

A focus on improvement: proposals for further education and skills system inspections from September 2009

Consultation document

We have reviewed arrangements for the inspection of the FE and skills system to ensure that they are coherent and well matched to the needs of the user and the quality of the service, and that they develop our ability to target inspection where it will make the most difference. Our proposals for a revised Common Inspection Framework and for the inspection of colleges, work-based learning and nextstep from September 2009 are set out in this consultation document.

The closing date for the consultation is 27 January 2009.

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Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE
T 08456 404040

www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Inspection provides an independent, external evaluation of the quality and standards of a college or provider. It aims to raise standards and improve outcomes for children, young people and adults and the quality of their lives.

The published inspection report tells the provider, (school, college, training provider, employer, local authority, charitable organisation), users (learners, parents/carers, employers,) and the wider community about the quality of education offered and whether learners achieve as much as they can. The findings from the inspection provide information to users about how well the college or provider compares with others locally and nationally, and sets out what needs to be done to improve.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector's Annual Report to Parliament on the quality and standards of education in England is based on all the inspections conducted in the previous year, including those that focus on themes across the system.² This 'state of the nation' report ensures that inspection drives improvement in policies, as well as in individual colleges and providers. Inspection also provides a unique opportunity to highlight, disseminate and validate the good practice that is found in the system.

If you would like a version of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 08456 404040, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

¹ nextstep offers face-to-face help and support about training, learning and the world of work (www.nextstep.org.uk).

² The Annual Reports are available via our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research.

Introduction and background to consultation

1. The further education (FE) and skills system is a generic term for all provision in the learning and skills sector. This includes colleges, work-based learning providers, adult and community learning provision, offender learning and skills, nextstep and Department for Work and Pensions-funded provision, including employability programmes.

The purpose of the consultation

2. The current cycle of inspections for colleges, work-based learning providers and nextstep comes to an end in the summer of 2009. We have therefore reviewed arrangements for the inspection of the FE and skills system – including information, advice and guidance – to ensure that they are coherent and well matched to the needs of the user and the quality of the service, and that they develop our ability to target inspection where it will make the most difference. Our proposals for a revised Common Inspection Framework and for the inspection of colleges, work-based learning and nextstep from September 2009 are set out in this consultation document.³

Ofsted requirements and priorities

3. The Education and Inspections Act 2006 established the new Ofsted.⁴ It requires us to carry out our work in ways that encourage the services we inspect and regulate to:
 - improve
 - be user-focused
 - be efficient and effective.
4. The Act requires the Chief Inspector to devise a framework for the inspection of the FE and skills system, including a common set of principles applicable to all inspections of FE and training.
5. Our strategic plan sets out the ways in which we will meet these requirements.⁵ In our strategic plan we set out our intentions to ensure that inspection has more impact on outcomes for learners of all ages and to make inspection more coherent, rigorous and proportionate.

³ The current framework is on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/2434.

⁴ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2006/ukpga_20060040_en_1.

⁵ *Raising standards, improving lives: The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills Strategic Plan 2007–2010* (070179), Ofsted, 2007; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070179.

Inspection of the FE and skills system

6. Ofsted is responsible for the inspection of education and training in England for learners over the age of 16, except those in higher education. In developing these inspection proposals we have taken account of the major policy developments affecting the FE and skills system. These include:
- Government changes that will drive different approaches to the commissioning and funding of learning for people pre-and post-19; this may require separate judgements for provision about outcomes for these two different groups
 - the recently published proposition from the FE and skills system for greater self-regulation; this will require more assurance from inspection that the system has the capacity to self-improve and self-regulate, and that learners and employers will continue to be well served
 - the roll out of the Framework for Excellence⁶ for all providers in the FE and skills system, and in school sixth forms, and the need to use it intelligently in inspections
 - recognition of the greater emphasis on the empowerment of users as a result of public sector reforms; this will demand more attention to be paid to the interaction between users and services to promote improvement
 - the rising importance of locality leadership for many providers in the FE and skills system – especially colleges – where they are key players in the delivery of local priorities expressed in local and multi area agreements; this will require inspection outcomes that will relate to a provider's contribution to the priorities of local areas
 - the critical importance of employability skills and progression onto sustainable employment and further learning as outcomes from many government-funded programmes, and the need to judge this alongside learner achievements
 - the introduction of new, more flexible qualifications where it may not be possible to measure outcomes in the traditional ways over easily defined timescales.

We had these developments and many other challenges in mind when we were devising the proposals for new inspection arrangements. If you have observations and suggestions that will enable us better to reflect the changing policy landscape, please include them in your consultation response.

⁶ <http://ffe.lsc.gov.uk/>.

The proposals in brief

What are the key differences between the current arrangements and the new proposals?

