The Institute for Learning

The professional body for individual teachers and trainers committed to excellence in their practice

Acknowledgments

In February 2013, IfL gathered in-depth case study evidence from members whose institutions had recently been inspected under Ofsted’s common inspection framework that was introduced in September 2012. Participating institutions were chosen by stratified random sample to obtain a range of different types of further education and skills providers. Participating institutions then nominated a teaching or training practitioner who had been directly observed by an Ofsted inspector to take part in an online survey.

We welcome your feedback on this practitioner guide and any ideas for future topics that would be useful for teachers and trainers. Contact us at communications@ifl.ac.uk

Terminology

Throughout this document we use the term ‘teachers and trainers’ or ‘teachers’ to cover all those who direct support teaching and learning in further education and skills, including lecturers, teachers, trainers, tutors assessors, instructors and trainee teachers. We use the terms ‘colleges’ and ‘learning providers’ or ‘providers’ to cover the range of organisations that provide learning outside schools and higher education.

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This practitioner’s guide aims to give you an overview of the experience of Ofsted inspections across further education (FE) and skills in England, based on the voices of teachers and trainers who have recently experienced inspection.

The guide was developed in response to requests from members of the Institute for Learning (IfL) to hear more from other teachers and trainers about inspection. IfL also hears much about that the anxiety that often surrounds inspection and we hope that this guide will help to allay fears. Teachers and trainers who have experienced inspection recently say strongly that they need to approach inspection feeling confident and assured about their practice and the choices they make about content, materials and teaching and learning methods for the particular needs of their groups of learners.
Foreword

I am delighted to be invited to write the foreword for this booklet on inspection. It provides a comprehensive description of all the processes that providers need to consider as they prepare for inspection. It is particularly pleasing that it is written especially for teaching and training staff.

The purpose of inspection is to report on the quality of provision by identifying the strengths and areas for improvement. Making recommendations to improve the quality of the provision for learners is of course significant, but we must not forget that inspectors are also in a unique position to pick out examples of good practice.

Our good practice website now has over 130 case studies of practical examples that have been particularly effective in motivating and inspiring learners to achieve, in supporting staff to bring out the best in their learners, and in evaluating every aspect of provision to bring about continuous improvements. The list is of course endless and I urge you to look at the website as I believe it complements this booklet well by showing how we use inspections to disseminate good practice across the sector.

Indeed, we have readily come across good and outstanding provision since we introduced two-day notice for inspections.

I believe that this is because we see what people do day in, day out, not a rehearsal of what teachers, trainers and assessors think Ofsted inspectors are looking for. I need to be really clear on this point – there is no set lesson format or preferred method that inspectors are expecting to see.

Inspectors use our published handbook and common inspection framework for further education and skills flexibly, according to the circumstances of each provider. This booklet is based on our handbook and framework and it provides some really helpful advice. The most important message for me is that good inspection outcomes mean that learners are benefiting from good-quality teaching, learning and assessment.

Do not fear inspection: embrace the opportunity to celebrate excellence and, most importantly, continue to do what you do every day.

Matthew Coffey HMI
Director for Further Education and Skills
Regional Director for the South East Ofsted
Introduction

Our experience as the professional body shows that teachers and trainers are relentlessly committed to doing the best they can for their learners. Teachers and trainers care about their young and adult learners, seeking always to offer and develop learning experiences that are interesting, valuable and effective – and lead to learners’ success. Teaching and training professionals in further education and skills enrich the lives of individuals; they help to deliver growth and prosperity in local communities and economies and deliver the skills needs for our national economy too. Teaching and training is a profession at the heart of our national interest.

So given this passion and professionalism, why might some teachers and trainers be apprehensive about inspection? How does a teacher or trainer approach inspection so the experience is useful?

Inspectors can be seen as a number of critical friends alongside the institution for a short time to aid individual practitioners they meet or whose practice they observe. They are there to aid your organisation on the journey towards better and excellent practice in all areas.

Do you see inspection in this way?

The Institute for Learning has had many requests from across our wide membership to help share with one another, as fellow professional teachers and trainers, the experience of going through an Ofsted inspection.

