

# Further education and skills: inspections and outcomes

Methodology and quality report

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## Introduction

1. This paper contains methodology and quality information relevant to the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills' (Ofsted's) six-monthly release on further education and skills inspections and outcomes data. This paper should be read in conjunction with the background notes contained within the statistical first release (SFR) and accompanying tables as those notes will include helpful information that is not included in this report. The release can be found at the following webpage:  
[www.gov.uk/government/collections/further-education-and-skills-inspection-outcomes](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/further-education-and-skills-inspection-outcomes).

## Methodology

2. The SFR contains data that has been sourced from inspections carried out by Ofsted for all further education and skills providers in England, wholly or partly funded by the Skills Funding Agency or Education Funding Agency and reports on the outcomes of:
  - in-year inspection outcomes for inspections carried out between 1 September and 31 August of the latest reporting year, regardless of whether the provider has since closed or lost funding. Tables and charts count the number of inspections that took place and a provider could be counted more than once, depending on the number of times they were inspected within the year. Statistics are published each year, with a mid-year picture also published part way through the year.
  - the most recent (or latest) full inspection outcomes for all open and funded providers at a certain point in time, regardless of when the inspection took place. Tables and charts count the number of providers that have been inspected and each provider can appear only once in the underlying data. If a provider is open and funded but has not yet been inspected then they do not appear in this measure, though they are included within the underlying data. Statistics about the most recent inspection outcomes for all providers open and funded on 31 August are published each year, with a mid-year picture also published part way through the year.
3. The inspection outcome data is extracted from Ofsted's administrative systems. The full list of provider types covered by further education and skills inspections, and therefore included in the release, is included in the table below. Provider types and groups have been separated out to make the underlying data easier for users to aggregate and these groupings are also included within tables and charts in the SFR.

Provider type	Provider group	
General further education college	Colleges	All further education and skills providers
Sixth form college		
Specialist further education college		
Independent specialist college	Independent specialist colleges	
Independent learning provider	Independent learning providers (including employer providers)	
Employer provider		
Local authority provider	Community learning and skills providers	
Not for profit organisation		
Specialist designated institution		
16-19 academy converter	16-19 academies	
16-19 academy sponsor led		
16-19 free school		
Dance and drama college	Dance and drama colleges	
Higher education institution*	Higher education institutions	
National Careers Service contractor	National Careers Service contractors	
Prison and young offender institution	Prisons and young offender institutions	Prisons and young offender institutions

4. On 1 September 2015, under the new Common Inspection Framework, Ofsted introduced short inspections for providers previously judged good. Short inspections can either confirm that the provider is still good overall or the lead inspector can choose to convert the inspection to a full inspection where:
  - there is insufficient evidence to confirm that the provider remains good
  - there are concerns that there is evidence that the provider may no longer be good (which may include concerns about safeguarding)
  - there is sufficient evidence of improved performance to suggest that the provider may be judged outstanding.
  
5. Where a short inspection does not convert, the overall effectiveness of the provider remains unchanged from its previous inspection. No individual or sub-provision judgements are made (for example for effectiveness of leadership and management, quality of teaching, learning and assessment, 16 to 19 study

programmes). A decision to convert the short inspection does not predetermine the outcome of the full inspection, which will make the full set of graded judgements using the four-point grading scale. At the end of the full inspection a provider could remain good, improve to outstanding or decline to requires improvement or inadequate.

