

# Teaching, learning and assessment in further education and skills – what works and why

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This report summarises the most significant features of outstanding teaching, learning and assessment in the further education and skills sector and the factors that contribute to these. It also identifies several areas where more improvement is needed. Her Majesty's Inspectors visited further education colleges, sixth form colleges, independent learning providers, employer providers and providers of community learning and skills between September 2013 and April 2014, as well as using evidence from inspections to inform the report findings.

**Age group:** post-16

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**Published:** September 2014

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**Reference no:** 140138



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## Introduction

The further education (FE) and skills sector has a fundamental role in supporting learners' future economic prosperity, besides promoting social and educational inclusion. The impact, for many learners, of their experience in FE and skills is life-changing. It is not unusual for learners to move into the sector with a chequered past in terms of their formal education, and some see it as their last chance before they drop out of education and training altogether.

Learners therefore need the very best teaching to ensure that they remain on track and are able to take the right next steps to secure a future of sustained employment. To be successful, all types of learning programmes, including apprenticeships, must be underpinned by teaching, learning and assessment that are at least good. Overall, employers must be confident that their future employees receive good quality training and assessment so that they have a solid foundation of skills that they can build on as they progress through their careers. The importance of consistently good or outstanding teaching, combined with high quality assessment, which leads to very effective learning, has never been more significant in every type of provision.

The revised *Common Inspection Framework 2012* emphasises the 'teaching, learning and assessment' judgement, with sharp focus on the role of assessment in supporting learning, the effectiveness of the leadership of teaching and learning and the extent to which leaders and managers use performance management of staff to ensure high quality provision.<sup>1</sup> Inspections have shown that this focus has had a significant impact on improving the quality of teaching across the sector.

This survey evaluates what constitutes good or outstanding practice in teaching, learning and assessment in the FE and skills sector, as well as identifying where improvement in teaching, learning and assessment is needed.

Inspectors' visits to 20 outstanding providers highlighted the barriers to providing excellent teaching and training that had existed as a backdrop to their actions for improvement and to sustaining their excellent provision. The following common barriers emerged across the different types of providers in the FE and skills sector:<sup>2</sup>

- a culture that is driven by policies, strategies and documentation and not by practice in the classroom or training workshop
- a lack of rigour in evaluating the quality of provision that focused too much on what the teachers were doing as opposed to how well the teaching promoted learning
- a lack of leadership and some complacency in senior management teams about the quality of teaching and learning

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

<sup>2</sup> The term 'provider' includes FE colleges, sixth form colleges, independent learning providers, employer providers and providers of community learning and skills.

- the low status given to managers with responsibility for teaching, learning and assessment and a widespread lack of accountability for the quality of teaching and learning
- resistance from some teaching staff to change their approach and take sufficient account of the differing needs of learners, in part because of unclear or over-complicated organisational values and priorities, as well as weaknesses in the leadership of teaching and learning
- little investment in staff development
- investing too little in high quality resources or developing teachers' use of information and learning technology (ILT) to underpin teaching, learning and assessment
- relying too much on low quality on-the-job training for learners and insufficient involvement of employers in planning and contributing to learning
- a highly competitive sector that was data-driven and overly focused on qualification aim success.

All the providers responded to these barriers by taking actions focused sharply on improving their provision to a very high level of effectiveness. Their priority was to make it clear that the responsibility for improvement lay firmly and collectively with leaders, managers and teachers.<sup>3</sup> Senior managers made sure that they were well-informed about what was needed and led by example.

Inspectors identified some of the actions listed below as having had the greatest influence in improving teaching, learning and assessment to be outstanding and in sustaining it:

- establishing a mission and a set of values and objectives that clearly and in simple terms placed a priority on giving learners the very best learning experience and ensured a corporate approach to developing and delivering high quality provision for them
- high involvement of all stakeholders, including learners, apprentices, other work-based learners and employers in contributing to getting teaching, learning and assessment right
- significant investment in high-quality staff development that focuses sharply on the priorities and actions identified to improve teaching and learning for individual teachers
- strong and effective links to ensure that the results of rigorous observation of teaching and learning are used to manage teachers' performance and provide relevant staff development

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<sup>3</sup> The term 'teacher' is used in this report to include all staff with responsibility for teaching in different settings, such as trainers and staff with coaching responsibilities. Where appropriate, staff with specific responsibilities for aspects of learning are named separately.

