



The voice of specialist further education

Removal of the Outstanding Exemption

Natspec response to the DfE consultation

Headline proposal

Government is consulting on a proposal to remove the exemption from inspection by Ofsted for providers graded Outstanding.

Current situation

- Schools and most other organisations delivering publicly-funded education and training who have been graded Outstanding are exempt from routine inspection as a matter of Ofsted policy.
- Independent specialist colleges (ISCs), special schools, higher education institutions offering further education and/or apprenticeship training up to and including level 5 local and authority providers graded Outstanding are **NOT** exempt from routine inspection. They are normally re-inspected within a 6-year period.

Proposed transitional arrangements

- First inspection of all schools, colleges and other organisations delivering publicly-funded education and training previously exempt because of their Outstanding grade will be inspected within 5 years.
- Priority for inspection will be those that have gone the longest without inspection, starting with those that have not been inspected for a decade or longer. These providers will receive a full inspection.
- Schools and colleges last inspected after September 2015 will be re-inspected within five or six years of previous inspection. These providers will receive a Section 8 (schools) or short (other providers) inspection. If a short inspection does not provide sufficient evidence to satisfy inspectors that the college remains outstanding, or concerns are identified, the short inspection will be extended to a full inspection within 15 working days.

Going forward

- Outstanding schools or colleges will receive a Section 8/short inspection thereafter every four or five years, mirroring the treatment of providers graded Good currently.

Implications for ISCs

- The changes for ISCs if the proposals set out above are enacted would be minimal:
 - re-inspection following award of an Outstanding grade would follow after four or five years rather than six years
 - subsequent inspections would normally be short rather than full.
- Inspection of ISCs would fall into line with all other FE and skills providers, resulting in a more level playing field across provider types.



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Natspec response to consultation questions

1. Do you agree we should remove the exemption for outstanding schools, which currently means they are not routinely inspected?

Yes.

2. Do you agree we should remove the exemption for outstanding colleges and other organisations delivering publicly-funded education and training, which currently means they are not routinely inspected?

Yes.

We welcome the parity of approach across all provider types that the removal of the exemption will bring. In the current approach, independent specialist colleges are treated differently from other further education providers. We believe that routine inspection for all providers, regardless of grade previously awarded and of provider type, will help promote continuous quality improvement across the sector and provide young people and families with more accurate and up-to-date information on the quality of provision.

The new Education Inspection Framework focuses on aspects of provision not previously scrutinised by Ofsted. Some providers judged Outstanding under previous frameworks may not be considered as such when evaluated against the four key judgements in the new framework.

3. Do you support our proposed approach for currently exempt outstanding schools?

Yes.

4. Do you support our proposed approach for currently exempt outstanding colleges and other organisations delivering publicly-funded education and training?

Yes.

However, we would recommend that, in addition to length of time elapsed since previous inspection, assessment of risk should also play a part in prioritising which providers previously graded Outstanding should be most swiftly inspected during the transition period. Ofsted's existing risk assessment methodology and list of key risk factors, as set out in the [FE and Skills Inspection Handbook](#) would make a sensible starting point for post-16 providers. Serious concerns about key aspects of the Education Inspection Framework, such as



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curriculum or inclusion of children and young people with SEND, which may not have been picked up in inspections under previous frameworks should also be considered as risk factors prompting an earlier inspection during the transition period.

5. Do you have any other comments on the proposals set out in this consultation?

No