

Independent wellbeing impact assessment of the revised Ofsted framework

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Introduction

This project was commissioned as an independent wellbeing assessment of the forthcoming revised Ofsted inspection framework on staff wellbeing.

The project took place between April and July 2025. The work was broken into two phases: an initial scoping phase in April-May 2025, followed by the substantive review work during June and July 2025.

Much has been written about the impact on wellbeing of inspections over the past thirty years. The heartbreaking death of Ruth Perry in January 2023 catalysed a groundswell of pressure for change to the current inspection system. The coroner's conclusion – that Ruth Perry's death was the result of "Suicide, contributed to by an Ofsted inspection carried out in November 2022"¹ – is the North Star for this review. That verdict makes clear that pressures on workplace wellbeing can be fatal.

The review engaged with seventy-seven people from sector organisations, schools, colleges, MATs, local authorities and Ofsted. Sector organisations included: Association of School and College Leaders, Association of Colleges, Chartered College of Teaching, Confederation of School Trusts, Department for Education (DfE), Local Government Association, National Association of Headteachers, National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers, National Education Union, National Governance Association and the Sixth Form Colleges Association. Stakeholder roles included: teachers, school and college leaders, school improvement advisors, Multi-Academy Trust CEO and leadership roles, SENDCo, governor and trustee roles. His Majesty's Inspector (HMI) and Ofsted Inspector (contracted, usually from the current education workforce) voices were also heard. Participants included colleagues who have experienced the revised framework through a test inspection, as well as those who have not.

Despite the wide range of organisational agendas and political philosophies across the stakeholder group, a clear, central set of shared concerns emerged. These are explored through the subsequent sections of this report.

Clear tensions were also apparent; not least the desire for national consistency in inspection practice, balanced with a need for local context to be understood and accommodated. Much hinges on the resolution of the tension between variation that improves the validity of inspection outcomes and variation that does not.

The key task of this project was to make an informed estimate of the wellbeing impact of the revised framework. This report seeks to be transparent about how this estimate has been made, and the evidence which has informed it.

The significance of the wellbeing of the education workforce – and its centrality for the achievement of great outcomes for children and young people – continues to be underestimated. Ofsted deserves some credit for inviting this level of scrutiny of its proposals. It will deserve further credit if it runs with the resulting recommendations.

Whilst this project was commissioned by Ofsted, it also raises important questions for Government. As Massey (2021) points out, "recommendations and actions for greater clarity, transparency and

¹ Connor, H. (2023). "Regulation 28: Report to Prevent Future Deaths". 12 December 2023. Available at: https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Ruth-Perry-Prevention-of-future-deaths-report-2023-0524_Published-1.pdf

amendatory accountability can only be effectively made with a political commitment that is carried through and regularly audited².”

To really shift the dial on the impact of inspection on wellbeing, Government must engage with the issues raised in this report and take action where recommendations fall within its purview.

Note: Any factual error or inaccuracy in this report should be attributed to the author and not to the commissioners of, or contributors to, this report.

About the author

Sinéad Mc Brearty is CEO at Education Support, the mental health and wellbeing charity for the education workforce across the UK. Education Support works with education staff across all settings, providing preventative and crisis interventions. Sinéad advocates for a systemic approach to wellbeing for the education workforce, attending to the individual, the workplace and the wider policy environment.

In 2025 she was appointed to Ofsted’s *Well-Being of Leaders and Staff External Reference Group* and has attended two meetings of this group.

Acknowledgements:

Thank you to everyone who has generously given their time and thoughtfulness to this review, especially the education staff and HMIs who shared their experience and insight and allowed me to observe the inspection process.

² Massey, A. (2021). “Accountability and Networks: Mind the Gap”. In Connolly, J and van der Zwet, A (Eds.), Public Value Management, Governance and Reform in Britain, International Series on Public Policy, http://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-55586-3_8

Section one – overall approach

Project approach and timing

Initial scoping

The scoping phase comprised a range of internal and external stakeholder interviews and focus groups, alongside a desk-based review of possible impact assessment tools which could be used. The outcome of this phase was the definition of the project's scope, and, after an initial screening process, the decision to use the Mental Wellbeing Impact Assessment framework (MWIA)³ for the substantive review.

MWIA selection

This review could not identify any previous examples of wellbeing or mental health impact assessments of inspection practice in any country. A systematic review by Cresswell-Smith et al (2022)⁴ defined impact assessment as, “the process of identifying the future consequence of a current or proposed action with the ‘impact’ being the difference between what would happen with the action and what would happen without it.” Their systematic review identified five different types of impact assessment frameworks that have been used to evaluate policy in various contexts.

MWIA was selected for four reasons:

- i. The framework requires attention to be paid to positive definitions of wellbeing, rather than focusing more tightly on mental ill-health.
- ii. Stakeholder voice is central to the approach.
- iii. The framework offers the opportunity to triangulate findings between three key information sources:
 - a. community profiling data
 - b. academic and grey literature
 - c. stakeholder experience.
- iv. The framework supports a systemic view of the impacts at individual, community and structural levels⁵.

The main weakness of MWIA identified in the literature is its dependence on management co-operation to implement action and change following the assessment⁶.

³ Cooke, A., Friedli, L., Coggins, T., Edmonds, N., Michealson, J., O'Hara, K., Snowden, L., Stansfield, J., Steuer, N., and Scott-Samuel, A. (2011). “Mental Well-Being Impact Assessment; A Toolkit for Well-Being”. <https://healthycampuses.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/MentalWellbeingImpactAssessmentAtoolkitforwellbe-1.pdf>

⁴ Cresswell-Smith J., Kauppinen T., Laaksoharju T., Rotko T., Solin P., Suvisaari J., Wahlbeck K., and Tamminen N. (2022). “Mental Health and Mental Wellbeing Impact Assessment Frameworks-A Systematic Review”. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(21):13985. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph192113985>

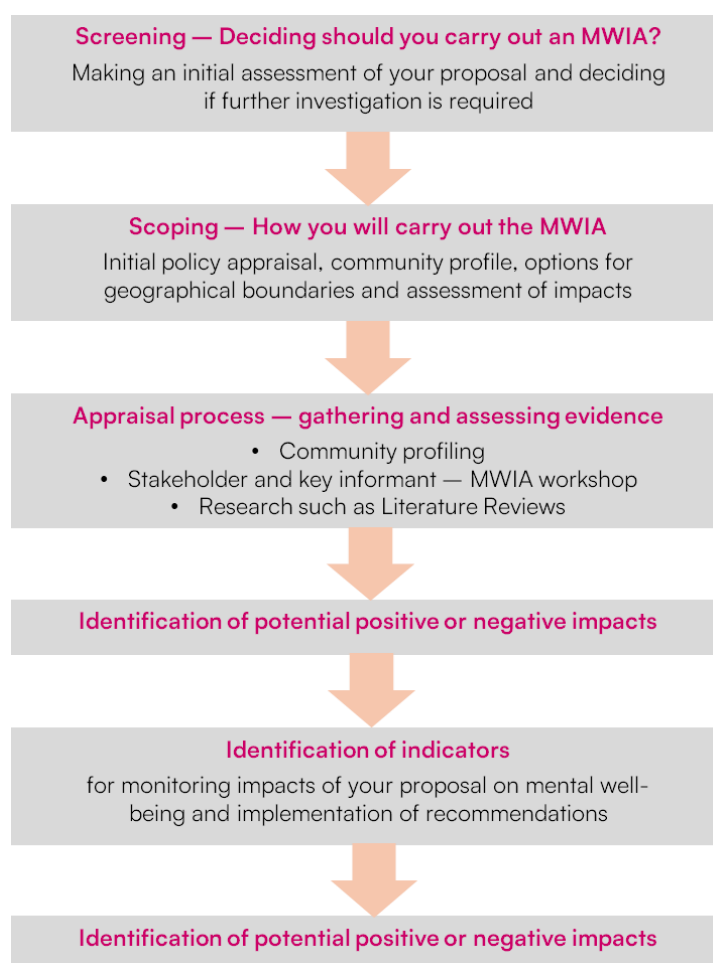
⁵ Mc Brearty, S. (2020). “Teacher wellbeing: A systemic perspective” (blog post). Part of a series ‘Researching education and mental health: From ‘Where we are now?’ to ‘What’s next?’’. 3 March 2020. <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/teacher-wellbeing-a-systemic-perspective>

⁶ Burford, C., Davey, S., Knight, A., King, S., Cooke, A., and Coggins, T. (2017). “Mental Wellbeing Impact Assessment (MWIA) in the workplace”. *Journal of Public Mental Health*, 16(3), 104-112. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPMH-01-2017-0002>

MWIA process

The stages of the MWIA process as outlined by Cooke et al (2011)⁷ are illustrated below:

Figure 1: Stage of the MWIA process (Cooke et al, 2011)



Project adaptation

The MWIA framework was adapted in two ways for this project.

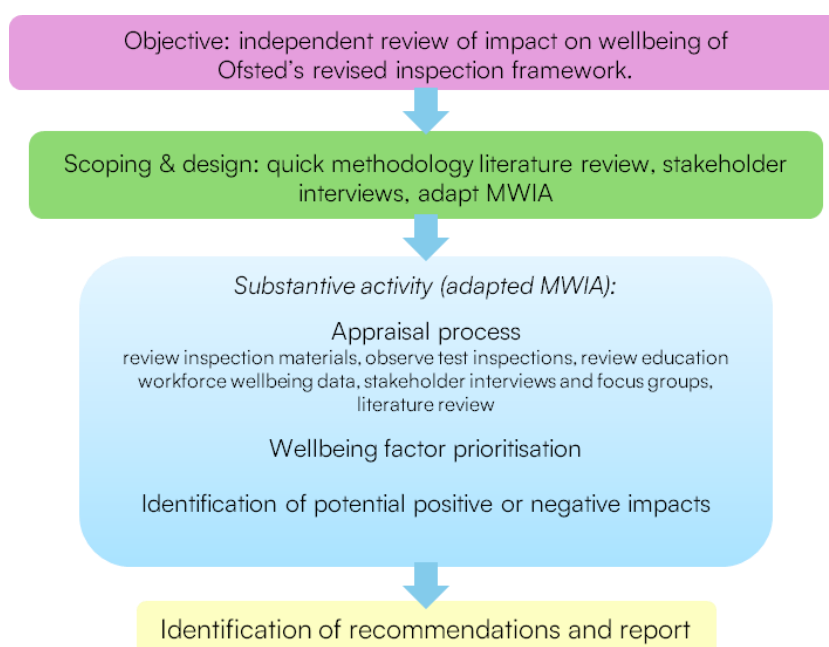
Firstly, given the timeframe for this project, stakeholder engagement was conducted bilaterally, rather than through stakeholder workshops. It was not practicable to bring the full range of stakeholders together within the timeframe of this project. To support coherence, stakeholders were asked a structured series of questions (see Appendix 1). The question set was adapted from Werner Ulrich's Critical Systems Heuristics framework⁸, with the express purpose of supporting critical reflection on boundaries and assumptions. In later interviews, stakeholders were asked a shorter sub-set of these questions focused on the wellbeing impacts observed or anticipated.