- Information on the performance of colleges and other providers will be risk assessed and adjusted annually to plan the inspection programme for the forthcoming year; this will include determining the focus and frequency of inspection. In this way, inspection will be proportionate to risk.
- Satisfactory colleges and other providers will have an inspection at least every four years. High-performing providers may have up to six years between inspections. The outcomes of the annual risk assessment can bring forward or delay the next inspection.
- A health check based on risk assessment will be produced within three years after an inspection. This will be published on our website.
- The use of performance indicators from the Framework for Excellence within the risk assessment.
- The Common Inspection Framework 2009 will build on the current framework, which is used by schools and the FE and skills system.⁷ This will allow some comparison and continuity, but there are some key differences. The Common Inspection Framework 2009 has:
 - a greater focus on how colleges and providers meet users' needs
 - a greater focus on learning through teaching, training and assessment
 - grades for equality and diversity, safeguarding and value for money that will contribute to the judgement on leadership and management
 - more emphasis on the Every Child Matters outcomes where appropriate⁸
 - an increased focus on the progress made by different groups of learners
 - the introduction of limiting judgements that will affect the maximum grade which can be achieved for some aspects. Judgements are expressed in the words outstanding, good, satisfactory and inadequate.
 - a strengthened approach to judging capacity to improve, in recognition of the FE and skills system's drive for self regulation.
- The Common Inspection Framework 2009 will provide the basis for all inspections of FE and skills system provision from September 2009.
- The notice periods for inspection will be reduced. We will use pilots to explore if no notice inspections are feasible.

⁷ The current framework is on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/2434.

⁸ www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/aims/.

- Inspections of provision for 14–19-year-olds in colleges, training providers and the third sector⁹ will be aligned wherever possible with inspections of schools to provide a fuller picture of the impact of 14 to 19 reforms in an area.
- Inspections of individual colleges and providers will enable a coherent set of judgements to be made for both pre- and post-19 provision.
 - Where appropriate there will be differentiating judgements.
 - A coherent set of judgements will provide respective funding bodies, commissioners and departments with a clear picture of performance in their areas of interest.
- The avoidance of duplication and multiple inspection visits will be a priority in inspection planning, including arrangements for inspecting sub-contracted work and provision delivered through consortia.
- Changes to reports to include more detailed recommendations and to make them more useful for learners and other users.

Current practices that will continue

7. Learners, employers, colleges and providers in the FE and skills system have told us that many aspects of inspections are of benefit; therefore many features will be carried forward into the new methodology. These include:
 - the use of the same four-point grading scale
 - a strong focus on self-assessment and the engagement of a nominee in the inspection process
 - high priority being given to achievement and standards
 - those providers judged to be inadequate being subject to a full or partial reinspection
 - continued work with partners in the FE and skills system to share information and intelligence and to use recognised and transparent methods of analysing data in order to streamline inspection planning and practice.

⁹ The third sector is the voluntary or not-for-profit sector and includes voluntary and community organisations, charities, social enterprises, cooperatives and mutuals. A mutual is a member-owned business either for their benefit or that of their communities. For further reading visit www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector.aspx.

Why change the inspection of the FE and skills system?

An increased focus on improvement

8. Our strategic plan states that we will focus inspections on those providers and issues where they will have the most impact on improving outcomes for learners. We have set ourselves challenging targets for improvement. We intend to:
 - help reduce the number of learners receiving inadequate provision
 - help increase the number of good and outstanding colleges and providers
 - have a positive impact on the quality of those colleges and providers that we inspect
 - ensure that the colleges and providers which we inspect meet the needs of all learners through effective promotion of equality, diversity and social inclusion
 - ensure that our inspections take account of users' views and expect providers to do the same
 - publish inspection reports that are even clearer and more concise in ways that are more accessible to users
 - make explicit judgements in all our reports on the value for money delivered by colleges and providers.
9. Since 2005 and the focus on self-assessment in inspection we have noticed increasing confidence in the ways in which colleges and providers use performance data to establish their priorities and evaluate their progress.
10. Nevertheless, standards need to improve for the FE and skills system if England is going to compare favourably with the best in the world. In fact, the skills gap remains a cause for concern. Not only that, but the gap between outcomes for specific groups of young people and adults remains too large. Government policy sets out ambitious goals for the achievement of global skills. How do we reduce the number of people who do not have the necessary skills and knowledge to reach their social and economic potential?
11. Our increased monitoring of those colleges and providers where we have concerns, including a number of providers that we judged to be satisfactory, is paying off. Inspection can be a powerful lever for improvement.
12. These are encouraging signs, but there is still a long way to go. Although many of these colleges and providers go on to become good and outstanding, too many remain as satisfactory or fall back and become inadequate. As the sector aspires to be world class, and to establish effective self-regulation, then further improvement is essential. The key challenges are to improve the weakest and to prevent those that are improving from slipping back.

13. We want to continue to reduce the scale of inspection for the best colleges and providers to enable us to focus our efforts where they are most required. Since 2005 some colleges and providers have received a lighter touch inspection, with fewer inspectors in organisations for a shorter time. These were organisations with performance data, previous inspection outcomes and local intelligence which indicated that their provision was likely to be highly effective.
14. These lighter touch inspections have demonstrated that it is possible for us to use the information we hold to identify whether each college or provider can have a longer period between inspections or not. For example, many of those currently identified for a light touch inspection are judged by inspectors to be either good or outstanding. We believe that we are now in a position to identify more precisely what type of inspection is needed and when.

