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Guidance

Inspecting further education and skills: guide for providers

This guide gives a summary of what providers should expect and what they need to do as part of an Ofsted inspection.

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Applies to England

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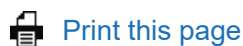
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Learner View and Employer View have changed. We give providers a unique [web survey link to share at the time of inspection](#).

Introduction

If you are publicly funded to provide post-16 education and/or training, you will normally be subject to Ofsted inspection.

Inspection may take the form of a monitoring visit or a full or short inspection.

Inspection involves inspectors gathering evidence from the provider to arrive at judgements using the evaluation criteria set out in the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#). They will gather that evidence through observing teaching and training, through speaking to managers, teachers, trainers and learners, and through analysing provider documents, data and information.

The focus of inspection is on the provider and on how all of the individuals within the provider work together to make sure learners receive the highest quality of education and training. The focus is not on inspecting the specific individuals that work within the provider.

Conduct during Ofsted inspections

Ofsted's [code of conduct](#) sets out the expectations for both inspectors and providers. At the start of the inspection or monitoring visit (usually during the planning call), the lead inspector will explain these expectations and will ask providers to read the code. Inspectors will work constructively with leaders and staff, demonstrating professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect at all times.

Notice of an inspection

We will normally notify providers up to 2 working days before an inspection, unless the inspection is unannounced. However, we will notify some providers of an inspection 5 or 6 days before. These providers include:

- further education colleges
- sixth-form colleges and designated institutions
- other very large and complex providers (who will have been notified of this by Ofsted)

We will notify the provider on the morning of the notification day and will email the notification letter. The lead inspector will then contact the provider as soon as possible.

While it is important that we carry out our inspections as planned wherever possible, sometimes there may be a reason why an inspection may not go ahead, and so a provider may request a deferral of its monitoring visit or inspection. We will decide whether this should be granted in accordance with our [deferral policy](#). The lead inspector will liaise with the provider to ensure that, wherever possible, the inspection or monitoring visit can go ahead.

Before the inspection visit

Providers should nominate a senior member of staff to act as a link between staff and the inspectors.

The nominee should:

- understand the provider's programmes and operations
- ensure the cooperation of staff at all levels
- have authority to carry out the role with autonomy

The nominee will:

- provide information for the lead inspector to support inspection planning

- brief the provider's staff about arrangements
- inform learners and employers about the inspection
- attend team meetings, including the final team meeting
- coordinate feedback arrangements during and at the end of the inspection
- act as a link with the lead inspector and ensure that documents are available and that staff can attend meetings
- provide details of any requests for adaptations that may need to be made to the inspection process because of an equality issue. For example, this could be a reasonable adjustment because of a disability.

Further education colleges, sixth-form colleges and designated institutions should select a skills nominee because the inspection will focus on how well the college is contributing to meeting skills needs.

Other providers may have a shadow nominee on an inspection or monitoring visit. The shadow nominee will act as an observer and support for the provider and the nominee. They will not normally contribute to discussions with inspectors.

The lead inspector will hold a telephone planning meeting with the nominee. The senior leader (usually the CEO or principal) and shadow or skills nominee (or other senior managers) may also attend.

The lead inspector will normally ask the nominee/ senior leader who is responsible for the nominee(s)/senior leader's welfare.

Following the planning meeting, we will send a short pre-inspection briefing letter that sets out the plan for the inspection.

The lead inspector will give the provider an opportunity to raise any issues or concerns, or to seek clarification, before and during the inspection. They will explain how the provider will be able to raise any matters during the inspection itself.

During the inspection visit

A full inspection will normally last between 2 and 5 days on site. Short inspections will normally last no longer than 2 days on site and monitoring visits will usually last between 1 and 2 days.

The number of inspectors involved in the inspection will vary according to the size and complexity of the provider.

Inspectors will spend time collecting evidence both on and off site.