- an unrelenting focus on developing the skills learners need for progression to their next step, including employability skills, through teaching and assessment
- ensuring highly effective sharing of good practice within and across teaching teams
- developing and sustaining high quality on-the-job training and assessment through excellent links with employers.

## Key findings

Inspections and follow-up visits to the outstanding providers have shown that the most significant factors in the provision of outstanding teaching and learning comprise a combination of:

- sharply-focused leadership
- unequivocal and well-informed direction
- the consistent use of successful teaching strategies based on sound educational principles
- realistically high expectations of learners by all staff.

Additionally, rigorous performance management, closely aligned with high quality staff development, high levels of accountability for the quality of teaching for all and highly effective self-evaluation are all essential elements in ensuring sustained excellent practice.

Inspectors identified the following as the most significant characteristics of outstanding teaching, learning and assessment.

- Managers and leaders are ambitious and well-informed and take responsibility for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Management structures and capacity at all levels support fully the emphasis on high quality teaching and learning. All staff work together to create and embed a culture that is centred on very high quality provision. All staff understand clearly, and take full responsibility for, their roles and their accountability in ensuring and sustaining quality.
- Teachers understand the purpose, and are very flexible in their use, of a particularly wide range of teaching strategies and approaches that very successfully enhance all learners' development, regardless of their ability levels. They base these strategies and their approach on developing learners' essential skills and knowledge in subjects and vocational specialisms as well as the wider range of skills needed for progression and employment. They adapt these quickly and effectively according to learners' progress.
- Teachers consistently measure the success of their approach by how well learners develop their understanding, skills and knowledge. They understand clearly the importance of assessing learners' progress frequently to help them plan and adapt each learning activity to make them most effective. Teachers structure and

manage learning very effectively, including when facilitating remote learning or learning in vocational workshops or work placements.

- Teachers use assessment frequently and very effectively to ensure that all learners receive constructive feedback on their progress in each session and towards achieving their main learning goals or qualifications. They use a wide range of assessment methods, at appropriate times in learners' programmes of study, to help learners understand what they need to do to improve. They set relevant and interesting assessments that encompass a wide range of research and presentation skills, provide challenge for learners at all levels and have a strong link to their future career aims. They provide high quality feedback that is focused sharply on further skill development.
- Vocational teachers, subject teachers and specialist teachers work closely together to develop and implement learning activities and approaches that improve learners' skills in English and mathematics up to and, where appropriate, beyond level 2. This good work is beginning to have an impact on learners' development of these skills in the subjects that they need to achieve their main course and specialist qualifications, and to progress to further study or work.
- Teachers use their subject or vocational expertise very well to inspire and motivate learners and to underpin the high expectations they demand of them. Teachers are excellent role models and understand the significance of the influence they have on learners' aspirations and potential for success.
- Trainers and assessors in work-based learning provision have significantly increased their focus on learning and raised their expectations of what apprentices and other work-based learners can achieve. Managers have strengthened quality assurance arrangements, including using them in subcontracted provision. They involve employers fully in contributing to planning and implementing learning programmes.

Inspectors also identified several weaker features of teaching, learning and assessment that need improving across the sector.

- Relatively little outstanding practice exists in teaching of English and mathematics. Outstanding providers generally have a well-established and strong focus on improving teaching and learning in these subjects, but consistently good or outstanding practice is not yet widespread.
- The expertise evident in teacher education departments that provide teaching or assessing qualifications for unqualified teachers and those that need to gain further accreditation of their teaching or assessing skills is not used widely enough across colleges in developing all teachers' skills, supporting high-quality staff development and in sharing of good practice. Often, these departments work separately from managers and teachers who deliver cross-college staff development and this disconnect limits the potential for maximum gain from the good provision.

- Staff development in work-based learning is increasing in volume and more closely linked to teaching and learning priorities. However, it often lacks focus and is insufficient to ensure that staff are equipped with the skills and knowledge they need to support learning and to ensure learners' good progress. Only relatively recently has enough attention been paid to ensuring the quality of teaching and learning in subcontracted provision, which is not always of a high enough quality.