It is fair to say too that many IfL members describe a certain amount of apprehension or even dread about inspection and, in the light of what is being seen as a raised bar from Ofsted, about what inspectors expect to see in order to give grades of good or outstanding. Members’ ideas for what they want in such a guide gave the impetus for what follows, and we hope that the voices of teachers and trainers and their descriptions of inspection are useful for you. Thank you to all those IfL members who have contributed to the production of this guide.

Already, you are likely to have experience of being assessed from previous inspections and other forms of review, appraisal and peer reviews, for example, so in this sense the guide is not definitive or exhaustive. It does share teachers’ real experiences of recent inspections using the current inspection framework. This guide is designed to support and to prompt conversations with colleagues.

One of IfL’s core values for the profession, developed with thousands of members, is excellence. We stand for professionals being the best they can be and trusted to exercise informed judgement in the interest of learners.

Inspection should not detract from being a trusted professional. As in the case of inspections or audits for other professionals, such as doctors and accountants, inspection should be a means of holding up a mirror and give insights that the professional, and indeed the organisation, can consider carefully to determine what should be celebrated and what can usefully be learned and the best ways to develop our practice further as a result.

Toni Fazaeli
Chief Executive
Institute for Learning
Overview of the Ofsted common inspection framework for further education and skills

As the effectiveness of teaching is given paramount importance in the current and very short-notice inspections, we know that increasing priority is being given to how to achieve outstanding grades for teaching and learning. We have asked practitioners from colleges and providers recently graded as good and outstanding for their perspectives on the experience of inspection. First though, we set out an overview of inspection and how arrangements work.

Every further education and skills institution that receives funding from the Skills Funding Agency or Education Funding Agency is subject to the Ofsted common inspection framework. As well as FE, sixth-form and independent specialist colleges, this includes independent learning providers, local authorities and community organisations that deliver further education provision and employers that deliver their own training.

The common inspection framework provides inspectors – and those undergoing an inspection – with the criteria they use to make judgements on their inspection visits.
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment
Inspectors look at a range of criteria to come to a judgement on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. In addition to the quality of planning and delivery to meet the needs of learners; the quality of feedback learners receive; and how equality and diversity is promoted, inspectors look at the effectiveness of how learner support and initial assessment are used. Inspectors look at a range of sources of evidence to inform their judgement on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This includes direct observation of teaching and learning; evaluating learning materials; talking with learners; looking at assessed work; and accompanying assessors on visits to apprentices and other learners in the workplace.

Outcomes for learners
The criteria that inspectors use to inform the outcomes for learners grade are based on the extent to which learners achieve; that attainment gaps between different groups of learners are narrowed; learners’ development of personal, social and employability skills; and their progression on to higher-level qualifications or into employment.

Inspectors look for evidence on outcomes for learners from a variety of sources. They collect and compare data relating to provision and learner performance against local and national trends and look at internal documents such as policies, procedures and self-assessment reports.

Effectiveness of leadership and management
Inspectors seek to make a judgement on how well leaders and managers in the organisation work to deliver the highest standards for learners. This category encompasses the enabling factors of successful outcomes for learners and effective teaching and learning, such as an ambitious strategy; performance management; professional development; and how well policies and procedures for self-assessment, curriculum planning and equality and diversity work for learners.
Overall effectiveness

Judgements made for outcomes for learners; the quality of teaching, learning and assessment; and effectiveness of leadership and management inform the grade for the provider’s overall effectiveness. A provider cannot achieve the top grade of ‘outstanding’ for overall effectiveness unless it has achieved ‘outstanding’ for its quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Ofsted uses the same grading scale for each of these judgements:

Grade 1 is outstanding
Grade 2 is good
Grade 3 is requires improvement (satisfactory before September 2012)
Grade 4 is inadequate

If an institution scored outstanding for overall effectiveness in its last Ofsted inspection, it could be exempt from Ofsted inspections altogether. There are exceptions to this rule, which are detailed in Ofsted’s inspection handbook,¹ and an ‘outstanding’ institution could still receive an inspection if the annual risk assessment shows concern.