Putting learners first

15. We are aware that, in some inspections, we have not always got to the heart of the learner's experience. We want to do more to gain learners' views and spend more time with learners while on inspection. We have therefore enhanced the focus on learners in the Common Inspection Framework 2009.
16. In judging any provider, a number of basic questions need to be asked. The most fundamental are below.
 - How effective and efficient is the provider in meeting the reasonable needs of learners and users?
 - What is the provider's capacity to make and sustain improvements?
 - How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?
 - What is the quality of provision?
 - How well do learners learn, achieve and progress?

The Common Inspection Framework 2009 will provide more detail on each of these questions. The inspection handbook will include further guidance.

17. See Annex A for a summary of the Common Inspection Framework 2009.

The changes to inspections in the FE and skills system in detail

Inspections will be more proportionate to risk and focused on improvement

18. Inspections that are proportionate to risk have been received positively by the sector. The introduction of these inspections reflects the national move towards self-regulation. In the new proposals the frequency and type of inspection will be even more proportionate to risk and focused on improvement. Most providers will generally have an inspection every four years, but for high-performing providers the time between inspections could be up to six years. If a provider's performance is weak or faltering, or if a provider is new, they could be inspected more frequently than every four years.
19. The identification of colleges and providers to be inspected will be based on an analysis of risk using the information available about the college or provider's performance. A large amount of this information is already in the public domain. This will include outcomes from the Framework for Excellence.
20. An annual risk assessment will be undertaken that will utilise information about each college or provider's performance. Early work suggests that indicators for this risk assessment will include:
 - information from the previous inspection
 - success rates for a range of qualifications and frameworks
 - outcomes from the Framework for Excellence, including user views
 - progress data
 - trend data over the last three years
 - findings from survey visits
 - analysis of the self-assessment report
 - how long the provider has been established
 - any significant changes to the type of provision and learner numbers.

The risk assessment will inform inspection planning and determine when a provider should be inspected. It will also provide information for the focus of the inspection.

- Q1. The use of inspection resource will be proportionate to risk. Prioritised areas will include satisfactory and inadequate provision, and provision that has not been previously inspected.*

Do you agree that the range of indicators used to prioritise inspection activity is appropriate?

Q2. Most colleges and providers will be inspected every four years. Following annual risk assessments, some high-performing colleges and providers may have a gap of six years between inspections.

Do you agree that a gap of six years between inspections for high-performing colleges and providers is appropriate?

The health check

21. Six years is a long time between inspections even for the best colleges and providers.
22. To deal with this we will carry out a health check of a college or provider within three years of their last inspection visit to report on their progress.
23. We will base the health check on the information used in the annual risk assessment. An inspector will analyse this information. and report to the college or provider in a letter. This letter will be published on our website.

Q3. Do you agree with the proposals for a published health check?

The Framework for Excellence

24. The Framework for Excellence is currently being introduced in all colleges and work-based learning providers. It is planned that it will be extended to all Learning and Skills Council-funded provision by 2011. Pilots in school sixth forms are planned for 2009.
25. The Framework for Excellence consists of three performance dimensions: responsiveness, effectiveness and finance.¹⁰ Each dimension contains two or three key performance areas that the sector has agreed are the main constituents of performance within the dimension. The grades or points values arising from each key performance area support the calculation of a single grade for each of the three dimensions. The overall performance rating is calculated by combining the three dimension grades or points values.
26. Where appropriate, we plan to use the Framework for Excellence performance measures as a source of evidence for the annual risk assessment. These measures will also contribute to the health check. In addition, where appropriate, inspectors will take into account the Framework for Excellence measures during inspection: they will form a part of the evidence that inspectors will consider when forming their judgements. Annex A is a summary

¹⁰ Further reading about the dimensions is on the Framework for Excellence site:
<http://ffe.lsc.gov.uk/key-performance-areas/>.

of the Common Inspection Framework 2009 and indicates where the current Framework for Excellence measures may contribute to inspectors' judgements.

Q4. *Do you agree with the ways in which we propose to use the performance measures from the Framework for Excellence?*

The different types of inspection that a provider might receive under the proposed changes

27. The following table sets out the frequency and type of inspection that a provider might receive under the proposed changes:

Inspection type	Triggered by	Aims
Health check	Within three years of the last inspection if no inspection is planned.	Based on the evidence from the annual risk assessment. To be summarised in a letter to the provider, published on the Ofsted website.
Inspection	At least four yearly for those graded satisfactory overall and for new providers. For high-performing providers, up to six years between inspections. This is dependent on results from the risk assessment.	To inspect all aspects of the Common Inspection Framework 2009 across the range of provision at the provider. To carry out a single inspection event where possible: for example, a FE college with boarding and nursery provision. Increased emphasis on teaching and learning, the learner journey, users' views, value for money, Every Child Matters themes, vulnerability, safeguarding. A report will be published on the Ofsted website.
Focused monitoring visit (FMV)	Normally within two years for providers with both : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ satisfactory grade for overall effectiveness and ■ satisfactory or less grade for capacity to improve. All providers may have focused visit(s) based on annual	All FMVs will be thematic in approach. The themes will be informed by the annual risk assessment and the previous inspection outcomes. There will be a focus on capacity to improve. Themes could also include new areas of work like Train to Gain ¹¹ , accuracy of the self-assessment report, vulnerable groups of learners, good practice/survey visits. There will be an increased emphasis on teaching and learning, the learner journey and users' views. A report will be published on the Ofsted website.