## Recommendations

### Recommendations for the Education and Training Foundation

- To support the sector to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, directors should:
  - reinforce the importance of good leadership and high expectations of learners across the sector
  - use the professional standards for teachers and trainers as a basis for promoting consistently good or better practice across the sector.<sup>4</sup>

### Recommendations for providers

- To improve teaching, learning and assessment and maintain high standards across their provision, leaders should:<sup>5</sup>
  - take full overall responsibility for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all types of programmes, including subcontractors
  - ensure that they are rigorous and self-critical in their evaluation of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and that they set, and frequently review, ambitious targets for improvement
  - evaluate the quality of teachers' practice by using a wide range of indicators of the impact of their work on learners' progress and their development of skills and knowledge
  - draw fully on learners' views about the teaching, learning and assessment that they receive to inform self-assessment and improvement actions
  - consult with employers on how well the standards of work and the range of skills their learners achieve prepare them for employment
  - support and develop all teachers to improve by ensuring that the fundamental aspects of good quality teaching underpin all teachers' practice

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<sup>4</sup> Professional Standards for Teachers and Trainers in Education and Training, The Education and Training Foundation; [www.et-foundation.co.uk](http://www.et-foundation.co.uk).

<sup>5</sup> The term 'leader' includes principals, chief executives and senior directors.



- provide high quality and relevant development opportunities for all staff, as individuals, in teams and across the provision, including those in work-based settings and subcontractors
  - use the expertise available in teacher education departments more widely to support actions for improvement.
- To ensure that they fulfil their role in achieving consistently high standards for learners, teachers should:
- have consistently high expectations for their learners, based on an accurate assessment of their starting points and an understanding of how the course or programme relates to their plans for the next step in their careers
  - be flexible in their selection of teaching and learning methods, approaches, activities and resources according to the aims of each session and the development needs of all the learners
  - ensure that they measure the effectiveness of these approaches and activities on developing the skills and knowledge of all learners in each session
  - ensure that their assessment practice is of a consistently high standard and used frequently to provide learners with relevant constructive feedback that helps them understand and put into place what they need to do to achieve their ambitious targets
  - work collaboratively, where possible, with other providers to share good practice and learn from each other, and be prepared to take calculated risks and be innovative in their practice.
- To inspire learners and help them to take greater responsibility for their own learning and achievement, managers and teachers should:
- support learners to achieve greater autonomy in their learning in a planned and structured way so that they develop a range of study skills, including, in peer and self-assessment, a reflective approach to their own learning and the ability to be self-critical about their own performance
  - use assessments that are realistic, challenging and require learners to use a wide range of skills
  - develop further the use of ILT so that it complements and enhances learning as well as giving learners wider access to learning resources and teachers' support.
- To motivate learners and help them develop the skills in English and mathematics that they may have struggled to gain in the past, leaders and managers should:

- ensure that they give learners the best chance of success in improving and accrediting their skills by giving English and mathematics a very high profile across all learning programmes and all types of provision<sup>6</sup>
  - ensure that teachers with very good specialist expertise support learners' development across the provision, either directly as teachers or through working closely with vocational teams.
- To ensure that all provision helps learners develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes that will give them a greater chance of sustained employment in the future, leaders and managers should:
- involve employers fully in planning and implementing learning programmes
  - ensure that staff involved in work-based learning and other vocational training take full responsibility for learners developing a wide range of skills.

## Recommendations for Ofsted

Ofsted should:

- disseminate the good practice identified in this report, including through support and challenge programmes with individual providers and regional and national improvement seminars
- use the Ofsted website and other resources to provide a comprehensive source of good practice case studies and guidance resources to aid improvement.

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<sup>6</sup> Types of provision include college-, employment- and community-based provision, including apprenticeships.

## The main factors in achieving and sustaining outstanding practice

1. Inspectors identified the following seven key themes that the outstanding providers used as their priorities in successfully turning around the quality of their teaching, learning and assessment to become outstanding and in sustaining this very high quality:
  - maintaining the clear focus by all staff, employers and subcontractors on the organisational values and priorities
  - sustaining the momentum of improvement activities and ensuring that all staff remain aspirational and maintain and build on the excellent provision
  - continuing to develop capacity in management and teaching teams, particularly for apprenticeships
  - promoting innovation and providing strong support for using new ideas and approaches
  - ensuring that all teaching teams work collaboratively and in a fully transparent way
  - maintaining excellent communication at all levels, promoting professional dialogue about teaching and learning, and consistently taking a corporate approach to tackling issues to ensure high quality
  - relentless and rigorous monitoring of the quality of provision by using a range of quality assurance functions, including robust use of a range of data on learners' performance.