An institution that scored a good for overall effectiveness at its previous inspection could have up to six years before it gets inspected again. If an institution received a satisfactory grade before September 2012, it will be reinspected within two years, and receiving the requires improvement grade will mean a reinspection within 12 to 18 months. If an institution receives an inadequate judgement for overall effectiveness, it will be inspected again within 12 to 15 months.

It is likely that you may agree with the overall purposes of inspection as set out by Ofsted. They are to:

1. give users, i.e. prospective learners and employers, information to help them to make choices about providers
2. help bring about improvement by identifying strengths and areas for improvements, highlighting good practice and judging what steps need to be taken to improve provision further
3. provide the secretary of state and other stakeholders with an independent public account of the quality of education and training, the standards achieved and how efficiently resources are managed. (Ofsted, 2012).

What to expect before an Ofsted inspection

IfL member tips

Further education and skills institutions generally have a good idea when they are likely to be inspected, based on the date of their last inspection and the grades that they achieved. Ofsted takes a risk-assessment based approach to the frequency of inspections. That is to say, crudely, the better an institution performs under Ofsted’s criteria, the less likely it is to be inspected again anytime soon.

Institutions can make predictions based on what they scored for overall effectiveness at their last Ofsted inspection. This can be unreliable though, because every institution also undergoes an annual risk assessment using performance data; learners’ and parents’ views; concerns from one of the funding bodies; and other measures. If any of these signals a decline in performance, an Ofsted inspection could be brought forward.

Ofsted will notify your institution up to two working days in advance of an inspection. It is not uncommon to begin to feel apprehensive at this point.

Q. What advice would you give fellow teachers or trainers who may be worried about Ofsted inspection?

A. “This is more advice to management, who need to have really accurate data to support their staff. If results are not recorded accurately, staff are really disadvantaged. This seems obvious, but our system did not serve us well. To fellow teachers, I would say try to do lessons that represent your real teaching, not put on special lessons, and get plenty of rest on the days of the inspection because however nice the inspectors are it is extra tiring and stressful. If you are a professional, you have nothing to fear and whatever grade you get the students’ grades matter even more.”

A. “I would advise other trainers to have a really good session plan with excellent learner outcomes. Make sure there is a variety of activities during the session to encourage interaction and learning. Ensure you have read through the grading guidelines so you know clearly what the inspector will be looking for. It is also useful to carry out peer observations and critically analyse one another’s session.”

A. “To make sure you reference everything on lesson plans so demonstrate all your sources, particularly things like ‘learner feedback’ that demonstrate responsiveness. Also, be yourself and if you are providing high-quality teaching, you should have nothing to worry about.”

A. “Make sure you are always prepared for an observation from your workplace and treat the Ofsted inspection like as an opportunity to showcase your work, not as a threat.”

A. “Ensure you have a good group profile and course file.”
IfL member tips

Q. What immediately ran through your mind when you received the news that Ofsted was shortly due to inspect your institution?

A. “Are we ready? And panic! Even though you know that you do things right, engage learners, use lesson plans and schemes of work, you always feel that Ofsted will just look for what you do wrong. You feel that they are out to find the worst.”

If you have been advised that an inspection is likely in the year, there are some early preparations that can be made in advance of your two days’ notice.

IfL members who have successfully undergone an Ofsted inspection during 2012-13 have provided a number of examples of activities that helped them prepare in advance of their institution’s inspection:

- Training days in teams to look at the inspection criteria, your institution’s procedures and the Ofsted handbook for inspection to understand the process
- Organising data on attendance, retention and achievement for your learners
- Revisiting peer review feedback and feedback from other types of observation
- Familiarising yourself with self-assessment feedback and keeping on top of quality improvement plans

- Attending a course facilitated by a consultant who inspects for Ofsted
- Seeking guidance from the quality manager on the institution’s procedures relating to inspection

Q. What information, formal and informal, were you given about preparing for a teaching observation during the inspection?