6. When reporting on in-year inspections, the following fields and labels are included in the 'data, tables and charts' file to help users identify short inspections:
  - an 'inspection type group' has been added to the in-year data tabs to allow users to identify whether a provider received a full or short inspection
  - where a short inspection did not convert and the provider remained good, this will be recorded in the inspection type group as 'Short inspection' and the overall effectiveness column will be populated with a "9".
  - where a short inspection did convert to a full inspection, this will be recorded in the inspection type group as 'Full Inspection (short converted)' and the remaining columns will be completed as they would for a full inspection
  - the titles on each tab have been edited to clearly identify whether the data shown includes the outcomes from full inspections only or full and short inspections combined.
7. Short inspections have a minimal impact on the most recent inspection outcomes. Within the 'Most recent inspection data' tab, the most recent (latest) full inspection outcomes are shown for each provider. This includes short inspections that converted to full inspections. Short inspections which did not convert to full inspections do not affect this tab because the provider's original overall effectiveness judgement remains good. A table has been included within the release to show the volumes of short inspections, the proportion that convert to full inspections, and the resulting inspection outcomes.
8. Official statistics on further education and skills inspection outcomes have a time delay between the end of the reporting period and the publication cut-off date of one calendar month. We try to ensure that most of the reports of inspections undertaken within the reporting period have been published in order to minimise bias. For instance, the inspection reports of those providers judged inadequate undergo additional moderation checks, and there may therefore be a longer time period between the inspection and the publication of the inspection report.

9. Under exceptional circumstances, Ofsted may withhold/withdraw publication of an inspection report. Outcomes of withheld/withdrawn inspection reports are not included in any of the datasets.
10. Where statements are made about whether inspection outcomes have declined or improved, they are referring to the most recent overall effectiveness outcomes compared to the previous inspection.
11. Data in this release is also used to update Ofsted's DataView tool.

## Relevance

12. 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's official statistics are released to promote reform and improvement across government through increasing transparency of the work that Ofsted does.
13. Data in this official statistics series is from inspections conducted under part 8 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. More information on this can be found on the gov.uk website: [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/40/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/40/contents)
14. The new Common Inspection Framework, introduced on 1 September 2015, was designed to provide greater coherence across different providers that cater for similar age ranges. It sets out the principles that apply to inspection and the main judgements that inspectors make when conducting inspections of registered early years settings, maintained schools, academies, non-association independent schools and further education and skills providers. The framework can be found here: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/common-inspection-framework-education-skills-and-early-years-from-september-2015](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/common-inspection-framework-education-skills-and-early-years-from-september-2015). The framework is accompanied by an inspection handbook that set out how each of the inspection judgements are made and reflects the needs and expectations for each type of setting. The further education and skills inspection handbook can be found here: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-education-and-skills-inspection-handbook](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-education-and-skills-inspection-handbook)
15. The framework included a new key judgment on 'personal development, behaviour and welfare'. Analysis of this judgement will only represent inspections since 1 September 2015 and will not provide a comprehensive view of the quality of provision nationally.

16. The aggregation of data for official statistics allows us to communicate to users the key data and messages from inspection outcomes, for example, at different geographical levels and within sub-types of provider. The official statistics draw out the key messages and communicate these in an understandable way appropriate for a wide range of different users. Users are able to interpret and manipulate the data published for their own purposes. Specific users and uses of the data include:
- media outlets use the key findings from our statistical release to inform the public about the quality of further education and skills providers across the country
  - this data allows users to track movement in the further education and skills sector and monitor the quality of provision available at a national level and across provider types
  - this data helps identify areas of weak performance. This informs policy development within the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Skills Funding Agency and the Department for Education 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 Her Majesty's Chief Inspector's Annual Report to Parliament.
17. More contextual information about further education and skills in England and Ofsted's inspection activity can be found within the release.
18. The data included in the release is generated by Ofsted's inspection process and is therefore administrative data.

## Meeting user needs

19. In 2014, Ofsted held a consultation on 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. The majority of responses supported this change and the proposal was accepted. The response to the consultation can be found here: [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/further-education-and-skills-inspection-and-outcomes-official-statistics](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/further-education-and-skills-inspection-and-outcomes-official-statistics).
20. A further consultation was held between 30 June 2016 and 29 July 2016, asking users to comment on two possible changes to the official statistics release:



- a change to the methodology for aggregating the 'all further education and skills providers' figure to include National Careers Service (NCS) contractors and higher education institutions
  - excluding providers that have ceased to be funded or closed as at 31 August from the most recent inspection outcome statistics.
21. As a result of the consultation, both these changes were implemented.
  
