Official statistics

Methodology report: Further education and skills inspections and outcomes

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Introduction

This document provides methodology and quality information relevant to Ofsted's thematic review on further education and skills inspections and outcomes.

We also report the document in conjunction with the background notes, contained within the statistical first release and accompanying tables. These notes include further information that is not included here.

Methodology

The statistics and key indicator contains data that has been sourced from the administrative data that Ofsted collects for all further education and skills providers in England, which is partly funded by:

- the Education and Skills Funding Agency
- in the case of adult education, a required or combined authority or the Greater London Authority
- through the apprenticeship levy

It reports on the following:

> **In-year inspection outcomes for inspections carried out between 1 September and 31 August of the academic year** (1 September to 31 August, regardless of whether the provider has since closed, stopped delivering or is currently)
>
> Tables and charts count the number of inspections that took place. It includes inspections that were carried out in-person, remotely or a combination of them that were reported on during the academic year.
>
> We publish statistics each year, with a mid-year picture also published part way through the year.
>
> **The most recent, or latest, full inspection outcomes for all providers inspected and reported on between 1 September and 31 August (approximately) regardless of when Ofsted's outcome as at a certain point in time**
>
> These are regardless of when the inspection took place.
>
> Tables and charts count the number of providers that have been inspected. Each provider is counted once, regardless of how many times it is inspected. It includes providers that are currently delivering education, training or apprenticeships, and those that have closed, stopped or are no longer in scope. It also includes those that are currently being inspected.
>
> We publish statistics about the most recent inspection outcomes for all providers inspected and reported on between 1 September and 31 August (approximately) at 31 August each year, and we also publish a mid-year picture.

Provider type	Provider group
Adult education and skills providers	Colleges
Apprenticeship providers	Colleges
Specialist further education colleges	Colleges
Independent learning providers	Independent specialist providers
Independent learning providers	Independent learning providers (including employer providers)
Employer providers	Independent learning providers (including employer providers)
Local authority providers	Community learning and skills providers
Community learning providers	Community learning and skills providers
Specialist designated institution	Community learning and skills providers
16 to 19 academies	16 to 19 academies
16 to 19 academy sixth forms	16 to 19 academies
16 to 19 free schools	16 to 19 academies
Sixth form colleges	Sixth form colleges
Higher education institutions	Higher education institutions
Prisons Learning Skills Partnerships	National prisons education
Prison and young offender institutions	Prisons and young offender institutions

Short inspections

On 1 September 2015, under the common inspection framework, Ofsted introduced short inspections. We carry out a short inspection when we judge that a provider has maintained its overall effectiveness and that we believe that the next inspection can choose to extend the inspection to a full inspection if:

- the provider is not judged to be inadequate in any area or provision area
- there are concerns that there is evidence that the provider may no longer be meeting the requirements for its registration or approval
- there is sufficient evidence of high quality provision to conclude that the provider may be judged outstanding

A short inspection does not determine the overall effectiveness of the provider remains unchanged from its previous inspection. No individual or sub-contracted provision is inspected. We only look at the following areas:

- effectiveness of leadership and management
- quality of education
- behaviour and attitudes
- education programmes for young people

A decision to extend the short inspection does not pre-determine the outcome of the full inspection. We make a judgement on the provider's overall effectiveness at the point grading scale. At the end of the full inspection, a provider could:

- retain its grade
- improve to outstanding
- decline to require improvement or inadequate

When reporting on in-year inspections, we have included the following fields, which are only relevant to short inspections. We have included these in our inspection tables:

- we have added an 'inspection type group' to the in-year data table to allow users to identify short inspections, full inspections and monitoring visits
- if a short inspection did not extend and the provider remained good, we will record the outcome as 'Not applicable'. This is because we do not make a judgement that the provider's effectiveness remains good
- if a short inspection did extend to a full inspection, we will record this in the 'extended to full inspection' field. We will record the outcome of the full inspection the remaining sections of the inspection report, not just the short form
- we have added the title or each sub-field to clarify whether the data relates to a short inspection, full inspection or monitoring visit, or to a provider's overall outcome

Short inspections have a minimal impact on the most recent inspection outcomes. Within the most recent inspection data, we count the most recent or latest full inspection outcomes per provider for each provider. This includes providers that have closed, stopped or are no longer in scope. Providers that are subject to a full inspection, but that have not yet completed their first full inspection, are not included in our most recent inspection data. We publish a table within the release to show the volume of short inspections, the number that curtail to full inspections and the resulting inspection outcomes.

More information

Official statistics on further education and skills inspection outcomes have a delay between the end of the inspection and the publication of data, with a date of one calendar month. We try to ensure that we publish most of the inspection reports within 40 working days of the inspection, but some reports will be delayed. The inspection reports of these providers is published as soon as we go through additional moderation checks. There may therefore be a longer time between inspection and publication for providers with more complex or difficult inspections.