¹¹ www.traintogain.gov.uk.

	risk assessment.	
Survey inspection visits	Survey inspection visits will take place at a selected number of colleges and providers each year including those judged outstanding or good.	The survey programme will include a rolling programme of surveys of sector subject area and surveys based on topics linked to national priorities. Each provider will have a report that will include judgements and a grade. A report will be published on the Ofsted website.

For colleges or providers found to be inadequate

Reinspection monitoring visit (RMV)	All providers with an inadequate overall grade or inadequate grade for an aspect from the last inspection will have a monitoring visit. These will take place six to eight months after the last full inspection.	To inspect themes identified through the previous inspection. There will be two mandatory themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ outcomes for learners ■ focus on a provider's capacity to improve, including the self-assessment and improvement planning process. The remaining themes will focus on progress since the last inspection. Although they may include a check that areas of strength are being maintained, the emphasis should be on identified areas for improvement and recommendations from the previous report.
Following a reinspection monitoring visit an inadequate provider will either have		
a) a partial reinspection	Inadequate grade for an aspect from the last full inspection. Will take place 12 to 15 months after the most recent full inspection.	To focus on the aspects of provision judged inadequate at the last full inspection. This will also focus on a provider's capacity to improve. A report will be published on the Ofsted website.
b) a full reinspection	Inadequate overall grade. Will take place 12 to 15 months after the last full inspection.	To inspect all aspects of the Common Inspection Framework across all remits. This will also focus on a provider's capacity to improve. A report will be published on the Ofsted website.

What does this mean for colleges and providers?

28. These different types of inspection will be used depending on the outcomes of inspection and the annual risk assessment. The type of inspection activity will be proportionate to risk and selected according to the level of performance of the college or provider.

For high-performing colleges and providers

29. A high-performing college or provider will have an annual risk assessment to review if its performance has improved or been maintained at high levels since the last full inspection. As explained in the health check section on page 12, if the risk assessments show that performance remains at high levels, then the college/provider will receive a health check within three years of the last full inspection. All colleges and providers will have an inspection within six years of their last full inspection. A sample of high-performing colleges and providers will be inspected every year.

For satisfactory colleges and providers

30. A provider that was awarded satisfactory for overall effectiveness and good or better for capacity to improve during its inspection would have a full inspection within four years of its last full inspection if the annual risk assessment revealed that its performance has stayed the same or declined. If the risk assessment demonstrated that the provider's performance was improving significantly, then their inspection could take place more than four years after their last full inspection and they would receive a health check within three years of their last full inspection.
31. We define 'satisfactory, not improving' as a provider graded satisfactory for overall effectiveness and satisfactory or inadequate for capacity to improve. If a provider was found to be 'satisfactory not improving' at its last inspection it would also receive a focused monitoring visit within two years of inspection following an annual risk assessment. This focused visit would include a review of their capacity to improve. The interval between full inspections will be up to four years for these providers.

For inadequate providers

32. A provider that was awarded an inadequate grade for overall effectiveness will receive a reinspection monitoring visit within six to eight months of the last full inspection to assess the progress that is being made. This will be followed by a full reinspection within 12 to 15 months of the last full inspection.
33. Providers that were awarded an inadequate grade for an aspect at the last full inspection will receive a reinspection monitoring visit within six to eight months and a partial reinspection within 12 to 15 months of the last full inspection.

Q5. Inspection visits differ according to the risk associated with each college and provider.

Do you agree that the proposals for targeting inspection at satisfactory and inadequate colleges and providers are appropriate?

Common Inspection Framework 2009

34. The new proposals retain many of the features of the current arrangements, such as the use of self-assessment as the starting point of the inspection, and interviews with staff, learners, governors and others. There will, however, be a greater focus on some issues of particular importance.

The achievement of specific groups of learners

35. Attention will focus on whether particular groups of learners are achieving as well as they should, including the most able and those whose circumstances make them vulnerable. We will specifically judge how well a college or provider fulfils its duties in terms of equality and diversity and the impact on learner achievements. Inspectors will use a range of data and other information to help them make judgements about the achievement of different groups of learners.

Q6. Do you agree that inspectors should focus more attention on the achievement of different groups of learners?

Engaging with users

36. Inspectors will make a judgement about how well the college or provider engages with its users. In this context users can include learners, employers and parents or carers. Inspectors will explore how well colleges and providers engage with users to bring about improvements. This will include:

- the mechanisms that they use to communicate with users
- the actions that are identified
- the impact made and the effectiveness of feedback to users
- the college or provider's learner engagement strategy, where appropriate.

There will be a wider range of inspection activities that involve collecting and using the views of learners, employers and partners. These may include emails, focus groups, on-site interviews and telephone interviews. Other initiatives to be explored during the pilot inspections include the development of a role for learner representatives.

