

Further education and skills inspections and outcomes

Methodology and Quality Report

Last updated: 8 December 2015

Introduction

This paper contains methodology and quality information relevant to Ofsted's six-monthly release on the outcomes of inspections of further education and skills providers. This release can be found at the following webpage:

www.gov.uk/government/collections/further-education-and-skills-inspection-outcomes

The official statistics release covers inspections of all further education and skills providers in England wholly or partly funded by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) or Education Funding Agency (EFA). The release reports on the outcomes of further education and skills inspections that were conducted within the relevant period. The release also includes the most recent inspection outcomes for all open and funded providers that have been inspected, as at the end of the period. This provides a picture of the overall quality of the further education and skills sector as indicated by inspection outcomes.

This methodology and quality report should be read in conjunction with the background notes contained within the statistical first release as those notes might include information that is not in this report.

Methodology

Data in this official statistics series are from inspections conducted under part 8 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 – see www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/40/contents

Further detail on the dates of inspections included can be found within the release. If an inspection report is not published by the cut-off date given in the release then the previous inspection will be reported as a provider's most recent inspection where applicable. Data are presented and analysed in two ways:

- Inspections that have occurred within the reporting period where published by the given date.
- The most recent inspection outcome of open and funded providers as at the end of the reporting period as well as those providers inspected within the year which have since closed or lost funding.

When preparing the Official Statistics, data for the relevant period are extracted from a database containing historical inspection judgements and manipulated and analysed in Excel. Data are

presented in the form of tables and charts showing the performance of further education and skills providers in the current academic year and at their most recent inspection.

Ofsted also publish monthly management information on the outcomes of further education and skills inspections. There is a difference between the length of time between the end of the reporting period, and the publication cut-off date used for this official statistics release and that used for the management information. As the official statistics report key findings, it is important to ensure that most of the reports of inspections undertaken within the reporting period have been published in order to minimise bias. However, the management information does not report key findings so the most up-to-date information possible is published.

Under exceptional circumstances, Ofsted may withhold/withdraw publication of an inspection report. Outcomes of withheld/withdrawn inspection reports are not included in the statistics.

Ofsted does not include analysis of data at local authority level in these statistics, as the number of further education and skills providers in each is relatively small and caution should be taken in drawing conclusions from these figures.

The further education and skills statistics are updated twice a year. Inspections up to the end of February are published in June each year, while inspections over the whole year up to the end of August are published in December each year. Further data over time is published at dataview.ofsted.gov.uk

Provider types

The statistical release reports on the inspection outcomes of further education and skills providers in England wholly or partly funded by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) or Education Funding Agency (EFA). These providers include:

- further education colleges, sixth form colleges and independent specialist colleges
- dance and drama colleges
- independent learning providers
- community learning and skills providers: local authorities, specialist designated institutions and not-for-profit organisations
- employer providers
- higher education institutions providing further education
- prime contractors for the National Careers Service
- 16 to 19 academies and free schools.

The different types of provision inspected include:

- 14-16 part-time provision
- 14-16 full-time provision
- 16-19 study programmes
- traineeships
- 19+ learning programmes
- apprenticeships
- employability programmes
- community learning

Since 1 January 2012, Ofsted has not produced its own summary report for prison inspections, but instead reports within the HMI Prisons report. Ofsted statistics report on prison inspections which have been published within the reporting period of the official statistics. Further information on how Ofsted inspects prisoner education and training in the further education and skills sector can be found on the Ofsted website:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/handbook-for-the-inspection-of-learning-and-skills-training-for-young-adults-and-adults-in-custody

Issues affecting comparability

The process used to select further education and skills providers for inspection means that a smaller proportion of previously good providers are inspected than the proportion of good providers nationally. In addition, further education and skills providers judged outstanding for overall effectiveness at their previous inspection may be exempt from further routine inspection. More information about this can be found within the coherence and comparability section of the quality report below.

Changes in inspection framework and policy over time may impact upon these statistics. Further information on this can be found within the comparability section of the quality report below.