  22. A number of essential changes were made to the further education and skills inspections and outcomes official statistics from 1 September 2015. This was to accommodate changes caused by the new Common Inspection Framework and changes resulting from a database migration. Details of the changes resulting from the introduction of the Common Inspection Framework have been included elsewhere in this document, as well as within the consultation document published on 30 June 2016, which can be found here: [www.gov.uk/government/statistics/further-education-and-skills-inspection-and-outcomes-as-at-29-february-2016](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/further-education-and-skills-inspection-and-outcomes-as-at-29-february-2016).
  
  23. In 2016, the National Statistician published new guidance covering Management Information and Official Statistics. This guidance can be accessed here: [gss.civilservice.gov.uk/blog/2016/06/management-information-guidance/](http://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/blog/2016/06/management-information-guidance/)
  
  24. Ofsted welcomes feedback about its 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](mailto:FEandSkillsData@ofsted.gov.uk).

## Coherence and compatibility

25. The tables and charts within the release compare inspection outcomes over the past several years. There have been a number of framework changes since the first release of statistics and these have been reflected in the publications. The overall effectiveness grade has remained comparable across the different frameworks. Other sub judgements and provision judgements are, if possible, mapped across frameworks when changes occur. This is explained in more detail below.
  
26. When these changes have occurred, users have been alerted via updates in the official statistics introduction and methodology sections of the key findings document. When changes to inspection frameworks or methodological changes have been implemented to improve the output, guidance has been added to footnotes and the key findings document for easy access.

27. 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 all inspections within the reporting period have been published, the statistics will be marked as final.
28. There is no comparable data published by other producers of official or national statistics for further education and skills inspections in England.
29. In Scotland, inspections are carried out by Education Scotland and can be found at: [www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/index.asp](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/index.asp).
30. In Wales, inspections are carried out by Estyn and can be found at: [www.estyn.gov.uk/](http://www.estyn.gov.uk/)
31. In Northern Ireland, inspections are carried out by Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) and can be found at: [www.etini.gov.uk/](http://www.etini.gov.uk/).
32. Ofsted also produces regular management information on the outcomes of further education and skills inspections. The management information is not directly comparable with the official statistics due to a difference in methodology. The official statistics allow an additional month after the reporting period has ended for inspection reports to be published.
33. Several third parties provide interactive tools displaying publicly available Ofsted inspection judgements. These appear to be collated by using advanced computer techniques to harvest information from published inspection reports. Ofsted cannot comment on the quality of these datasets.
34. Framework changes have an impact on the comparability of data and reporting over time. Consideration of how judgements change means that between frameworks there may be breaks or changes in the way we report certain judgements.
35. The new Common Inspection Framework was introduced on 1 September 2015 following the 'better inspection for all' consultation. This consultation initiated various changes to the way Ofsted inspects providers. The Common Inspection Framework can be found here:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/common-inspection-framework-education-skills-and-early-years-from-september-2015](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/common-inspection-framework-education-skills-and-early-years-from-september-2015).

36. The Common Inspection Framework is designed to bring together the inspection of different education, skills and early years settings to provide greater coherence across different providers that cater for similar age ranges. Inspection judgements have therefore been standardised to apply across all remit areas.
37. The previous inspection framework ran between 1 September 2012 and 31 August 2015 and can be found here:  
[www.gov.uk/government/publications/common-inspection-framework-for-further-education-and-skills-2012](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/common-inspection-framework-for-further-education-and-skills-2012).
38. Not all providers are inspected with equal regularity. Ofsted takes a proportionate risk assessed approach to inspection, as indicated in our inspection frameworks. 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 all providers within the sector. This will also affect the comparability of inspection outcomes between years. This is because:
- providers that were previously judged to be less than good in their most recent inspection are inspected more frequently than good providers. More information can be found at: [www.gov.uk/guidance/changes-to-education-inspection-from-september-2015](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/changes-to-education-inspection-from-september-2015)
  - as of 1 September 2015, previously good providers will receive a short inspection approximately every three years. Short inspections and how they are included within the data are described above in the methodology section
  - users need to be particularly cautious if comparing outcomes from 2015/16 or later with previous years. Before 1 September 2015, all good providers received a full inspection no later than the fifth reporting year, including in cases where they continued to provide the same standard of education
  - most further education and skills providers previously judged to be outstanding at their most recent inspection are exempt from routine inspection and will not be inspected unless Ofsted has concerns about them. This can include concerns identified through risk assessment, a complaint, a serious safeguarding incident or concerns about the standards of leadership and management. Where we refer to risk assessed inspections within this statistical release it may also include a small number of compulsory inspections of non-exempt outstanding providers.

