

A single inspection of voluntary adoption agencies

Consultation document

This consultation seeks your views on proposed changes to the inspection of voluntary adoption agencies.

We propose that:

- all voluntary adoption agencies will receive one inspection in a three-year period and one overall judgement irrespective of the number of premises they use.
- the notice period for the inspection of voluntary adoption agencies is reduced from 10 working days to two working days.

The closing date for this consultation is **04 August 2017**.

If you would like a version of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231 or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

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Plain English Campaign
Committed to clearer communication

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About Ofsted

1. The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (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.

Introduction

2. This consultation document seeks your views on the proposed changes to the inspection of voluntary adoption agencies (VAAs).
3. We propose that all VAAs will receive one inspection in a three-year period and one overall judgement on adoption, irrespective of the number of premises they use.
4. We will use information gathered through the consultation and events to finalise the future inspection model.
5. We plan to start using the new inspection model from April 2018.
6. We will publish a response to the consultation later in the year.
7. The consultation is open from 10 July 2017 to 04 August 2017.

Purpose and background to the consultation

Background

8. Under our current arrangements, all VAAs must notify HMCI when they appoint a new manager at any branch. This branch is then subject to a separate inspection.
9. In July 2015, we wrote to all VAAs asking for information about their services. We identified some VAAs that had listed additional premises previously unknown to Ofsted. We met with these VAAs last year. They told us that the additional premises were mostly established in response to the government's strategy around adoption, including the expansion grant programme and Adoption Vision.¹
10. The VAAs had not considered these premises to be a 'branch', but rather an extension of the principal office. Consequently, we were not notified about them and they were not inspected individually. We found a lack of clarity across the sector as to what is, or is not, a branch. In the absence of any legal definition, this is open to interpretation.

¹ www.gov.uk/government/publications/adoption-a-vision-for-change.

11. VAAs told us that:
 - inspecting additional premises would be duplication because their work would be covered in the inspection of the principal office and/or branches
 - the current inspection model (a separate inspection of the principal office and individual branches, resulting in separate reports) deters VAAs from extending their reach by opening new premises.
12. Many VAAs felt that if all additional premises were classified as a branch, it would force some to close: this is a position we want to avoid. We recognise that VAAs may need to provide different services in different locations to respond to demand.
13. Given the emerging regionalising of adoption agencies agenda, it is the right time to reconsider how we inspect VAAs.
14. We have worked closely with the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies (CVAA) and the Department for Education (DfE) to agree the principles to underpin the inspection of VAAs. This consultation document is the outcome from those discussions.
15. During this work, we:
 - sought to agree principles to clarify what constitutes a branch. This will help agencies and Ofsted distinguish between branches and other premises and determine what should be inspected
 - reconsidered the approach to the inspection of VAAs. We want to be proportionate and take account of the concerns raised about the current model of separate inspections of branches.
16. We considered some principles that might help VAAs classify their additional branches, including:
 - whether they operate in standalone premises
 - the degree of management oversight
 - the range of activity undertaken.
17. The principles agreed provide better clarity of what constitutes a branch, but it was felt that they would still be open to interpretation. For example, 'standalone premises' could be interpreted differently. Also, simply defining what counts as a branch does not give a holistic view of the VAA and does not stop the potential duplication of inspection.
18. We concluded that the best way to deal with these issues raised would be to have a single inspection of VAAs. This would mean one inspection with one overall judgement for each agency. This consultation is your opportunity to comment on the proposal.