⁷ Cooke, A., Friedli, L., Coggins, T., Edmons, N., Michealson, J., O'Hara, K., Snowden, L., Stansfield, J., Steuer, N., and Scott-Samuel, A. (2011). "Mental Well-Being Impact Assessment; A Toolkit for Well-Being". <https://healthycampuses.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/MentalWellbeingImpactAssessmentAtoolkitforwellbe-1.pdf>

⁸ Ulrich, W., and Reynolds, M. (2010). "Critical Systems Heuristics". In: Reynolds, M, and Holwell, S (Eds). 'Systems Approaches to Managing Change: A Practical Guide'. January 2010. Springer, London. http://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-84882-809-4_6

Secondly, the framework specifies the identification of indicators for monitoring the implementation of recommendations. This step was not completed within the current review. It is proposed as a next step following discussion and acceptance/amendment of recommendations upon the completion of this report.

Figure 2: Illustration of project approach



Definition of scope

Following the initial stakeholder meetings, the scope of the project was defined as:

- To review the impact on wellbeing associated with the implementation of the revised inspection framework (as it stands in June 2025)
 - To primarily consider the impact on school and college staff, but to also recognise the impact on inspectors
- To clearly distinguish between:
 - the framework and approach to inspection
 - conduct during inspection
 - wider consequences that arise from inspection.

Wellbeing definition

To support this scope, a working definition of wellbeing for the purposes of this paper is drawn from De Neve and Ward's *Why Workplace Wellbeing Matters* (2025). Their work considers evaluative, affective and eudaimonic aspects (purpose and meaning) of wellbeing. They define workplace wellbeing as "job satisfaction, sense of purpose, happiness and stress⁹." This is further explored in section two, part 2 of this report.

⁹ De Neve, J.,-E and Ward, G. (2025). "Why Workplace Wellbeing Matters". Harvard Business Review Press

A review of definitions of workplace wellbeing would require a whole separate paper¹⁰. This definition has been chosen for its holism and practicality of application.

This review does not consider the impact of inspection on learners or other community stakeholders.

¹⁰ Education Support (2024a). "Teacher Well-being: A Global Understanding". Report for Education International. <http://ei-ie.org/en/item/28804:teacher-well-being-a-global-understanding>

Section two: the evidence

Wellbeing of the education workforce

Appraisal process: Part 1 of 4

Education workforce wellbeing

Education is widely, though not universally, considered to be a stressful occupation in England. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) publishes annual data for Great Britain. In its most recent report, education continues to be in the top three “industries” with high levels of self-reported work-related ill health¹¹. It also reports that 2.53m working days are lost each year to work-related illness in the sector, at an economic cost of c. £1.8bn.¹² Work-related stress, depression or anxiety accounts for 53% of all ill health in the sector.¹³ The HSE reports that this level of work-related stress, depression or anxiety “is statistically significantly higher than for workers across all industries”.¹⁴

The Department for Education’s own research highlights significant rates of workplace stress among the English education workforce¹⁵:

- 89% of teachers and leaders experience stress at work
- 70% feel their job does not leave enough time for their personal life
- 62% feel their job negatively affects their mental health
- 49% feel their job negatively affects their physical health.
- High workload and stress and/or poor wellbeing are the two most commonly cited reasons for teachers and leaders to consider leaving the English state school sector (both reported by 90% of those considering leaving).

Education Support’s annual Teacher Wellbeing Index has reported persistently high levels of stress, burnout, depression and anxiety across the English workforce in recent years. Rates of stress, burnout and inability to switch off from work among school and college leaders are concerningly high. The 2023 Index highlighted that education staff feel twice as lonely at work as the national population, with staff from a global majority background reporting even higher levels of loneliness¹⁶.

Using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Score, the overall wellbeing of the education workforce continues to score significantly below the general population. In 2024, 35% of the workforce scored at a low enough level to signify potentially significant mental health concerns¹⁷.

Work intensity is an important part of the wellbeing picture. Professor Francis Green’s (2021) analysis of the British Skills and Employment Survey (SES) data series concluded that “compared to other professional workers and all other occupations, teachers work more intensively during their

¹¹ HSE (2024a). “Industries”. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/industry/index.htm>

¹² HSE (2024b). “Education Statistics in Great Britain, 2024”. 20 November 2024.

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/assets/docs/education.pdf>.

¹³ *ibid*

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ DfE (2024). “Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders, Wave 3 Summary Report”. November 2024.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67852c953a9388161c5d2335/Wave_3_Summary_Report.pdf

¹⁶ Education Support (2023a). “Teacher Wellbeing Index”. November 2023. <https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/resources/for-organisations/research/teacher-wellbeing-index/>

¹⁷ Education Support (2024b). “Teacher Wellbeing Index”. November 2024. <https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/resources/for-organisations/research/teacher-wellbeing-index/>.

work hours, and their work intensity has risen to unprecedented levels.”¹⁸ This intensification of work represents a decline in teachers’ job quality and drives exhaustion and poor work-related wellbeing at all levels.

The amount of time spent working also matters. A World Health Organization study¹⁹ of loss of life and health associated with long working hours highlighted that the number of deaths from heart disease and stroke rose considerably for those who worked at least 55 hours per week. Average working hours for school leaders in England are 56.6 hours per week (DfE, 2024a).

Evidence on the impact of poor work-life balance and stress continues to grow²⁰. The inability to switch off from work is strongly linked to a significant negative impact on personal wellbeing.²¹ The physical risks of stress include high blood pressure²², diabetes²³, heart disease²⁴, a suppressed immune system²⁵ and musculoskeletal conditions²⁶.

This brief review of context is not comprehensive, but it is important to note that not all findings point in the same direction. In their analysis of longitudinal data-sets relating to educational professionals over a twenty year period, Jerrim et al (2021) concluded that “there is little evidence to suggest that actual levels of wellbeing and mental health amongst this group has declined”²⁷.

Impact on pupil and learner outcomes

A systematic review of teacher wellbeing has suggested that teacher wellbeing influences teaching quality, indicating an impact on pupils and learners.²⁸ There is also evidence of a negative association between teacher stress, burnout, depression and/or anxiety and outcomes for pupils in schools in terms of their academic achievement.^{29 30 31}

¹⁸ Green, F. (2021). “British Teachers’ Declining Job Quality: Evidence from the Skills and Employment Survey”. Oxford Review of Education, 47(3), 386–403. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2020.1847719>

¹⁹ Pega F., Náfrádi B., Momen N.C., Ujita Y., Streicher K.N., Prüss-Üstün A.M.; Technical Advisory Group; Descatha A., Driscoll T., Fischer F.M., Godderis L., Kiiver H.M., Li J., Magnusson Hanson L.L., Rugulies R., Sørensen K., Woodruff T.J. “Global, regional, and national burdens of ischemic heart disease and stroke attributable to exposure to long working hours for 194 countries, 2000–2016: A systematic analysis from the WHO/ILO Joint Estimates of the Work-related Burden of Disease and Injury”. Environment International, 154. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envint.2021.106595>.

²⁰ Education Support (2024a). “Teacher Wellbeing: A Global Understanding”. Report for Education International.

https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/media/z02jahif/2024_eiresearch_teacherwellbeing_eng.pdf

²¹ Helliwell, J., Layard, R., and Sachs, J. (2017). “World Happiness Report 2017”. <https://www.worldhappiness.report/ed/2017/>

²² Ottaviani, C., Thayer, J.F., Verkuil, B., Lonigro, A., Medea, B., Couyoumdjian, A., and Brosschot, J.F. (2016). “Physiological concomitants of perseverative cognition: A systematic review and meta-analysis”. Psychological Bulletin, 142(3), 231–259. <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000036>

²³ Lloyd, C., Smith, J., and Weinger, K. (2005). “Stress and Diabetes: A Review of the Links”. Diabetes Spectrum, 18(2), 121–127. <https://sackkyndig.com/psykologi/artvit/lloyd2005.pdf>

²⁴ Richardson, S., Shaffer, J.A., Falzon, L., Krupka, D., Davidson, K.W., and Edmondson, D. (2012). “Meta-analysis of perceived stress and its association with incident coronary heart disease”. The American Journal of Cardiology, 110(12), 1711–1716. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amjcard.2012.08.004>

²⁵ Dhabhar, F.S. (2014). “Effects of stress on immune function: the good, the bad, and the beautiful”. Immunologic research, 58, 193–210. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12026-014-8517-0>

²⁶ Buscemi, V., Chang, W-J, Liston, M.B., McAuley, J.H., Schabrun, S.M. (2019). “The Role of Perceived Stress and Life Stressors in the Development of Chronic Musculoskeletal Pain Disorders: A Systematic Review”. The Journal of Pain, 20(10), 1127–1139. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpain.2019.02.008>.

²⁷ Jerrim, J., Sims, S., Taylor, H., and Allen, R. (2021). “Has the mental health and wellbeing of teachers in England changed over time? New evidence from three datasets”. Oxford Review of Education, 47(6), 805–825. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2021.1902795>.

²⁸ Hascher, T. and Waber, J. (2021). “Teacher well-being: A systematic review of the research literature from the year 2000–2019”. Educational Research Review, 34, November 2021. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1747938X21000348>

²⁹ Gray, C., Wilcox, G., and Nordstokke, D. (2017). “Teacher mental health, school climate, inclusive education and student learning: A review”. Canadian Psychology / Psychologie canadienne, 58(3), 203–210. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cap0000117>

³⁰ Gibson, S., and Carroll, C. (2021). “Stress, Burnout, Anxiety and Depression: How they impact on the mental health and wellbeing of teachers and on learner outcomes”. October 2021. <https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/media/qeupkgep/literature-review-stress-anxiety-burnout-and-depression-impact-on-teachers-and-on-learner-outcomes.pdf>

³¹ Education Support (2024a). “Teacher Wellbeing: A Global Understanding”. Report for Education International. https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/media/z02jahif/2024_eiresearch_teacherwellbeing_eng.pdf

Education workforce suicide risk

There is limited data available on work-related suicide in the UK. Overall, the risk of suicide for those in teaching and education jobs is 31% lower than the national average³². However, there are significant differences when looking at sub-occupation categories within the data. Looking at the female population, Windsor-Shellard and Gunnell (2019) identify six occupations at high risk, including “primary and nursery education teaching professionals.” Between 2011 and 2015, this group experienced a 42% higher risk of suicide compared to peers of the same age and gender in the wider population³³.

This review could not locate analysis of the more recent data sets for occupational risk in the UK, though more recent raw data is available from the ONS (2024)³⁴.

Inspector workforce

The HMI community is a critical group to consider when reviewing the wellbeing impact of any aspect of inspection. However, there is limited data available about the inspector workforce. The wellbeing of this workforce will directly affect the ability of individuals to perform well in their roles, as well as their capacity to relate positively to others involved in inspection.

The Gilbert review (2024) highlighted that HMI workload is high, morale is low and the average length of service runs at between two to four years³⁵.

The National Audit Office (2018) reported that “the available evidence indicates that workload is one of the main reasons why HMIs leave³⁶.”

Since Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) are drawn largely from the education workforce, they are expected to share the wellbeing profile of the broader education workforce outlined above.

