



Common Inspection Framework 2012: consultation

A response from the Association of National Specialist Colleges: Natspec

Natspec is the membership association for independent specialist colleges and currently represents all YPLA funded colleges and a further 10 FE units or sixth forms in special schools.

The 3,800 full time students with learning difficulties or disabilities at Natspec colleges have a wide range of ambitions and aspirations, just like their peers. Colleges use their specialism and inter-disciplinary expertise to provide personalised learning and hands-on experience which enables students to achieve their goals and improve their life chances.

Natspec colleges create a model of inclusion that works for each individual. They offer innovative and creative solutions, using technology where appropriate, to promote real independence.

Natspec welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation. Our comments relate to issues that will impact on young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in post-16 provision, and specifically in independent specialist colleges.

Q1. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed overarching grade and three headline grades for **overall effectiveness**?

- outcomes for learners
- the quality of teaching, learning and assessment
- the effectiveness of leadership and management (incorporating capacity to improve)

We agree with this proposal

Q2. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our approach to judging **outcomes for learners**?

- all learners achieve
- gaps are narrowing between different groups of learners
- learners develop personal, social and employability skills
- learners progress to higher level qualifications and into jobs that meet local and national needs

We broadly agree with the approach but we have some concerns about how all these judgements will be applied fairly to learners with learning difficulties and disabilities. We agree that the judgements about learners achieving and about personal, social and employability skills are important and relevant.

We have some concerns about the way in which gaps between groups of learners are measured, because of the individual nature of the learning programmes. We are not sure how useful it is to compare achievements in this way, although we agree that colleges should be able to provide and analyse data on achievements in order to ensure that all learners are equally able to achieve to their maximum potential.

We have a significant concern about the 4th bullet point measure. We cannot see that this can be a useful way to judge the achievements of those learners with LDD for whom these are not realistic progression routes. For example, some may go on to a qualification at the same level before moving on, while others may move into independent living before looking for employment.

Others may have goals that are not linked to these outcomes at all. In particular, there is an assumption that all learners will follow a qualification path, but this is not appropriate for all learners with learning difficulties and disabilities. This was in fact flagged up in Ofsted's post 16 survey report, and we agree that it is not appropriate for accreditation to be used if it is not relevant, meaningful or with currency outside of education settings. Progression routes for these learners can only realistically be judged against the outcomes identified in their ILPs which will enable them to achieve their long term goals and aspirations and improve their life chances.

We are disappointed that some of the other contributory grades have been removed. We believe it is particularly important for young people with LDD to 'make informed choices about their own health and well-being' and to 'make a positive contribution to the community'. In fact, these might be key learning goals for some of them. They also chime well with some of the national developments for people with LDD and it is a pity to lose them.

Q3. To what extent do you agree or disagree that inspectors should judge **the quality of teaching, learning and assessment** as proposed?

- staff demonstrate high expectations, enthuse, engage, support and motivate learners so that they learn and make progress

- staff set challenging tasks, build on and extend learning for all learners
- staff have appropriate skills and expertise to provide good quality teaching, learning, assessment and support for each learner
- staff assess learners' progress and provide for a range of needs including those learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- equality and diversity are promoted through teaching and learning
- teaching develops literacy, numeracy, language and functional skills, independent and lifelong learning to support the achievement of learning goals
- learning is effectively supported by appropriate and timely information, and advice and guidance on next steps in training, education and employment

We agree with the criteria for judging the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. However, we would like reassurance that teaching and learning which takes place in residential settings outside of the '9-5' day is also inspected as part of the process. Specialist colleges ensure that opportunities to learn independence and other skills in real life settings are used to the full, and in the past Ofsted has reported on the benefits of curriculum delivery through the extended curriculum. We hope this will continue under the new framework.

We welcome the use of subject inspectors but we would wish to ensure that those inspectors judging provision for learners with LDD **in all settings** are suitably qualified and experienced. This is important for all aspects of the inspection, but in particular in relation to their understanding of assessment and support, the effective embedding of literacy and numeracy and the promotion of equality and diversity through the curriculum and what this might mean for learners with LDD.

Q4. To what extent do you agree or disagree that inspectors should judge the effectiveness of leadership and management as proposed?

- raise expectations, promote ambition for learners and improve their outcomes
- improve teaching and learning
- ensure the appropriateness of the provision, including the curriculum in meeting the needs and interests of learners, employers and the local and national community
- deploy resources, including staff, accommodation, facilities and technologies to support learning effectively and provide value for money
- evaluate the provision through monitoring quality, including engagement with users and using their findings to make, promote and sustain improvement

- actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow any achievement gaps
- ensure the safeguarding and well-being of all learners

We agree with this proposal and the criteria

Specialist colleges have a good record of working with employers, but the current inflexibilities of the matrix funding system can be a barrier to colleges doing as much as they would wish. We hope that Ofsted will take this into account in making its judgements

Q5. To what extent do you agree or disagree that **capacity to improve** is adequately represented by a judgement on the quality of leadership and management?