19. Subject to consultation, the new inspection model will be applied from April 2018.

Proposal 1: A single inspection

20. We propose a 'single inspection' for the VAA organisation as a whole.
21. In practice, the new approach means that:
- all VAAs will receive one inspection in a three-year period and one overall judgement for their organisation, irrespective of the number of premises they use
 - we will ask VAAs to notify us of all premises they have and the activity undertaken at each. This will help us to decide the size of the inspection team and plan the inspection. We will take full account of which services are delivered and where they are delivered so that we are able make secure judgements at the inspection
 - for VAAs that have additional premises, a selection of the branches and premises will be visited
 - we will take into account the timing of the last inspection and the graded judgement of the principal office and any branches. We will use this to determine the timing of inspection under the new model
 - we will make judgements in line with the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF)²
 - where there is a discrepancy in performance across a VAA, the inspection team will use a 'best fit' to determine the overall judgement
 - VAAs will continue to be held to account for any failures to meet regulatory requirements.
22. In our view, this will:
- simplify the inspection process before regional adoption agencies become fully operational
 - support greater consistency in the inspection of VAAs
 - reduce the burden of inspection on providers
 - result in a comprehensive assessment of the VAA as a whole
 - support VAAs to deliver their services flexibly
 - improve the focus on the quality of what is delivered for children and adults, rather than the organisational structure.

² www.gov.uk/guidance/social-care-common-inspection-framework-sccif-adoption-support-agencies/1-introduction.

23. We used the following criteria to guide our thinking before deciding on the single inspection approach:
- inspection must be fair and proportionate
 - while all agency activity must be inspected, not all premises need to be visited
 - children remain at the heart of all inspection activity and decisions
 - inspection should not get in the way of VAAs developing their services.
24. We will discuss with the DfE to decide whether any changes to the Fees and Frequency of Inspections Regulations 2015 are needed as the result of this approach.³ Any proposed changes would be subject to consultation by the DfE.

Proposal 2: Notice period of inspection

25. Currently, VAA inspections are carried out with 10 working days' notice. We propose this is reduced to two working days. This will bring notice periods more in line with the majority of our inspections. It will help to give inspectors a clear and realistic picture of the day-to-day operation and impact of the agency. We also believe this will reduce the demands of preparing for inspection for VAAs and other stakeholders.
26. We will provide a clear explanation of the information that we will need once we have announced an inspection. This will ensure that the shorter notice period will not affect the ability of inspectors to gather evidence while on site.

³ www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/551/regulation/27/made#regulation-27-1-a.

The consultation process

27. We welcome your response to this consultation document. The consultation opens on 10 July 2017 and closes on 04 August 2017.
28. The information you give us will inform our approach to the inspection of VAAs.
29. We will publish a response to the consultation later in the year.
30. Subject to consultation, the new inspection model will be implemented from April 2018.

Sending back your response

31. There are three ways of completing and submitting your response.

Online electronic questionnaire – visit

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/VAAconsultation>

- to complete and submit an electronic version of the response form.
- **Download and email** – visit <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/a-single-inspection-of-voluntary-adoption-agencies> , download a Word version of a questionnaire and complete the questions on your computer. When you have completed the form, please email it to socialcare@ofsted.gov.uk with the consultation name in the subject line: a single inspection of voluntary adoption agencies.
- **Print and post** – visit <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/a-single-inspection-of-voluntary-adoption-agencies> to print a Word or PDF version of the response form that you can fill in by hand. When you have completed it, please post it to:

Social Care Policy Team
Ofsted
Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

Questionnaire for a single inspection of voluntary adoption agencies

Confidentiality

The information you provide will be held by us. It will only be used for the purposes of consultation and research to help us to become more effective, influence policies and inform inspection and regulatory practice.

We will treat your identity in confidence, if you disclose it to us.

Are you responding on behalf of an organisation?

Yes If yes please complete Section 1

No If no please start at Section 2

Section 1

Which organisation are you responding on behalf of? (if you'd prefer not to say, please leave blank)

Organisation: _____

Are you happy for us to consider anonymously publishing the views of your organisation?

Yes

No

Section 2

Which type of organisation are you linked to?

Voluntary adoption agency	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adoption support agency	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local authority children's services	<input type="checkbox"/>
Representative of a provider or worker group/association	<input type="checkbox"/>
Commissioner for services for children/families	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify) _____	

Which of the below best describes you? Please tick one option.

I am:

Responsible individual/registered provider	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agency/branch manager	<input type="checkbox"/>
Member of staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Panel member	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social work manager/social worker	<input type="checkbox"/>
Independent reviewing officer	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parent/carer	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adopter or prospective adopter	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adult receiving adoption support	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other agency/organisation (please specify) _____	

Proposal 1: A single inspection

Question 1

Do you agree with the principle of a single inspection of voluntary adoptions agencies (VAAs), irrespective of the number of premises used?

