

Cookies on GOV.UK

We use some essential cookies to make this website work.

We'd like to set additional cookies to understand how you use GOV.UK, remember your settings and improve government services.

We also use cookies set by other sites to help us deliver content from their services.

[Accept additional cookies](#)

[Reject additional cookies](#)

[View cookies](#)

GOV.UK

▼ Menu

[Home](#) > [Education, training and skills](#) > [Inspections and performance of education providers](#)

- > [Inspection and performance of further education providers](#) > [Inspection of further education and skills providers](#)
- > [Further education and skills inspections: statistical commentaries 2022 to 2023](#)



Research and analysis

How mergers have changed the number of colleges we inspect and their inspection outcomes

Published 15 June 2023

Applies to England

Contents

[Introduction](#)

[How college mergers are processed](#)

[Mergers have reduced the number of colleges we inspect](#)

[The impact on the inspection profile](#)

[Annex: data tables for figures](#)

 [Print this page](#)

Introduction

In 2015, the government launched its review of post-16 education and training institutions across England. One of the areas the review considered was the ‘need to move towards fewer, often larger, more resilient and efficient providers... to enable greater specialisation, creating institutions that are genuine centres of expertise’. This led to a series of area reviews which, among other recommendations, resulted in many colleges merging.

This commentary explores the mergers that followed the area reviews, starting in September 2016, and how this has had an impact on the number of colleges and the inspection profile. [\[footnote 1\]](#)

How college mergers are processed

A college merger involves 2 or more providers merging to form a single institution. Each provider has a unique reference number (URN) that their inspection outcome is reported against. When the new institution is formed, one of the URNs is retained and the others are closed. The colleges are no longer inspected separately, and any future inspection activity is reported under the URN that has been retained.

A newly merged institution will appear as not yet inspected until it receives its first full inspection as a merged entity. Although this leads to a reduction in the number of colleges we report on, the original colleges remain in place, and learners still attend them. It is the structures and governance across the colleges that change, but the locations remain largely unchanged.

Mergers have reduced the number of colleges we inspect

The number of colleges we inspect has reduced by just under a third between 1 September 2016 and 31 May 2023. This is largely because 66 colleges have merged into other institutions.

Figure 1: Number of colleges at 31 August 2016 and 31 May 2023



Note: Total number of colleges in brackets.

View [data in an accessible table format](#).

Since September 2016, 114 colleges have been involved in a merger, as well as 2 institutes for adult learning. These mergers resulted in the formation of 48 colleges and 2 institutes for adult learning. The number of colleges we report on has reduced further, as 29 sixth-form colleges academised, and 4 colleges dissolved.

Figure 2: Types of providers that merged and what they became



Note: Providers that closed and merged into another provider are shown in grey.

In August 2016, institutes for adult learning were known as specialist designated institutions.

Specialist FE colleges are colleges that specialise in the provision of agriculture, horticulture or art, design and technology courses. These do not include independent specialist colleges that provide education and training for students with complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities, whose learning needs cannot be met by their local college or provider.

View [data in an accessible table format](#).

Of the 66 colleges that have merged into other institutions, the vast majority (62) merged into general further education colleges (see [Figure 2](#)).

The impact on the inspection profile

A higher proportion of colleges that went on to merge were judged requires improvement or inadequate than the proportion of all colleges at 31 August 2016. This reflected the aim of the area reviews to deliver high-quality education and training.

By 31 May 2023, 42 of the 48 merged colleges had received their first full inspection. Eighty-one per cent were judged good or outstanding. This is 16 percentage points higher than the proportion judged good or outstanding prior to merging (see [Figure 3](#)).

Figure 3: Overall effectiveness of colleges that merged, before and after merging



Note: Total number of colleges in brackets.

View [data in an accessible table format](#).

Most colleges either maintained or improved on the grades of their constituent institutions at their first inspection after merging. There were 11 that saw a lower grade than any of their constituent

institutions and were judged requires improvement or inadequate at their first inspection after merging. Of these, 5 improved at their next inspection and one remained requires improvement. The other 5 are awaiting their next full inspection.

Colleges that have not merged have also improved over the same period. At 31 August 2016, 81% of colleges that have not since been involved in a merger were judged good or outstanding. At 31 May 2023, 95% of these colleges were judged good or outstanding. This represents an increase of 14 percentage points.