## Teaching and learning – what works and why

2. The following section covers the main findings of the survey and relates these to the criteria from the 'Common Inspection Framework for further education and skills 2012' as well as the evidence that emerges from outstanding providers and inspection reports from September 2012.
3. Inspectors do not prescribe specific ways of teaching; they evaluate the quality of teaching and training by measuring its impact on learning over the length of learners' course of study. Underpinning inspectors' judgements across all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment is the importance of the promotion of equality and diversity through teaching and learning. This is essential to ensure that no individual or groups of learners are disadvantaged in their opportunities to learn and achieve, and that learners appreciate, understand and respect differences between different groups of people in modern society.

## Planning and delivering learning

Common Inspection Framework 2012

Inspectors make a judgement on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by evaluating the extent to which:

- staff use their skills and expertise to plan and deliver teaching, learning and support to meet each learner's needs.

4. The common barriers to good planning that inspectors identified from inspections and during the discussions with the outstanding providers they visited, include:
  - teachers' use of complicated lesson plans based on managers' requirements of a lengthy checklist of priorities for inclusion; such plans often prove rigid and cumbersome to implement and hinder the extent to which teachers adapt and adjust their work according to the extent of learners' progress
  - teachers' use of objectives based on completing activities or tasks rather than developing skills and knowledge
  - schemes of work that lack coherence and do not build on learners' knowledge and skills development over time; too much time set aside for completing coursework during timetabled hours, which reduces teachers' impact on learning
  - insufficient account taken of employers' contribution to apprentices' development, particularly of their wider skills when planning their overall learning programmes and weak links between on- and off-the-job training.
5. In the most effective provision, teachers plan learning comprehensively based, very effectively on well-established educational principles.
6. Teachers are skilled at assessing learners' starting points and developing schemes of work that build on learners' skills and knowledge coherently, comprehensively and constructively. These plans are underpinned by uncomplicated policies based securely on sound educational values.
7. In planning, teachers understand and accept full accountability for their role in ensuring learners' specialist and wider learning over their learning programme. Managers are unequivocal about the basis for planning learning and ensure that a consistent approach is used based on a sound and workable structure that all teachers can follow.
8. Teachers identify the objectives for each learning activity clearly. Learning objectives are based on skill development alongside the acquisition of knowledge. Assessment plans integrate closely with the schemes of work or individual learning plans and support the use of regular assessment to ensure

that teachers monitor learners' development of skills over time and support them to increase their rates of progress.

9. Teachers' planning considers fully employers' contribution to helping learners acquire a broad set of skills alongside their specialist technical skills and knowledge. Workplace routines are integrated with plans for learning, which ensures a comprehensive coverage of learning objectives in a coherent and balanced way. The link between on- and off-the-job training is strong. Staff work with employers flexibly and closely to adjust training programmes to fit with learners' needs and the needs of the business.

## Teaching and learning strategies

### Common Inspection Framework 2012

Inspectors make a judgement on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by evaluating the extent to which:

- learners benefit from high expectations, engagement, care, support and motivation from staff
- staff initially assess learners' starting points and monitor their progress, set challenging tasks, and build on and extend learning for all learners.

10. Inspectors observe a wide range of teaching and learning strategies in use across different types of provision. This range of strategies has expanded considerably over recent years as the FE and skills sector has developed a wide range of pedagogical approaches. This range is informed by the increase in commentary and research into FE learning. In addition, a wide variety of learning resources is available for teachers' use alongside an increased range of information and communication technology (ICT).
11. The common barriers to the effective use of teaching and learning strategies that inspectors identified from inspections and during the discussions with the outstanding providers they visited, included:
  - teachers' low expectations of learners, their overuse of support to compensate for undemanding teaching and learning and their lack of promotion of learners' autonomy
  - an insufficiently close match between teachers' choice of learning activities and meeting learners' needs
  - too much focus on completing learning activities without enough attention paid to ensuring that the main learning points are thoroughly understood
  - time wasted on unstructured independent work, which involves learners' use of unreliable or irrelevant information sources that has negative

