



Inspections in Further Education (FE)

By Nilab Amin

The Douay Martyrs Catholic Secondary School

August 2022

Abstract

This report will investigate the new Ofsted inspection framework and the effect this had had on colleges and their reports/inspection outcomes. It will also investigate the changes over time since the introduction of Ofsted in colleges, and whether the Education Inspection Framework (EIF) is suitable in a college context. The research includes comparisons between the old inspection framework (and how it affects colleges) and the recent Ofsted inspection framework. Topics such as mergers and ways the inspection framework can be improved will be included in this report. It has been found that the inspection reports produced after the new 2019 EIF lacks some detail such as gradings on specific subject areas. It can be argued that information like the summary of weaknesses and strengths the provider has and why the inspectors decided to judge the provider as they did should be brought back in the reports.

Introduction

Ofsted was first introduced in England in 1992, holding its first school inspections in 1993 (OneFile, 2020), they had also changed their education inspection framework in 2019, this was so institutions can be judged more on intent (knowledge and skills gained), implementation (how curriculum is taught and assessed) and impact (student outcomes) rather than numbers. This report will include analysis of government data that looks at further education (FE) college inspections and outcomes; and case studies comparing FE college inspection reports before and after the new 2019 framework was introduced.

A further education college is an institution that offer vocational courses, academic courses, and higher education courses, they educate and train students from 16+. In 2022, there are currently 163 FE colleges in England, however, this can change overtime due to mergers. A merger is where an institution(s) stops existing after it is incorporated with another institution which is still running (Dobson, 2020). Reasons why colleges merge is due to financial reasons, to improve the way the curriculum is taught and to also increase efficiency. This topic is important for research as pupils go to college to receive a high-quality education. What they learn in college helps them with future careers, so the environment they are learning in is just as important as a school environment and further research needs to be done to ensure that colleges are performing at their best.

The key changes to the new education inspection framework (EIF) introduced in 2019 are as follows:

- A new quality of education judgement – focussing on curriculum intent, implementation, and impact
- The removal of the outcomes judgement

- The separation of behaviours and attitudes (exhibited by students) and personal development judgements (the activities a college provides to develop students outside of their academic or technical discipline)
- The simplification of provision types – education programmes for young people, apprenticeships, high needs provision and adult learning programmes
- The introduction of the deep dive methodology (AoC, n.d.)

'Inspectors will be visiting every college in the next 4 years to assess how well they are meeting skills needed for the economy' (Staufenberg et al., 2022)

In April 2007, the former Office for Standards in Education merged with the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) to provide an inspection service that includes all post-16 government funded education (but not Higher Education Institutes and Universities which are inspected by the Quality Assurance Agency). (Ofsted - Wikipedia, 2022) Therefore, at this point, Ofsted gained responsibility of inspection FE colleges as well as schools as it had done previously.

This research seeks to understand the impact the new EIF has had on FE colleges' inspections in England. It attempts to highlight some of the differences between the old and new frameworks from the perspective of colleges.

Methodology

This research was conducted using qualitative research, using document analysis, investigating this topic included analysing articles and full inspection reports. Using the government's reports on Ofsted as a whole, helped with finding documents and data to compare with other years, before and after the new 2019 inspection framework. From a list of merged FE colleges since September 2019, random sampling was used to choose which college will be reported on. FE colleges that were used to compare with the old and new education inspection framework were also selected using random sampling, picking a random college from the Ofsted website, however, making sure the college had a report with both new and old education inspection framework.

Quantitative data was also used to gather information, which will be shown in the tables and graphs used to show differences in data from before and after the new 2019 inspection framework. For example, putting tables of overall effectiveness from a college before and after a merger helped view the differences of grades of individual areas such as 'quality of education.' A content comparison of colleges' inspection reports before and after the merge and colleges before and after the new EIF will also be included. There are likely to be changes occurred during the gap of the two inspections, so it just gives an idea of how the inspections have changed in colleges.