Under exceptional circumstances, we may withhold further publication of an inspection report. Outcomes of short and full inspections and monitoring visits are not included in any of the datasets.

> If statements are made about whether inspection outcomes have improved, we will only do so if we have at least 3 years of comparable effectiveness outcomes compared to the previous inspection, unless otherwise stated.

We also use data in this release to update Ofsted's Dashboard.

Relevance

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. We release official statistics to provide reform and improvement across government departments and the education, skills and children's services sectors.

Data in this official statistics series is for inspections carried out under part 8 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Communicating with users

The aggregation of data for official statistics allows us to communicate to users and stakeholders the overall picture of inspection outcomes. We can also show geographical patterns within such figures and trends over time. We can also point out the important messages and communicate these in an understandable way. We can also highlight the data that we feel is of use to users, and we can also manipulate the data collection to meet user needs.

Specific users and uses of the data include:

- parents, who use our reports to inform our statistical release to inform the public about the quality of further education and skills providers across the country
- allowing users to track movement in the further education and skills sector and to see which providers are improving, declining or maintaining their inspection outcomes
- helping identify areas of weak performance. This informs policy development and Ofsted's inspection and regulation activities. For example, the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) uses our data to inform its risk assessments and to target its monitoring visits
- Ofsted staff using inspection profiles to inform inspection framework development and preparation for inspection activities. The inspection messages within the profiles contain information based on the findings of inspections carried out in the last 3 academic years

You can find more information about Ofsted's other statistical releases, such as England and Ofsted's inspection activity within the release.

We generally do not publish the data release by Ofsted's inspection process and it is therefore administrative data.

Meeting user needs

In 2004, we held a consultation on the further education and skills official statistics. We published the results of the consultation. We made changes in response to these points, summarised in the consultation response document. The majority of responses supported this change and the proposed was accepted.

We held a further consultation between 30 June 2016 and 29 July 2016, and made changes to our official statistics in response to the following points:

- a change to the methodology for the 16 to 19 academies and 16 to 19 academy sixth providers Figure to include Centre Assessed Grades contractors and sub-contractors
- a change to the methodology for the Apprenticeship providers Figure to include the most recent inspection outcome statistics

As a result of the consultation, we made the following changes:

We made a number of essential changes to the further education and skills inspection outcomes and key indicator statistics for the academic year 2017 to 2018. We to accommodate changes caused by the common inspection framework and the transition to the new Ofsted IT system. We made the following changes to our methodology:

- we have changed our methodology for calculating the most recent inspection outcomes in this document, as well as within the consultation document
- we have added a new table to show the volume of short inspections and the resulting inspection outcomes

We have changed our methodology for calculating the most recent inspection outcomes in this document, as well as within the consultation document because of the transition to the common inspection framework. We have added a new table to show the volume of short inspections, the number that curtail to full inspections and the resulting inspection outcomes.

Coherence and comparability

The tables and charts within the release compare inspection outcomes over the most recent academic year. We also compare the most recent inspection outcomes for the first release of statistics and we have reflected them in the publications. We have made a table available to show the volume of short inspections and their outcomes. When we publish our annual statistical release, we will compare to previous years. We publish a mid-year picture. This is explained in more detail below.

Inspection data from the common inspection framework and previous years will match the data shown in Data flow. If we publish inspection reports after the cut-off date, we will include them in the next release. We publish inspection outcomes within the inspection report. We publish the data we have published as inspectors within the reporting period, we will match the data.

There is no comparable data published by other producers of official or national statistics on further education and skills inspections in England.

Inspections are carried out:

- in England by Ofsted
- in Scotland by Ofsted
- in Northern Ireland by the Education and Training Inspectorate

Ofsted also produces regular management information on the outcomes of further education and skills inspections. The management information is not comparable with the data in this release because it uses different methodology. The Ofsted management information report reflects the reporting period has ended for inspection reports to be published.

Several third parties produce analysis and commentary using our publication. Ofsted inspection judgements. Third parties appear to collate these by using our inspection data. We do not collate or publish these official statistics.

Framework changes have an impact on the comparability of data and reporting. We have made a table available to show the volume of short inspections and the resulting inspection outcomes. We have published inspections within the reporting period, we will match the data.

We introduced the education inspection framework (EIF) in September 2019 following a consultation.

The framework was accompanied by an inspection handbook. This set out the inspection methodology for the EIF. It also set out the evidence we would use and expectations for each type of provider.

