

Q1. Do you agree or disagree with the introduction of a new common inspection framework for maintained schools, academies, further education and skills providers, non-association independent schools and registered early years setting from September 2015.

Strongly agree

The SFCA welcomes the proposal in principle to introduce a new single common inspection framework for all providers. We believe that a common framework for all providers will allow greater consistency and comparability between institutions serving students in the same age range. SFCA has long campaigned for students and parents to be able to make meaningful comparisons between institutions.

However, it is unclear how the single common inspection framework will be implemented across all types of providers. We assume that school/academy sixth forms will continue to be inspected under a different 'remit' to the FE and skills remit where Sixth Form Colleges sit. Paragraph 13 states that separate handbooks for each remit will set out in detail how judgements will be made. **If meaningful comparisons are to be made between school/academy sixth forms, FE colleges and Sixth Form Colleges, the same handbook and crucially - the same data and benchmarks - must be used.** We agree that *there are unnecessary differences between the different Ofsted inspection frameworks* – but a single framework with different handbooks and data will not create the level playing field that is required.

A single inspection framework must mark the end of differential national averages/benchmarks that have unfairly penalised Sixth Form Colleges in recent years. The use of a separate Sixth Form College national average is based on misguided assumptions about the prior attainment profile of students in the sector. This has meant that Sixth Form Colleges with the same outcomes data and prior attainment profile as neighbouring FE colleges have found it very difficult to achieve the same inspection grade. The legal designation of a provider should have no bearing on the data used in its inspection.

It is important for all inspection teams to be fully trained in post-16 education, they should be able to analyse and acknowledge the type of data and trends that exist. Furthermore, we will see radical changes to the curriculum during the next few years, and inspectors should be kept abreast of these developments and the challenges they are likely to present.

The duration of inspections and the number of inspectors at each inspection varies under the different types of frameworks that currently exist. For example, school and academy inspections last two days in comparison to Sixth Form College inspections that last four days. We would like to see

Ofsted take a consistent approach for all providers and agree a set number of inspectors and duration of inspections.

Although the consultation does not focus on the notice periods of inspections, it is important that notice periods are harmonised by September 2015 when the new common inspection framework will be in place.

Q2. Do you agree or disagree with the proposed 'effectiveness of leadership and management' judgement?

Agree in principle – but more detail is required

We welcome the proposal for all institutions to be judged on the extent to which their curriculum that has *suitable breadth, depth and relevance* for different groups. Sixth Form Colleges are renowned for providing a broad and balanced curriculum to a diverse range of students. Many offer over 40 A levels alongside a range of vocational qualifications and non-qualification activities. This criterion will help to shine a light on small school and academy sixth forms that tend to offer a very narrow curriculum.

We also welcome the greater emphasis on safeguarding. It is a priority of Sixth Form Colleges to safeguard students and their welfare. Safeguarding and welfare go hand in hand and we believe the two should be linked under the new personal development judgement. But more detail is required on how these judgements will be made - for example, what constitutes 'outstanding' safeguarding? Further guidance is also required on what is meant by the promotion of fundamental British values. What will colleges need to do to meet this criteria? Again, any criteria agreed should be consistent for all types of providers.

Quality of curriculum should still be judged under the leadership and management criteria and not as a separate graded judgement. The quality of curriculum and the range of courses offered are intrinsically linked to the leadership and management of an institution. We suggest that the quality of curriculum could be a sub-judgement under leadership and management. This would help to ensure the curriculum offer reflects the needs of students and the local community and is linked to the core vision and aims of the institution.

Q3. Do you agree or disagree with the proposed 'quality of teaching learning and assessment' judgement?

Agree in principle – but more detail is required.

The criteria against this judgement is broad and does not detail how each will be assessed. For example, how will Ofsted measure '*a positive ethos, sense of achievement and commitment to learning are evident across the whole learning environment*'. A high degree of subjectivity is likely, and this is

something that is already problematic with much more concrete issues such as the success rate national averages that are used by inspectors!

The document states that *'where relevant, English, mathematics and other skills necessary to function as an economically active member of today's British society are promoted through teaching and learning'*. Given that some students progress to higher education/employment overseas or study in an intercultural environment, 'globalised society' might be a more appropriate phrase to use.

Q4. Do you agree or disagree with the proposed 'personal development, behaviour and welfare' judgement?

Agree in principle – but more detail is required.

Again, it is difficult to see how some of these areas can be judged in an objective way. There is already variability in inspection practice – more information is required on what inspectors will take into account.

Under this judgement, it states that inspectors will make a judgement based on the extent to which the provision is successfully promoting or supporting learners *'where relevant, employability skills so that they are well prepared for the next stage of their education, employment, self-employment or training'*. It is important for Ofsted to recognise the impact that current curriculum and funding reforms have on areas such as employability skills. For example; the removal of internal assessments, the move to linear assessments and big reduction to enrichment activities have narrowed the opportunities for students to build their employability skills.