consequences for learners' knowledge development, engagement and interest

- unproductive use of learning time because learners' activities are not structured sufficiently or monitored closely enough and some lose their way; teachers do not ensure that learners have the skills they need to gain the most benefit and learn well from the work they are engaged in
  - insufficient emphasis on ensuring that learning on-the-job is of high quality.
12. In the most effective provision, teachers use a wide range of strategies very effectively and they are flexible and accurate in adapting their approaches according to each learner's progress.
  13. In ensuring very effective learning, teachers provide a well-defined structure for learning activities as well as managing and facilitating learning very successfully in the classroom, in vocational training workshops and for learners at work. These approaches are extended to support learning that takes place where a teacher is not present and in helping learners become more independent and accountable for their own learning.
  14. Teachers ensure that their detailed strategies are tailored closely to learners' needs and to covering what needs to be taught. Alongside this, they regularly assess how thoroughly learning is taking place. Because of this, they are able to reshape their approaches appropriately, quickly, confidently and with impact.
  15. Teachers refer constantly to the skills that are being learnt and use the setting of skill-based objectives at the start of learning activities wisely. They ensure a purpose linked to learning points in doing every activity or task. They motivate learners by adhering to challenging timescales for completion of work. Learners know that they must meet deadlines, which develops their resilience.
  16. Teachers integrate wide and creative use of technology into their approach in a complementary way. This supports learners to work independently and to develop their skills in using modern technology. They use virtual learning environments to extend learning rather than duplicating what has been already covered. Teachers make creative use of social media and a wide range of apps as part of activities and in assessment.
  17. Staff support learners to work and learn collaboratively very effectively. Many learning activities involve some structured and purposeful collaboration among staff and learners in order to develop learners' wider skills and help them learn from each other. When using group work, teachers agree the protocols with the learners, state the expectations and encourage self- and peer-evaluation by learners of the outcomes.
  18. Staff support learners to develop greater autonomy and become confident in using skills such as in reflective practice or in research, analysis and evaluation as part of learning activities. They provide a structure for developing these skills over the period of learners' study and ensure that learners adopt a disciplined

approach. In learners' early stages of developing these skills, teachers guide them in the use of appropriate sources and always provide a valid source for checking.

19. Staff have strong connections with the relevant industries and a deep passion for and strong commitment to their subjects, which they use to motivate and inspire learners. These characteristics instil in learners a good understanding and a secure grounding in their chosen career path. Learners thrive on highly productive role modelling by specialist staff.
20. Staff use a wide range of motivational techniques very effectively. Staff explain the purpose of learning activities well so that all learners understand their relevance from the start. Staff maintain a brisk and purposeful pace, keeping a close eye on the progress of individual learners to minimise unproductive time. They allow time to check and reinforce learning of the important points. They do not leave consolidating these points to chance and they make sure that learners are clear and secure in their understanding before moving on.
21. Staff use realistic working environments, such as a hotel setting or hairdressing and beauty salons, to develop economic awareness and replicate industry requirements as a starting point for training before learners progress to external work placements. Teachers, and employers where relevant, use commercial contexts as a basis for learning activities and map learning to work requirements. They insist on high standards of work completed in realistic timescales. They develop learners' wider skills, such as in entrepreneurship, corporate promotion, sales techniques, work ethics and communication, consistently.
22. Teachers have accurate and comprehensive information about learners and are able to adapt their approaches to meet their needs and ensure realistic challenge to different ability groups. Good support arrangements allow teachers to tackle barriers to learning that exist for individuals and groups and support their achievement.
23. Teachers promote an understanding of diversity seamlessly in their work by involving learners in understanding differences in culture, heritage and religion that emerge through teaching points. Teachers are confident to develop these points because of good training and their skill in developing discussions.

## Assessment and its role in underpinning learning

Common Inspection Framework 2012

Inspectors make a judgement on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by evaluating the extent to which:

- learners understand how to improve as a result of frequent, detailed and accurate feedback from staff following assessment of their learning

24. The common barriers to effective use of assessment that inspectors identified from inspections and during the discussions with the outstanding providers they visited include:

- too narrow a focus on assessment, based on criteria for meeting minimum qualification requirements, not including assessment of wider skills
- insufficiently frequent assessment to inform and underpin teaching and learning as well as providing an accurate and valid measure of learners' progress at points during learners' programmes of study
- unstructured and unproductive use of assessment methods because learners had not learnt the skills to be able to undertake the assessments required of them
- weak links between regular assessment and the provision of valuable feedback on improvement
- due to infrequent or inaccurate assessment, teachers not knowing how well their learners are progressing towards developing their knowledge and skills, although they may know how many assessments have been completed to a minimum standard.