An issue faced in this research was that there is a lack of previous research done on Ofsted in the context of FE. This was an issue as it was more difficult trying to gather information on Ofsted inspections with FE colleges.

Results and Discussion

In this section, there will be information about mergers, giving statistics on them and how they have affected Stafford College and Newcastle-under-Lyme College as an example of a merger. There will be case studies of FE colleges improving. Then, there will be statistics on general further education colleges, comparing recent years statistics to older years statistics. Finally, the disadvantages and issues of the new 2019 education inspection framework will be discussed.

The impact of mergers on further education colleges inspection outcomes:

Since 31st August 2015, nearly 100 colleges had been through a merger. The following tables show the Ofsted judgement of these merged colleges that have been inspected from 2017 to 2020

Table 1.1 – Inspection outcomes for merged FE colleges in 2017/18

	Newly merged FE college inspections in 2017/18 (22)
Outstanding	0 (0%)
Good	13 (59%)
Required Improvement	6 (27%)
Inadequate	3 (14%)

(Gov, 2018)

In 2017/18, Ofsted inspected 22 merged colleges, Table 1.1 connotes that no merged colleges were judged 'Outstanding' but, the majority were judged 'Good.'

Looking below, you will see the outcomes of further inspections carried out in 2019/20 on merged FE colleges.

Table 1.2 - Inspection outcomes for merged FE colleges in 2019/20:

	Newly merged FE college inspections in 2019/20 (26)
Outstanding	2 (8%)
Good	15 (58%)
Required Improvement	9 (34%)
Inadequate	0 (0%)

(Gov, 2020)

Comparing the figures in Tables 1.1 and Table 1.2, the outcomes have improved since 2017/18, more merged colleges were being judged as 'Outstanding' in 2019/20, whereas there was none in 2017/18. The number of merged colleges judged 'Inadequate' also dropped down to 0 in 2019/20.

Figure 2.1- Inspection 2019 in Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group

Inspection of Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group

Inspection dates: 22–25 October 2019

Overall effectiveness **Outstanding**

The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Education programmes for young people	Outstanding
Adult learning programmes	Outstanding
Apprenticeships	Outstanding
Provision for learners with high needs	Outstanding

After Merge

Figure 2.2 – Inspection 2013 in Newcastle-under-Lyme College

Further Education and Skills inspection report
Date published: 08 January 2014
Inspection Number: 423364
URN: 130812



Newcastle-under-Lyme College General further education college

Inspection dates		25–29 November 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

Before Merge

On 1 November 2016, Stafford College merged with Newcastle-under-Lyme College to form the Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group. The college claims, 'We are the largest and highest performing college in Staffordshire and one of the top performing post-merger

institutions in England.' (Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group Company Profile | AoC Jobs, 2022)

The following is qualitative evidence which shows how has the merger with the Newcastle-under-Lyme has benefitted Stafford College:

Ofsted monitoring visit in 2017:

Stafford College was judged inadequate at its previous full inspection in February 2016 for overall effectiveness, and leadership and management. It was inadequate in two of the four provision types inspected: apprenticeships and provision for learners with high needs

In the inspection in 2016 (before the merger) it was informed that former senior leaders and managers didn't achieve fixing the college's weaknesses as quick as they should have. However, this changed after the merger between the 2 colleges occurred as Ofsted said in their 2017 report that *'Leaders and managers of the merged college successfully demonstrated to inspectors at this second monitoring visit, their capacity to tackle previous issues from the February 2016 inspection. Since the merger, managers have increased the use of data, based on robust evidence, to support the measurement of impact of improvement actions.'* (Ofsted, 2017) This shows that the merger has improved the performance of Stafford College in Ofsted inspections and has helped achieve expectations given.

