

**Response by fforwm to consultation document:
Estyn inspections post 2010
(April 2009)**

2. There should be a more proportionate approach to inspection based on a core inspection for all providers and follow-up inspection activity for those that under-perform

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

fforwm supports an inspection framework which is proportionate to risk. This approach fits firmly within fforwm's strategy for Raising Standards through Self Regulation, the vision for which is:

'to work towards meeting quality thresholds and enabling all our member colleges to achieve this target. This will be achieved through benchmarking, sharing good practice and identifying and working on weaknesses in the sector.'

There are a number of key activities which guide and drive this strategy and facilitate the achievement of the vision and aims. These are:

- benchmarking
- celebrating success
- sharing good practice
- further developing bilingualism
- strategies for non engagement
- maintaining and improving quality

It is pleasing to note that the proposals for the 2010 framework support and fit with the key activities of fforwm's Self Regulation Strategy.

Quality profiles of FE organisations have continually improved throughout the current Estyn cycle. It is important that any new framework enables the FE sector to continue to build on improvements in quality and recognises the growing maturity of the FE sector in assessing its own quality.

Follow up activities will be a useful vehicle to support institutions in recognising where they need to make additional improvements. Estyn should identify a single point of contact for each college in order to develop trust and foster a productive relationship. Estyn and the college should work effectively together to make any changes required after an inspection.

3. Continued engagement with providers identified as under-performing will help promote progress towards improvement

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

A supportive approach is required to tackle underperformance in order to ensure that swift improvements are made and so that learners' education and well being is not compromised. In order to engage effectively with providers who underperform, it will be vital to maintain continuity of the inspector/inspection team, i.e. those who carry out the initial core inspection should also be involved in the follow-up.

4. The proposals for a streamlined framework of inspection are likely to make inspections more efficient and effective

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

It is difficult to make a judgement about efficiency and effectiveness prior to the framework and timescales becoming fully operational. The proposals, however, are encouraging as they provide a more consistent approach across all providers. Colleges are already accustomed to the common inspection framework but the proposed implementation and follow-up activities may have great potential in supporting a more effective and fair process for all providers. Any moves to make inspections less bureaucratic and time consuming will be welcomed.

5. The grades of 'Outstanding', 'Good', 'Adequate' and 'Poor' are an improvement on the five-point numerical system

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

It is worthy of note that no FE college has been awarded a grade 5 rating for a number of years. fforwm welcomes the introduction of a four-point scale and the above descriptors seem appropriate.

6. Learner wellbeing should be a feature of the new inspection framework

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Learner wellbeing is a central focus of FE institutions in Wales. This is reflected in the high grades awarded in the current cycle of Estyn inspections. fforwm would welcome this as a key feature of the new framework.

7. The new focus on customer satisfaction is a positive step

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Collecting and measuring the views of a wide range of stakeholders should help facilitate evidence-based judgements. In order to ensure comparability, consistency and transparency of method will be required in collecting views from different partners.

FE institutions have well developed mechanisms for obtaining the views of their stakeholders. Many have examples of good practice. It would be useful if Estyn would evaluate methods currently in use before introducing any new methods, in order to identify any potential transferability.

8. The new inspections should have a clear focus on literacy and numeracy

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Literacy and numeracy are already a key priority for the FE sector as a whole. To make literacy and numeracy central to the new inspection framework will ensure that all providers take literacy and numeracy seriously. Such a focus will go some way in addressing the low levels of literacy and numeracy evidenced in many of the young people entering FE from schools who require substantial support to enable them to benefit from their programmes of study.

9. The new focus on partnership working between inspectors, providers and learners should

drive up quality and standards of provision

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Effective partnership, where there is thorough understanding between all involved, will assist in driving up quality. Providers which have been judged as having high quality can assist partners by sharing best practice and benchmarking. Closer working with learners can help both providers and inspectors get a clearer perspective of the real issues and inform improvement. FE has always valued the close working with Estyn through the college inspector role.

10. The stronger emphasis on gathering and assessing the views of learners and other stakeholders during inspection will improve the inspection process

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

This question is similar to question 7 above. A strong emphasis on gathering and assessing the views of all stakeholders is reflective of current practices in most colleges.

11. Involving learners as members of inspection teams in initial teacher training, and adult and community-based learning should offer valuable insights

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

A learner's contribution will undoubtedly provide a new dimension and valuable perspective to an inspection team. The learner's voice and experience provide an important insight into any provider's learning offer.

However, the number and type of learners used in an inspection will need to be clear. For example there may be different perspectives from younger learners compared to older learners; from those on full-time compared to part-time courses; and from those on leisure compared to employment-based courses.

The selection of “learner inspectors” and the training and logistics of implementation will need careful consideration. It will be vital that the process is of benefit to the learner as well as the institution and the inspection team and that it does not impact upon a learner’s studies.

fforwm considers that involving learners as members of inspection teams is a useful proposal that could be developed into an effective feature of all post-16 inspections, not only ITT and ACL, if carefully deployed.

The consultation document does not state whether the learner would come from the host provider or from another provider. In order to make logistics manageable and to minimise disruption to the learner, it might be sensible to have a ‘learner nominee’ who could work alongside the Estyn team and the provider nominee.

