

Purpose Of This Document

This document brings together questions and answers arising from recent Ofsted briefings, webinars and pilot inspections under the renewed Further Education and Skills (FES) inspection framework. It is intended as a practical, sector-facing reference for leaders, quality teams, apprenticeship teams and governance.

The FAQ will be updated on a **monthly rolling basis** with questions from members. **New question added are highlighted in yellow.**

How To Raise A Question

We welcome questions, points of uncertainty and issues for clarification.

Please: - **Email us with your questions** as they arise. - **Let us know when you receive your Ofsted notification call**, as we are tracking how the renewed framework is operating in practice and will use anonymised themes to update this FAQ.

Your contributions will help ensure that this remains a live, practitioner-informed resource.

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1. General Inspection Structures & Elements

Q: How is an inspection conducted during weeks when teaching does not take place.?

A: The lead inspector will identify specific focus areas and inspectors will review recordings of teaching sessions, where these exist. Ofsted do not expect providers to have recordings of sessions. They will also view apprentices work and conduct meetings with teaching staff apprentices and employers as they would in a standard inspection. They will want to see how the model works overtime, not just in the days they are on site and will want to see your documentation, learner work, reviews, planning, recordings/materials.

As part of these inspection focus areas, it is likely inspectors will want to meet with apprentices including in the workplace.

Q: What will lesson observations look like under the new framework?

A: Observations remain broadly similar to previous practice so inspectors will observe teaching, speak to learners and staff, look at learner work and incorporate case sample learners where relevant. Inspectors don't observe lessons in isolation and whilst they will visit lessons/learning environments they don't make judgements or grade individual lessons.

Sensitive issues will be handled carefully; inspectors will not directly expose or label learners' personal circumstances.

Q: How will inspectors evaluate employer engagement where there are many small employers or national cohorts rather than a few strategic partners?

A: Ofsted will always engage employers in 1-1 discussions as part of the inspection based on the proportions and employer mix in each provider. The scope of the inspection established in the planning calls will also determine which employers are involved.

Inspectors appreciate the challenges with engaging employers and are exploring how providers enable and ensure that employers are sufficiently engaged, informed, and contributing to apprentice development. That is demonstrated through a range of other evidence outside 1-1 meetings with inspectors, for example employer communications, tripartite records, advisory groups, survey results, escalation routes and examples of curriculum/employer feedback loops.

Q: Has anything changed in inspection of franchised, validated or subcontracted elements of delivery?

No - providers are accountable for the provision delivered by their subcontractors

Q How will Ofsted handle L7 learners now given that these programmes are being 'taught out' or may only have only a few learners active?

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A: Level 7 learners on programme are fully in scope for apprenticeship Inspections. They will be included as in scope alongside any other learning cohorts, and their stages can be highlighted as part of the planning calls.

2. Staff Roles, Skills and Knowledge

Q: Outside mandatory (safeguarding) are there any expectations about the training tutors, coaches are expected to have and is a simple log of training sufficient?

A: Not explicitly. Ofsted does not specify any training for every tutor or coach, but leaders must ensure that all staff receive training relevant to their role and be competent in their role. Inspectors will explore whether training is understood and used and is resulting in the impact intended.

Ofsted meet teaching staff and explore the training and development they have had, for example to support learners with barriers, on designing teaching and assessments. They are interested in what teachers and trainers know about to adapt teaching, how they maintain their teaching and learning skills and how each tutor maintains their knowledge and skills about the occupation which their apprenticeship training supports.

Q: What training do inspectors receive on inclusion? Is this what providers need to have?

A: Inspectors undertake extensive training, including core framework training, dedicated inclusion training and ongoing updates from specialist teams. Some Inspector training materials are published and publicly available: [Inspector training videos | GoToStage.com](#)

Provider leaders need to identify what training is needed by staff relevant to the different roles that they are delivering and ensure that training is kept up to date, relevant and is being used appropriately to support learners in the way intended.

3. Data, Systems and Evidence

Q: Do inspectors want direct access to systems such as APTM or only exported data?

A: Inspectors may view live systems if this is helpful, but there is no requirement to provide access. What matters is that data is accurate, accessible and staff are confident in explaining it. Providers should ensure key systems can be demonstrated by staff who use them routinely. Inspectors will view systems with leaders and staff and are interested in how this information is used and do not evaluate internal data.

Q: Will Ofsted still issue learner, employer and staff surveys?

A: In pilot inspections, Ofsted did not issue their standard surveys. In full inspections, the normal survey process is expected to resume. Providers' own learner and employer surveys can be used as evidence of learner and employer voice.

Q: Is it a requirement to give access to apprenticeship data systems?

A: No, it's not a requirement to provide access. If inspectors require data for example from your ILR or apprentice ILR they should ask you to provide this.

You will also want to understand what the data is for so that you can support the inspector to get us fuller picture as possible. There is no need for inspectors to have direct access into provide a system not least because of the confidentiality of some data held there.

4. Compliance, Eligibility and Funding

Q: Are compliance teams involved in inspections under the renewed framework?

A: Yes. Compliance and onboarding processes may form part of the learner journey and are explored through learning walks, case sampling and evidence review, including pre-enrolment, induction, progress monitoring and completion or withdrawal.

Q: Will inspectors check right-to-work and funding eligibility evidence?

A: Inspectors may review eligibility and right-to-work evidence where relevant, but the primary focus remains on quality of education, safeguarding, inclusion and learner experience.