25. In the most effective provision, teachers use assessment very effectively to underpin and accredit learning.

- Managers and teachers place considerable emphasis on the wide use of assessment to support learning. This applies across all provision and is well-communicated through clear policies and guidance. Staff plan assessments carefully, making sure that they are relevant and interesting and that coursework prescribed by the awarding body is adapted accordingly.
- Staff ensure that learners are challenged to demonstrate their skills and expertise at the highest level from the start. They ensure that assessments are realistically challenging so that learners have to think for themselves and do not copy work from a range of sources.
- Staff use a wide range of assessment methods, including computers and digital media such as cameras and recorders, very effectively. Staff understand the importance of providing high quality feedback that



recognises strengths in assessed work, but that also provides constructive improvement points that learners use to support their work.

- Teachers ensure that learners use peer- and self-assessment widely and effectively. They judge carefully when it is appropriate to use these assessments and make sure that learners are well-prepared. Through their guidance and reinforcement of the purpose and value of these forms of assessment, they help learners to develop these skills well.
- For classroom-based learners, teachers use creative, interesting and challenging assignments that: involve the use of a wide range of skills, link with industry practice or an employment perspective and are relevant to learners and motivate them well. As a result, learners' work is often of high quality and exceeds the expectations of learners and their teachers.
- Teachers ensure that assessment is linked appropriately to examination requirements, particularly for A- and AS-level courses. Teachers help learners to understand how marking schemes should be interpreted to inform their answers, including in the use of terminology and developing skills in research and evaluation.
- In work-based learning, staff work closely with employers in the assessment of work-based learners. Where assessors have broad roles, which include coaching or mentoring to promote learning and achievement, assessments are planned as a separate activity so that the distinction between teaching and assessment is very clear.
- Staff use full and accurate information about learners' prior attainment and a breadth of information from accurate initial and diagnostic assessment of their skills on entry, all of which they use well to inform their assessment plans. They use accurate profiles of learners, which include information about any barriers to learning established from knowledge of learners' backgrounds and previous learning experiences. As a result, they are able to tailor their support and intervention to meet learners' needs even in large providers.

## Monitoring learners' progress and providing them with guidance and support to learn and to make progress towards fulfilling their career aims

Common Inspection Framework 2012

Inspectors make a judgement on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by evaluating the extent to which:

- appropriate and timely information, advice and guidance support learning effectively

26. Arrangements to monitor learners' progress and to provide them with guidance and support to ensure that they achieve as well as they can are often extensive. In particular, with vulnerable learners, support is often essential to help reduce the barriers to their learning that may exist and to ensure equality of opportunity.
27. The common barriers to effective use of advice, guidance and support inspectors identified from inspections and during the discussions with the outstanding providers they visited are:
  - the use of extensive support arrangements to mitigate the impact of weak teaching and assessment
  - insufficient communication between the range of staff responsible for monitoring or assessing the different aspects of learners' progress, such as their assessments in English and mathematics
  - over-general or unchallenging targets that are not reviewed frequently
  - teachers' lack of awareness of learners' careers aims and plans for their next step and insufficient use of information when planning individualised learning programmes.
28. In the most effective provision, staff use advice, guidance and support very effectively to ensure that learners achieve at the highest level possible.
29. The support and monitoring of progress that underpin learning are well-established, comprehensive and of high quality. Individual learners receive support and extra help that is tailored to meet their needs. Support staff and teachers work closely and communicate well, which enhances learners' experiences and chances of success. Specialist staff and teachers work very effectively with a wide range of learners, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
30. Staff monitor learners' progress very thoroughly and use targets, both numerical and written, such as for percentage attendance or increases in skills,

constructively and productively. Targets set are checked frequently to measure learners' progress. Staff place great importance on the transparency of this process and on easy and frequent access to records by all, including learners and, where relevant to younger learners, their parents or carers. Electronic systems aid this access and ensure transparency, particularly for learners in work-based settings.

31. Learners and staff work together to set and review targets so that the process is meaningful and rigorous. Staff maintain a close control over the purpose and quality of target-setting and ensure that all targets are sharply focused, purposeful and are achieved.