Q7. *Do you agree with the range of activities that inspectors will undertake to:*

- *gather the views of learners and other users?*
- *explore how well the provider engages with users to bring about improvements?*

Capacity to improve

37. A significant judgement arising from inspection will be the overall effectiveness of the college or provider. However, given the system's aspirations for greater self-regulation, more emphasis will be placed on the capacity of the provider to improve than is currently the case. Self-assessment is important: a college or provider that does not know its own strengths and weaknesses is unlikely to be able to put in place well-targeted plans that lead to improvement. The judgement for capacity to improve will continue to include an assessment of the effectiveness of the steps taken to improve the provision for learners since the last inspection. In addition, inspectors will look closely at performance management arrangements and targets that the provision is setting itself and its learners: they will consider whether these are sufficiently ambitious and realistic.

Q8. *Do you agree that inspection should take more account of the capacity to improve?*

Value for money

38. The Common Inspection Framework 2009 will provide more detailed criteria to enhance the inspection of value for money across all colleges and providers. Inspectors will address the question of how efficiently and effectively a provider uses and manages its available resources to meet the needs of its users and deliver value for money.

Every Child Matters

39. As sixth form colleges and many other aspects of 16 to 19 provision will be funded through local authorities as commissioners of provision, it is important that inspection assesses the contribution of colleges and providers to the Every Child Matters outcomes of being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being. We will adapt these outcomes for use in all inspections in the FE and skills system wherever appropriate and they will contribute to judgements that inform the main grade of outcomes for learners. We will use the term Every Citizen Matters as Every Child Matters does not apply to many adult learners.

Limiting grades

40. We are examining the concept of limiting grades.
41. These are grades in a given area that will impose a limit on a grade that may be awarded elsewhere. For example, a judgement of inadequate for equality and diversity might mean that the judgement for overall effectiveness would be limited to no better than satisfactory. We believe the judgements that are so important in the delivery of learning and skills and are appropriate to be applied in this way are those for safeguarding, equality and diversity and capacity to improve.
- Q9. Do you agree with the concept of limiting grades in relation to safeguarding, equality and diversity, and capacity to improve, which would affect the judgement on overall effectiveness?*

Changes to the inspection methodology

42. In our revised inspection methodology we are seeking a broader range of evidence including teaching, learning and by following the learners' journey throughout their time with the college/provider. We realise that there have been concerns from the sector about the amount of direct evidence that can be gathered from our short inspections. We therefore wish to spend more time looking at the experience of learners while on inspection.
43. We are seeking to revise our methodology to ensure that inspectors will spend more time with learners: observing teaching and learning and reviewing their work and the levels of support that they receive. We are proposing two models of inspection and seek your views about which would be the most effective to get a clear picture of a provider from the learner's perspective. However judging the quality and reporting on sector subject areas remains important to inform the sector and to help colleges and providers to improve. This includes the sharing of good practice.

Option 1

- This model of inspection would apply to all inspections.
- The whole inspection team will spend a proportion of the inspection visiting a number of learning groups within the college or provider.
- At an early stage of the inspection they will follow a number of groups of learners that have been carefully chosen by inspectors to ensure the sample covered a wide range of the college or provider's work.
- The inspectors will focus on the quality of teaching and learning, standards of learners' knowledge, understanding and skills, support arrangements and the views of learners of the provision. They will gather evidence that will inform the

judgements in the key areas in the Common Inspection Framework 2009, but will not lead to a distinct or separate grade. We will visit some sector subject areas and sample teaching and learning, but there will be no grading of individual sector subject areas. We will identify the performance data from different sector subject areas in the published inspection report to help inform learners' and employers' choices.

- To enable us to gain a national picture of learning and outcomes in different sector subject areas, a rolling programme of subject area surveys will be undertaken and will draw from a representative sample of colleges and providers to ensure that the full spectrum of provision is visited. Each of these survey visits would result in a grade and judgements that we will include in a letter to the provider which we will also publish on our website. Inspectors will usually have specialist expertise and experience in the sector subject areas they inspect.

Option 2

44. The methodology laid out in Option 1 would be employed in all high-performing colleges and providers. Satisfactory and inadequate providers would be inspected as they are currently with a sample of sector subject areas being included in the inspection and the outcomes graded.

Q10. Do you agree with Option 1 in which inspectors inspect but do not grade sector subject areas and where whole system sector subject reports are published on a regular basis?

Q11. Do you agree with Option 2 in which inspectors grade sector subject areas in satisfactory and inadequate colleges and providers only?

Notice periods

45. Employers and learners have told us that they would welcome inspections where no notice is given to enable us to see the provision as it really is. Colleges tell us that the reduction in notice period for inspection has worked well: staff have been less stressed and the disruption caused by preparation for inspection has been reduced.
46. We would like to reduce notice periods to the shortest practicable length. In the past there have been difficulties in reducing notice periods further. However, with improvement in the data available we feel that notice periods can now be reduced. We would like to seek your views on these notice periods:
- one week for colleges
 - three weeks for work-based learning and nextstep providers.

47. In certain circumstances we feel that there is a need for unannounced inspections. For example, where we have received a complaint or have been notified about a safeguarding issue. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector has the authority to undertake inspections without prior notice.

Q12. We would like to introduce reduced notice periods of one week for colleges and three weeks for work-based learning and nextstep providers.

Do you agree with these proposals?