The impact of the changes to the EIF judgements are as follows:

- special effectiveness: 100 percent comparable because all frameworks from September 2019 to date
- quality of education: 100 percent comparable. This judgement is broadly comparable across the common inspection framework and the EIF
- quality of education: this judgement was introduced in September 2019 and has a different meaning to previous years. It is not comparable. It is not comparable because it is a judgement on the quality of education and does not provide a comprehensive view of the quality of provision overall
- behaviour and attitudes: this judgement was introduced in September 2019 and has a different meaning to previous years. It is not comparable. This judgement will only represent inspections since September 2019 and will not provide a comprehensive view of the behaviour and attitudes of learners
- personal development: this judgement was introduced in September 2019 and has a different meaning to previous years. It is not comparable. This judgement will only represent inspections since September 2019 and will not provide a comprehensive view of the personal development of learners

The transition to the new framework between September 2019 and 31 August 2020.

Frequency of inspection

We do not inspect all providers with equal regularity. We take a proportionate, risk-assessed approach to inspection, as indicated in our inspection handbooks. We do not inspect all providers every year. We do not schedule inspection in a particular year. We do not publish a list of inspection dates of providers within the sector. This will also affect the comparability of inspection outcomes between years.

We inspect providers that were previously judged to be good, requires improvement or inadequate at their last inspection.

As of September 2018, previously outstanding providers become a short inspection within 5 years. Short inspections and how they are included within this release are explained in the section above.

Users need to be particularly careful when if comparing outcomes from 2015 to 2016 onwards with previous years. This is because the 2015 to 2016 academic year included a full inspection of all providers, including those that had stable cases where they continued to provide the same standard of education.

We further adjusted our inspection programme between 2016 to 2017 and 2017 to 2018 to inspect providers that were previously outstanding and will not be inspected unless we have concerns about them. This can impact on the comparability of inspection outcomes between years for previously outstanding providers in certain aspects of the quality of leadership and management. Fewer will be risk-assessed inspections within this statistical release. We will publish a table showing the volume of short inspections and their resulting outcomes.

Comparisons between provider types should be treated with caution. This is due to the different inspection frameworks used over the past 10 years and the variation in the number of providers included within the different groups.

We directly and publicly fund providers usually receive a monitoring visit within 24 months of starting to receive directly funded provision. In most cases, this will be a full inspection. We do not inspect all providers every year. We do not schedule inspection in a particular year. We do not publish a list of inspection dates of providers within the sector. This will also affect the comparability of inspection outcomes between years.

A new sub-contractor of a provider will usually receive a monitoring visit within 24 months of starting to deliver directly funded provision. In most cases, this will be a full inspection. We do not inspect all providers every year. We do not schedule inspection in a particular year. We do not publish a list of inspection dates of providers within the sector. This will also affect the comparability of inspection outcomes between years. We do not publish a list of sub-contractors. We do not inspect all providers every year. We do not schedule inspection in a particular year. We do not publish a list of inspection dates of providers within the sector. This will also affect the comparability of inspection outcomes between years.

Comparing inspections over time

Comparability between years of the most recent inspection outcomes for further education and skills providers has been affected by the following:

Consultation

> Following a consultation carried out in July 2016, there was a change to the methodology for calculating the most recent inspection outcomes for provider Figures to include National Centre for Social Research contractors and higher education institutions. As a result, the '16 to 19 academies and 16 to 19 academy sixth forms' in August 2018 and already will include contractors and sub-contractors.

Changes to methodology

> It has also produced a change to the methodology to include providers that have ceased to be inspected or have stopped delivering by year, from the 31 August statistics. We backdated this change and recalculated the figures for 2015 to 2016 and 2016 to 2017. We published recent inspection outcomes for Ofsted inspections. Previous inspection outcomes are comparable from 31 August 2015 onwards but not comparable before this date.

Independent specialist colleges and dance and drama colleges

Before 1 September 2015, we included independent specialist colleges within the category general and general further education colleges. We included dance and drama colleges within the category specialist colleges of agriculture and horticulture or performing arts. We made the decision to separate independent specialist colleges and dance and drama colleges into separate categories from 1 September 2015. We adjusted historic data published in the statistics to take account of this change.

Before 1 September 2015, we included independent specialist colleges of course level, with one dance and drama college potentially receiving multiple inspections. We made the decision to separate the data for independent specialist colleges and these categories from 1 September 2015. We adjusted historic data and dates. Ofsted now makes a judgement on the overall effectiveness of independent specialist colleges. We do not make a judgement on the overall effectiveness of other providers and therefore we have adjusted the inspection data from September 2015 onwards in the aggregation for 16 to19 free education and skills providers. We have removed from the underlying data the inspections of colleges that were inspected in the previous inspection. We have removed from the underlying data to prevent inappropriate comparisons.