Ofsted Full Inspection in October 2019 (new inspection framework):

In the 2019 inspection report with the new education inspection framework, Ofsted states, *'Learners and apprentices – including learners who have high needs – make very good and sustained progress from their starting points.'* The institution has made significant progress as it was judged as 'Inadequate' for apprenticeships and provision for learners with high needs in the previous report in 2016. The curriculum and the teachings at the college may have helped the college with achieving a judgement of 'Outstanding' as Ofsted looked more into the curriculum as part of the new inspection framework.

Content differences between an inspection report using the new 2019 education inspection framework and an inspection report using the old education inspection framework:

The following comparisons are made from looking at a 2013 inspection report for Newcastle-under-Lyme before it merged and the 2019 inspection report after it merged with Stafford College.

The new inspection reports are shorter than the older inspection reports, there is less detail, such as no gradings on subject areas, this is as they focus more on the teachers and students rather than the actual subjects. In the 2013 inspection, there were grades on subject areas such as, Health and Social Care, Science and Accounting and Finance. There were no grades on subject areas at all in the 2019 inspection report, however, the subject areas were talked about such as Science and Health and Social Care with information about how teachers design the curriculum and how they help students practice what they are taught by, for example, using quizzes.

In the 2019 inspection, the reports focus much more on how the provider is as a whole and how it can improve, it also expresses how learners are in the environment as a whole and how they cope in stressful situations, whereas, in the 2013 inspection, the report focuses more on each area of study and how teaching is, but they also talk about learners in each subject area separately too, which is more informative on how the subject area is.

The new inspection report has a section where it mentions the topic of safeguarding. Safeguarding is not mentioned in the 2013 inspection report; however, it is important that safeguarding is talked about. A key element to a learning environment is ensuring that all learners know they are safe and what they should do if something concerning occurs.

The impact on gradings of the new EIF on further education colleges inspection outcomes

The following figures show the overall inspection outcome for colleges as well as the breakdown of outcomes for the different areas that are assessed.

How some colleges have been affected by the new inspection framework:

Figure 3.1- Inspection in November 2019 Figure 3.2- Inspection of same college in 2012



Inspection of Cheshire College – South & West

Inspection dates: 12–15 November 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Education programmes for young people	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Grade 2
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	2
Subject Areas	Grade
Health and social care, and child care	2
Leisure, travel and tourism	3
Visual and performing arts	2
Social sciences and humanities	2

After using new inspection framework, the college was still judged 'good' (Grade 2 = Good; Grade 3 = Required Improvement)

Figure 4.1- Inspection in 2021

Further education and skills inspection report



Inspection of Bradford College

Inspection dates: 9–12 November 2021

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Education programmes for young people	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Figure 4.2 - Inspection in 2017

Bradford College

General further education college

Inspection dates: 10–13 October 2017

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Bradford college has improved its grading after using the new inspection framework

Making comparisons of inspection reports before and after the new 2019 education inspection framework was introduced, the following differences were seen:

The old inspection report from 2017 starts with a summary of why Bradford College was judged as 'Required Improvement,' including their weaknesses and their strengths, this is not the case in 2021 with the new inspection framework where the report dives into the information about the college. The summary at the start could be seen as an informative way to start the report so it could be said that it should have been kept in later reports.

The 2021 report cuts out detail with the information about the provider as they have taken out information on Bradford's area. The 2017 report talks about the population of Bradford along with qualifications and employment of people that live in the area, that was not mentioned in the 2021 report. The reason for this may be because the inspectors didn't believe that the information was related or as important to the provider so having that information in the report would not be necessary.

The 2021 report explains more about how tutors and leaders plan their curriculums and how they reinforce their learning, this is different to the 2017 report because even though they include how teachers are with the way they teach, they talk more about the learners in the report and how they cope with the teachings and the provider as a whole.