For more information about this proposal, see paragraphs 21 - 23 of this consultation document.

Yes	No	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please tell us your reasons for your answer:

Question 2

Do you agree or disagree that a single inspection of VAAs that have more than one premises will:

For more information about this proposal, see paragraphs 21 - 23 of this consultation document.

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
support agencies to deliver services flexibly, including promoting access for children and adult users	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
improve the focus on the quality of what is delivered to children and adults	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
reduce duplication for providers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
lead to a more proportionate inspection programme.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please tell us your reasons for your answers:

Question 3

What opportunities do you feel will result from a single inspection of those VAAs that have more than one premises?

For more information about this proposal see paragraphs 21 - 23 of this consultation document.

Question 4

What challenges do you feel will result from a single inspection of those VAAs that have more than one premises and how do you think Ofsted could address them?

For more information about this proposal, see paragraphs 21 - 23 of this consultation document.

Proposal 2: Notice period of inspection

Question 5

Do you agree that the notice period for the inspection of VAAs should be reduced from 10 working days to two working days?

For more information about this proposal, see paragraph 25 and 26 of this consultation document.

Yes	No	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please tell us your reasons for your answer:

What did you think of this consultation?

One of the commitments in our strategic plan is to monitor whether or not our consultations are accessible to those wishing to take part.

How did you hear about this consultation?

- Ofsted website
- 'Ofsted News', Ofsted's monthly newsletter
- Ofsted conference
- Twitter (@ofstednews)
- Ofsted email alerts
- Another organisation (please specify, if known) _____
- Other (please specify) _____

Please tell us what you thought of this consultation by answering the questions below.

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know
I found the consultation information clear and easy to understand.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I found the consultation easy to find on the Ofsted website.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I had enough information about the consultation topic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would take part in a future Ofsted consultation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Is there anything you would like us to improve or do differently for future consultations? If so, please tell us below.

Additional questions about you

Your answers to the following questions will help us to evaluate how successfully we are communicating messages from inspection to all sections of society. We would like to assure you that completing this section is optional; you do not have to answer any of the questions. All responses are confidential.

Please tick the appropriate box.

1. Gender

Female <input type="checkbox"/>	Male <input type="checkbox"/>
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2. Age

Under 14 <input type="checkbox"/>	14–18 <input type="checkbox"/>	19–24 <input type="checkbox"/>	25–34 <input type="checkbox"/>	35–44 <input type="checkbox"/>	45–54 <input type="checkbox"/>	55–64 <input type="checkbox"/>	65+ <input type="checkbox"/>
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3. Ethnic origin

(a) How would you describe your national group?

- British or mixed British
- English
- Irish
- Northern Irish
- Scottish
- Welsh
- Other (specify if you wish)

(b) How would you describe your ethnic group?

Asian		Mixed ethnic origin	
Bangladeshi	<input type="checkbox"/>	Asian and White	<input type="checkbox"/>
Indian	<input type="checkbox"/>	Black African and White	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pakistani	<input type="checkbox"/>	Black Caribbean and White	<input type="checkbox"/>
Any other Asian background (specify if you wish)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Any other mixed ethnic background (specify if you wish)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Black		White	
African	<input type="checkbox"/>	Any White background (specify if you wish)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>	Any other ethnic background	
Any other Black background (specify if you wish)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Any other background (specify if you wish)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chinese			
Any Chinese background (specify if you wish)	<input type="checkbox"/>		

4. Sexual orientation

Heterosexual <input type="checkbox"/>	Lesbian <input type="checkbox"/>	Gay <input type="checkbox"/>	Bisexual <input type="checkbox"/>
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5. Religion/belief

Buddhist	<input type="checkbox"/>	Muslim	<input type="checkbox"/>
Christian	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sikh	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hindu	<input type="checkbox"/>	Any other, please state:	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jewish	<input type="checkbox"/>	None	

6. Disability

Do you consider yourself to have a disability?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
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