Recent changes

Ofsted has launched far-reaching changes to the way it inspects early years provision, schools and further education and skills. These changes came into effect in September 2015 and include the introduction of a common inspection framework for all early years settings on the Early Years Register, maintained schools and academies, non-association independent schools and further education and skills providers. Outcomes for inspections under the common inspection framework will be reported in subsequent official statistic releases.

The common inspection framework can be found at:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/common-inspection-framework-education-skills-and-early-years-from-september-2015

Revisions

Revisions are published in line with Ofsted's revisions policy for official statistics which can be found on the Ofsted website:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-standards-for-official-statistics

Quality

Relevance

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. Ofsted official statistics are released to inform government and the public about the quality of further education and skills providers in England, provide an evidence base for policy making and to promote improvement across the further education and skills sector.

The inspection framework was revised on 1 September 2012 and this framework was implemented until 31 August 2015. Under this framework, further education and skills providers are judged as outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate. This version of the framework can be found here:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/common-inspection-framework-for-further-education-and-skills-2012

A new version of the framework was launched on 1 September 2015. This will not affect inspections reported in the 2014/15 academic year.

These official statistics are the aggregates of judgements made on the inspections of individual further education and skills providers. By aggregating the judgements made and showing these as proportions of the total number of inspections, we can identify messages from the data. We analyse the data in different ways, for example by region or by type of provider, to identify important differences, patterns and trends. The official statistics release draws out the key messages and communicates these in an understandable way appropriate for a wide range of different users. Users are able to interpret and manipulate the data for their own purposes. The users of these official statistics include the Department for Education (DfE), the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), local authorities, further education and skills providers, the media, academics and the third sector.

More specifically, information found within this release is used in a variety of ways.

- Media outlets use the key findings from our statistical release to inform the public about the quality of further education and skills provision across the country and in particular regions.
- These data allow users to track movement in the further education and skills sector and monitor the quality of provision available at a national and regional level and across provider types.
- This accurate picture of the provision influences policy decisions about the quality of further education and skills provision.
- These data allow the identification of areas of weak performance. This informs policy development within government to address issues and implement strategies to mitigate them.
- Within Ofsted, inspection profiles inform inspection framework development, and underpin policies to improve standards. The key messages within the official statistics contribute towards the findings in Ofsted's annual report to parliament.

The data included in the release are generated by Ofsted's inspection processes and are therefore administrative data.

Meeting user needs

In 2014, Ofsted held a consultation into the further education and skills official statistics, which proposed that the frequency of the statistics be reduced from quarterly to twice-yearly, supplemented by regular management information. After consideration of the responses – the majority of which supported this change – the proposal was accepted. The response to the consultation can be found at:

www.gov.uk/government/consultations/further-education-and-skills-inspection-and-outcomes-official-statistics

Ofsted welcomes feedback about our statistical releases. If you have any comments, questions or suggestions, please contact the Further Education and Skills Data and Analysis Team at: FEandSkillsData@ofsted.gov.uk

Coherence and comparability

Ofsted has reported on the inspection outcomes of further education and sixth form colleges since 2000 and additionally has reported the outcomes of inspections for adult learning and work-based learning from April 2007. There have been a number of framework changes since the first release of statistics and these have been reflected in the releases. As a result of framework changes there are differences in the definition of some of the judgements that are given in the inspections, however the overall effectiveness grade has remained comparable across the different frameworks. Other sub judgements are, if possible, mapped across frameworks when changes occur.

When framework changes have meant direct comparisons have not been possible then breaks in times series have been clearly added to tables and charts and explained in the text.

Over time the types of further education and skills providers inspected by Ofsted change. This will be detailed in the release. Also, the selection of providers for inspection changes over time due to different priorities, government policies, or changes in the overall performance of providers. For example there has recently been a focus on inspecting providers that have previously been judged as requires improvement. This will affect the volume and composition of the providers inspected in a particular period.

Inspection outcomes data presented in provisional official statistics releases will match the data shown in Dataview. Where inspection reports are published after the final publication date included within a release, the inspection outcomes will be reflected within the next provisional official statistics release.