- comparisons between provider types should be treated with caution due to the different inspection frameworks used over the past ten years and the variation in the number of providers included within the different groups
  - new providers are usually inspected according to a fixed cycle, in the majority of cases the timing of this inspection is not determined by performance data of the provider.
39. The comparability of the most recent inspection outcomes for further education and skills providers between years has been affected by:
- the result of a user consultation undertaken in July 2016, there was a change to the methodology for aggregating the 'all further education and skills providers' figure to include NCS contractors and higher education institutions. As a result the 'all further education and skills providers' figure as at 31 August 2016 and onwards will not be comparable to previous years
  - a change to the methodology to exclude providers that had ceased to be funded or closed during the reporting year, from the 31 August statistics. This change was back dated and applied to the statistics as at 31 August 2015. Therefore the most recent inspection outcomes for the different provider types and groups are comparable from 31 August 2015 onwards, but are not comparable before this date.
40. Prior to 1 September 2015, independent specialist colleges (ISCs) were included within the 'colleges' group, along with general further education colleges, sixth form colleges and specialist further education colleges (which specialise in agriculture and horticulture or performing arts). Ofsted took the decision to remove ISCs from the 'colleges' group and to report on them separately from 1 September 2015. Historic data published in the statistics was adjusted to take account of this change.
41. Before 1 September 2015 Ofsted inspected dance and drama colleges at course level, with one dance and drama college potentially receiving multiple judgements for the different courses they delivered. One of these judgements would have been published as a proxy for overall effectiveness in the underlying data and tables. Ofsted now makes a judgement on the overall effectiveness for dance and drama colleges. This change makes the judgement comparable to other providers and therefore dance and drama colleges from 1 September 2015 onwards will be included in the aggregation for 'all further education and skills providers'. The previously published proxy for overall effectiveness is not comparable to the new judgement and has been removed from the underlying data to prevent inappropriate comparisons.

## Accuracy and reliability

42. This release reports on (1) the most recent inspection outcome for all open and funded further education and skills providers. Funded providers includes providers that are marked as being in receipt of funding within the dataset taken from Ofsted's systems as at the end of the relevant reporting period. There may be a delay between changes to a providers funding status and Ofsted being informed. (2) inspections that have taken place during the reporting year. A cut-off date for the publication of the reports included is given in the publication. Providers that have yet to be inspected are included within the underlying data, but are not included as part of the aggregated statistics. If an inspection report has been published but subsequently withheld then this will 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.
43. Ofsted moderates all inspection reports where a provider is judged to be inadequate. This may result in some inspection reports being published after the publication cut-off date required for inclusion within the provisional release. In addition, where there are concerns that further evidence may be required to secure the inspection evidence base, this will delay publication of an inspection report. Further details of these procedures can be found here: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/gathering-additional-evidence-to-secure-an-incomplete-inspection-ofsted-related-protocol](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gathering-additional-evidence-to-secure-an-incomplete-inspection-ofsted-related-protocol).
44. This release does not include the inspection outcomes of maintained schools and academies, independent schools or providers of early years provision. These are included in separate releases. Further details of these can be found at: [www.gov.uk/government/statistics](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics).
45. Inspection outcomes data is extracted from Ofsted's administrative systems. Errors in recording inspections outcomes may affect the quality of the source data. A number of appropriate systems have been put in place by Ofsted to minimise the risk of reporting error.
46. Until April 2015, Ofsted used a document scanner as a means of validating the outcomes entered into our systems of inspections undertaken under section 5 of the Education Act. In September 2015, Ofsted introduced a new administrative system, undertaking thorough checking throughout the data migration process from the old to the new system to ensure inspection data was transferred accurately. Since September 2015, inspections outcome data has been extracted from the new administrative systems.