Evidence-gathering methods include:

- observing teaching, training and assessment in practice
- speaking to trainers, teachers and learners about the education and training provided
- scrutinising learners' work
- having discussions with learners
- analysing provider and learner records showing planning for, and monitoring of, learners' individual progress
- meeting with learners, employers, staff, governors, councillors, trustees and the provider's partners, if appropriate (and in particular in the case of colleges, meeting with skills stakeholders)
- using learner, employer and other surveys

There may be exceptional occasions when it is difficult or inappropriate to continue with an inspection and the inspection needs to be paused. We will consider each situation on a case-by-case basis using our [published guidance](#).

At the time of inspection

Providers will share a link to an online survey to gather views from:

- learners at the provider
- employers using the services of the provider
- parents and carers of learners
- staff at the provider

You can [read the questions for each survey](#).

For college inspections, there will also be an online survey for the college's skills stakeholders.

There is more information about the main activities that our inspectors carry out when they inspect further education and skills providers in the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#).

At the end of the inspection or monitoring visit, inspectors will provide feedback to the nominee and senior leader so that the provider is clear about the grades/ judgements awarded, that the grades/ judgements awarded are provisional and, although unlikely, may be subject to change through moderation and quality assurance. Inspectors will also explain that the provider has an opportunity to raise any issues or concerns or to seek clarification about the inspection, and can also contact Ofsted

on the working day after the end of the inspection, if needed.

After the inspection visit

Following the inspection, the lead inspector will write a report outlining the findings of the inspection or monitoring visit. We will normally send providers this draft report within 18 working days of the end of the inspection.

We expect leaders to share the inspection outcome and findings with whoever they deem appropriate. Leaders may also share inspection outcomes, in confidence, with others, not involved with the provider, provided the information is not made public. This may include leaders' colleagues, family members, medical advisers, and/or their wider support group in confidence.

Providers will normally have 5 working days to comment on the draft report, inspection process and findings. The provider can highlight minor points relating to the clarity or factual accuracy of the report, or it can submit a formal complaint seeking a review of the inspection process, including the judgements made or concerns about inspector conduct. If it only submits minor points of clarity or factual accuracy, we will consider and respond to these when we share the final report with the provider, normally within 30 working days after the inspection. We will publish the final report on [our reports website](#) 5 working days after sending it to the provider.

After the inspection, we will invite providers to complete an online inspection survey. The survey asks for their views on the inspection process, including the impact that the inspection is likely to have in bringing about improvement.

Complaints about inspection

You should raise any complaints about the inspection immediately to the lead inspector.

If you are not able to resolve any issues during the inspection, or by contacting Ofsted the working day after inspection, you may want to [make a formal complaint](#).

We will respond to any complaint before we finalise and send the inspection report to the provider. If the provider has previously chosen to highlight some minor points of clarity or factual accuracy on the draft inspection report, it will not normally be able to submit a formal complaint or challenge later.

The grading scale for inspection judgements

Inspectors use a 4-point grading scale to make judgements during inspections:

- grade 1: outstanding
- grade 2: good
- grade 3: requires improvement
- grade 4: inadequate

Frequency of inspection

The information provided below is a brief guide to the frequency of inspection. For full details, including exceptions, please refer to the [‘Frequency of inspection’ section in the further education and skills inspection handbook](#).

New providers

New providers will normally have a monitoring visit within 18 months of being funded. They will then normally receive a full inspection within 18 months of the publication of the monitoring visit report.

Newly merged colleges

Newly merged colleges will normally receive a full inspection within 3 years of the merger. They may also receive a monitoring visit. They will normally receive a monitoring visit if we graded any of the predecessor colleges as requires improvement or inadequate at their last inspection. Newly merged colleges will not carry forward any inspection grades from predecessor colleges.