With explaining what the provider needs to do to improve, the 2021 report only states it as a brief bullet point with no explanation, an example of this is that in the 2017 report and 2021 report, Ofsted said Bradford College needs to improve their attendance rates. In the 2021 report Ofsted states: *'Provide targeted support to improve attendance in areas where absence rates are still too high.'* However, the older 2017 report includes idea following on to their point on how the provider can improve by stating: *'Leaders and managers should ensure that attendance increases, especially in English and mathematics lessons.'* This provides more detail on where attendance rates are lower so the provider can focus more on improving attendance rates in those areas This could be something that is brought back as it backs up the inspector's point as well helping the provider look into what they need to do next.

Figure 5.1 - Inspection in 2021

Figure 5.2 - Inspection in 2009

Inspection of Burnley College

Inspection dates: 23–26 November 2021

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Education programmes for young people	Good
Adult learning programmes	Outstanding
Apprenticeships	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Outstanding: Grade 1
Capacity to improve	Outstanding: Grade 1
Achievement and standards	Outstanding: Grade 1
Quality of provision	Outstanding: Grade 1
Leadership and management	Outstanding: Grade 1
Equality of opportunity	Outstanding: contributory grade 1

Under the new inspection framework, Burnley college was judged as 'Good', compared with an inspection in 2009 with the old inspection framework where they were judged as 'Outstanding'.

Some colleges have improved their grading under the new inspection framework, whereas others have seen ratings decrease. This may not be a result of the new inspection framework and may reflect other changes that have taken place within the colleges. Nevertheless, it is interesting to make the comparison of what changes the colleges have been judged on and how this has impacted them.

Statistics: College inspection histories:

Inspections in 2017/18:

- 178 → General further education colleges
- 64 → Inspections

Inspections in 2019/20:

- 170 → General further education colleges
- 39 → Inspections
- 18 → Monitoring visits

The number of colleges being inspected dropped from 2017/18 and 2019/20, the number of inspections dropped by 25. The number of inspections dropped due to COVID – 19, the last full inspection was carried out in March 2020, before lockdown took place. Due to lockdown, monitoring visits were conducted more instead of full inspections. Even though monitoring visits took place in 2017/18, the figure of exactly how many was not found. A monitoring visit is a shorter inspection where progress of the institution is assessed and more advice on how the institution can improve is given. They are conducted in person and last around one to two days, this is a shorter period compared to full inspections where they last around two to five days. Due to COVID-19, monitoring visits were efficient as they lasted a shorter period. There is an issue that the number of inspections has decreased due to Ofsted staff shortages, an article has shown that the cause of this is because *“Ofsted said staff turnover rose this year to 14 per cent, up from 9 per cent in 2020-21, adding this “may be the result of staff delaying job moves and retirement during the pandemic”.* (Walker et al., 2022)

Figures 6.1 and 6.2 shows the overall effectiveness of further education and skill providers in 2018 and 2020 as judged as Ofsted.

Overall, there has been some variations in outcomes between 2018 and 2020. We can see that in 2020 there was a higher percentage of 'Good' inspection outcomes compared to 2018 (61% compared to 58% in 2018). Even though in 2018 has a 2% higher 'Outstanding' figure, it has a 1% higher 'Required improvement' figure.

Figure 6.1

Overall effectiveness of further education and skills providers - 31 August 2020



Figure 6.2

Overall effectiveness of further education and skill providers - 31 August 2018



Advantages of the new EIF

One advantage of the new education inspection framework is that they talk more about safeguarding, including procedures that the institution carries out in emergencies and whether they have trained staff that learners can turn to when they are in a vulnerable state. This is a key advantage as making sure learners are safe in their learning environment should be one of the priorities in an institution.

Another advantage is the framework is focussing more of the 'quality of education.' This is an advantage because looking at the curriculum more in depth and how they are carried out by teachers helps see where providers can improve to increase outcomes of pupils in their exams.