47. As part of the data migration, one missing inspection and a small number of missing key judgements were identified and have been corrected. The revised data is available in the official statistics published since September 2015.
48. Technical production of the publications may also result in manual errors. A rigorous data quality assurance procedure is adopted with the aim of minimising the risk of reporting error. If an error is discovered within the document, a note is placed on the website and a corrected version of the document is uploaded as soon as possible.
49. More information on the issues relating to the use of administrative data is available here: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-standards-for-official-statistics](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-standards-for-official-statistics).
50. Revisions are published in line with Ofsted's revisions policy for official statistics. For more information about the policy please visit the Ofsted website: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-standards-for-official-statistics](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-standards-for-official-statistics).

## Timeliness and punctuality

51. Data is currently published twice a year and includes details of inspections that have taken place and been published in the relevant period. To ensure data is as timely as possible, each release includes the most recent possible full month of inspections.
52. Data is published at 09:30 on the date pre-announced in the publication schedule: [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted/about/statistics](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted/about/statistics). Information on any delay in publication can also be found on the publication schedule.
53. We allow one calendar month after the end of the reporting period as the cut-off date for the inclusion of published inspection reports. This is to allow time for the publication of the majority of inspections that have taken place within the reporting period. The production stage for this release includes obtaining and cleaning the data, drafting findings, quality assuring all outputs and uploading the information onto the gov.uk website.
54. Publications are announced via social media. Pre-release access is given in accordance with the pre-release 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](http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/about-the-authority/uk-statistical-system/legislation/pre-release-access/index.html).

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

## **Accessibility and clarity**

56. 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. Each release includes outcomes from Ofsted inspections that have subsequently been published. The data is aimed at keeping users informed of the progress of the inspection framework and of changes in the further education and skills sector.
57. Underlying data in an accessible format accompanies each release to allow users to perform their own analysis. 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/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/).
58. This underlying data consists of provider level files in Excel and is available in the 'data, tables and charts' file.

## **Performance, cost and respondent burden**

59. There is no respondent burden in relation to these statistics releases 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**

60. All data releases follow Ofsted's confidentiality and revisions policies which can be found in this location: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-standards-for-official-statistics](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-standards-for-official-statistics).

## Glossary

### **General further education colleges**

General further education colleges offer a range of education and training opportunities for learners aged from 14 years upwards, including adults. They include tertiary colleges, which specialise in land based education and training.

### **Sixth form colleges**

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 colleges**

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

### **Independent specialist colleges**

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.

### **Independent learning providers (including employer providers)**

Independent learning providers are companies which provide government funded education. The category includes employer providers who only offer government funded training to their own employees.

### **Community learning and skills providers**

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 that lead to a qualification; programmes leading to qualifications whilst in employment (such as apprenticeships); provision for informal adult learning; and provision for social and personal development. Community learning and skills providers were previously categorised as adult and community learning providers.

### **16–19 academies**

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

### **Dance and drama colleges**

Colleges that specialises in delivering dance and drama courses.



## **Higher education institution**

Where higher education institutions (such as universities) offer further education courses, these are subject to inspection by Ofsted.

## **National Careers Service contractors**

The National Careers Service provides information, advice and guidance for those aged 13 and over across England. The service is delivered in 12 geographical regions by area based prime contractors and a national contact centre by one national contractor. These National Careers Service contractors are subject to an Ofsted inspection.

## **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 provision in community settings. Ofsted does not publish inspection reports for prisons and young offender institutions - these reports can be found on the HMIP website: [www.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/hmiprisons](http://www.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/hmiprisons). Ofsted contributes to a reduced number of judgements in these reports.