## Teaching of English, mathematics, functional skills and skills for employment

Common Inspection Framework 2012

Inspectors make a judgement on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by evaluating the extent to which:

- teaching and learning develop English, mathematics and functional skills, and support the achievement of learning goals and career aims

32. The common barriers to high quality teaching of these skills that inspectors identified from inspections and during the discussions with the outstanding providers they visited are:
- unclear or underdeveloped guidance to staff, with insufficient clarity on responsibilities and accountability to ensure that learners know their levels of skills in English and mathematics and that, where required, they follow courses in these subjects at the most appropriate level
  - underdeveloped initial and diagnostic assessments, which can easily lead to learners working towards qualifications that are insufficiently challenging compared with their prior attainment
  - insufficient collaboration and weak communication between English and mathematics specialists and vocational staff to ensure that learners develop these skills in meaningful contexts, including those relevant to their main learning programme
  - insufficient monitoring of learners' progress in English and mathematics and too few improvement actions identified and acted on to help them make good progress
  - a lack of skill and experience in supporting learners to understand the concepts that underpin their development of English and mathematical skills

- overuse of paper-based worksheets, or computerised exercises that do little to help learners develop the ability and confidence to carry out tasks involving literacy and numeracy independently and accurately.
33. In the most effective provision, teachers develop learners' English, mathematics and functional skills thoroughly across the curriculum.
  34. Senior staff lead the implementation of clear and well-conceived strategies to underpin teaching and learning of these skills. The roles and responsibilities of teachers across different subject areas are explicit in the part they play in helping learners to improve their skills in English and mathematics, particularly those on the 16–19 study programmes.
  35. Staff use initial and diagnostic assessment to guide learners accurately. Staff recognise the importance of undertaking additional diagnostic tests to inform an appropriate pathway for younger learners who do not have GCSEs in English and mathematics at a grade C or above. In particular, this is seen as essential for learners who hold a grade D to assess how quickly they will be ready to retake to gain the maximum chance to improve their grade.
  36. Staff promote the value of English and mathematics skills to learners at the start of their programmes. They include employers in this promotion and involve them well. Their strong focus on the significance of GCSE accreditation and the status of this qualification has increased learners' motivation in these subjects, particularly learners up to the age of 25.
  37. Specialist English and mathematics teachers support vocational teachers to integrate these skills into their work. Providers train and give considerable support for vocational teachers and other staff to improve their skills in English, mathematics and the use of ILT. Specialist English and mathematics teams and vocational teams work together, closely and productively.
  38. Staff produce a wide range of resources to support skills development. Vocational teachers have a strong focus on developing skills within a vocational context and promoting the use of specialist terminology in their lessons.
  39. All teachers routinely use an agreed approach to correct learners' spelling and grammar as well as their accuracy in mathematics. They ensure that learners are supported to understand why they made the errors and are motivated to improve the quality and accuracy of their work. Teachers are clear about their responsibilities in doing this because protocols are well-established.
  40. Staff use a wide range of approaches to support skills development in English, such as identifying common subject-related spelling errors, promoting ways to increase their vocabulary, providing help with the structure of written work and learning how to skim read or scan an article effectively. Teachers integrate the development of mathematical skills into tasks and routinely involve skills, such as estimating, measuring and costing, to support this.

41. Staff use well-established strategies for supporting learners' wider skills development, such as in communication, presentation skills and team work, and emphasise the importance of high attendance rates, good attitudes and punctuality to ensure that they fulfil their future career aims.

### **Supporting and challenging further education teachers to develop their skills in teaching, learning and assessment**

The Common Inspection Framework 2012

Inspectors evaluate the extent to which leaders and managers at all levels, including, where relevant, governors:

- improve teaching and learning through rigorous performance management and appropriate professional development

42. The common barriers to challenging and supporting staff to provide consistently good or better teaching and learning that inspectors identified from inspections and during the discussions with the outstanding providers they visited are:
- inaccurate evaluation of the impact of teachers' work on learning because of a lack of rigour in observations of their work and insufficient use of other measures of their performance to inform assessments, resulting in a false sense of security about the quality of practice
  - too much variation in the quality of training and development for trainers and assessors in apprenticeships and insufficient focus on developing their role in teaching and learning to bring about rapid and secure improvement in the sector
  - insufficient rigour in the quality assurance of subcontracted provision because of weak links between observations of learning, setting of targets for improvement and the provision of staff development.
  - in colleges, too little use of teacher education departments in improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the college as a whole. Teacher education departments are often marginalised, small departments with a limited scope and influence.
43. In the most effective provision, leaders and managers implement very effective arrangements to ensure that provision is of the highest quality.
44. Managers use observations of learning constructively and frequently to inform and support their improvement actions. Managers extend the scope of their observations beyond lessons to include activities such as themed short visits to learning environments in order to obtain an accurate and full evaluation of learning activities. Observers often include focused discussions with learners as part of observation activities, which ensures that they compare their findings

with learners' views. Unannounced observations are used relatively widely to ensure rigour.

