

Support and challenge for further education and skills providers

This guidance sets out Ofsted's approach to supporting and challenging further education and skills providers that are judged to require improvement, have changed status or are providing a new type of provision, as set out in the 'Further education and skills inspection handbook'.

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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, have changed status or is providing a new type of provision in accordance with the 'Common inspection framework: education, skills and early years from September 2015'¹ and the 'Further education and skills inspection handbook'.²
2. The arrangements whereby Ofsted supports and challenges inadequate providers to improve are detailed in the 'Further education and skills inspection handbook'.
3. A provider judged to require improvement at their most recent inspection will normally have a full re-inspection within 12 to 24 months of its previous inspection.
4. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector has set out his vision:

'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.'
5. This guidance sets out the contribution that Ofsted will make to helping providers that require improvement get to good or better.
6. Ofsted may also, where it sees fit, carry out support and challenge visits to newly merged providers or other providers that have had a change of status and so are treated as though they are new providers. Ofsted may also carry out such visits where a provider has a new type of provision, such as new full-time college provision for 14 to 16 year olds.³

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.

¹ 'Common inspection framework: education, skills and early years from September 2015', Ofsted; www.gov.uk/government/publications/common-inspection-framework-education-skills-and-early-years-from-september-2015.

² 'Further education and skills inspection handbook', Ofsted; www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-education-and-skills-inspection-handbook-from-september-2015.

³ 'Further education and skills inspection handbook' – sections on 'New providers' and 'Support and challenge visits'.

Inspection and regulation are Ofsted's principal ways of identifying strengths and weaknesses in the quality of provision and bringing about improvement. In 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
 - HMI arranging opportunities for representatives from the provider to shadow an Ofsted inspection
 - HMI offering to arrange a visit for senior leaders and governors to another provider
 - a meeting between the HMI and 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 normally contact the provider's principal or chief executive beforehand to offer a visit to the provider by the improvement HMI.
11. The improvement HMI will normally agree with the provider a suitable time for an initial telephone conversation and an on-site improvement visit. The improvement HMI will:
 - 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

- 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
 - agree other means of support and challenge that are deemed appropriate.
12. To maintain a clear separation of roles, the 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.

After the visit

13. The inspector will send the principal/chief executive the reporting letter that confirms the actions, timescales and any further arrangements discussed at the visit.
14. The reporting letter will not be published on the Ofsted website. However, the letter and relevant information arising from a visit may be shared with funding bodies and/or the further education commissioner or equivalent.
15. Where a support and challenge visit is carried out to a provider that has had a change of status or has new provision (as set out in paragraph 6), a similar process will be followed to that set out above in relation to the visit and after the visit.

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