

Ofsted's inspection workforce from September 2015

From September, Ofsted has made radical changes to the way it inspects schools, early years provision and further education and skills. We have introduced a common inspection framework for these remits and new shorter inspections for good schools and FE providers led by Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Alongside these reforms, we have also made major changes to the inspection workforce. This document aims to answer some of the common questions about our inspection workforce arrangements.

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Q1. What changes has Ofsted made to the inspection workforce?

We brought the management of our contracts with Additional Inspectors in-house, enabling us to have direct control over their selection, training and deployment. We have made no changes to our employment arrangements for Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI).

Because of the parallel changes to inspection, we required fewer contracted inspectors than employed by the previous three main contractors. This gave us the opportunity to tighten the selection criteria for the Ofsted Inspector (OI) role in terms of the experience, skills and minimum commitment we require. Those applicants who met our criteria were then invited to participate in a very stringent assessment process.

Consequently, we have also been able to increase the proportion of contracted inspectors who are serving practitioners – seven in 10 of our OIs are from good and outstanding schools and further education providers. Previously, just over half of our inspection teams included at least one practitioner with either current or very recent experience, but our longer-term ambition is to have a serving practitioner in every team.

We now have a pool of part-time OIs who'll each carry out more inspection days per year than was previously the case. We have worked hard to ensure that this is a manageable number for serving leaders who choose to inspect on our behalf as OIs.

Q2. Are all inspectors Ofsted employees?

No. OIs are not employed by the organisation as permanent staff. Ofsted contracts with these inspectors directly – rather than through a third-party organisation; they are registered with and trained by Ofsted to inspect schools and further education and skills provision.

HMI and Senior HMI are employed by Ofsted.

Q3. Does bringing inspection in-house provide value for money?

The primary objective of our reforms is not to reduce costs but to further increase the quality, consistency and impact of Ofsted's work. However, we have looked carefully at the new model and are confident that it also improves the value for money of inspection and that we can deliver within our existing budget.

Q4. How will the changes improve inspections?

Contracting with inspectors directly allows Ofsted to have overall control and flexibility over the end-to-end inspection process. We can provide a single consistent means of induction, mentoring and ongoing training across our entire workforce – continually driving up the quality of inspection.

The contracted OIs will have a much closer working relationship with the employed HMI and will be mentored by a link HMI in their region.

Q5. What are the benefits of having more serving practitioners on inspection teams?

By having an increased proportion of education professionals on our teams, we're enabling more people from the sectors to get involved in the inspection process.

Their familiarity of contemporary education practice will continuously refresh Ofsted's working knowledge and ensure that our inspections are of the quality that parents, learners and colleagues across the sectors rightly expect. This will increase the credibility and value of inspection with those we inspect.

The serving practitioners who inspect will gain first-hand insight into inspection, continuous professional development and closer working links with HMI. They'll be able to take the experience and lessons learnt from training and inspection back to the settings they lead, building capacity and expertise in the sector.

We're investing more time and resources in high-quality ongoing training and development so that all our inspectors are well equipped to conduct inspections – this training is free for OIs when they commit to a minimum number of days inspecting.

Those OIs who are serving practitioners will also be invaluable in helping us shape up inspection by drawing on their expertise of what works and what doesn't work in inspection from the point of view of providers.

Q6. How will Ofsted check the quality of the new inspectors' work?

We have built on the best aspects of our tried and tested quality assurance procedures and strengthened further the arrangements to monitor and improve the inspection process. We've set out clear quality standards that we expect all our employed and contracted inspectors to meet in different aspects of their roles, such as gathering evidence, determining judgements, communicating feedback clearly and writing strong, clear and accurate reports.

Our HMI will play an important mentoring role out in the field working alongside OIs and looking at inspection practice in greater detail. They will advise, support and give feedback to help colleagues improve if necessary and make inspections a more valuable experience.

We will quickly and fairly address substandard work, putting in place further training, support plans and action plans where needed. If quality does not improve, the likely result is that we will terminate an OI's contract.

Our quality assurance process will be continually reviewed to make sure that every one of the thousands of inspections we undertake each year is delivered to a high standard.

Q7. How will Ofsted guard against OIs who are serving practitioners advocating pre-conceived ideas from their own provision of what good or outstanding provision should look like?

This is addressed directly in our induction and training, which affirms that we are not prescriptive about what we expect to see during inspection. Our inspection framework, handbooks and inspection guidance and methodology are also very clear about inspectors seeking evidence on the impact of a provision in delivering the best possible education and improving outcomes for children and learners.

The increased opportunities for HMI and OIs to share their knowledge and evaluate experiences regularly will also ensure that inspections are of higher quality, more reliable and more consistent.

Q8. What if OIs who are serving practitioners inspect peers who may be friends, rivals or previous colleagues?

All of our inspectors have to follow a clear conflict of interest policy, to which they will be expected to stringently adhere. This policy explicitly seeks to ensure that inspectors are not involved in any inspection activity in schools and colleges with which they are associated or with leaders with whom they have current or previous links. Our training and induction, and our quality assurance and performance management arrangements ensure that inspection is objective and in line with Ofsted frameworks and policies.

Ofsted also has a transparent complaints process that we are strengthening further with the establishment of independent scrutiny panels.

Q9. What advice would Ofsted give to schools and colleges who enlist improvement services from consultants, whether previous Additional Inspectors or new OIs?

Clearly, it is a matter for individual schools and colleges how they choose to address their own improvement and development needs. However, Ofsted has repeatedly made it clear that the only necessary way to prepare for inspection is to be delivering a quality education.

Ofsted cannot prevent self-employed individuals (as some of our OIs will be) from legitimately obtaining other work. However, our contracts with OIs restrict them from calling themselves OIs when doing anything other than inspection activity for us. As such, we advise schools to exercise caution in recruiting any consultants who describe themselves as OIs. OIs are strictly prohibited from carrying out so-called 'mocksteds'.

Q10. Does Ofsted expect to undertake a further selection process for OIs?

We're delighted with the huge amount of interest in the OI role and are pleased to have sourced and trained more than 1,500 OIs to inspect schools, colleges and training providers across England. We are currently screening a further cohort of potential OIs who submitted Expressions of Interest over the summer months. This current activity will enable us to source more inspectors, particularly for roles where specialisms are required and ultimately further strengthen our overall OI resource. We will continue to assess our needs and publicise any further opportunities as they arise.

To find out more, including how to register your details so that we can contact you about these opportunities, visit the [Working for Ofsted](#) section of our website.