Where a release gives statements about whether inspection outcomes have declined or improved, they are referring to the most recent relevant outcome.

In Scotland, inspections of further education and skills providers are carried out by Education Scotland and can be found at: www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/index.asp

In Wales, inspections of further education and skills providers are carried out by Estyn and can be found at: www.estyn.gov.uk/

In Northern Ireland, inspections of further education and skills providers are carried out by ETI and can be found at: www.etini.gov.uk/

Changes that affect how comparable data are across time

Not all further education and skills providers are inspected with equal regularity. Instead, Ofsted takes a risk-proportionate approach to inspection so that we can focus our efforts where we can have the greatest impact. The risk-assessment process has two stages.

- Stage one is a provider assessment based on an automated analysis of publicly available data.
- Stage two is where further analysis is necessary and the provider receives a desk-based review from an HMI.

Other aspects taken into consideration are:

- Ofsted will normally inspect providers awarded a grade of 'requires improvement' for overall effectiveness before September 2014 again within 12–18 months. Providers judged to be 'requires improvement' from September 2014 onwards will normally be inspected within 12–24 months of their previous inspection.
- We will normally re-inspect providers awarded a grade of inadequate for overall effectiveness within 15 months.
- Providers awarded a grade of good for overall effectiveness at their previous inspection will normally have up to six years between inspections, unless their performance drops.
- Providers awarded a grade of outstanding for overall effectiveness at their previous inspection (if after March 2007) will usually only have a full inspection if their performance drops or there are other compelling reasons.

Any provider where the above does not apply will be included in the inspection selection process at Ofsted's discretion. In addition, Ofsted may conduct unannounced inspections and monitoring visits at any time.

The result of this is that the further education and skills providers inspected in a particular reporting year are very unlikely to be representative of the sector as a whole. In particular, using a risk based approach to selection means that inspection judgements for providers, in any given year, can look slightly more pessimistic than we know the national picture to be. This may also affect the comparability of inspection outcomes between years.

Frameworks

As noted above, framework changes have had an impact on what we can report on in a consistent way. Consideration of how judgements change means that between frameworks there may be breaks, or changes in the way we report certain judgements.

Historical inspection frameworks and a list of changes to these can be found on the national archives at:

[webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20141124154759/http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/further-education-and-skills-inspection-documents-summary-of-changes](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20141124154759/http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/further-education-and-skills-inspection-documents-summary-of-changes)

Accuracy and reliability

This release reports on (1) the most recent inspection grade of all open and funded further education and skills providers and (2) inspections that have taken place during the reporting year and that have subsequently been published. A cut-off date for the publication of the reports included is given. Providers that have yet to be inspected are not included. If an inspection report

has been published but subsequently withheld then this will also not be included in inspection outcomes. Where the inspection report is published after the cut-off date given for the release, the inspection judgement will not be included. These will appear in later releases, after they have been published.

Inspection outcomes data are extracted from internal administrative systems. Errors in recording inspection outcomes may affect the quality of the source data. A document scanner is therefore used by Ofsted as a means of validating the outcomes entered into our systems of inspections. Technical production of the publications may also result in manual errors. However a rigorous data quality assurance procedure is adopted with the aim of minimising the risk of error during data preparation and analysis. This includes the following steps:

- comparing new data to previously published data to check numbers and outcomes are within realistic parameters (time series comparisons)
- carrying out independent checks on procedures used to extract data from databases
- carrying out independent checks on tables, charts and text to check embedded formulae are correct and wording is clear, accurate and adheres to Ofsted's house style
- ensuring quality assurance logs are completed and that the statistical release is reviewed by someone not directly involved in the production before sign off by the Chief Statistician
- cross checking data with reports extracted from independent systems to ensure initial entry of data is correct
- ensuring that data is only provided for providers who are funded and open, either at the date when the snapshot is taken or at some point during the reporting year for the most recent outcomes released alongside the Annual Report.

If an error is discovered within the document, then a note is placed on the website and a corrected version of the document uploaded as soon as possible.