Wider demographic context

It is a limitation of this review that there is insufficient capacity to include the full range of wider demographic information that should be considered relevant, for example, the mental health and wellbeing disparities associated with protected characteristics or socio-economic factors.

³² ONS (2017). “Suicide by occupation, England: 2011 to 2015”. 17 March 2017.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/suicidebyoccupation/england2011to2015#suicide-by-occupation-among-females>.

³³ Windsor-Shellard, B., and Gunnell, D. (2019). “Occupation-specific suicide risk in England: 2011-2015”. The British Journal of Psychiatry, 215(4), 594-599. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.2019.69>

³⁴ ONS (2024). “Suicide by occupation in England and Wales: 2020 to 2022”. 7 May 2024.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/adhocs/2028suicidebyoccupationinengland2020to2022>

³⁵ Gilbert, C. (2024). “Independent learning review for Ofsted” by Dame Christine Gilbert. September 2024.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66ce24201aaf41b21139cf94/Independent_learning_review_for_Ofsted_by_Dame_Christine_Gilbert.pdf

³⁶ National Audit Office (2018). “Ofsted’s inspection of schools”. 24 May 2018. <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Ofsteds-inspection-of-schools.pdf>

Wellbeing impact of inspection

Appraisal process: Part 2 of 4

To understand the wellbeing risks of inspection, we must locate it within what is known about workplace wellbeing.

Workplace wellbeing

This report relies on De Neve and Ward's (2025) definition of workplace wellbeing,^{37 38} which itself is rooted in the field of subjective wellbeing. They propose a composite definition that combines:

- evaluative workplace wellbeing judgement: job satisfaction;
- positive affective wellbeing measurement: happiness at work;
- negative affective wellbeing measurement: stress at work;
- eudaimonic wellbeing measurement: sense of purpose at work.

De Neve and Ward (2025) have developed a model of workplace wellbeing that illustrates how evidence-based drivers of workplace wellbeing directly contribute to these four dimensions of work-related wellbeing. The drivers lead to positive and/or negative wellbeing, which in turn affects workforce productivity, recruitment, retention and organisational performance. They show that it is possible to have positive and negative aspects of wellbeing at the same time.

Looking at the available data for the education workforce, we can map data for the first three dimensions of this definition. Sense of purpose at work data is not readily available, so two related data points are offered as the best available proxies:

Table 1: Workplace wellbeing of education staff in England

Measure	Available data	Source
<i>Job satisfaction</i>	49% of teachers and leaders report themselves satisfied with their job all or most of the time (down from 58% in 2022)	DfE (2024). "Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders, Wave 3 Summary Report"
<i>Happiness at work</i>	The mean score for educators is 6.3, compared to 7.3 for the general population	As above
<i>Stress at work</i>	89% of teachers and leaders experience stress at work	As above
<i>Sense of purpose at work</i>	Feeling things done in life are worthwhile: mean score for educators is 7.0, compared to 7.8 for the general population	As above
	77% of all educators have a clear sense of purpose when they join the profession. 90% of these educators still felt connected to their sense of purpose always, most or some of the time	Education Support (2021). "Teacher Wellbeing Index"

³⁷ De Neve, J-E., and Ward, G. (2023). "Measuring Workplace Wellbeing". University of Oxford Wellbeing Research Centre Working Paper 2303. doi.org/10.5287/ora-exxjkdzym

³⁸ De Neve, J-E., and Ward, G. (2025). "Why Workplace Wellbeing Matters". Harvard Business Review Press

Further research is required to measure these aspects of educator wellbeing reliably. Nonetheless, the data is consistent with other indicators of relatively poor workplace wellbeing for education staff compared to the general population, (as outlined in section two, part one of this report), with sense of purpose offering protective, positive wellbeing effects.

Drivers of workplace wellbeing

De Neve and Ward's (2025) model of workplace wellbeing is the most helpful that Education Support has yet found in terms of the translation from theory to practice. Whilst there are many other ways to conceptualise workplace wellbeing,³⁹ this model best fits our understanding of the dynamics of workplace wellbeing in the education sector currently.

Through their extensive systematic review of evidence-based interventions to improve employee wellbeing, Cunningham et al (2024)⁴⁰ distinguish twelve drivers of workplace wellbeing, namely:

- Achievement
- Appreciation
- Compensation
- Energy
- Flexibility
- Inclusion & belonging
- Learning
- Management
- Purpose
- Stress
- Support
- Trust.

These twelve drivers are related to, and consistent with, De Neve and Ward's (2025) model. As such, they have been selected as a lens through which to consider wellbeing in this impact assessment.

Current wellbeing impact of inspection on college and school staff

Ofsted's own research clearly identifies many impacts on wellbeing associated with inspection. The Big Listen consultation findings (2024)⁴¹ reported that "inspection can have a negative impact on staff well-being and mental health"; "there is a culture of fear around inspections"; and that "respondents said the process is high-stakes, stressful, pressured and causes considerable anxiety."

The Big Listen IFF Research report (2024) indicated that 73% of individuals working in schools "were more likely to say that inspections 'always' affected leaders and staff wellbeing".⁴² The same report highlighted qualitative findings that staff felt "stressed, nervous, anxious, worried and frustrated

³⁹ Education Support (2024a) Teacher Wellbeing: A Global Understanding. Available at: https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/media/z02jahif/2024_eiresearch_teacherwellbeing_eng.pdf

⁴⁰ Cunningham, S., Fleming, W., Regier, C., Kaats, M., and De Neve, J. (2024). "Work Wellbeing Playbook: A Systematic Review of Evidence-Based Interventions to Improve Employee Wellbeing". Work Wellbeing Movement. <https://worldwellbeingmovement.org/playbook/>

⁴¹ IFF Research (2024). "Ofsted Big Listen research report: findings from professionals". September 2024. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66d06d137c42acbec502c8b/ofsted-big-listen-research-report-findings-from-professionals-IFF-Research.pdf>

⁴² *ibid*

before an inspection,” and “commonly felt exhausted, frustrated, deflated, but also often relieved and pleased” after an inspection.

In Education Support’s Teacher Wellbeing Index (2023), 71% of all staff agreed that inspections negatively impact staff mental health and wellbeing, rising to 82% of senior leaders⁴³. Perryman et al (2025) also highlight the extent to which a sense of responsibility for the outcome of inspection weighs on headteachers.⁴⁴

Workload is a widely reported driver of poor wellbeing in education.^{45 46 47 48 49} In IFF Research’s Big Listen report (2024), 84% of individuals working in schools said that inspections “always added undue pressure to workloads or did so most of the time.”⁵⁰ 63% of teachers surveyed for the Teacher Retention Commission (2023)⁵¹ believed they spent more time doing lesson planning and marking papers because of external accountability.

There is little positive impact data relating to inspections. Anecdotally, this review heard that a positive inspection experience can be affirming for leaders and staff, supporting their sense of purpose and providing an opportunity to celebrate their achievements as a staff team.

Trust in Ofsted

One of the key issues underpinning the impact of inspection is the perception of Ofsted across the sector: specifically, the low levels of trust in Ofsted reported by stakeholders.

Through the Big Listen review, we learned that 29% of schools agree that Ofsted has achieved its ambition of being trusted⁵². Just 20% of primary schools agree. Other (non-school) education providers describe a culture of fear, lack of trust and insufficient opportunity to provide feedback or challenge to Ofsted.⁵³ Less than half of the public (44%) say they trust Ofsted⁵⁴.

The levels of trust do not appear to correlate with inspection outcomes. In the NAO’s (2018) independent survey of headteachers, 84% felt that the outcome of their most recent inspection was fair (with a range of responses from 100% of schools judged to be outstanding agreeing to 51% of

⁴³ Education Support (2023). “Teacher Wellbeing Index”. November 2023. <https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/resources/for-organisations/research/teacher-wellbeing-index/>

⁴⁴ Perryman, J., Bradbury, A., Calvert, G., and Kilian, K. (2025). “Headteachers and external inspection in England”. Educational Management Administration and Leadership 0(0) 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432251340525>

⁴⁵ DfE (2024). “Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders, Wave 3 Summary Report”. November 2024. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67852c953a9388161c5d2335/Wave_3_Summary_Report.pdf

⁴⁶ Creagh, S., Thompson, G., Mockler, N., Stacey, M., and Hogan, A. (2023). “Workload, work intensification and time poverty for teachers and school leaders: a systematic research synthesis”. Educational Review, 77(2), 661–680. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2023.2196607>

⁴⁷ Fitzsimons, S., and Smith, D. S. (2025). “‘Don’t do anything special for us coming’: the mental health impact of Ofsted inspections on teacher educators in England”. Cambridge Journal of Education, 55(1), 93–111. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2025.2451280>

⁴⁸ Perryman, J., Bradbury, A., Calvert, G., and Kilian, K. (2025). “Headteachers and external inspection in England”. Educational Management Administration and Leadership 0(0) 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432251340525>

⁴⁹ Ofsted (2019). “Teacher well-being at work in schools and further education providers”. July 2019. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5fb41122e90e07208d0d5df1/Teacher_well-being_report_110719F.pdf

⁵⁰ IFF Research (2024). “Ofsted Big Listen research report: findings from professionals”. September 2024. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66d06d137c42acbec502c8b/ofsted-big-listen-research-report-findings-from-professionals-IFF-Research.pdf>

⁵¹ Education Support (2023b). “1970s working conditions in the 2020s: Modernising the professional lives of teachers for the 21st Century”. Education Support/Public First. June 2023. <https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/media/bn2bk5a3/1970s-working-conditions-in-the-2020s.pdf>

⁵² IFF Research (2024). “Ofsted Big Listen research report: findings from professionals”. September 2024. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66d06d137c42acbec502c8b/ofsted-big-listen-research-report-findings-from-professionals-IFF-Research.pdf>

⁵³ *ibid*

⁵⁴ National Centre for Social Research (2024). “Ofsted Big Listen: research with the public and parents/carers”. September 2024. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66d06d7f59b0ec2e151f84c4/ofsted-big-listen-research-with-the-public-parents-carers-NatCen-Research.pdf>

schools judged to be inadequate agreeing). Through the Big Listen, 67% of schools described themselves as satisfied with the process and experience of their most recent inspection⁵⁵. Satisfaction with a specific inspection outcome runs at a much higher rate than trust.

Two factors appear to be repeatedly linked with the low levels of trust: perceived inconsistency in judgements (largely attributed to personal biases of inspectors) and a view that Ofsted's complaints process lacks independence. One headteacher commented to this review that, "one bad Ofsted experience drowns out seven good experiences," and that it will take significant improvements to "get past the traumatic muscle memory in the sector."