Q5. Do you agree or disagree with the proposed 'outcomes for children and learners' judgement?

Agree.

For a single common inspection framework to be credible, it is absolutely vital for the data underpinning this judgement to be consistent across all providers delivering the same provision to the same age group.

The role of qualification success rates is particularly important in this context. SFCA has long opposed the use of a success rate benchmark (or 'national average') in Sixth Form College inspections that is higher than the benchmark used when inspecting other FE providers. It makes no sense to have a national average based on the legal status of a group of institutions, and this is based on misguided assumptions about the prior attainment profile of students that attend Sixth Form Colleges. If success rates are to be used for benchmarking purposes, the national average should be based on the performance of all providers (including schools) by qualification type, irrespective of institution type.

In its data dashboard, Ofsted uses data from the DfE performance tables. Success rates do not feature in this, nor will they feature in the revised performance tables data that will be published in January 2017. And yet inspectors still rely heavily on success rate data. Although success rates appear to have fallen out of favour, it is unclear what data inspectors will use between now and the publication of the new performance tables in 2017. School success rate data remains in experimental form and we understand this is unlikely to change. With this in mind, it is difficult to see how a single inspection framework will create a level playing field while different data is being used. Even when the revised performance data starts to be used, it is important that national averages/benchmarks for sub groups of providers do not creep back into use.

Success rates have served inspectors, institutions and students well over recent years. They provide a useful measure of performance at subject level which can be masked by wider measures and allow institutions to focus on areas of weakness. Less rigorous treatment of data from overall study programmes is likely to lead to misinterpretation and overly subjective grading. The data used in inspections must also link to the data dashboard and KS5 tables data – data used in inspections must match what is presented in public. On this latter point, it is important to address some of the well document deficiencies in the data dashboard, not least the inexplicable use of the “proportion of all students achieving three A levels” measure that discriminates against providers with students on mixed academic and vocational programmes.

Q6. Do you agree or disagree with the specific additional judgements proposed for the common inspection framework?

Agree

We welcome the introduction of a separate, numerical judgement for sixth forms in schools and academies. Under the previous arrangements, the overall numerical grade for a school or an academy often masked serious underperformance in the sixth form.

An overall grade for area of provision will help students make an informed choice based on the type of study programme they wish to follow. It will also help colleges to compare their areas of provision with other institutions. There are mixed views on the removal of individual subjects not being graded. On the one hand, it is important for overall types of provision to be judged, but colleges have also found subject grades useful (particularly as part of peer review). If subject grades are removed, we would like to see a detailed description of the quality of provision in each subject.

Q7. Do you agree or disagree that Ofsted should continue to report on the curriculum as part of the judgement on leadership and management?

Agree – see response to question in answer 2.

Q8. Do you agree or disagree with the proposals for short inspections of good maintain schools and academies?

Neither agree nor disagree - a consistent approach for all providers should be deployed. See below for further details.

Q9. Do you agree or disagree with the proposals for short inspections of good further education and skills providers?

Neither agree nor disagree

Short inspections of good providers could be viewed as a positive development by Sixth Form Colleges – but more detail is required.

More regular visits will in theory enable good providers to engage in helpful dialogue with inspectors. The old model of a linked inspector who visited the college and understood the college ethos and data is something we would like to return to.

But much more information is required on how the short inspection will be implemented and key questions need to be answered including:

- Who will the inspector speak to at the college?
- What data will be reviewed during the short inspection?
- How they will inspect e.g. undertake a set pre-analysis before the short inspection?
- Will colleges be notified when the short inspection will take place?
- When will colleges be notified of the outcome of the short inspection?
- If the short inspection triggers a full inspection, will it take place on the same week of the short inspection or will colleges be given an indication that a full inspection is likely?
- Will the short inspection be tailored towards individual colleges and their offer or will it follow a general pattern?
- Will there be guidance on the process for a college's grade profile to change to a grade 1?

There is concern in the Sixth Form College sector that short inspections will be primarily data driven. This concern is understandable given how Ofsted has used data in the past, but more broadly, inspections should focus on all four areas, not just outcomes.

The letter to parents, students and employers should also outline the positive findings of the inspection in addition to stating that '*no concerns have arisen*'.

Q10. Do you agree or disagree with the proposals for the inspection of non-association independent schools?

Agree

Q11. Are there specific changes to the way that inspectors gather evidence that you think could make our judgements more reliable and robust?

The consistent use of data across all types of providers is critical. We have made this point throughout the consultation and would be happy to work with Ofsted to explore this area in more detail.

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