Q13. Do you agree that there is a place for unannounced inspections?

Aligned inspection

48. We know that many providers have felt that the burden of inspection has been too great when they have experienced a number of inspection visits for different remits that they offer. We aim to align inspection visits and maximise the value of inspection visits to providers by covering in a single inspection event all the government funded provision an institution provides.

49. Single inspection events may involve specialist inspectors or inspection teams with particular specialist expertise. For example, a provider that has work-based learning provision and also runs a workplace nursery could have both aspects inspected at the same time. We would also explore using a single inspection event to include all provision funded through different public bodies.

50. Many providers with contracts for government-funded training subcontract part of the provision to other providers. Similarly, some provision is delivered through a consortium, federation or partnership. When we inspect a provider, we would seek to inspect all government-funded provision, whether the provider receives a grant, holds a direct contract or is a sub-contractor or partner. In all contracting arrangements, we would seek to hold to account the lead contract holder for overall quality and delivery, as well as each of the partners for their individual, agreed, contributions.

Q14. Do you agree that there should be single inspection events where all aspects of a college's or provider's provision are subject to inspection at the same time where practical?

Inspection reports

51. We would like to ensure that our reports are clear, helpful and accessible to all users.

52. Proposals to revise the structure of inspection reports include:
- shorter reports
 - a summary report for learners and other users, including employers and community groups
 - sharper recommendations to promote improvement
 - these recommendations will focus on areas for improvement and satisfactory areas
 - a revised style with fewer paragraphs of text and a list of short sentences that highlight the main judgements
 - reports will be published on our website within 20 working days after the inspection.

Q15. Do you agree that there should be a summary report for users, including learners and employers, that also sets out what the college or provider should achieve?

Q16. Do you agree with the proposals to include recommendations which focus on areas where improvements are needed in inspection reports?

How would this work in practice for work-based learning providers?

53. Getting the practical detail right is important when devising new arrangements. We plan to pilot the following changes:

Before the inspection

- We intend to significantly reduce the bureaucracy and time spent preparing for inspection.
- An annual risk assessment using Framework for Excellence data.
- Up to three weeks' notice rather than 12 weeks.
- A detailed handbook and guidance on the new methodology.
- A requirement for providers to inform all their users of the inspection.
- Either a telephone call or visit to plan the inspection.
- Clear information about what providers will need to give lead inspectors before the inspection.

During the inspection

- We intend to significantly increase the involvement of learners and other users in inspections.
- A change in approach to gathering evidence that is focused on the main themes and is intended to ensure better coverage of all aspects of provision and groups of learners.
- Minimal provision of documentation for inspectors.
- Interviews with key managers.
- Increased emphasis on capacity to improve, safeguarding, value for money and equality and diversity.
- Wherever possible a single inspection event where the provider has more than one type of provision.
- A wider range of methods to evaluate teaching, learning and assessment.
- A proposed change in approach to grading provision that will not necessarily include sector subject area grades unless part of a survey visit.

After the inspection

- A revised report structure that is common to all reports on FE and skills system providers and includes recommendations.
- Report publication on our website within 20 working days after the inspection.

How would this work in practice for colleges?

54. Getting the practical detail right is important when devising new arrangements. We plan to pilot the following changes:

Before the inspection

- We intend to significantly reduce the bureaucracy and burden of preparing for inspection.
- An annual risk assessment using Framework for Excellence data.
- One week notice rather than three weeks.
- A detailed handbook and guidance on the new methodology.
- A requirement for providers to inform all their users of the inspection.
- Either a telephone call or a visit to plan the inspection.

- Clear information about what colleges will need to give lead inspectors before the inspection.
- No annual monitoring visits.

During the inspection

- We intend to significantly increase the involvement of learners and other users in inspections.
- We plan to have a greater focus on evaluating the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the full range of a college's provision.
- A change in approach to gathering evidence that is focused on the main themes and is intended to ensure better coverage of all aspects of provision and groups of learners.
- Minimal provision of documentation for inspectors.
- Interviews with key managers.
- A proposed change in approach to grading provision that will not necessarily include sector subject area grades unless part of a survey visit.
- Increased emphasis on capacity to improve, safeguarding, value for money and equality and diversity.
- Wherever possible a single inspection event where the provider has more than one type of provision.
- A wider range of methods to evaluate teaching, learning and assessment.
- Enhanced monitoring visits for outstanding colleges will be replaced by less frequent full inspections.

After the inspection

- A revised report structure that is common to all reports on FE and skills system providers and includes recommendations.
- Report publication on our website within 20 working days after the inspection.

How this would this work in practice for nextstep providers?

55. New contracts for nextstep provision were awarded to 10 providers across England in August 2008. These new providers will not have been inspected before under the new contracting arrangements. These 10 providers will all be inspected between September 2009 and March 2010 using the new methodology. They will have three weeks' notice of inspection. It is proposed that an inspector will visit to plan the inspection. All will have full inspections in the first instance.