Accuracy and reliability

What this release reports on

The most recent inspection outcomes for all further education and skills providers publicly funded and delivering education, training or apprenticeships in the academic year

Publicly funded providers include providers that are not receiving funds in receipt of funding within the dataset taken from Ofsted's systems, as at the end of the reporting period. This is the 31 August. We publish the most recent inspection outcomes for these providers.

Inspections that have taken place during the reporting year

We give the cut-off date for the inclusion of the reports included in the publication. Providers that have yet to be inspected are included within the dataset. We do not include any reports that have not yet been published. We have published an inspection that curtailed to a full inspection, the inspection will not be included in inspection outcomes. If the inspection report is published after the cut-off date, the inspection outcome and the inspection will not be included. These will appear in the next release.

Other reliability information

This release does not include the inspection outcomes of maintained schools, academies and independent schools. Ofsted publishes these outcomes separately.

We extract inspection outcomes data from Ofsted's administrative systems. Ofsted is recording inspection outcomes mainly for the purpose of the quality data. We have put in place a number of appropriate systems to minimise the risk of reporting error.

Until April 2015, Ofsted used a document scanner as a means of validating the data entered into the inspection system. This document scanner was a legacy of the Education for Excellence (EfE) system. Ofsted's inspectors used two administrative system. We carried out through checking throughout the data collection process and at the end of the data collection. We carried out further data checks before publication. Since September 2015, we have made data improvements to the inspection system.

As part of the data migration, we identified and corrected any missing inspection data. We published the inspection outcomes for these missing data available in the official statistics published since September 2015.

Technical production of the inspection data release relies on a small number of staff. We use a rigorous data quality assurance procedure with the aim of minimising the risk of reporting error. We have put in place a number of appropriate systems to minimise the risk of reporting error. We have put in place a number of appropriate systems to minimise the risk of reporting error.

See more information on the issues relating to the use of administrative data.

We publish revisions in line with our revisions policy for official statistics. For more information about the revisions policy, read the revisions policy.

Timeliness and punctuality

We currently publish data quarterly. This includes details of inspections that have taken place in the last academic year. We publish the data as soon as it is ready to provide, we release the data as soon as it is ready.

We publish data at 9.30am on the date we announced in the publication calendar. We do not publish data on a date that we have not announced in the publication calendar.

We allow one calendar month after the end of the reporting period as the cut-off date for the inclusion of published inspection reports. This is to allow time for the publication of the majority of inspections that have taken place within the reporting period. The production stage for this release includes extracting and cleaning the data, drafting findings, quality assuring all outputs and uploading the information onto the GOV.UK website.

We announce publications via social media. We give pre-release access in accordance with the Pre-release to Official Statistics Order (2008).

You can find the list of postholders granted pre-release access as a separate document accompanying each release.

Accessibility and clarity

We publish our releases in an accessible format on the GOV.UK website. The information is publicly available and there are no restrictions on access to the published data. Each release includes outcomes from Ofsted inspections that we have subsequently published. The data is for keeping users informed of the progress of the inspection framework and of changes in the further education and skills sector.

Underlying data in an accessible format accompanies each release to allow users to perform their own analysis. Users may use and re-use this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence.

This underlying data consists of provider-level files in Excel and is available in the 'data, charts and tables' file.

Performance, cost and burden on respondents

There is no respondent burden in relation to these statistics. This is because data is a by-product of Ofsted's inspection process. The only cost involved is the internal resource involved in collating the release.

Confidentiality, transparency and security

All data releases follow Ofsted's confidentiality and revisions.

Prisons and young offender institutions

Ofsted carries out inspections in prisons and young offender institutions in partnership with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP). Ofsted inspectors evaluate the quality of education, skills and work in prisons and young offender institutions. HMIP publishes inspection reports.

We carried out inspections of prisons and young offender institutions under the common inspection framework until 31 January 2020.

The education inspection framework was introduced for inspections of prisons and young offender institutions taking place from 1 February 2020.

Instructions for printing and saving

Instructions may vary depending on which browser you use, such as Internet Explorer or Google Chrome, and the type of device you use, such as an iPhone or laptop.

You will find your print and save options in your browser's menu. You may also have other options available on your device. The instructions for mobile and tablet devices will be specific to their make and model.

How to search

Click on Ctrl + F on a Windows laptop or Command + F on a Mac

This will open a search box in the top right-hand corner of the page. Type the word you are looking for in the search bar and press enter.

Your browser will highlight the word, usually in yellow, wherever it appears on the page. Press enter to move to the next place it appears.

How to print a copy of the guidance

Click on Ctrl + P on a Windows laptop or Command + P on a Mac

You can also choose to save as a PDF.

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