Providers judged outstanding

All providers judged outstanding for overall effectiveness at their most recent inspection are now subject to routine inspection and will be inspected by September 2025. Those judged to be outstanding at their previous inspection before September 2015 will normally receive a full inspection. We will prioritise these inspections. All outstanding further education colleges, sixth-form colleges, designated institutions and providers of apprenticeship training (of whatever type) will also receive a full inspection regardless of when they were last inspected. Any other type of outstanding provider that was last inspected after September 2015 will normally receive a short inspection.

Providers judged good

The inspection of a good provider will normally take place within 5 years of the publication of the previous inspection report (extended to 7 years where the suspension of routine inspections during the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on inspection activity) and certainly by September 2025. The inspection may be a full or a short inspection depending on the type of provider and/or if risks are identified.

A short inspection will be extended to become a full inspection if inspectors:

- do not have enough evidence that the provider remains good
- have concerns about effectiveness or safeguarding
- have not been able to gather sufficient evidence to arrive at an overall judgement
- have enough evidence of improved performance to strongly suggest that the provider may be outstanding

Providers judged as requires improvement

A provider judged as requires improvement will normally have a full re-inspection within 12 to 30 months of the publication of its previous inspection report. We will make a monitoring visit to the provider to assess progress with improvements before the full re-inspection. We will publish the progress judgements and findings from these visits.

Providers judged inadequate

We will monitor providers judged as inadequate and re-inspect them within 15 months of publication of their last full inspection report, but only if the provider continues to be funded, and if it remains on the register of apprenticeships training providers if its main funding is for apprenticeships training.

The first monitoring inspection will usually take place within 6 months of the publication date of the provider's most recent full inspection report, if the provider continues to be funded. A further visit may take place after the first monitoring visit and before the re-inspection.

Monitoring visits

A monitoring visit is an interim type of inspection to assess progress and risk and to encourage improvement.

On monitoring visits, inspectors arrive at progress judgements against themes.

These progress judgements are:

- insufficient progress
- reasonable progress
- significant progress

There will be no learner, employer, parent/carer or staff surveys for monitoring visits. Otherwise, monitoring visits are similar to other inspections and they result in a published report.

If you are a new and directly funded provider of education or training, you will normally receive a monitoring visit first, and normally within 18 months of starting to deliver.

The themes covered will be:

- leadership and management
- quality of training/education
- safeguarding

Each theme will have a progress judgement made against it.

We also carry out monitoring visits:

- to newly merged colleges
- to providers judged to require improvement
- in certain circumstances, to providers judged to be inadequate
- if we have identified a significant cause for concern

Short inspections of further education and skills providers

A short inspection will be carried out by one or more inspectors over 1 or 2 days, depending on the size and type of provider.

Inspectors will start a short inspection assuming that the provider remains at its current grade (either good or outstanding). They will test this during the inspection through their inspection activities and talking to leaders, managers and governors.

Inspectors will judge whether or not:

- the provider continues to provide the same quality of education/training for learners (either good or outstanding)

as at their previous inspection

- safeguarding is effective
- careers education and guidance are of a good quality
- leaders, managers and governors have the capacity to make continued improvement and manage change well

The report will record the 2 main judgements on quality of education or training and safeguarding and summarise the findings of the short inspection.

A short inspection report will not:

- make individual graded judgements
- change the provider's overall effectiveness grade

The short inspection will be extended to a full inspection if inspectors:

- do not have enough evidence that the provider remains good/outstanding (as applicable)
- have concerns about effectiveness or safeguarding
- have not been able to gather sufficient evidence to arrive at an overall judgement
- have enough evidence of improved performance of a currently good provider to strongly suggest that the provider may be outstanding

Information you may need to share with inspectors

We do not expect you to prepare anything extra for inspectors.

You should make the following documents available to inspectors, where relevant:

- lists of learners, their types of provision, subject areas and locations
- lesson, session and workshop timetable information
- staff details
- the current self-assessment report or equivalent and any evaluation of the impact of actions taken to date
- recent data on learners' outcomes, performance and progress
- details of employers and subcontractors

If any of the information is available before the inspection, you can upload it to the inspection portal. The notification of inspection letter includes instructions on using the portal.