A. “In 2012, our whole observation team took a level 4 teaching, learning and assessment qualification through our local university. This course gave us the skills and knowledge to enable us to ensure our observation of teaching, learning and assessment (OTLA) paperwork and process was effective and fit for purpose. Sixth months prior to our inspection, I had attended Ofsted nominee training along with two colleagues. This training was extremely valuable in preparing us for imminent inspection. We therefore felt ready.”

In preparing, more specifically, for receiving a teaching observation from an Ofsted inspector, you can consider practising the following for one of your sessions.

Talking clearly and confidently about your teaching and training practice with one another, with managers and with inspectors is a vital professional skill. You should aim to:

- articulate why you teach or train this programme in this way, including at this stage of the programme
It is natural for teachers and trainers to react differently to the prospect of being observed by an Ofsted inspector. Here are a few examples of experiences cited by IfL members.

“I was worried about the learners, even though we had prepared them before the session that an inspector would be observing our session.”

“I can’t say I was worried. The advice we received from managers was to be ourselves, make sure that learners could be fully engaged and enjoy the session.”

“It sounds silly now, but I was slightly worried that my learners wouldn’t show up, which would affect my session because I had planned for group activities. Also punctuality of learners as this has been an issue in the past.”

“I was worried that the inspector wouldn’t see how productive my lessons were under ‘normal circumstances’ and wouldn’t see how much learning takes place. Also that the session we were doing that day was only a revision session, so it was not particularly representative of the range of activities that would normally take place.”

“As a manager for my curriculum area, I felt pressure to perform and be an excellent role model for my team.”

“I feared the inspector would pick holes in my plans, resources and assessments.”

• explain the rationale for what content and skills you are covering at this point in the context of the longer programme and goals

• summarise the thinking you have done for meeting the needs of each of your learners, and illustrate how activities reflect this

• describe how goals are set and feedback is given to learners, including how learners assess themselves

• describe the successes of your learners on the programme to date, illustrating broader outcomes as appropriate

• demonstrate critical reflection and commitment to your own professional learning and showing that you are always open to and seeking to improve your practice

• practise talking with colleagues, describing these features, challenging one another to do so very succinctly as you may have only a few minutes with an inspector

• remind one another, and managers, that you want to take inspection in your stride, and be the best you can be. Support from one another is positive.

• Consider a session where your fears and hopes about inspection are surfaced and shared, and fears laid to rest, as it is not good for anyone to bottle up worries. Discussions can also help to build team spirit.
What was clear from the feedback we received was that some simple exercises to prepare can make a huge difference to a teacher’s or trainer’s attitude, and possibly performance too, leading up to the inspection and the teaching observation element in particular.

In summary: dos and don’ts leading up to inspection

- Do feel assertive and confident in your practice, as you know your learners and the subject and level and stage of the programme you are teaching better than anyone.

- Do ask and expect managers to be supportive and help you to feel comfortable and confident about your practice, and open and relaxed about sharing the way you teach and train there with inspectors, as you do with one another.

- Do talk with other teachers and help one another stay calm and confident about your practice. Ideally, you will have observed one another and talked many times about teaching practice, pedagogy, your professional development and the research evidence you draw upon.

These can be from ‘Ask Geoff Petty’ columns in IfL’s e-newsletters and book reviews and features in IfL’s professional journal *InTuition*, as well as your conversations about what has worked in sessions; what has not gone so well; and how to support individuals who are not learning as fast or as well as others.

- Do think ahead and have outline plans for your teaching, so that you are ready at any time if any observer, including an inspector, visits part of one of your sessions. This will ensure that you can set the scene for the observer, outlining your session and its focus and the reasons for the choice you have made about content and methods used.

- Do remember, the more you talk with one another about your practice, the more assured you will be in talking with inspectors. As we know, learning and professional learning and reflection is best done collaboratively and in a social context.\(^2\)

- Do talk with learners and make sure that sessions being observed by peers and others feel normal to them. Involve learners in discussing teaching and learning methods and why they are learning this content in this way, in the context of the broader programme. Always seek feedback from learners.

- Don’t panic: remember you know more about teaching and training this group or individual more than anyone else.

- Don’t think “I must play safe at all costs and not do anything in my teaching that could possibly go wrong” – this will almost certainly lead to dull sessions and puzzled learners who are used to your vibrancy.