Disadvantages of the new EIF

In a FE Week Podcast, Lowell Williams states (referring to the new 2019 education inspection framework), *'I don't think it's a framework, on a macro level, a high level, very fit for purpose.'* He also told Ofsted, *'You aren't looking at the right things.'* A former inspector also expresses his opinions saying, *'one of the things we have lost that would be useful to come back is the opportunity to explore quality in subjects.'* This is a disadvantage as taking away sections on subject areas separately makes it more difficult to see what the areas are the provider is stronger or weaker in. Separate judgements on subject areas can allow the provider to see how they can improve a certain subject area. Improving a subject area can

improve the judgement in the 'quality of education,' so bringing back more information and judgements on subject areas are beneficial. Another issue with the lack of information to explore subject areas are that some pupils may want to study a specific area so taking away the judgements on subject areas makes it disadvantageous when searching for a FE college for a pupil.

Ways to improve

There needs to be better collaboration and discussion between all the stakeholders involved in college inspections to ensure they work best for colleges. As a FE Week podcast states: *'Full consultation between provision providers, and colleges and Ofsted and the employer bodies'* is what is required to make it successful. This is one way to improve as all stakeholders can express their thoughts on the inspection framework and discuss whether it should be adjusted, how and why it should be adjusted and what sort of information they should keep in their inspection reports. The podcast also states, *'Inspection is commentary rather than judgement,'* this means that they believe that Ofsted are giving more opinions now in their inspection reports and are more descriptive in stating what the providers do rather than stating conclusions on how the provider can improve.

A former inspector states *'Programmes such as A-levels and T-levels should be more spoken about.'* (Staufenberg et al., 2022) A-levels and T-levels, including how they are performing is an important element of an inspection, especially given the emphasis that are now being placed on new T-levels. It is also beneficial as it shows how effective the teaching of the institution is.

The following Figure is a section from a document written by David Corke who is the Director of Policy and Research at the Association of Colleges. This section explains what he believes Ofsted should look into next going forward with the education inspection framework. He came to these points after discussing how the inspection framework has changed, what their focus is more on now, behaviours of the inspectors and the new inspection framework overall.

Figure 6.3

5. Issues for consideration:

- Is there a need for support and/or a scribe for the nominee to help the college keep up with the evidence?
- Could more extensive feedback be shared at the end of inspection, especially where it might not appear in the final report?
- Issues with the inspection of large colleges and the possibility of campus level grading.
- The exemption for outstanding provision; should outstanding providers be risk assessed? Will there be at least one inspection per college per five year cycle? Should it be a full inspection?
- Could areas graded below 'good' be re-inspected where the overall grade is 'good'?
- What is the link between inspection, financial performance and financial health? How will this be assessed in future?

(Corke, 2019)

This shows a number of relatively small changes that could be integrated into a college inspection, that would potentially support a college to make significant improvements.

Conclusion

Overall, there are both advantages and disadvantages of the new 2019 inspection framework. Some gaps do need to be filled such as why has Ofsted stopped adding some of the detail, they had in their previous reports such as information on how learners are coping with each subject area, as the pupils can see each subject area differently, and why they have decided to take away gradings on certain subject areas. Ofsted has stopped grading specific subject areas such as Health and Social Care and Science. Taking away the judgements on subject areas can be seen as a drawback as some students would like to go to a certain college based on how they teach certain subjects, however, now that they aren't able to see the subject judgements, it may make it harder for students to choose which college they would like to attend. The inspection framework has been beneficial to some FE colleges but not all. It can be argued that some information should be brought back to the reports like the summary of weaknesses and strengths the provider has and why the inspectors decided to judge the provider as they did. From the findings on comparisons of Bradford College, it can also be seen that inspection reports focus a lot more on the curriculum and teachings compared to learners.

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Acknowledgments

To start off, I would like to thank the Nuffield Research Foundation for allowing me to have such an experience where I have learnt so much! It really made my summer, and it was so fascinating trying something I have never done before. I would also like to give a big thank you to Kat Emms who has been there throughout my whole placement, making sure I am not having trouble with anything and giving me helpful tips. Finally, I am also thankful for the whole Edge Foundation Team for all their support and for being so welcoming in the office. Thank you to you all once again.