High stakes

It is also important to consider the nature of the much-discussed high stakes of inspection. Whilst the whole English accountability system can be characterised as *high stakes*,⁵⁶ the term is also routinely used in relation to inspection outcomes that identify a school or college as causing concern. It is not always clear if stakeholders, school staff and civil servants mean the same thing when referring to the high stakes nature of inspection. Through its work with school and college leaders, Education Support has developed the following four-part working definition of the specific stakes in question. We welcome further discussion with stakeholders to refine this. For schools, we identify four dimensions of high stakes:

- i. *Loss of control*: structural intervention where a maintained school is required to become an academy, or, an existing academy is transferred to an alternative trust.
- ii. *Job/career loss*: Trust boards or school governors may terminate the employment of a Headteacher or other staff. In this sense, an Ofsted judgement is used by employers as a performance management tool.
- iii. *Financial strain*: Parents/carers may choose to move their child to an alternative setting, following a disappointing judgement. Falling pupil numbers lead to a drop in funding and a commensurate degradation of in-school provision. This can ultimately mean that schools cease to be financially viable and tip into a vicious cycle of restructuring and redundancy, reduction of provision and/or reduction of pupil roll.
- iv. *Workforce strain*: It tends to be more difficult for schools with a poor Ofsted report to recruit and/or retain qualified staff. This makes it ever harder for them to improve.

The dynamics are slightly different for colleges. Certainly job loss or negative career impact is a factor, alongside professional and personal reputation within the sector. Financial strain is a significant factor, with colleges excluded from a variety of funding streams if their inspection grade is not high enough. This in turn can impact the quality of provision that can be offered to learners and the relative attractiveness of a college compared to neighbouring colleges.

To state the obvious, none of these high stakes actions are taken by Ofsted. Rather, an Ofsted report can catalyse one or more of these consequences. Whilst an inspection is separate from its

⁵⁵ IFF Research (2024). "Ofsted Big Listen research report: findings from professionals". September 2024. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66d06d137c42acbece502c8b/ofsted-big-listen-research-report-findings-from-professionals-IFF-Research.pdf>

⁵⁶ Gilbert, C. (2024). "Independent learning review for Ofsted" by Dame Christine Gilbert. September 2024. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66ce24201aaf41b21139cf94/Independent_learning_review_for_Ofsted_by_Dame_Christine_Gilbert.pdf

consequences, the two are inextricably bound in the view of the workforce. Inspection and its consequences are experienced as a whole.

These high stakes are a crucial contributor to the negative wellbeing impact surrounding our culture of accountability in England. This needs to be taken seriously.

An inspection system with lower stakes accountability would not generate the extent of negative impact on wellbeing that is currently reported across the sector.

Stakeholder perspectives on impact of inspection

Appraisal process: Part 3 of 4

This review engaged with a wide variety of stakeholders within Ofsted and across the education sector. Stakeholder insight and experience was sought to inform the scope of the project and to ensure that issues that matter to key stakeholders could be considered whenever possible.

There was a core of shared ambitions, concerns and perspectives across the majority of stakeholders:

- Everyone felt it critical to independently establish the full range of risks to wellbeing associated with inspection, alongside routes to reduce or mitigate those risks.
- Stakeholders felt that it would be impossible to remove all stress from all inspections.
- The vast majority of stakeholders wanted this review to consider:
 - the whole inspection approach, related materials, processes and the associated impact on school and college staff before, during and after inspection
 - the culture and conduct of inspection and the guardrails in place for inappropriate behaviour by inspectors or school/college staff
 - the workload and wellbeing of inspectors
 - the impact of disappointing outcomes or contested inspections on school and college staff, and on inspectors
 - the opportunity for challenge or complaint on the process or outcome
 - the role of school and college staff in contributing to wellbeing pressures
 - the role of employers in contributing to wellbeing pressures
 - suicide prevention
 - the ways in which inspection may become divisive in relationships between parents/carers and school staff.

A variety of other requests were made across the stakeholder group, but the list above represents the central concerns shared by the majority.

Key wellbeing impacts highlighted by stakeholders

Across the diverse range of stakeholders, a wide number of issues were tabled for consideration. Five major themes were consistently raised by both internal and external (to Ofsted) stakeholders.

1. Pressure

Stakeholders raised fundamental questions about how we think about wellbeing and stress in the context of inspection.

- i. For many, there is a basic question about whether wellbeing can genuinely be addressed within the context of a high stakes accountability system. There is a widely held view that the philosophical acceptance of high stakes implies a default de-prioritisation of workforce wellbeing; and the corollary that a system in which wellbeing was taken seriously would by definition dismantle high stakes as its starting point.
- ii. There were reflections on the nature of stress and questions about how “reasonable stress” could be defined in the context of a leadership role.
- iii. The role of “public shaming” was highlighted as a key component of the particular stress risk associated with inspection.

- iv. Stakeholders highlighted that small and/or rural schools/colleges may face particular demands in coping with inspection and maintaining normal operations, compared with more resourced settings.
- v. The role of ambiguity in contributing to inspection pressure was raised, with one stakeholder suggesting that both inspectors and education leaders need support and development to learn to hold uncertainty in a way that mitigates acute stress responses.
- vi. There is a perception that the window of judgement is very short for a setting, but that the consequences can be very big. This is experienced as unfair or disproportionate.
- vii. Stakeholders raised concern about the “HMI hamster wheel” and the relatively high workloads of senior HMIs. This was seen as problematic in its own right for those affected individuals, as well as a risk for school and college staff since, “nice people can behave very differently under stress”, and “often doesn’t realise how they come across.”
- viii. There was recognition that individuals across the education sector and the Ofsted workforce may face specific challenges that will affect the speed with which they can adjust to a new framework, e.g. mental health conditions, lower personal empathy skills, neurodivergent traits.
- ix. The proposed addition of “exemplary” status to the revised framework is mostly expected to be a source of new/additional pressure for leaders.
- x. Among leaders, there were two broad schools of thought about the framework: (a) this is the same old Ofsted model in new packaging, and (b) this seems quite different and will be demanding to understand, learn and prepare for. Both groups expressed a view that the extent to which inspectors are supported to engage with a strengths-based inquiry model, and unlearn the deep-dive approach, will be critical.

Ultimately the revised framework is perceived to be, at best, at least as demanding as the current model. Most stakeholders expect inspection to be more demanding and stressful.

2. *Disappointing inspection outcomes*

There was wide consensus that the key wellbeing risks from inspection are related to those situations in which the inspection outcome is disappointing. This can occur at both ends of the spectrum – where a poor judgement puts a school or college into a category of concern, but also where failure to achieve the highest possible judgement is experienced as a significant event.

- i. The impact can be personal, hitting college and school leaders hard and leading to ill health. This is seen as directly relating to an individual’s sense of professional identity and a blow to, or collapse of, their self-esteem in the face of a judgement that is experienced as humiliating.
- ii. The professional impact relates primarily to an individual’s risk of job loss arising from a disappointing inspection, and the possibility that news of the judgement will prevent them from securing future employment. There is also an impact on professional reputation and a perceived loss of status or respect within the school or college community and local area.
- iii. The way in which a disappointing outcome is delivered is widely considered to be of critical importance. Stakeholders rehearsed stories from the past that exemplified harsh or unkind practice, as well as examples of good, empathetic practice. The key point for most stakeholders is that the communication style, or “bedside manner,” of inspectors can be very negatively experienced by school and college leaders and cause distress.
- iv. HMIs experience stress and anxiety around the welfare of school and college staff. They are very aware of the risk of “getting it wrong” and don’t always feel well-versed about

- the specific triggers that might affect one individual or another. Even with good inspection practice, education staff can become distressed.
- v. Ofsted's complaints process was widely decried as insufficiently independent. Stakeholders simply do not trust that the process is, or can be, fair without meaningful independence.
 - vi. In the words of one stakeholder, "a poor outcome leaves leaders embittered, embattled and joyless about the job – this doesn't improve education. How can we help people get over and move on from a difficult outcome?"

3. *Unintended consequences of the revised framework*

Stakeholders highlighted a wide variety of issues that they believe will arise from the roll-out of the revised framework:

- i. There is a wide consensus that the significant increase in formal judgement areas will result in "many more ways to fail." One Ofsted colleague summarised the point: "anything that is not green will flash brightly on the dashboard." Education leaders expressed concern that the move away from "best fit" judgements will inevitably bring more jeopardy into the process: a weakness that would not historically have prevented a "good" judgement, can now create an "amber" judgement.
- ii. Aligned to this is the view that with HMIs required to make more evaluations and formal judgements, there will be a greater risk of consequential error, since the volume of activities required to gather evidence will dominate the inspection days.
- iii. There is a strong view that the revised framework will expand the number of job roles that may experience significant stress and feel personally responsible for the success, or failure, of an inspection. In particular, stakeholders expressed concerns about SENDCos, DSLs, Directors/Heads/curriculum managers in colleges, nominees and shadow nominees.
- iv. Stakeholders reflected that education staff will be less likely to feel positive about an inspection that includes an amber judgement. Stakeholders expect many historically "good" or "outstanding" settings will be judged amber in places and that this will feel deflating, even if much else in the provision is judged positively.
- v. Stakeholders expect a wave of new policies and practices to be developed by employers and leaders in anticipation of inspection. Given the relatively low levels of trust in Ofsted, the view is that many leaders will not "wait and see," but will want to act immediately to prepare the best evidence audit trail that they can to meet their interpretation of what the inspectorate might value. This will increase workload for school and college staff.
- vi. Stakeholders expect that the roll-out of the new framework will disadvantage smaller schools and colleges that do not have capacity to quickly review and revise their practice, bureaucracy and administration in line with the revised framework.
- vii. Some stakeholders expressed concerns that Ofsted's approach to the development of the revised framework had pitted educators against parents and carers. There is a view that Ofsted promotes tension between parents/carers and schools.
- viii. Stakeholders worried about the way in which the framework rollout would affect communities. Those in the first wave of inspections face the risk of looking less attractive to parents and carers due to the scorecard (compared to a school down the road that is still rated "Good") and this could have a significant impact on school and college rolls, particularly in localities where pupil or learner numbers are falling. This "mixed economy" of Ofsted judgements is expected to have a particularly negative impact on school and college leaders, but is likely to affect whole staff teams, governors and trustees.

- ix. Schools and colleges that were rated inadequate within the twelve months leading up to the launch of the revised framework were also highlighted as a cohort of concern. There is a concern that staff and governors in those already pressurised situations will experience higher levels of stress than they otherwise would. This is amplified by the lack of visibility of inspection requirements within three months of potential live inspection dates and the high stakes that would likely follow a poor outcome.
- x. Stakeholders expressed concerns about the Ofsted definition of inclusion. It is perceived to be a unilateral decision by Ofsted about what matters most, without consultation with the sector. There are concerns about the relationship to the SEND review and way in which the definition will affect selection at the point of entry to a school or college. In schools, there is a concern that this will increase the incentive for “cream-skimming” in the sector, leaving the schools that seek to be fully inclusive with an ever more challenging intake. In Further Education, there are concerns that the definition will lead to the exclusion of learners who will be seen as “too risky” to take on.
- xi. The introduction of the exemplary status was viewed by some as potentially interesting; others believe it will increase pressure on leaders to “achieve the impossible”. Stakeholders questioned why this category is necessary and whether the cost/benefit analysis of introducing it had been sufficiently considered in terms of wellbeing.
- xii. Finally, stakeholders were bemused by the introduction of another level of decision-making into the award of exemplary status. This is seen as undermining the credibility and authority of HMIs and is seen as a message that Ofsted does not trust its own inspector team to make “low stakes” decisions.

4. Trust

Most stakeholder groups expressed low trust in Ofsted, with the notable exception of governors and trustees.

