsibility for ensuring that they provide a good quality of education and/or training for their learners. Senior managers together with the governing body, as appropriate, must determine the exact actions to take to improve the provider and how to access any necessary support. However, HMI will support and challenge the provider in this process.

### **Improvement activity - the range of options**

9. The following is an indicative range of support and challenge strategies that HMI may choose to employ and/or recommend when visiting a provider. The strategies are not mutually exclusive and the list is not exhaustive. HMI may identify other activities that suit the specific circumstances of the provider. The range of options may include:
  - HMI meeting with governors to explain, using Ofsted evidence, how the governing body can assist in ensuring that a provider improves to good;
  - an invitation to leaders and managers from the provider to attend an Ofsted improvement seminar covering the range of common weaknesses as identified through inspection evidence; this is likely to include, for instance, improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and governance;
  - HMI brokered opportunities for representatives from the provider to shadow an Ofsted inspection;
  - establishing stronger links with other regional or national providers to learn from their strengths, as well as to work together on shared issues;
  - HMI offering to arrange a visit for senior leaders and governors to another provider;
  - leaders or managers attending a specific subject or aspect seminar led by HMI, drawing on Ofsted evidence;
  - a meeting between the HMI with other staff, or groups of staff, at the provider to review progress against agreed action plans and/or to share good practice;
  - HMI meeting with middle leaders and managers in the provider to discuss how teaching or training can be strengthened;
  - joint observation of a particular subject or aspect by the HMI and senior/middle leaders.

## Carrying out improvement visits

10. Where a provider has been judged to require improvement at the most recent inspection, an HMI will contact the provider's principal or chief executive to offer a visit to the provider by the HMI (the improvement HMI) normally between 10 and 30 working days after the publication of the inspection report.
11. The improvement HMI will agree with the provider a suitable time for an initial telephone conversation and the first on-site improvement visit. The improvement HMI will:
  - a. discuss, by telephone or meeting, with the principal, CEO or their representative the provider's areas of improvement as set out in the inspection report;
  - b. discuss and agree the priority actions that the provider will take and the timescales for doing so in order to address the areas for improvement and so improve to good or outstanding;
  - c. agree other means of support and challenge which are deemed appropriate.
12. In the event of the improvement HMI conducting the visit judging that the provider is not making sufficient progress, funding bodies may be notified.
13. In order to maintain a clear separation of roles, improvement HMI will not normally be one of those who carried out the last inspection. They will also not normally be one of those HMI who will carry out the subsequent inspection. The improvement visit is not an inspection. The improvement HMI can request that the subsequent inspection be brought forward. The provider will receive two working days' notice of the inspection.

## After the visit

14. Within five working days of the visit the inspector will send to the principal/chief executive the reporting letter which confirms the actions and timescales and any further arrangements discussed at the visit.
15. The reporting letter will not be published on the Ofsted website. However, where HMI have concerns about poor progress, the letter and relevant information arising from a visit may be shared with funding bodies.
16. Ofsted provides a wide range of good practice cases studies on its website to help you with your improvement. This can be seen at:  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/goodpractice](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/goodpractice).