56. Getting the practical detail right is important when devising new arrangements. We plan to pilot the following changes:

Before the inspection

- We intend to minimise the bureaucracy and time spent preparing for inspection.
- As these are new providers initially there will not be an annual risk assessment. This will be reviewed following the first round of inspections.
- Up to three weeks' notice.
- A detailed handbook and guidance on the new methodology.
- A requirement for providers to inform all their users of the inspection as practicable.
- Either a telephone call or visit to plan the inspection.
- Clear information about what providers will need to give lead inspectors before the inspection.
- We will work with the sector to develop appropriate data requirements in relation to clients' outcomes.

During the inspection

- A much stronger focus on gathering inspection evidence directly from clients.
- A change in approach to gathering evidence that is focused on the main themes and is intended to ensure better coverage of all aspects of provision and groups of clients.
- An emphasis on capacity to improve, safeguarding, value for money and equality and diversity.
- Minimal provision of documentation for inspectors.
- Interviews with key managers.

After the inspection

- A style of report that includes recommendations for improvements and is accessible by users.
- Report publication on our website within 20 working days after the inspection.

Conclusion

57. We are proposing changes which should ensure that inspection does more to drive improvement where it is most needed; takes greater account of the needs of those being inspected; targets resources where they will have the greatest impact on outcomes for learners; and uses resources as efficiently as possible.

58. In this consultation document we have proposed an approach that we believe will be effective, will drive greater improvement and will ensure that we are more user focused. Crucially, we also believe the improvements are achievable in a climate of reducing resources.
59. We look forward to receiving your comments. Annex B explains how you can tell us what you think.

Annex A. Summary of the Common Inspection Framework 2009

Section	Evaluation	Grading
Overall Effectiveness	How effective and efficient is the provider in meeting the reasonable needs of learners and users?	Overall grade
Capacity to Improve	<p>What is the provider's capacity to make and sustain improvements?</p> <p>How effective are the steps taken to improve the provision for learners since the previous inspection, as appropriate?</p> <p>How effective is the self-assessment process?</p> <p>How effective are the systems and actions to evaluate and improve the outcomes for learners?</p>	Limiting main grade
Leadership and management	<p>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</p> <p>How effectively do leaders and managers, and where appropriate governors or trustees, raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?</p> <p>How effective is the planning, management and delivery of learning and learning outcomes?</p> <p>How effectively does a provider actively promote equality and diversity and tackle unlawful and unfair discrimination? How effectively is the provider closing the achievement gap?</p> <p>How effectively does the provider ensure that learners are safe?</p>	<p>Main grade¹²</p> <p>Limiting contributory grade</p> <p>Limiting judgement</p>

¹² Inspection judgements will include reference to Framework for Excellence measures. These are shown here as text within square brackets.

	<p>How efficiently and effectively does the provider use and manage its available resources to meet the needs of its users and provide value for money?</p> <p>How effectively does the provider engage with users and partners to support and promote improvement?</p>	<p>Contributory grade [Framework for Excellence finance performance measures]</p> <p>Judgement [Framework for Excellence responsiveness performance measures]</p>
Quality of provision	<p>What is the quality of provision?</p> <p>How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?</p> <p>How well do programmes and activities meet the needs and interests of users?</p> <p>How effective are the guidance and support learners receive in helping them achieve?</p>	<p>Main grade</p> <p>Contributory grade</p> <p>Contributory grade</p> <p>Contributory grade</p>
Outcomes for learners	<p>How well do learners learn, achieve and progress?</p> <p>How well do learners progress throughout their programmes and achieve their learning goals?</p> <p>How well do learners increase their employability and economic well-being through learning and development?</p> <p>How well do learners take responsibility for their own health, safety and well being?</p> <p>Do learners feel safe?</p> <p>How well does the provision enable learners to contribute to the wider community?</p>	<p>Main grade</p> <p>[Framework for Excellence effectiveness performance measures]</p>

Contributory grades for leadership and management, quality of provision and outcomes for learners will be awarded, where appropriate for:

Remits of provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ work-based learning ■ adult and community learning ■ provision funded by the Department of Work and Pensions ■ nextstep ■ FE provision ■ offender learning
Age groups	14–16, 16–18, 19+

Annex B. The consultation

Consultation questions

We welcome your responses to this consultation paper. The consultation remains open until 27 January 2009.

There are three ways you can submit your responses to the questions and any other comments.

Online questionnaire

Visit our website to complete and submit the online questionnaire:

<http://85.234.135.179/index.php?sid=51732>.

By hand

The questionnaire in this version of the consultation document can be filled in by hand.

Copies are available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080132.

When you have completed the questionnaire, please post it to:

Focus on improvement consultation
Learning and Skills Inspection Development Project
8th floor
Ofsted
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE.

Onscreen

Visit our website to download the onscreen version of the consultation document:

www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080132. It has a questionnaire that you can complete on your computer.

When you have completed the questionnaire, please email it to lsdidp@ofsted.gov.uk. Please put 'Response to Focus on improvement consultation' in the subject line.

What happens next?

Who will be involved in developing the proposals and how?

These proposals have been informed by discussions with users, providers, partners and stakeholders during the past year. They reflect current and anticipated changes in the FE and skills system, and Government policies and priorities that have an impact on the system.

November 2008 to February 2009 will be the main period of consultation and will involve:

- external consultation events
- expert seminars involving users and key stakeholders
- an online consultation
- pilot inspections.