More information of the issues relating to the use of administrative data is available at www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-standards-for-official-statistics.

The release does not use any imputation or other statistical techniques and data are not used to make any estimates about the population or other geographical areas. As the data are solely reporting on events that have occurred, the risk of bias or error is reduced. Data on inspection judgements is produced and held by Ofsted, however some contextual data on the provider – such as whether a provider is open or funded – depends on other organisations such as the DfE, the EFA or SFA.

Timeliness and punctuality

From 2015, official statistics on the inspection outcomes of further education and skills providers are published on a six-monthly basis, supplemented by regular management information.

Data are published at 9.30am on the date pre-announced in the publication schedule: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted/about/statistics. Information on any delay in publication can also be found on the publication schedule.

The average production time for this statistical release is approximately four to six weeks. This time includes obtaining and checking the data, drafting findings, quality assuring all outputs and publishing the information on to the gov.uk website.

Users can sign up to be notified of each release. Publications are also announced on Ofsted's social media channels page. Pre-release is given in accordance to the Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order (2008). Details of this order can be found at: www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/about-the-authority/uk-statistical-system/legislation/pre-release-access/index.html.

The list of post holders granted pre-release access can be found as a separate document accompanying each release.

Accessibility and clarity

Ofsted releases are published in an accessible format on the gov.uk website. The information is publicly available and there are no restrictions on access to the published data.

Supporting metadata in an accessible format accompanies each release. Users may use and re-use this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/.

This metadata consists of provider level files in Excel. An Excel file is also provided with additional charts.

Performance, cost and respondent burden

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

Confidentiality, transparency and security

Due to the nature of the release, which reports solely on published inspection outcomes of further education and skills providers, data are not subject to confidentiality concerns. All data releases follow Ofsted's policies which can be found at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-standards-for-official-statistics.

GLOSSARY

Ofsted categorises providers in the following ways:

16-19 Academy /free school

These are state-funded, non-fee-paying schools independent of local authorities which cater for pupils aged 16-19.

Community learning and skills provider

Community learning and skills providers include local authorities, charities, voluntary, not-for-profit companies and community organisations, specialist designated institutions, and community interest companies. Their provision is diverse in character and aims to meet the needs and interests of a wide range of communities. Courses include those leading to qualifications; programmes leading to qualifications whilst in employment (such as apprenticeships); provision for informal adult learning; provision for social and personal development. Community learning and skills providers were previously categorised as adult and community learning providers.

Dance and drama college

A college participating in the Dance and Drama Awards scheme.

General further education/tertiary college

General further education colleges offer a range of education and training opportunities for learners aged from 14 years upwards, including adults.

Higher education institution

Where higher education institutions offer further education courses these are subject to inspection by Ofsted.

Independent learning provider

A company which provides government funded education. The category independent learning provider includes employer providers who only offer government funded training to their own employees.

Independent specialist college

Independent specialist colleges provide education and training for students with complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities, whose learning needs cannot be met by their local college or provider.

National Careers Service

The National Careers Service was launched on 5 April 2012. It is available in England and provides information to those over the age of 13. The service is delivered by 11 prime contractors in 12 designated areas and the adult and young person's telephone services. National Careers Service prime contractors are subject to an Ofsted inspection, including the adult and young people's telephone service.

Prisons and youth offender institutions

Ofsted undertakes inspections in prisons and youth offender institutions in partnership with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons. Ofsted HMI evaluate the quality of learning and skills in prisons, including young offender institutions and secure units for young people and also provision in community settings. Ofsted does not publish inspection reports for prison and young offender institutions - these reports can be found on the HMIP website:

www.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/hmiprison/

Ofsted contributes to a reduced number of judgements in these reports.

Sixth form college

A sixth form college is an educational institution where students aged 16 to 18 typically study for advanced school-level qualifications, such as A-Levels, or school-level qualifications such as GCSEs.

Specialist further education college

Specialist further education colleges are colleges who specialise in the provision of agricultural, horticultural or art, design and technology courses.