45. Providers develop confidence, capacity and sustainability in teaching teams by using small teams of internal experts to undertake observations. They use this approach to identify good practice with very effective arrangements for disseminating this across teaching teams, including dedicated meeting times and the use of specialist resource areas. Providers give excellent practitioners time and influence to spread good practice widely. Teachers undertake peer-observation and use an 'open-door' policy to promote a culture of learning from each other.
46. Managers ensure that the link between observing learning and evaluating performance is very strong. They use the results from observations as part of performance management and develop sharply focused action plans that lead to individualised and successful continuous professional development opportunities. They draw a clear distinction between the role of observers who contribute to the quality assurance of teaching and learning and those staff who have roles as coaches or mentors. These staff, who hold responsibility for supporting teachers to improve, are given time, resources and influence with good results. Their work often has a wide scope, including mentoring new teachers and extensive use as workplace coaches working with employers and assessors and trainers across learning sites.
47. Teachers are encouraged to be innovative and creative and to try different approaches and take risks. Highly effective teachers provide good leadership and set very good examples in this respect. Managers provide strong support for teachers' research projects and experiments to explore new ways of working. Secondments to industry and 'shop-floor' exposure are used well to keep teachers' skills up to date.
48. Managers' evaluations of teachers' performance are correlated with the range of outcomes data available to derive a robust and secure conclusion about the impact of each teacher's work on learners' outcomes and progression opportunities.
49. Teachers are provided with clear and informative guidance materials to support their work. These use current research and inspection evidence in their commentary on approaches to teaching and learning and are influential in ensuring that staff are clear about the educational principles that they should adhere to in their work.
50. High quality, frequent staff development is tailored to meet individual needs and often provided in short, sharply-focused sessions to maximise its impact. Appropriate high-quality staff development for improving learners' literacy and numeracy skills and for specialist training for those teaching learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are also strong features.

## Good practice resources

51. In addition to the source of good practice case studies that are available on the Ofsted website, a range of resources to promote improvement in teaching, learning and assessment is planned to be made available during 2014/15. These resources are likely to include many of the following topics:

- promotion of equality and diversity in learning activities
- teaching and learning in English and mathematics
- use of information and learning technology
- observing and evaluating learning
- developing the use of learners' views to inform teaching and learning
- teachers and trainers' views about their practice.

## Notes

To inform this survey, inspectors visited 20 outstanding providers, including FE colleges, sixth form colleges, independent learning providers, employer providers and providers of community learning and skills, 18 of which have been judged as outstanding for teaching, learning and assessment since the revisions to the *Common Inspection Framework* in September 2012. Each of these providers was asked to identify and demonstrate their outstanding practice related to teaching, learning and assessment.

Inspectors observed learning activities, had discussions with learners, teachers and managers and considered policies and procedures put in place to support learning. In addition, evidence from the inspection of teacher education in colleges in the autumn term 2013 and evidence related to staff education and development retrieved from the inspections of other FE and skills providers in the spring term 2014 inform the survey.

The findings are set in the context of the strengths and areas for improvement in teaching, learning and assessment identified in the Chief Inspector's Annual Report for 2012/13 and those that have emerged from the analysis of inspection reports since September 2012.

## Annex A: Providers visited

<b>Provider</b>	<b>Local authority</b>
Blackpool and Fylde College	Blackpool
Brighton Hove and Sussex Sixth Form College	Brighton and Hove
CITB - Construction Skills	Norfolk
David Lewis College	Cheshire East
Defence Equipment & Support, Defence Munitions (DM) Gosport	Hampshire
Foxes Academy	Somerset
Hawk Management	Richmond on Thames
John Ruskin College	Croydon
Manchester Metropolitan University	Manchester
QA Ltd	Slough
Rochdale Sixth Form College	Rochdale
Rochdale Training Association Limited	Rochdale
Rolls Royce	Derby
Runshaw College	Lancashire
Seashell Trust	Stockport
Swindon College	Swindon
The Working Men's College	Camden
The Training and Learning Company	Tower Hamlets
Walsall Adult And Community College	Walsall
Walsall College	Walsall