



How do Ofsted inspectors evaluate teaching in the further education and skills sector?

A summary by Matthew Coffey HMI, National Director, Further Education and Skills



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As Ofsted's National Director for Further Education and Skills, I am responding to the recent debate about why, and how, inspectors observe and gather evidence about teaching, and how that contributes to the overall judgement on the quality of teaching in a school. This summary clarifies our approach to making judgements on teaching, learning and assessment in further education (FE) and skills inspections.

Mike Cladingbowl, Ofsted's National Director for Schools, made it clear in a recent article that inspectors do not judge a teacher, and especially not a lesson overall, by evaluating the performance of the teacher in a lesson or part of a lesson.¹

In this respect, we are no different in FE and skills. Inspectors do not inspect or grade teachers. We inspect and grade the impact of teaching, learning and assessment activities on learners' development of skills, knowledge and understanding.

However, we do award an overall grade for 'teaching, learning and assessment' after observing a learning session, where we have sufficient evidence to do so, and I have no current plans to change this.

Why is this different from school inspections?

The FE and skills sector provides a very rich variety of opportunities for inspectors to gather evidence about teaching, learning and assessment. It was no accident that, in developing the revised Common Inspection Framework 2012, we called the judgement 'teaching, learning and assessment'.

Inspectors expect to find different types of learning activities according to the type of programme or stage of learners' development, such as one-to-one coaching at work, direct assessment of practical skills in a workshop or workplace, group discussions or project work. Spending time in classrooms, training workshops and work places observing teachers, trainers, assessors and learners is an invaluable part of inspections, as it provides direct evidence of the quality of learning.

When inspectors observe a learning session, or part thereof, they will award a grade if they have enough evidence, on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment together. In reaching the grade, they will consider the extent to which the learning and assessment activities and the quality of the learning environment and resources, support learners' progress and overall development. They are not inspecting the teacher nor are they seeking to find or approve a particular approach. As with schools, Ofsted has no preferred teaching style. In providing feedback to teachers, inspectors outline the strengths and any areas for development in the session they observed and give the grade awarded for that session. Inspectors do not share

¹ Why do Ofsted inspectors observe individual lessons and how do they evaluate teaching in schools? (140050), Ofsted, 2014; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/why-do-ofsted-inspectors-observe-individual-lessons-and-how-do-they-evaluate-teaching-schools.

individual session grades or a profile of grades with other members of the provider's staff, including the nominee.

How do inspectors reach the overall grade for teaching learning and assessment?

Evidence collected through direct observation is just one factor that contributes to the overall grade for teaching, learning and assessment. Inspectors also:

- explore how well all the aspects of the programme support learners in successfully completing their programmes and achieving their career aims
- make short visits to learning sessions to follow specific themes, such as the learning environment, the use of learning plans, where relevant, or the resources available
- consider evidence of learning over time, not just during the week of inspection, through reviewing learners' work, learners' progress from their starting points, learning materials and planned learning activities
- prioritise talking to learners about their programmes and their progress during learning sessions, where appropriate, in groups or individually. We have introduced Learner View (<https://learnerview.ofsted.gov.uk/>), to give all learners the opportunity to give inspectors direct feedback on their experience at their provider.

The *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills* (2012), paragraphs 108-114, provides guidance for inspectors and the sector on how inspectors judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment (see Annex 1).

One of Ofsted's roles is to highlight and share the very good practice that is evident across the sector. We continually add to the good practice case studies on our website (www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/goodpractice) and this year we plan to publish the findings of surveys and other projects that are exploring good practice in teaching, learning and assessment across all types of provision in FE and skills.

Finally, we welcome the sector's views on our inspection practice and we frequently gather and use the views of providers who have been inspected. We welcome the debate and, while we will continue to grade learning sessions on FE and skills inspections, we will of course consult with the sector if we plan to make any significant changes to the way we carry out our inspections.

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Further resources:

Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills from September 2012, 120061, www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120061.

Common inspection framework for further education and skills 2012, 120062, www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120062.

Annex A. Extract from the Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills, September 2012

Inspection of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment

108. Inspection of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and the impact it has on the quality of learning, provides direct evidence. Inspectors will capture evidence from a variety of learning activities, such as through: direct observation; evaluation of learning materials and their use by learners; the use of technology to deliver and assess learning; and examining what learners can understand, do and make as a result of their learning.
109. Inspectors may accompany an assessor to a number of employers to observe learners' skills development on-the-job. They may assess how the learner is progressing compared with their starting point.
110. Inspectors will also conduct formal observations of teaching, training or assessment activities. These should be of sufficient length to ensure the inspector has enough evidence to form clear judgements and give a grade. The inspector will usually provide feedback to the person observed. This will normally include the grade awarded, with a short summary of the strengths and areas for development. Other forms of learning activity that are not teaching or assessment sessions may be graded; for example progress reviews.
111. Inspectors will conduct short, focused observations of activities. These will usually last approximately 15 minutes and have a specific focus, for example learner support, the use of information and learning technology, attendance, or personalised learning. Inspectors will not normally give feedback to the person observed following these sessions.
112. The lead inspector will give the provider overall feedback on the quality of teaching, training and assessment, but they will not produce a profile of the grades awarded.
113. The lead inspector may, in discussion with the provider, select one or more learning sessions or assessments for a joint observation. A joint observation comprises an HMI or Additional Inspector and a member of the provider's own observation team. The inspector will observe the learning session jointly with the provider's observer.
114. At the end of the joint observation, the inspector will record a grade but will not share this with the observer or teacher/trainer/assessor. It is the responsibility of the provider's observer to provide feedback to the person observed. After leaving the teaching/training session the inspector will listen to the observer's recorded observations and proposed grade and then feedback to the observer.