- i. None of the external stakeholders believed that this independent review into wellbeing would be able to instigate meaningful change. The expectation was that it would either be “a stitch up”, or else will “be buried.”
- ii. The way in which the new framework has been developed was experienced as deeply frustrating by sector stakeholders. Ofsted was seen as a closed shop and organisationally viewed as “incapable of collaboration”.
- iii. The perceived lack of meaningful collaboration with sector stakeholders is seen as an important mechanism through which the professional autonomy of educators is reduced, with knock-on effects on workplace wellbeing.
- iv. Stakeholders perceive a gap between the messages promoted by Ofsted’s leadership about working with the sector, and the day-to-day reality on the ground. This appears to have a negative impact on the trust placed in Ofsted.
- v. Questions around the equity⁵⁷, efficacy⁵⁸, validity⁵⁹, reliability⁶⁰ and consistency of inspections were a major theme for external stakeholders. Stakeholders would like Ofsted to

⁵⁷ Stakeholders refer to the extent to which inspection outcomes measure the affluence of a locality rather than the distance-travelled for the children and young people in that setting. A specific EPI report was cited by stakeholders here: Hutchinson, J (2016). “School Inspection in England: Is there room to improve?”. November 2016. <https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/school-inspection-in-england-web.pdf>

⁵⁸ Stakeholders highlight that Ofsted has not made the case for the efficacy of inspection, referencing the National Audit Office’s (2018) view that Ofsted doesn’t know whether its inspections have the intended impact of raising the standards of education and improve the quality of children’s and young people’s lives.

⁵⁹ Stakeholders here refer to the extent to which what is measured through an inspection is truly reflective of the quality of a school or college.

⁶⁰ Stakeholders refer to the extent to which two different inspectors might reach different conclusions based on the same evidence. A specific study (Bokhove et al, 2023) was highlighted here.

- ensure that these aspects of its work are measured, and to be clear about the extent to which different inspectors can reach different judgements based on the same evidence.
- vi. There is a perception across all stakeholders that poor inspection practice is not dealt with well at Ofsted. External stakeholders suggested that this undermines trust in Ofsted. Internal stakeholders expressed frustration that colleagues who don't perform well are still able to inspect and expressed dismay that all inspectors are "tarred with the same brush" within the sector.
 - vii. The complaints process is widely seen as a significant block to trust. Stakeholders do not accept that recent changes have made a material difference, and do not believe that the process can be trusted until it is more independence in it is secured.
 - viii. The tone of Ofsted's communications was repeatedly highlighted as creating mistrust. For example, when Ofsted says that it does not want providers to do additional work for inspection, this message is received by many as "gaslighting", rather than taken at face value.
 - ix. Over 60% of the National Governance Association's (NGA) membership supports inspection. The NGA also highlights the outsized role Ofsted can have in the sector, noting that "both leaders and boards may feel compelled to prioritise practices that are deemed favourable by Ofsted, potentially at the expense of other valuable approaches based on local need⁶¹."
 - x. Stakeholders reflected concerns about the governance of policymaking. Ofsted is seen to be a *de facto* policymaker, e.g. in establishing a definition of inclusion. The DfE is seen as failing to ensure adequate consultation on substantive matters of policy, as well as failing to address problematic lack of alignment, or duplication, through the overlapping remits of a variety of accountability mechanisms.
 - xi. HMI morale appears low and this groups feels disconnected from the rest of the organisation.

5. Culture

Culture is closely linked with trust, but stakeholders made some specific points:

- i. There is a view that the mindset and behaviours of the senior team at Ofsted is relatively fixed and rigid. Internal and external stakeholders have felt excluded from meaningful involvement in the development of the revised framework.
- ii. Externally, there is a perception that Ofsted is old-fashioned in its thinking about genuine collaboration and is not yet working in a way that aligns with the espoused intention of the HMCI to "work with the sector".
- iii. Almost universally, stakeholders feel that Ofsted has a blind spot around pace. There is much to admire about getting things done quickly, but if that is perceived to be at the cost of doing things well, it is seen as counter-productive to the intended aim.
- iv. Stakeholders were sceptical about Ofsted's ability to specify and deliver the right kind of professional development for the inspector workforce, both HMIs and Ofsted Inspectors. There is a concern that this will comprise relatively simplistic, online, modular training components and that this type of training will not be able to deliver the quality or sophistication of support that inspectors need to enable them to undertake inspections well.
- v. There were various remarks on the isolation and disconnection of HMIs within the wider Ofsted organisation.
- vi. There was appreciation for the perception that there are many good people working at Ofsted.
- vii. There was surprise and appreciation that this review had been commissioned by Ofsted.

⁶¹ NGA (2024). "Annual school and trust governance survey". National Governance Association. July 2024.
<https://www.nga.org.uk/media/etmfhxpc/nga-governance-survey-2024-full-report.pdf>

The experience of inspectors

One final theme emerging from the stakeholder conversations relates to the ways in which Ofsted and its inspectors can be treated within the sector.

HMIs can experience significant hostility but often do not seem to find this remarkable. They understand that any abusive behaviour is not acceptable, but it was not clear whether there was a consistent line about what might constitute unacceptable behaviour by leaders in colleges, schools and MATs.

It is right that significant attention has been paid to the behaviour of inspectors, given the power dynamics inherent in inspection. We must, however, also consider when poor behaviour comes from leaders or staff in schools, colleges and MATs. This will influence how inspectors and staff interact throughout the inspection. This might usefully be an area for Ofsted to sensitively explore with sector stakeholders. A mutual understanding of, and commitment to, professionalism and civility, will improve the atmosphere and conduct on an inspection for everyone.

This review heard much valid criticism of the inspection system and of the organisational choices and actions of Ofsted over the past fifteen years. However, perhaps as a function of low trust, it is notable that Ofsted is also blamed for much that is outside of its direct control, for example:

- The consequences of inspection.
- Disingenuous employer behaviour, ranging from the use of, “Ofsted needs to see...[insert workload requirement of choice]”, through to using inspection outcomes as a performance management tool, up to and including sacking headteachers.
- Poor leadership behaviour, often in the form of increasing staff workload in order to achieve what is imagined to be “Ofsted readiness.” Doubtless this is driven by understandable anxiety, but the net effect on school and college staff can be damaging.

Review of revised inspection approach and artefacts

Appraisal process: Part 4 of 4

The revised Ofsted inspection framework was not finalised at the time of this review. For clarity, the specific resources available for review were:

- i. The school inspection toolkit (of 9 June 2025)
- ii. A presentation overview of the framework, methodology and operating guidance (June 2025)
- iii. The operating guide for inspectors (June 2025)
- iv. Shadowing a test inspection at a secondary school (June 2025)
- v. Shadowing a test inspection at an independent specialist college (July 2025)
- vi. Interviews with staff and governors during pilot inspections (June - July 2025)
- vii. Interviews with senior leaders that have experienced test inspection (June - July 2025)
- viii. Review of the complaints process (June 2025)

Reflections

Key reflections from a workforce wellbeing perspective, summarised in line with the scope are:

The framework and approach to inspection

- i. The inspection framework and methodology emphasise a “show and tell” approach, inviting college and school leaders to share their strengths.
 - a. Leaders reflected that they will not always be able to arrange access to the right evidence within the tight timeframe of the inspection visit, but that they did feel invited to hand in relevant evidence throughout the test inspections.
- ii. Inspection remains personally demanding on leaders and staff. Even in a test visit situation, some staff and leaders reported exhaustion and overwhelm.
- iii. This review is unable to determine whether the revised framework is more demanding, or simply differently demanding. Leaders highlighted their concern that a move away from “best fit” judgements to the report card would increase their sense of jeopardy in a live inspection. The addition of more judgement areas is reflected as “more hoops to jump through.” There was some fear that the scorecard would become a checklist that will ultimately constrain professional autonomy for educators. There were concerns that the tools may not be ready for full roll-out on the current planned timetable and that, if this is rushed, it would lower trust in the process and in Ofsted itself.
- iv. The flexibility and co-development of the inspection timetable is appreciated in terms of the opportunity to show the strengths of a setting.
 - a. Providers also reported that the operational impact of making this work can be difficult: the unpredictability of the shape of the inspection does not fit easily with the routines and structures of school or college.

- b. The wider staff group and learners will require enough information to understand what is happening on-site.
 - c. Governors and trustees welcomed the opportunity to participate via online meetings, rather than needing to attend in person.
- v. The introduction of the nominee role to school settings has the potential to support better relationships between settings and Ofsted.
 - a. Whilst Ofsted intends this to be a helpful addition to the process, those settings with limited capacity may struggle to engage with this offer. This may subsequently lead those in such settings to feel unfairly disadvantaged in an inspection process.
 - b. There are specific risks relating to MATs. In a situation where the MAT provides a nominee, headteachers may feel undermined or excluded from part of the inspection process. Where interpersonal relationships between the MAT and school colleagues are not positive, this would present a risk for further stress on the headteacher.
- vi. The inspection timetable is busy. It is difficult to see how lead inspectors will have enough time to plan activity, manage relationships and consider evidence in the available time in situations where the inspection is contested or difficult. If these inspections become time pressured, a detrimental knock-on impact on the behaviour of everyone involved ought to be expected.
 - a. Whilst there are plans to provide support to inspectors through the introduction of AI tools, the initial usage of these proved clunky during visit observations.
- vii. Leaders reflected that concerns about the equity, validity and reliability of inspection remain and require further research to convince the sector that inspection is “fair.”
- viii. Ofsted has worked to introduce independence into its complaints process through expert case reviews that focus on the inspection process.
 - a. This remains unconvincing to the sector, with concerns raised about the recourse available to them if they believe an incorrect judgement is made.

Conduct during inspection

- i. It became clear during the review just how critical the relationship between HMIs and college/school leaders is for positive wellbeing outcomes. There are few scenarios in which a pressured, stressed HMI and a pressured, stressed leader will bring out the best in each other. In attending to the wellbeing of everyone affected by inspection, the wellbeing of these two groups ought to be improved and sustained.
- ii. This review observed uniformly good conduct and professionalism from inspectors and from staff in a school and college.
- iii. Leaders spoke positively about their experience of “more humanity” in the inspection process and expressed that this feels like a positive change.
- iv. Inspectors and leaders separately reflected that time pressures during a live inspection should be expected to contribute to a more stressful inspection.
- v. Leaders remain sceptical about the degree to which all inspector behaviour will be equally empathic, versus their view that this positive experience is because they “got lucky” with their particular inspectors.

Wider consequences that arise from inspection

- i. The high stakes consequences of a poor inspection outcome may be modified by the plans on which DfE has recently consulted⁶², but educators continue to perceive the consequences as severe and anxiety-inducing.
 - a. Loss of control: structural intervention will still occur for schools, but with a longer window for school improvement, supported by RISE teams.
 - b. Job loss/career loss: will continue to be experienced as a threat by leaders.
 - c. Financial strain:
 - i. parental choice is expected to become more commonly exercised during the first four years of the framework roll-out as communities respond to a mixed economy of judgements (a historical “Good” in one school may look more attractive than a more recent scorecard that shows amber or red judgements). The overall reduction in pupil numbers across the system makes it easier for parents to exercise choice. More movement of pupils will put pressure on school budgets.
 - ii. Further Education settings will continue to face funding constraints on receipt of a disappointing judgement.
 - d. Workforce strain: in a competitive market for talent, recruitment and retention are expected to remain more difficult for settings that do not have solidly positive inspection outcomes.