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\(^2\) IfL, 2013. 2011–12 IfL review of CPD: Making professional learning work
What to expect during an Ofsted inspection?

IfL member tips

The days between being given notice of the inspection and the team of inspectors arriving at your institution will be an opportunity for you to revisit your preparations and gather up-to-date data and information required by your teams. During this time, your institution’s ‘Ofsted nominee’ – the person responsible for liaising with Ofsted on behalf of the institution, usually a senior manager for quality – is likely to have been in touch and informed you of the schedule. The duration of the inspection will depend on the extent of your institution’s provision, typically lasting between three and five days.

The grade your institution receives for overall effectiveness will be influenced to a large extent by the judgement Ofsted makes on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. An institution cannot achieve an ‘outstanding’ grade for overall effectiveness without an ‘outstanding’ grade for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

During the inspection, inspectors will form a view on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment using a variety of sources of evidence including, of course, teaching observations. Direct observations involve an inspector observing you themselves. You may experience a joint observation, where an inspector observes a session with a member of your own institution’s observation team, effectively observing you and the observer.

- Don’t think you have to be perfect and have meticulous and highly detailed paperwork – it is the way you help ensure that every one of your learners is learning and gaining confidence in their progress and their step-by-step achievements and readiness for success that counts.

- Don’t give inspection a greater authority than it has. Inspection is there to support improvement and you are committed to improvement too – you and the inspectors are equals with different and complementary roles.

- Don’t let managers wind you up about inspection or let them export their own anxieties to you. However good their intentions, the best thing that managers can do is to support you to feel confident and at ease, especially now that notification of inspection is only a couple of days ahead of inspectors arriving.

- Don’t go ‘in on yourself’ and worry. Talk with others, possibly trying humour to reduce feelings of tension. Remember far worse challenges you have faced and dealt with as a teacher or trainer, such as supporting the student who was homeless, helping calm a very irate and aggressive learner.

- Do practise giving a two-minute summary of your own evaluation of a session.

- Do be yourself.
In work-based learning, an inspector might accompany you on a visit to an employer to observe your practice working with learners and apprentices. How many teaching observations take place will depend largely on which subject areas are being focused on, but inspectors may visit any session in any curriculum area. Even though, in reality, only a small proportion of teachers and trainers will experience an observation, it is recommended that everyone is prepared.

If you are observed, you should be aware of the following processes that Ofsted inspectors should follow.

First, inspectors must observe enough of a session to form a firm judgement. Teachers and trainers should be aware that an Ofsted inspector coming into a session may arrive part way through and many may not stay until the end.

Second, you should receive feedback from the inspector who conducted a direct observation, to include the grade you have been awarded; what they believe to have strengths; and what they believe to be areas for improvement.

The grade and feedback you receive is the inspector’s judgement on the session that they observed, not on you as a teaching or training practitioner.

Third, your session grade and feedback will be known only by you and the inspectors. Your institution will not be told who was observed or the individual grades for the sessions that were observed.

Q. What advice would you give fellow teachers or trainers who may be worried about Ofsted inspection?

A. “If you are learner-focused and your delivery is interactive, you will have nothing to worry about. However, make sure you check what the learners have learned from the session.”

A. “Just be yourselves – as you are every day. If you believe you are a good teacher, then you have nothing to worry about. The lesson should be fully interactive, with different questioning techniques, use of IT, learners fully engaged – if this is the norm – then you have nothing to worry about.”

A. “Try to sit the inspector out of your line of sight and just be yourself. Teach your session just as you would any other day.”

What Ofsted says in its guidance

“Short verbal feedback to a member of staff after a graded observation will be given by an inspector in confidence. This will take place directly after an observation, or if not possible then, at the nearest convenient time. Written judgements made from a number of observations contribute to the inspectors’ overall judgement about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.” (Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills. Ofsted, 2013).

It is unlikely you will receive written feedback from the inspector who conducts a direct observation of your session, but you can take notes. In some circumstances, such as in offender learning, it might be the case that feedback from an observation takes place later, rather than immediately after the observation.
Inspectors do not have to provide feedback for a joint observation, because it is expected that your institution’s observer will provide you with the grade and feedback.