12. Inspections of schools should be organised by Estyn and led by HMI, as in other sectors

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

fforwm would strongly welcome this approach. Adopting the same model in schools as in further education would bring consistency and credibility to the overall inspection process and make comparisons across sectors more realistic and reliable.

13. HMI-led inspections of schools are likely to increase confidence in the findings

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please see response to question 12 above.

14. The stronger involvement of peer inspectors in all sectors should increase the positive impact of inspections

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

The peer inspector role in FE, ACL and WBL has had a highly positive impact across the sectors. fforwm would support the continuation and strengthening of this involvement across all sectors. The role in FE has been very beneficial both for the individuals concerned and their institutions. It has provided valuable continuous professional development (CPD) and has enhanced the rigour of internal inspection processes. Sharing of best practice has been a feature for those who have undertaken the peer inspector role. Best practice is disseminated widely both internally and externally through fforwm events and networks.

Financially, FE institutions have supported this initiative themselves. Although they recognise the benefits (as stated above), it must be recognised that in the current financial climate it will become increasingly difficult to release staff without some financial assistance from Estyn. fforwm would urge Estyn to consider reimbursing colleges for peer inspectors' time.

15. Use of peer inspectors should help to spread expertise in quality evaluation and improvement processes and promote 'cross-fertilisation' and dissemination of ideas and good practice

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please see response to question 12 above.

16. Providers should continue to be invited to select a nominee to work with the inspection team

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

The nominee role has been an important and valuable one for FE institutions. Having a key member of college staff liaising and engaging with the core Estyn team both during and prior to the inspection helps build confidence within the college being inspected. The role also provides the nominee with a further opportunity for CPD. Further, it provides a basis for sharing good practice: a key feature of the Quality Managers' Network, for example, is to hear nominees' feedback on their inspection experiences to their peer group. Sharing of good practice in this way has had a positive impact on raising quality in the FE sector.

17. Placing more emphasis on building capacity for self-evaluation and improvement among providers should be an important focus for inspection

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

The FE sector has a proven track record of using self evaluation effectively to improve performance. The track record is continually built upon year on year. Indeed, the inspection of providers should ideally focus on the strength of their internal quality processes and self-regulation.

18. Reports should be shorter

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Reports are a vital tool for FE institutions and for fforwm: they assist in reflecting upon the inspection process and much use is made of the contents to spread best practice, celebrate success and to identify weaknesses. If reports become shorter, then it is important that the evaluative sections remain and that the reductions are made to the more descriptive sections.

fforwm has previously expressed concerns about the lack of reference to functional areas such as ILT and learning resource centres within inspection reports. Shorter reports run the risk of omitting information that is essential to enable continuous improvements.

It is recognised, however, that there are benefits in having shorter clearer reports as they will be more accessible and understandable to a wider range of stakeholders such as parents, learners and employers.

One approach might be to introduce a shorter format for external stakeholders and a more extensive document for the FE institutions. This approach is used effectively by the QAA in the inspection of HE provision in FE colleges.

It is a source of considerable regret that Estyn will no longer be reporting on learning areas. This aspect has been hugely instrumental in helping to drive up quality and standards and will be sorely missed.

19. Reports should be clearer

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

In the main, Estyn reports are highly readable documents and offer clear judgements based on first hand evidence.

20. The proposed streamlined framework covering the 3 key questions on 'outcomes', 'provision' and 'leadership and management' will focus reporting on the most important issues

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

fforwm welcomes a streamlined framework and agrees that the 3 questions broadly cover the most important issues. If the focus is to be broader through these 3 key questions, then feedback must be clear, focused and sufficient to enable further development and identification of best practice. As stated in the response to question 18, fforwm is concerned about the lack of focus on learning areas, and the impact this could have on overall quality. Thematic inspections are mentioned in the consultation document which will need to concentrate on some of these areas over the inspection cycle.

21. Reports should be made more accessible to a wider audience by only focusing on the most important issues

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Whilst strongly supportive of the need to make reports more accessible to a wider audience, Estyn needs to be mindful of the impact that inspection reports have on professional educationalists. fforwm is of the opinion that there should be two kinds of reports – one for the wider audience (short and focussed) and a more detailed report for

the internal professional audience. This practice works well in the HE sector.

22. A three-week period of notice is appropriate for individual providers

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

The quality profile of FE and WBL in FE institutions has improved year on year and the culture of sharing and benchmarking has gone some way to facilitate this. FE is confident that, through the rigour of self assessment, high quality prevails at all times, and it would welcome shorter lead-in times to demonstrate this.

However, if shorter lead-in times are to be introduced, certain factors will need to be given adequate consideration if the process is to be manageable for all concerned. For example, careful consideration needs to be given as to how peer inspectors will be informed if they are to take part in inspections, both to maintain the notice period confidentiality and to enable the institution where the peer inspector is employed to arrange appropriate cover during their absence. This would also apply to any learner used as a peer inspector.

There would also need to be some flexibility in the notice period to fit in with college events. For example a senior management team might have booked and paid for a senior management awayday to plan the future of the college. Cancellation might be expensive.

fforwm would also encourage Estyn to make greater use of ILT and online resources such as Moodle to access documents in order to help ensure that the documentation needed by the inspection team, in such a short time span would be more manageable.

23. A four-week period of notice is appropriate to prepare for area and partnership inspections

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

fforwm's views on the four-week period are consistent with those made in response to question 22.