⁶² DfE (2025). “School accountability reform – school profiles, improvement and intervention. Government consultation”. 3 February 2025. Available at: https://consult.education.gov.uk/school-accountability/education-accountability-reform/supporting_documents/School%20accountability%20reform%20%20school%20profiles%20improvement%20and%20intervention.pdf

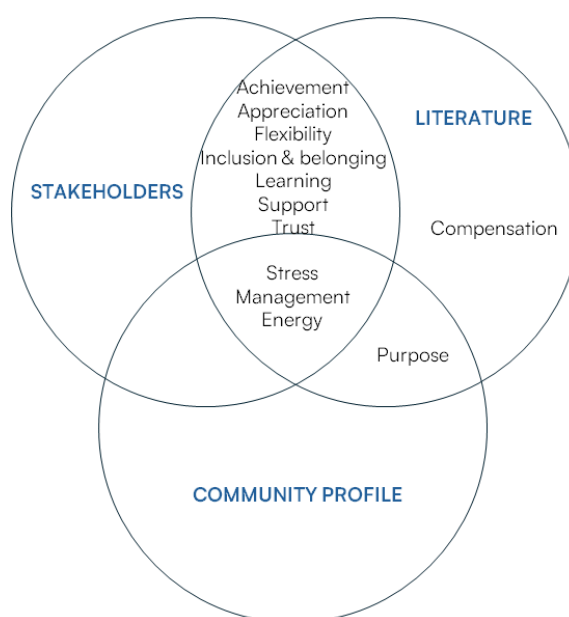
Section three: identification of potential impacts on wellbeing

Wellbeing factors prioritised

Ideally the prioritisation of wellbeing factors would have been carried out collaboratively with stakeholders. Time and capacity did not allow this.

To triangulate the various findings, this review started with Cunningham et al's (2024) twelve drivers of workplace wellbeing⁶³. These drivers have been identified through a systematic review of more than 3,000 academic studies of workplace wellbeing interventions. Stakeholder feedback and demographic data was mapped against these drivers. The result is summarised below.

Figure 3: Triangulation of wellbeing factors



The *management** and *energy* factors significantly materialise as *workload* in the education sector. To reflect this, the review proceeded with *workload* (hours worked, type of work, work intensity, work-life balance) rather than *management* and *energy*.

Purpose did come up in some stakeholder conversations, but it was a much less frequent theme than the others, and so is shown at the overlap between demographic data and literature. Similarly, *compensation* was barely referred to by stakeholders.

In the factors of overlap between stakeholders and the literature, *trust* and *support* were both significant in terms of frequency and severity attributed to them by stakeholders.

Consequently, *workload*, *stress*, *trust*, and *support* were taken forward as the priority workplace wellbeing factors for impact assessment.

*Additional aspects of *management* overlap with the *support* driver and are considered through that lens.

⁶³ Cunningham, S., Fleming, W., Regier, C., Kaats, M., and De Neve, J. (2024). "Work Wellbeing Playbook: A Systematic Review of Evidence-Based Interventions to Improve Employee Wellbeing". Work Wellbeing Movement. <https://worldwellbeingmovement.org/playbook/>

Identification of specific wellbeing impacts

An appraisal of the key wellbeing impacts of the revised Ofsted framework has been completed by:

1. Summarising the estimated baseline impact of the current framework, drawing on stakeholder feedback, data and the literature.
2. Summarising the anticipated impact of the transition to the revised framework over a four-year period (2026-2029). During this period, all settings will experience at least one graded inspection visit.
3. Summarising the anticipated impact of “business as usual” operation of the revised framework after the transition period i.e. beyond 2029.

Two tables now follow. Table 2 considers the priority factors as they impact wellbeing for school and college staff. Table 3 does the same for the wellbeing of HMIs.

Table 2 - the priority wellbeing impacts as they relate to school and college staff.

Wellbeing drivers⁶⁴	Baseline assessment of the impact experienced under current framework	Anticipated change in impact during transition to revised framework (2026-2029), compared to current impact	Anticipated change in impact post-transition, i.e. “business as usual” (post-2029), compared to current impact
Stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a significant imbalance between the total demands placed on schools and colleges and the capacity of staff in those institutions to meet these expectations. • This results in relatively high levels of stress across the workforce. • High stakes accountability is widely cited as one of the key factors driving stress in the sector. • Whilst these stakes are a consequence of the inspection 	<p><i>Negative impact:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The baseline stress level of school and college leaders is concerningly high. The revised framework does not reduce the pressure on leaders to achieve a desirable outcome. The consequence of not meeting the expected standards of the revised framework will remain high stakes in nature. • The transition from a “known quantity” framework to something unknown, creates additional anxiety about “getting it right.” The more granular judgements received by providers are unlikely to be uniformly “good.” This will be very stressful for many leaders. • The transition to a revised framework is likely to further heighten anxiety for some leaders e.g. those who face local competition for pupil/learner enrolment, or who are currently in a category of concern. 	<p><i>Neutral impact:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The stress related to inspection is unlikely to materially change whilst the ‘high stakes’ consequences remain broadly intact.

⁶⁴ Cunningham, S., Fleming, W., Regier, C., Kaats, M., and De Neve, J. (2024). “Work Wellbeing Playbook: A Systematic Review of Evidence-Based Interventions to Improve Employee Wellbeing”. Work Wellbeing Movement. <https://worldwellbeingmovement.org/playbook/>

	<p>outcome, the inspection itself is a catalyst for anxiety and fear.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many educators experience a sense of jeopardy linked to their perception of variability around fairness, personal bias and interpersonal rapport with inspection team etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leader anxiety and/or stress will, in many (though not all) cases, spillover and increase pressure on staff teams to perform well in inspection. The SENDCo role in schools and Director/Heads/curriculum manager roles in colleges are at risk of increased stress under the revised framework. The framework may leave these roles feeling personally exposed and responsible for inspection outcomes. <p><i>Positive impact:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Removing the deep dive will take pressure off middle leaders. 	
<p>Workload</p> <p>("workload" is the language of the sector. In Cunningham et al (2024) this maps against the "management" and "energy" drivers of workplace wellbeing)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Before inspection:</i> There is a pervasive perception across the education sector that additional work is routinely required, directly or indirectly, to maintain a sufficient, accessible audit trail for Ofsted. <i>During inspection:</i> In a workforce that reports relatively high levels of stress, burnout, and poor work/life balance, inspection is experienced as draining or exhausting. <i>After inspection:</i> This review found little data here. Anecdotally, educators report a range of feelings from elation (less commonly) through to exhaustion (more commonly) and devastation (less commonly). 	<p><i>Negative impact:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any change to the framework will require additional energy, attention and work from college and school staff as they engage with it, adding to workload. There is low trust between the inspectorate and the inspected. The addition of new categories for inspection will mean that schools and colleges alter their processes and documentation to reflect what they imagine will be required to secure a positive evaluation. This shift may not be required by Ofsted, but until trust in the process is improved, this well-established behavioural dynamic will continue to generate extra work across the sector. The revised framework will require leaders to evidence impact across a larger number of evaluation areas, which may drive new forms of bureaucracy and data collection in schools and colleges. The flexibility of the approach may well create some friction with school routines and structures. During inspection there will be less predictability as inspectors follow lines of inquiry in collaboration with leaders. This lack of predictability will be difficult for some settings to juggle. <p><i>Positive impact:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The commitment to shortening the inspection day will give leadership teams more time to prepare for the following day. 	<p><i>Positive impact:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If the new methodology is implemented as it has been described and piloted, additional work will not be required. After transition, there ought to be an evidence base that will demonstrate that no additional work is required. If this is independently evaluated and universally experienced and accepted, it will shift the dial in terms of colleges and schools producing Ofsted-focused artefacts and processes.
Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High levels of trust support better stress management in the 	<i>Neutral to negative impact:</i>	<i>Neutral to positive impact:</i>

	<p>workplace. Trust in Ofsted is reportedly low.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The equity, reliability and validity of inspection outcomes is contested. The “bad inspector” risk remains a very real concern in the sector, even while there is clear view that inspector engagement has improved over the past year. • The perceived insufficiency of independence in Ofsted’s complaints process is a driver for low trust. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The deployment of a new toolkit, in and of itself, is unlikely to materially change the level of trust in Ofsted. • The way in which a toolkit is created and launched matters. The extent of meaningful opportunity to engage and co-create the framework affects trust. All stakeholders reported deep frustration with what they experienced as a unilateral design process with tokenistic consultation. This has a negative impact on the trust the profession has in Ofsted. • If the launch of the new framework is perceived to be rushed, that will have a negative impact on trust. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ofsted has invested significant time and resource into improving processes and capability across the organisation. Over time, this ought to translate into greater consistency of HMI conduct during inspection, improved capacity for strengths-based evaluation and more collaborative engagement with schools and colleges. • As this impact is measured and evaluated, the improvement in experience will gradually increase trust in the inspectorate.
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support in the workplace can significantly mitigate wellbeing risks. Ofsted has worked to improve its capacity to support school/college leaders around inspections. This is recognised by educators. 	<p><i>Neutral impact:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As the revised methodology settles, inspectors are likely to have more bandwidth for interpersonal engagement (rather than technically thinking about how to run the inspection in line with the new framework). 	<p><i>Positive impact:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The revised framework is intended to take greater account of the context of each setting. In addition, there is an intent to support inclusive practice. If this is achieved, many educators are likely to feel supported and appreciated for the work that matters most to them.

Strategies to improve the impact on wellbeing

The table above represents an informed estimate of what is expected to happen as the framework is rolled out. It is, however, possible to achieve faster improvements in workforce wellbeing. Specific strategies for improving wellbeing more quickly than outlined above include:

Stress:

- Reduce the high-stakes consequences of inspection.
- Slow down the roll-out of the new framework to ensure sufficient time for educators to prepare.
- Reduce the isolation of heads and principals after the inspection process.
- Commission and publish a short, annual independent survey of inspected settings, with questions co-designed with the profession.
- Monitor wellbeing indicators and conduct periodic independent reviews of wellbeing outcomes.

Workload:

- During the transition phase, intentionally set out to collate strategies and ideas for improving the workload intensity of inspection and use these to inform regular methodology improvement cycles.

Trust:

- Ensure clear independence in Ofsted's complaints process.
- Track the impact, if any, of unintended consequences.
- Carry out an independent evaluation of inspection validity, reliability, consistency, equity and effectiveness.
- Reconsider the introduction of the "exemplary" standard, in partnership with the profession.
- Review partnership-working approach and seek improvement in stakeholder relationships.
- Continue engagement with independent experts as Ofsted continues to evolve. The continuation of this engagement and transparency around its own improvement plan will support increased trust.
- Review the tone and content of sector-wide communications.