Many mergers have involved colleges judged requires improvement or inadequate merging with colleges judged good or outstanding, which were then judged good at their first inspection. However, this is not the only direction of travel. There are 6 merged colleges, all made up of 2 colleges previously judged good, that were judged requires improvement or inadequate at their first inspection after merging.

Overall, due to more improvement than decline and colleges previously judged requires improvement or inadequate being disproportionately involved in mergers, the proportion of colleges judged good or outstanding has increased. Between 31 August 2016 and 31 May 2023, the proportion judged good or outstanding increased by 16 percentage points.

Figure 4: Overall effectiveness of colleges that merged, before and after merging



Note: Total number of colleges in brackets.

Percentages are rounded and may not add to 100.

View [data in an accessible table format](#).

On 31 May 2023, there were 216 colleges (159 general FE colleges, 44 sixth-form colleges and 13 specialist further education colleges) delivering publicly funded education, training and/or apprenticeships. Of these, 209 have had a full inspection, and 92% were judged good or outstanding at their most recent inspection. Seven colleges are yet to have their first inspection and will be inspected within the timescales outlined in our inspection handbook.

Between September 2022 and September 2025, all colleges will receive at least one full inspection. It will be the first time that many of these colleges have been inspected under the [education inspection framework](#). We will continue to report on inspection outcomes of all colleges in our [statistical releases](#) over this period.

Annex: data tables for figures

Data for figure 1: Number of colleges at 31 August 2016 and 31 May 2023

Date	Total number of	Total number of general FE	Total number of sixth-form colleges	Total number of specialist FE colleges
------	-----------------	----------------------------	-------------------------------------	--

	colleges	colleges		
31 August 2016	313	207	90	16
31 May 2023	216	159	44	13

See [Figure 1](#)

Data for figure 2: Types of providers that merged and what they became

Original provider type	Total number of institutions at 31 August 2016 that subsequently merged	Number that became part of a general FE college at 31 May 2023	Number that became part of a sixth-form college at 31 May 2023	Number that became part of a specialist FE college at 31 May 2023	Number that became part of an institute for adult learning at 31 May 2023	Total number of institutions that remained open at 31 May 2023
General FE college	95	46	0	1	2	46
Sixth-form college	17	15	1	0	0	1
Specialist FE college	2	1	0	0	0	1
Institute for adult learning	2	0	0	0	0	2

See [Figure 2](#)

Data for figure 3: Overall effectiveness of colleges that merged, before and after merging

Date	Total number of colleges inspected	% Outstanding	% Good	% Requires improvement	% Inadequate
------	------------------------------------	---------------	--------	------------------------	--------------

Colleges prior to merger	114	4	61	29	6
Merged colleges at 31 May 2023	42	7	74	17	2

See [Figure 3](#)

Data for figure 4: Proportion of colleges judged good or outstanding, over time

Date	Total number of colleges inspected	% Outstanding	% Good	% Requires improvement	% Inadequate	Number of colleges awaiting inspection
31 August 2016	302	21	56	20	4	11
31 May 2023	206	13	80	7	0	10

See [Figure 4](#)

1. This commentary is based on inspections carried out and published by 31 May 2023. [↩](#)

[Back to top](#)

Is this page useful?

Yes

No

[Report a problem with this page](#)

Topics

Government activity

[Benefits](#)

[Births, death, marriages and care](#)

[Business and self-employed](#)

[Childcare and parenting](#)

[Citizenship and living in the UK](#)

[Crime, justice and the law](#)

[Disabled people](#)

[Driving and transport](#)

[Education and learning](#)

[Employing people](#)

[Environment and countryside](#)

[Housing and local services](#)

[Money and tax](#)

[Passports, travel and living abroad](#)

[Visas and immigration](#)

[Working, jobs and pensions](#)

[Departments](#)

[News](#)

[Guidance and regulation](#)

[Research and statistics](#)

[Policy papers and consultations](#)

[Transparency](#)

[How government works](#)

[Get involved](#)

[Help](#) [Privacy](#) [Cookies](#) [Accessibility statement](#) [Contact](#) [Terms and conditions](#)

[Rhestr o Wasanaethau Cymraeg](#) [Government Digital Service](#)

All content is available under the [Open Government Licence v3.0](#), except where otherwise stated



© Crown copyright