Seeking the views of learners, employers, parents, carers, staff and stakeholders

Providers should send survey links to learners, employers, staff and parents so that they can give their views when they are notified of an inspection. In the case of further education colleges, sixth-form colleges and designated institutions inspections, providers should also send survey links to skills stakeholders. This does not apply to monitoring visits.

The links to the surveys will be included in the provider's inspection notification letter.

You can [read the questions for each survey](#).

There will be no learner, parent or carer, employer, stakeholder, or staff surveys for monitoring visits.

Full inspections of further education and skills providers

The [education inspection framework](#) sets out the principles that apply to inspection and the main judgements that inspectors make.

Under the [education inspection framework](#), inspectors will make judgements on the following areas:

- the quality of education
- behaviour and attitudes
- personal development
- leadership and management

They will also grade the following types of provision, when appropriate:

- education programmes for young people
- adult learning programmes
- apprenticeships
- provision for learners with high needs

These will contribute to the judgement about the overall effectiveness of the provider.

Inspectors will also make a judgement about the effectiveness of the arrangements for safeguarding learners.

In the case of inspections of further education colleges, sixth-form colleges and designated institutions, inspectors will also

make a worded sub-judgement on the college's contribution to meeting skills needs.

The quality of provision for learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is also always considered on inspection.

Information you may need to share with inspectors

We do not expect you to prepare anything extra for inspectors.

You should make the following information available, where relevant:

- details of the courses or programmes you are delivering and their mode of delivery
- timetables for lessons, sessions and workshops or other learning activities during the week
- a list of staff and a diagram of the organisational structure
- the geographical spread of training premises and learners, particularly work-based learners and apprentices, according to regions or sub-regions
- the names and location of employers
- the names and location of subcontractors
- contact information for key staff
- the current number of learners in the following age groups: 14 to 16; 16 to 18; 19+
- the current overall number of learners, excluding apprentices, at level 1 or below, level 2, level 3 and level 4/5, by subject area
- the current number of intermediate, advanced and higher-level apprentices, according to age groups: 16 to 18, 19 to 24, and 25+, by subject area and by apprenticeship framework or standard
- the current number of learners following employability programmes or Skills Bootcamps and those who have attended in the previous 12 months
- details of learners who are on a study programme but who are not working towards a substantial qualification
- the current number of learners following traineeships and those who have attended in the previous 12 months
- the current number of learners on community learning programmes and those who have attended in the previous 12 months
- the current number of learners with SEND and the number of learners that receive high-needs funding, and their particular needs

If any of the information is available before the inspection, you can upload it onto the inspection portal. The notification of inspection letter includes instructions on using the portal.

Seeking the views of learners, employers, parents, carers, staff and stakeholders

Providers should send survey links to learners, employers, staff and parents so they can give their views when they are notified of an inspection. In the case of colleges, providers should also send survey links to stakeholders. This does not apply to monitoring visits.

The links to the surveys will be included in the provider's inspection notification letter.

You can [read the questions for each survey](#).

Your views on the inspection

After the inspection, we will ask for your views on the inspection process, including any impact that it may have in making improvements.

We will use your responses to help keep us informed about the quality and impact of inspections. It will also help guide us in reviewing and improving the inspection process.

Further guidance

For more detailed guidance and explanation, you should read the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#). This explains how inspections and monitoring visits are carried out (in part 1) and how inspectors make judgements (in part 2). It also contains the criteria and grade descriptors inspectors use when making their judgements. There is a section on monitoring visits in part 1 and a section on short inspections at the end of part 1.

The [education inspection framework](#) sets out the principles that apply to inspection and the main judgements that inspectors make.