We agree with this proposal and agree that improvement is driven by strong, clear leadership and management.

Q6. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to judging **equality and diversity**?

We agree with this proposal but we feel it is essential that inspectors fully understand how this applies to the curriculum for learners with LDD, and how fair judgements can be made about groups of learners with LDD.

Q7. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposals to inspect and report on **subject areas**?

- continue to inspect a sample of subject areas, and that subject specialist inspectors increase their focus on teaching and learning
- evaluate the outcomes for learners and the teaching and learning in subject areas
- award a grade for teaching and learning overall, which will be supported by our detailed findings on teaching and learning in subject areas
- stop writing a report on each of the subject areas sampled through inspection

We have significant concerns about this proposal and to be honest cannot really understand the thinking behind it nor see any benefits.

We note that subject specialists will continue to be deployed, and will increase their

focus on teaching and learning which we support. Therefore we cannot understand why separate reports cannot be included as a result of their observations. These are easier for potential students to find and help to inform them about the quality of provision.

Specialist colleges of any kind will in effect continue to get subject reports, as they do now, because of the exclusive focus of the inspection. However, inspections of these same areas in general colleges and providers will be much more difficult to find. So a dance and drama college will have a comprehensive report in which all the focus will be on these areas, but the dance and drama provision in a general college will be subsumed within the main report.

We have particular concerns that the provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in general FE colleges and other post-16 providers will not be inspected. This is already a problem under the current arrangements, where this provision is only rarely inspected and when it is, often as part of a broader inspection of foundation or access learning. Unlike the full inspections against the whole framework which currently take place in independent specialist colleges, these inspections are not always undertaken by specialist LLDD inspectors, because of the wider remit of the inspection. We already have grave concerns about this lack of inspection and the situation can only get worse under these proposals. This move is being made against a policy backdrop of increasing numbers of learners with more complex needs being encouraged to attend their local FE college.

We therefore strongly recommend that all providers who make provision for learners with higher levels of ALS over £5,500 should be inspected on the same basis as specialist colleges. This would provide comparable information about the quality of the provision for LAs and others who commission provision for learners with the most complex learning and support needs. We note that at the recent Public Accounts Committee meeting on the NAO report into SEN 16-25, a witness who is the principal of a general FE college with outstanding LLDD provision expressed the view that 'learning difficulties should be inspected as a discrete area of provision in whatever provider and that that should be inspected, as it often is, by people who really understand what learning difficulty means.'

In specialist colleges, we have always understood the importance of regular inspection because of the potential vulnerability of the learners we work with. We therefore hope that Ofsted will give full consideration to putting inspection on an equal footing and ensuring that all vulnerable learners are afforded the same degree of protection, regardless of where they learn.

Q8. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should move to devoting a greater proportion of inspection effort to satisfactory and inadequate providers?

- adopt a more targeted approach to **satisfactory and inadequate providers**, giving priority to undertaking monitoring visits to satisfactory providers where leadership and management was no better than satisfactory or where the areas for improvement include key areas such as outcomes
- bring forward a full inspection if the monitoring visit suggests that the provider has made limited progress in improving its performance
- establish a secure web-based system for **gathering the views of learners, employers and parents/carers** between inspections, and to ensure that these views are taken into consideration in all risk assessments

We would welcome clarification as to whether or not this applies to independent specialist colleges. In our response to the education bill, we argued that there should be parity for learners and providers in the inspection regime. Having said that, we believe that **all** providers for students with complex learning difficulties or disabilities should be inspected, including those which are outstanding or good.

We are particularly concerned that as FE colleges are being encouraged to develop their provision for those with more complex needs, an outstanding provider might be able to do this without the provision ever being inspected. We would therefore propose that all new provision for those with more complex needs (using the £5,500 ALS as a baseline, or working to any new baseline that is introduced) should be inspected within two years of being established.

We would welcome further information on the risk assessment to be carried out on outstanding and good providers. In particular, we would wish to propose that it should include information about significant growth in numbers of potentially vulnerable learners in colleges, which we believe should trigger an inspection of that provision.

We have two specific concerns about reduced inspection:

- The outstanding and good grades will become devalued, because they will be perceived to be out of date and lacking currency
- Inspectors will no longer routinely see outstanding provision. We believe this will be detrimental to their ability to promote best practice and to share the innovative developments made by outstanding providers

We understand and welcome the focus on satisfactory and inadequate providers, it is vital that these providers improve their performance.

We welcome the approach to seeking the views of parents, learners and other stakeholders through a web-based system but it is imperative that this is monitored and made use of with great care. In particular, we hope the approach will be to encourage compliments as well as complaints. We would also ask that where a

complaint is made, Ofsted should check with the provider to ascertain if their complaints process is already being used to deal with the problem.

Q9. To what extent do you agree or disagree that Ofsted should respond positively to most **requests for inspection** and **charge for such inspections**?

We feel it is appropriate for this to happen if providers wish it. We would want to ensure that the charge is not excessive and on a sliding scale so that smaller providers are not excluded

For further information or with any queries, please contact:

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