We will encourage and involve in the consultation learners, employers, providers and their representative bodies, government departments, agencies and other organisations with an interest in inspection and the FE and skills system.

Publication of responses

We will publish a summary of the key responses in March 2008.

Finalising inspection arrangements

Following the closure of the consultation, we will finalise inspection arrangements.

Outcomes of the consultation

In the spring of 2009 we will publish the outcomes of the consultation and final recommendations for the inspection of FE, work-based learning and nextstep provision.

Common Inspection Framework 2009

In the summer of 2009 we will publish the Common Inspection Framework 2009 for use in all inspections across the FE and skills system from 1 September 2009. It will be available from our website (www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Forms-and-guidance).

Handbook for inspectors

In the summer of 2009 we will publish the handbook for inspectors and it will be available from our website (www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Forms-and-guidance). We will hold dissemination and training events to support the handbook's publication.

New inspection methodologies and inspection arrangements

In September 2009 we will introduce new inspection methodologies and arrangements for inspection of colleges, work-based learning and nextstep.

There will be a further consultation in 2009/10; as a result of this we will introduce new methodologies for the inspection of adult and community learning and Department for Work and Pensions-funded provision in 2010.

The consultation questionnaire

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, shape policies and inform inspection and regulatory practice.

We will treat your identity in confidence, if you disclose it to us. However, we may publish an organisation's views.

Are you responding on behalf of an organisation?

Yes please complete Section 1

No please complete Section 2

Section 1

If you are completing the consultation on behalf of an organisation and would like us to consider publishing the views of your organisation, please indicate this below.

Organisation: _____

I represent:

- a college
 - a local authority
 - an independent training provider
 - a school
 - a specialist independent college
 - a nextstep contractor
 - another type of organisation
(please specify)
- _____

Section 2

I am:

- an adult learner/student/participant
 - an employer with
a Learning and Skills Council training contract
 - an employer without
a Learning and Skills Council training contract
 - a parent or carer
 - a member of the public
 - other
(please specify)
-
- prefer not to say

Q1. The use of inspection resource will be proportionate to risk. Prioritised areas will include satisfactory and inadequate provision, and provision that has not been previously inspected.

Do you agree that the range of indicators used to prioritise inspection activity is appropriate?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments

Q2. Most colleges and providers will be inspected every four years. Following annual risk assessments, some high-performing colleges and providers may have a gap of six years between inspections.

Do you agree that a gap of six years between inspections for high-performing colleges and providers is appropriate?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments

Q3. Do you agree with the proposals for a published health check?

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------

Comments

Q4. Do you agree with the ways in which we propose to use the performance measures from the Framework for Excellence?

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------

Comments

Q5. Inspection visits differ according to the risk associated with each college and provider.

Do you agree that the proposals for targeting inspection at satisfactory and inadequate colleges and providers are appropriate?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments

Q6. Do you agree that inspectors should focus more attention on the achievement of different groups of learners?

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------

Comments

Q7. Do you agree with the range of activities that inspectors will undertake to:

- gather the views of learners and other users?

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------

- explore how well the provider engages with users to bring about improvements?

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------

Comments

Q8. Do you agree that inspection should take more account of the capacity to improve?

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------

Comments

Q9. Do you agree with the concept of limiting grades in relation to safeguarding, equality and diversity, and capacity to improve, which would affect the judgement on overall effectiveness?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments

Q10. Do you agree with Option 1 in which inspectors inspect but do not grade sector subject areas and where whole system sector subject reports are published on a regular basis?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments

Q11. Do you agree with Option 2 in which inspectors grade sector subject areas in satisfactory and inadequate colleges and providers only?

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------

Comments

Q12. We would like to introduce reduced notice periods of one week for colleges, and three weeks for work-based learning and nextstep providers.

Do you agree with these proposals?

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------

Comments

Q13. Do you agree that there is a place for unannounced inspections?

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------

Comments

Q14. Do you agree that there should be single inspection events where all aspects of a college's or provider's provision are subject to inspection at the same time where practical?

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------

Comments

Q15. Do you agree that there should be a summary report for users, including learners and employers, that also sets out what the college or provider should achieve?

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------

Comments

Q16. Do you agree with the proposals to include recommendations which focus on areas where improvements are needed in inspection reports?

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------

Comments

What did you think of this consultation?

One of the commitments in our strategic plan is to monitor whether our consultations are accessible to those wishing to take part.

Please tell us what you thought of this consultation process by ticking the box for that which most closely represents how you feel about each of the statements below.

I found the consultation information clear and easy to understand.

- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Don't know

I had enough information about the consultation topic.

- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Don't know

I would take part in a future Ofsted consultation.

- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Don't know

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

Thank you for taking part in our consultation.

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 all responses are anonymous and you do not have to answer every question.**

Please tick the appropriate box.

1. Gender

Female <input type="checkbox"/>	Male <input type="checkbox"/>	Transgender <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	<input type="checkbox"/>
English	<input type="checkbox"/>
Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>
Scottish	<input type="checkbox"/>
Welsh	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (specify if you wish)	<input type="checkbox"/>

(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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6. Religion/Belief

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

7. Disability

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