Privacy notice

Any information we gather during the inspection will be used as set out in our [privacy notice](#).

Contact us

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
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M1 2WD

Helpline: 0300 123 1231

[Contact Ofsted](#)

Survey for learners

The provider will share a link to the survey during inspection.

You will be asked to respond to statements with one of the following options:

- strongly agree
- agree
- neither agree nor disagree
- disagree
- strongly disagree

Statements:

- My course or programme meets my needs
- I receive the support I need
- I am treated fairly by the college's or organisation's staff
- Lessons and training sessions are delivered in a way that helps me build on my existing knowledge
- I am given feedback that helps me to improve
- My course or programme is preparing me for what I want to do next
- I have access to the resources that I need to do well on my course or training
- The college or organisation has created a safe, disciplined and positive environment for me to learn
- I am well informed by the college or organisation about the career choices available to me and understand what I need to do to succeed in my chosen career
- I am able to give my views about things that affect me and feel listened to

You will also be asked:

- Would you recommend this college or organisation to a friend? (Yes or No)
- What does the college or organisation do well? (free text)
- What could your college/organisation do to improve? (free text)
- What is it like to be a learner at this college or organisation? (free text)

Survey for employers

The provider will share a link to the survey during inspection.

You will be asked to respond to statements with one of the following options:

- strongly agree
- agree
- neither agree nor disagree
- disagree
- strongly disagree

Statements:

- Your employees are acquiring the knowledge, skills and behaviours that they need for their chosen next steps
- This provider communicates well with my organisation to ensure that there are good links between the training my employees receive at work and with the provider
- This provider works well with my organisation to review individual employees' progress and to plan their future training needs
- This provider delivers training that is up to date, relevant and meets industry standards

You will also be asked:

- Would you recommend this provider to other employers? (Yes or No)
- What does the provider do well? (free text)
- What could the provider do to improve? (free text)

Survey for parents, carers and learners

The provider will share a link to the survey during inspection.

You will be asked to respond to the statements with one of the following options:

- strongly agree
- agree
- neither agree nor disagree
- disagree
- strongly disagree

Statements:

- I would recommend this college or provider to another parent, carer or learner
- The college or provider responds well to any concerns that I have
- Teachers give my son, daughter or the person that I am caring for regular helpful feedback about their work and how well they are doing
- My son, daughter or the person I am caring for receives the support they need to help them to complete their course or programme

Survey for staff

Your employer will share a link to the survey during inspection.

You will be asked to select your role:

- leader
- manager
- teacher, trainer, lecturer, tutor or assessor
- support staff, teaching
- support staff, other

You will be asked to respond to the statements with one of the following options:

- strongly agree
- agree
- neither agree nor disagree
- disagree
- strongly disagree

Statements:

- I am proud to be a member of staff at this provider
- The college/organisation is well led and managed
- Leaders motivate me to take pride in my work and do my best

- I receive sufficient professional development which makes me more effective in my work
- Leaders and managers are considerate of my workload and well-being
- Learners are supported to develop positive attitudes to learning and work
- Safeguarding arrangements are effective at this provider

You will also be asked:

- If you do not think safeguarding arrangements are effective, please explain the ways in which they are not effective (free text)
- What are the main strengths of your provider? (free text)
- What could your provider do to improve? (free text)

Survey for stakeholders (full inspections of further education colleges, sixth-form colleges and designated institutions only)

You will be asked which category best describes your organisation/business:

- Large-sized employer/business
- Small- or medium-sized employer/business
- Local/regional government-related
- Community
- Education/training provider
- None of the above

You will be asked to respond to the statements with one of the following options:

- strongly agree
- agree
- neither agree nor disagree
- disagree
- strongly disagree
- not applicable


Statements:

- This college engages well with my organisation/business
- This college contributes well to meeting skills needs in my area
- This college is clear what the skills needs of my area are

- This college involves my organisation in the design and/or implementation of their courses

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