Support:

- Improve support for leaders before, during and after inspection, especially in situations with disappointing outcomes.
- Improve support and development for HMIs and OIs.
- Consider what else can be done to support small settings and primary schools.

Table 3 - the priority wellbeing impacts as they relate to HMIs.

Wellbeing drivers⁶⁵	Baseline assessment of the impact experienced under current framework	Anticipated change in impact during transition to revised framework (2026-2029), compared to current impact	Anticipated change in impact post-transition, i.e. “business as usual” (post-2029), compared to current impact
Stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unknown current position. Anecdotal feedback suggests that contested inspections can be very stressful for inspectors. 	<p><i>Negative impact:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HMIs expect a demanding period as the revised framework is rolled out. School and college staff stress is expected to be higher during the transition period – this in turn will affect HMIs as they seek to balance methodological support for educators with the technical requirements of evidence gathering and forming judgements. There is an expectation that Ofsted inspectors (those who inspect occasionally rather than full-time) may require additional support to work effectively within the new framework. This may place an additional burden on lead inspectors. 	<p><i>Neutral impact</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Once the revised framework is established, there is no material change to stress expected.
Workload	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workload is reportedly high. Anecdotally, some HMIs are concerned about the pace of the roll-out and the work required to get ready. 	<p><i>Negative impact:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The roll-out of the revised framework will likely require inspectors to spend more time adjusting to, and learning to work within, a new model. 	<p><i>Neutral impact:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Once the framework is embedded, there ought not be additional work compared to the baseline.
Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unknown current position Anecdotally, some HMIs have felt disconnected from the development of the framework. 	<p><i>Unknown impact:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A range of outcomes are possible here, significantly dependent on how the framework lands with schools and colleges, and how much voice HMIs will have as practice develops over time. 	
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for HMIs appears limited and fragmented across the organisation. There are projects in progress to improve this. 	<p><i>Unknown impact:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is subject to the specific type, mix and frequency of support that is offered to HMIs. 	

An additional table, highlighting the impact assessment of the other workplace wellbeing drivers considered can be found in Appendix 2.

⁶⁵ Cunningham, S., Fleming, W., Regier, C., Kaats, M., and De Neve, J. (2024). “Work Wellbeing Playbook: A Systematic Review of Evidence-Based Interventions to Improve Employee Wellbeing”. Work Wellbeing Movement. <https://worldwellbeingmovement.org/playbook/>

Identification of wellbeing impacts: risk of serious harm

This review clearly needs to undertake specific consideration of the risks of serious harm or suicide associated with inspection.

As noted by a variety of scholars, the phenomenon of work-related suicide is under-researched.^{66 67} LaMontagne et al (2024)⁶⁸ highlight that work or working conditions contribute to 10%-13% of suicide deaths. O'Connor and Kirtley (2018) make the point that "our ability to predict suicide is no better now than it was 50 years ago".⁶⁹

This review has focused on three specific areas in the literature that appear most related to our understanding of the wellbeing risks associated with school and college inspection.

Overlap between individual vulnerability, occupational risks and stressors

In their presentation of the integrated motivational-volitional (IMV)⁷⁰ model of suicidal behaviour, O'Connor and Kirtley (2018) highlight the diathesis-stress model as part of the IMV's theoretical heritage. The diathesis-stress model "recognises that individual vulnerabilities confer elevated risk for developing suicidal ideation when activated by the presence of stressors⁷¹."

There is obviously tremendous complexity and nuance in the huge variety of biological, psychological and social factors that contribute to an individual's vulnerability. This report does not attempt to map that complexity for educators.

What is clear, however, is that the available evidence indicates that the overall wellbeing of the education workforce is materially below the general population: in particular, the relatively high levels of stress, burnout, anxiety, depression and loneliness noted in section two, part one. All else being equal, this adds to the vulnerability faced by people working in schools and colleges.

There is a wide variety of events that cause significant acute stress in the working life of an educator. A challenging inspection experience is undoubtedly one such event.

⁶⁶ Howard M.C., Follmer K.B., Smith M.B., Tucker R.P., Van Zandt E.C. (2021). "Work and suicide: An interdisciplinary systematic literature review". *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 2021:1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2519>

⁶⁷ Llosa J.A., Agulló-Tómas E., Menéndez-Espina S. and Oliveros B. (2023). "Revisiting the work-suicide link: renewed evidence and models of analysis in workplace contexts". *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1290079>

⁶⁸ LaMontagne, A. D., Åberg, M., Blomqvist, S., Glozier, N., Greiner, B. A., Gullestrup, J., Harvey, S. B., Kyron, M. J., Madsen, I. E. H., Hanson, L. M., Maheen, H., Mustard, C., Niedhammer, I., Rugulies, R., Smith, P. M., Taouk, Y., Waters, S., Witt, K., and King, T. L. (2024). "Work-related suicide: Evolving understandings of etiology and intervention". *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, 67(8), 679-695. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajim.23624>

⁶⁹ O'Connor R.C., and Kirtley O.J. (2018). "The integrated motivational-volitional model of suicidal behaviour". *Philosophy Transactions of the Royal Society B*, 373. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2017.0268>

⁷⁰ *ibid*

⁷¹ *ibid*

Direct antecedents and supported predictors of suicide

In their interdisciplinary systematic literature review of work and suicide, Howard et al (2021)⁷² identify direct antecedents and supported predictors of suicide that are particularly relevant to this report: loneliness, social alienation, hopelessness and mental torment (which includes “excessively felt shame, or guilt, or humiliation, or loneliness, or loss, or sadness”). O’Connor and Kirtley (2018)⁷³ highlight the significance of defeat and humiliation, as well as entrapment.

The literature also highlights job insecurity,^{74 75 76 77} excessive working hours^{78 79}, job strain^{80 81}, high psychological demand⁸² and burnout⁸³ as risk factors for work-related suicide.

These specific antecedents and predictors of suicide are highlighted here because they are immediately recognisable from the work that Education Support does through its crisis and prevention work with school and college leaders. These themes are also evident across a range of submissions to the Select Committee Ofsted inquiry⁸⁴, as well as through Ofsted’s Big Listen consultation.^{85 86}

Individual treatment and universal prevention

Professor Steve Platt, Emeritus Professor of Health Policy Research at the University of Edinburgh, generously gave time to this review. He highlighted the difficulty of predicting suicide risk at the individual level: the analysis of an individual’s risk profile is an important element of a full psychosocial assessment, but its purpose is to identify the most effective intervention(s) for that individual, not the probability of their future suicide.

⁷² Howard M.C., Follmer K.B., Smith M.B., Tucker R.P., Van Zandt E.C. (2021). “Work and suicide: An interdisciplinary systematic literature review”. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 2021:1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2519>

⁷³ O’Connor R.C., and Kirtley O.J. (2018). “The integrated motivational-volitional model of suicidal behaviour”. *Philosophy Transactions of the Royal Society B*, 373. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2017.0268>

⁷⁴ O’Connor R.C., and Kirtley O.J. (2018). “The integrated motivational-volitional model of suicidal behaviour”. *Philosophy. Transactions of the Royal Society. B*, 373. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2017.0268>

⁷⁵ Howard M.C., Follmer K.B., Smith M.B., Tucker R.P., Van Zandt E.C. (2021). “Work and suicide: An interdisciplinary systematic literature review”. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 2021:1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2519>

⁷⁶ Llosa J.A., Agulló-Tomás E., Menéndez-Espina S., and Oliveros B. (2023). “Revisiting the work-suicide link: renewed evidence and models of analysis in workplace contexts”. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1290079>

⁷⁷ Milner A., Page K., Spencer-Thomas S., Lamotagne A.D (2015). “Workplace suicide prevention: a systematic review of published and unpublished activities”. *Health Promotion International*, 30(1): 29-37. <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/dau085>

⁷⁸ Llosa J.A., Agulló-Tomás E., Menéndez-Espina S., and Oliveros B. (2023). “Revisiting the work-suicide link: renewed evidence and models of analysis in workplace contexts”. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14. : <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1290079>

⁷⁹ LaMontagne, A. D., Åberg, M., Blomqvist, S., Glozier, N., Greiner, B. A., Gullestrup, J., Harvey, S. B., Kyron, M. J., Madsen, I. E. H., Hanson, L. M., Maheen, H., Mustard, C., Niedhammer, I., Rugulies, R., Smith, P. M., Taouk, Y., Waters, S., Witt, K., and King, T. L. (2024). “Work-related suicide: Evolving understandings of etiology and intervention”. *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, 67(8), 679-695. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajim.23624>

⁸⁰ *ibid*

⁸¹ Milner A., Page K., Spencer-Thomas S., and Lamotagne A.D (2015). “Workplace suicide prevention: a systematic review of published and unpublished activities”. *Health Promotion International*, 30(1): 29-37. <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/dau085>

⁸² *ibid*

⁸³ Howard M.C., Follmer K.B., Smith M.B., Tucker R.P., and Van Zandt E.C. (2021). “Work and suicide: An interdisciplinary systematic literature review”. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 2021:1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2519>

⁸⁴ Education Select Committee (2023). “Ofsted’s work with schools”. <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/7761/ofsteds-work-with-schools/publications/>

⁸⁵ IFF Research (2024). “Ofsted Big Listen research report: findings from professionals”. September 2024.

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66d06d137c42acbece502c8b/ofsted-big-listen-research-report-findings-from-professionals-IFF-Research.pdf>

⁸⁶ Ofsted (2024). “Findings of Ofsted’s Big Listen public consultation”. September 2024.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-big-listen-supporting-documents/findings-of-ofsteds-big-listen-public-consultation>

The overall health of the education workforce is a known risk. Any meaningful policy intervention to reduce suicide risk needs to be universally targeted at the whole workforce: a strategy to reduce the underlying poor wellbeing visible across education.

Specific action can, and should, be taken when a particular person is identified as being at risk. As O'Connor and Kirtley (2018) highlight, "if an individual is distressed and feeling trapped but they are not suicidal, then clearly interventions that reduce the likelihood that suicidal ideation emerges could offer benefit."

Whilst it is not possible to establish all the risk factors or stressors that may affect an individual, we do know that there is one specific situation in which stress is unquestionably significantly elevated: when a school or college receives a disappointing judgement. This doesn't solely apply to circumstances in which a school or college is placed within a category of concern, but that is the specific situation which most worries HMIs and the sector stakeholders that represent school and college leaders.

This is directly addressed by recommendations 4, 10 and 11 at the end of this report.

Limitations of this report

There are many limitations to this report.

Of particular importance is the fact that this review risks partiality in two ways. Firstly, in terms of completeness: the project was relatively small, with a limited timeframe. Budget and time constraints limited the degree of investigation possible, not least in terms of the literature review and the number of stakeholders reached.

Secondly, in terms of bias: the author leads a charity that exists to support the mental health and wellbeing of education professionals. This risks bias in the selection and interpretation of evidence.

Whilst every effort has been made to ground this review in strong evidence and a wide range of perspectives, these limitations remain.

In addition, the review is limited by its lack of engagement with:

- Children and young people
- Parents and carers
- Support staff
- Demographic data and evidence relating to the experience of educators with protected characteristics.