5. PSRB / Professional Regulator Requirements

Q: How will inspectors take account of programmes that must meet PSRB or professional regulator requirements (e.g. nursing, social work, teaching)?

A: This is important context for inspectors who will want to understand how this shapes the programme design. This can be included in the planning session as part of provider context. Inspectors do not assume one model fits every programme and want to understand differences.

A contextual overview might include:

- what is non-negotiable because of PSRB/regulatory requirements
- how that shapes curriculum design, sequencing, assessment and placement
- how the apprenticeship standard and EPA are aligned within those constraints
- where choices are yours versus where requirements are externally set

6. Self-Assessment and Quality Improvement

Q: Are providers required to submit a Self-Assessment Report (SAR) or Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) aligned to the new toolkit?

A: No. Submission of SARs and QIPs is optional but if providers do have a SAR they may share this as part of inspection planning. Ofsted is interested in how providers evaluate their performance and secure improvement, not in the format or alignment of specific documents. Self-assessment is for the provider, not for Ofsted.

7. Inclusion and SEND

Q: How should providers identify learners with barriers?

A: Providers are expected to use their own knowledge of their learner cohorts and context and identify those facing barriers without relying on rigid categories. Inspectors do not prescribe who should be included but they do expect a clear rationale for identification and for this to be in place consistently and through out the programme.

Q: Are inspectors interested only in individual SEND cases or also in whole-provider systems?

A: Both. Inspectors look for an embedded culture of inclusion (strategy, staff capability, curriculum design, support systems) and how this translates into effective, personalised support for individual learners and apprentices.

Q: Will one learner’s negative experience disproportionately affect inspection outcomes?

A: No. Inspectors seek typicality and patterns across the provision. Individual experiences are considered in context and alongside wider evidence.

Q: What definition of SEND is used for inspection purposes?

A: The issue of definition (EHC plans only, versus a broader interpretation of learning difficulties and disabilities) has been raised and acknowledged as requiring national clarification. Current practice indicates a broad, contextual understanding rather than reliance solely on statutory plans. The toolkit definition covers *‘learners and apprentices with SEND and learners who receive high needs funding; this includes learners and apprentices who receive additional support with their learning and those with an education, health and care (EHC) plan’*.

8. Learning walks and observations

Q: Who decides what is included in learning walks?

A: Learning walks are collaborative and provider led. Leaders decide what to showcase within the themes of inclusion; curriculum, teaching, training and achievement; and leadership. Walks may be physical or virtual and may involve discussion as well as observation.

Q: What is the difference between a deep dive and a learning walk?

A: The lead inspector plans three learning walks per inspection — one on inclusion, one on leadership/governance, and one on curriculum, teaching, training and achievement. A learning walk is a joint exploration of an areas with a senior leader enabling the provider to showcase an aspect of practice, a process, a system, or a priority/improvement journey. It is narrower, more structured, and more explicitly linked to a provider showing inspectors how a process or aspect of practice operates.

Ofsted advise that Inspectors do not use the deep dive methodology in current Inspections. Instead, through the planning process inspectors identify and agree 'inspection focus areas' with the provider. Inspection of the focus areas is still investigative and triangulated and may involve the same activities as a deep dive.

More practically:

- a deep dive is investigative and triangulated
- a learning walk is demonstrative and discursive
- a deep dive may involve conversations, observations, scrutiny, learner evidence and review records
- a learning walk is a guided opportunity to explain and show how something works

9. Case sampling

Q: How many learners or apprentices are typically included in case sampling?

A: Usually around two per inspector, selected by the lead inspector in discussion with the provider, with a focus (where relevant) on learners facing barriers to learning or wellbeing. This is used to understand learner journeys and test the effectiveness of systems. It is not the sole evidence base, and wider provision is always considered.

Q: Do inspectors only observe sessions involving learners in the case sample?

A: No. Inspectors observe a wide range of live and recorded activity. Case-sampled learners' work is included within broader evidence gathering but inspection activity is not restricted to them

Q: Are providers expected to prepare formal case studies?

A: No. Inspectors consider firsthand, naturally occurring evidence as stated in the toolkit: *'Inspectors collect first-hand evidence of how the provider typically operates...'* Case sampling draws on existing learner records, progress information, support plans, discussions and observation. Providers are not expected to produce written case studies for inspection.

Q: Will inspectors visit employers outside of the case sampling employers?

A: Yes they will. Inspectors consider a range of apprentices in all their activities.

10. Governance

Q: How should governance be presented during inspection?

A: Governance structures vary and inspectors recognise this and particularly in large complex providers understand that it may not be the very head of the organisation who is the senior leader accountable for apprenticeship. Inspectors do not require access to the most senior institutional leaders, only those with appropriate responsibility.

Providers should present those with relevant oversight of apprenticeships and demonstrate how governance links to decision-making and accountability.

11. Learner Voice

Q: Will existing university feedback mechanisms (e.g. module evaluations, NSS-style surveys, student reps) be sufficient for learner voice if they are not apprenticeship specific?

A: Inspectors want to understand apprentices' experience specifically, including support, barriers, and how well needs are met. Learners' views and aspirations should inform support decisions, and inspectors will talk directly to learners as part of case sampling and wider evidence gathering.

Generic university mechanisms are relevant, but apprenticeship learners sit in a slightly different position because of their working context and the different structure of their learning and assessment:

Providers should also be able to show apprenticeship-specific listening and response processes particularly to capture where apprenticeship-specific issues which may not surface in module evaluations or general student surveys. Providers will want to supplement them with apprenticeship-specific channels and can show what changes resulted.

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