Section four: recommendations

Recommendations

Across the stakeholder group, there was a loud and clear call for Ofsted to halt the roll-out of the current framework and to begin again in collaboration with the sector. Failing that, many stakeholders wanted the pace of roll-out of the new framework to be slowed. A small minority held the view that little could be achieved by waiting longer, and that only an initial phase of live roll-out would highlight the actual strengths and weaknesses of the framework in the full range of settings.

The recommendations of this review assume that the roll-out of the new framework will proceed during the autumn of 2025. There are five priority recommendations, and three secondary ones for Ofsted to consider. These are followed by recommendations for Government.

A key finding of this report is that an inspection system with lower stakes accountability would not generate the extent of negative impact on wellbeing that is currently reported across the sector. Recommendations explicitly seek to reduce the high stakes.

Priority recommendations for Ofsted

1. **Explore and implement changes to reduce the isolation and individual responsibility felt by headteachers and principals.** Too often, headteachers and principals are seen as solely culpable for a disappointing outcome. In truth, no school or college operates below par due to one individual. The schemes of delegation may vary from one setting to another, but a constellation of leadership actors is collectively responsible for where a setting is on its quality journey. Professional leaders and advisors (school improvement advisors, MAT leadership teams, specialist paid advisors) and governance volunteers (governing bodies, local governing bodies, trustee boards) all contribute significantly to the leadership of the setting.

It ought to be explicit that in most circumstances, a school or college leader losing their job following a poor inspection outcome is a sign of poor collective leadership practice.

Inspection should no longer be used as a tool for individual performance management.

There obviously are reasons for headteachers or principals to lose their jobs, but inspection should no longer be one of them (unless some kind of gross misconduct comes to light through inspection).

In making this change, Ofsted will reduce and remove one of the key planks of the high stakes of inspection.

2. **Invest significantly in the wellbeing and professional development of the HMI workforce.** Specifically, this means addressing the workload of HMIs in a meaningful way, and ensuring that they have access to high quality professional learning and peer support. It also requires investment in consistent line management, performance management and support practices across all regions.

The role of HMI demands great skill and sensitivity. The data in this report highlights that HMIs are interacting with a workforce that has lower wellbeing than the general population. The wellbeing of many within the education profession is significantly compromised, and they often are not aware of that themselves. A stressed and overloaded HMI workforce interacting with a stressed and overloaded education workforce presents

clear and avoidable risks. Ofsted can mitigate those risks by ensuring that its inspectors are well-resourced and able to do their best work sensitively.

3. **Introduce an unequivocal mechanism for independence in the complaints process.** Clearly this will require careful thinking to ensure affordability. It may involve the invitation of an independent observer to join internal case reviews of complaints, or use of an independent sampling process. However it is achieved, more independence in the complaints process will support greater trust in Ofsted.
4. **Develop a clear protocol for responding to individuals in acute distress or at risk of suicide.** Ofsted has already made a range of changes to improve the support available to educators during inspection. Further work is now required to ensure a positive and consistent approach to all individuals who manifest distress or raise self-harm or suicide. The forthcoming BSI standard on suicide awareness and the workplace will provide a helpful starting point (BS 30480)⁸⁷. Ofsted ought to work with sector stakeholders to think through how best to respond across a range of circumstances, e.g. how to respond when it becomes clear that there is relationship breakdown between the educator at risk and the individual identified as formally holding a duty of care towards them.
5. **Monitor the unintended consequences of the revised framework highlighted in this report** and take action to address issues arising quickly, e.g. impact of the inclusion definition or the introduction of exemplary status in the scorecard. It would be even better if this can be done in partnership with stakeholders.

Secondary recommendations for Ofsted

This review recognises that there is a limit to the capacity Ofsted will have to implement changes. These recommendations are important, but less urgent than the priorities highlighted above:

6. **Develop and monitor KPIs to track the progress of key actions** identified in this report.
7. **Carefully monitor and be prepared to revise the amount of inspector time that can be allocated to contested inspections.** This review has some concerns about the feasibility of gathering sufficient evidence to support contested or difficult judgements. Time pressure in such a circumstance will only amplify stress. Where possible, there needs to be an option to extend a visit to ensure that all judgements can be securely evidenced.
8. **Develop a plan to address the particularly low level of trust in Ofsted among primary schools.** There are a lot of primary schools. Ofsted cannot afford to be trusted by so small a proportion of that leadership community.

Recommendations for Government

9. **The Government must act to resolve the negative wellbeing impacts of high stakes inspection.** This review recognises that the DfE is working to amend the way structural intervention works in practice. The high stakes of financial strain and workforce strain remain. At precisely the moment when a school needs resource and talent, it is at risk of losing both, at a cost to school improvement. By systematically addressing the high stakes

⁸⁷ BSI (2025). "Public consultation for BS 30480". British Standards Institution. <https://pages.bsigroup.com/Register-Your-Interest-in-BS30480>

associated with inspection, Government can take the single most significant action to address the impact of inspection on wellbeing.

10. **Universal wellbeing interventions for the workforce must be promoted as a key strategy to reduce suicide risk.** The poor wellbeing of the education workforce (when compared to the general population) is now a known risk for a range of serious health outcomes and harms. Government must consider its duty of care to the workforce and take meaningful action to deliver real improvement in this area.
11. **Increase the personal support available for leaders who receive a poor inspection outcome.** This is a particularly high-risk moment for leaders (and other involved staff) and more support is required to ensure that they can move past this challenging experience with minimal risk to their health and wellbeing.
12. **Develop a sustainable, long-term approach to accountability in England.** This review highlighted how much time and energy is lost to inspection-related stress and workload. This significantly increases when the lens is widened to consider the whole accountability system. There is an enormous opportunity cost to the system, directly affecting outcomes for children and young people.
A revised accountability approach could be informed by the wellbeing drivers that are proven to raise productivity, recruit and retain talent and improve overall performance of organisations across all industries.
It is possible to have an effective accountability system at a much lower cost in terms of the health and energy of the workforce. The effects would be transformative for day-to-day relationships between educators and their learners.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Phase I – Stakeholder questions

Q1: What would you want a wellbeing impact review to achieve?

Q2: What can a wellbeing impact review not achieve?

Q3: What would you expect the review to consider?

Q4: What would you want to be assured is included?

Q5: How would you know it had done a good job? What measures of success would you use?

Q6: In a perfect world with unlimited resource, who would you want to be involved in the process?

Q7: Do you have any concerns about this process?

Q8: Based on your professional role, do you have any specific observations about the nature of the wellbeing impact from inspection?

Q9: Is there anything else you would like to the review to take onboard?

Appendix 2

Five priority drivers were assessed in Tables 2 and 3 in the main body of the report: Stress, Management, Energy, Trust, Support. Management and Energy were combined under the heading “Workload”. This table considers the balance of wellbeing drivers from the twelve highlighted by Cunningham et al (2024).

Table four: additional wellbeing impacts as they relate to school and college staff.

Wellbeing drivers⁸⁸	Baseline assessment of the impact experienced under current framework	Anticipated change in impact during transition to revised framework (2026-2029), compared to current impact	Anticipated change in impact post-transition, i.e. “business as usual” (post-2029), compared to current impact
Achievement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive impact for those who feel that an inspection fairly challenges and recognises their work. • Negative impact for those who experience inspection as unfair or punitive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Negative impact:</i> schools that have historically been graded positively will see an increase in amber and red judgements and this will be experienced as a judgement that their work is not of sufficient quality. • <i>Positive impact:</i> schools that have not previously secured strong judgements may receive targeted positive feedback through the scorecard approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Neutral to positive impact:</i> As the framework becomes normalised in the sector, it will become usual to see a range of colours on the scorecard. The impact of receiving a grade that is not green will eventually become less impactful.
Appreciation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A positive inspection outcome is often taken as an opportunity to thank staff and leaders for their hard-work. • A disappointing inspection outcome can be a lightning rod that allows dissatisfaction and blame to be expressed across the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Negative impact:</i> c.90% of schools and 84% of colleges are currently rated good or better. Under the revised framework, it seems highly unlikely that those proportions can retain at least a secure grading across all the evaluation areas. As such, disappointment seems likely to rise and many school teams may feel unable to celebrate or appreciate staff until all areas achieve a secure score. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Neutral impact:</i> Over time, as the scorecard becomes more familiar and the variability of scores nationally becomes apparent, staff ought to feel more able to celebrate the specific strengths that are highlighted through inspection.
Compensation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not considered based on lack of discussion/relevance in stakeholder meetings. 		
Flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current approach has a clear and relatively defined structure. • There is some accommodation made for special circumstances that may affect providers. • For volunteer governors/ trustees, it can be particularly tricky to respond to the immediacy of an inspection visit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Positive impact:</i> The revised framework aims to give school leaders the opportunity to direct the focus of the inspection. This represents a positive change in terms of a small increase in control and agency for leaders in the process. • Better use of online meetings may also improve the participation of school stakeholders who cannot be on site at short notice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Positive impact:</i> The flexibility of the methodology is intended to support schools to “show and tell” their own story.

⁸⁸ Cunningham, S., Fleming, W., Regier, C., Kaats, M., and De Neve, J. (2024). “Work Wellbeing Playbook: A Systematic Review of Evidence-Based Interventions to Improve Employee Wellbeing”. Work Wellbeing Movement. <https://worldwellbeingmovement.org/playbook/>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Negative impact:</i> There will be some friction between the rigidity of school/college structures and timetables and the fluidity of the new inspection approach. 	
Inclusion & belonging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited evidence available on this factor. • Inclusion and belonging are not explicitly considered under the EIF. It may be noticed under 'leadership and management' evaluations around staff wellbeing. • Demographically, leaders and teachers from a minoritised ethnic background are under-represented across the sector, including inspection teams. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Neutral impact:</i> Whilst 'inclusion' is a specific evaluation within the new framework, it is focused on children. Under 'leadership and governance' there is a general focus on staff wellbeing. There is not a specific focus on discriminatory or exclusionary practice in the sector, nor on the specific workplace risks that face particular groups of staff (eg sexual harassment, digital bullying, physical assault) 	
Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of staff is considered under the 'leadership and management' evaluation area. • The inspection itself is an evaluation of practice rather than an opportunity to learn from, or receive advice from, inspectors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Neutral impact:</i> There is no immediate change expected here. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Neutral to positive impact:</i> Over time, if the monitoring process is light-touch and outcome-oriented, it may contribute to more iterations of positive change in professional practice across a school community. This may afford positive, continuous development for professionals, though also risks the loss of specific personal professional development focus in favour of generic, school-wide priorities.
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education staff have a relatively high sense of purpose in their work, compared to other occupations. • Some educators decide to leave the profession in the wake of an inspection (irrespective of outcome), since the experience can highlight work-life balance and personal wellbeing issues. This is not measured in the sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Neutral to negative impact:</i> The revised approach is unlikely to make a material change in how education staff experience meaning in their work. • The effort required to engage with a new framework and the associated workload and stress impacts may lead to an increase in the number of leaders who decide it is time to leave the profession. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Positive impact:</i> If the revised framework consistently and demonstrably operates from a strengths-based, appreciative inquiry methodology, it may offer an opportunity for educators to reflect on what they do well and the difference that their work makes to children and young people. This would affirm their sense of purpose.

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