“The feedback I received was very detailed and extremely positive. I asked to take notes and this was the overall summary the inspector provided. ‘An outstanding lesson, a very skilful tutor. Managed class extremely well. Sensitive questioning. Extremely thorough plan of lesson. Excellent skills developing parents in prison. Reflective learners. Good written feedback. Invaluable oral feedback to extend knowledge of the learners. Excellent guidance, superb support. Outstanding inclusion. Very challenging pace of learning. Excellent initial assessment and individual plans and goals.’”

Family learning tutor, Doncaster Met Borough Council. The organisation received a grade 2 for quality of teaching, learning and assessment and overall effectiveness.

The quote provided above was one of the most positive and comprehensive examples IfL has received in terms of the quality of feedback provided from an Ofsted inspector conducting a direct observation of teaching, learning and assessment. Responses from teachers and trainers suggest that feedback might not always be up to this standard. What follows are more examples from teachers and trainers about the feedback they have received from an inspector conducting a direct observation between September 2012 and March 2013.

IfL member tips

Q. “Can you describe the quality of the feedback that you received from the inspector?”

A. “It was very supportive and polite and [the inspector] was prepared to listen to extra information I was giving about staffing in the curriculum area and the parts of the lesson they had not seen, which were more interactive, and she came back for a second look. She made some good points about our results, which she felt were not as good as the teaching she saw, but this is a college-wide point.”

A. “The feedback given was constructive and positive. The inspector explained that she saw the learners interacted with the group and that the learners themselves had shown they have learned from the topics delivered. Most of all the learners were engaged throughout the session.”

A. “The feedback the inspector gave was above and beyond what he needed to do. He outlined areas that I could improve and wrote these all down for my future reference. He was very positive and praised the good session that I had provided. I was more than happy with the feedback I received.”

A. “Inspectors gave only brief oral feedback and a grade”

A. “I received good, positive feedback from the inspector. She highlighted some key strengths and areas for improvement.”
In summary: dos and don’ts during inspection

- Do make sure you secure a couple of minutes to summarise for the inspector the rationale for your teaching or training approach, building on what you have covered so far with learners and their abilities and aspirations.

- Do ask for feedback from an inspector who observes any session you are teaching, as you can and should expect feedback, and an indication of what the inspector thought worked well or less well and the grade they are assigning.

- Do have a pen and paper and jot down key points, and remember to listen to the strengths, as it is easy to hear about the weaker aspects and forget the positives.

- Do take pride in the good things the inspector has seen and commented on, and see weaker areas as chance to hear back from an specialist inspector and point to areas on which you may want to work.

- Do listen to feedback and challenge the inspector politely and firmly if you disagree with or do not recognise the kind of judgements they are making. Describe the evidence that you think shows things to be different and ask them to confirm they are taking this evidence into account.

- If you still are sure the feedback and findings in your area are wrong, do talk with your managers and the nominee in your organisation for the inspection, giving them the evidence that supports a different judgement so they can follow it up.

- Don’t put inspectors on a pedestal and give away your authority on your teaching, and don’t perceive inspectors as sitting above you, but alongside you. Inspectors are professional colleagues who have a specialist role in the further education and skills system as it is currently configured, and many inspectors are from the sector and are or have been teachers or trainers, just like you.

- Don’t allow feedback from inspectors to break your heart or bash your confidence – they are giving feedback on a particular session or course at a particular point in time and maybe this was not as good as it could be or should be at that moment, but you will be working to improve all the time so hold on to what your teaching or training will be like after inspection, as your learners depend on this.

- Don’t be disappointed if you haven’t been observed this time or had a chance to talk with an inspector. Sampling means not everyone gets this chance. Find out if there was good practice that was praised and might be worth adapting for your teaching, training or assessment.
What to expect after inspection

Ofsted inspections should be viewed as an opportunity for everyone to take stock and evaluate their policies, procedures and practices. It can take up to 25 working days for the full report to be published on the Ofsted website, providing no formal complaints are being investigated. Whether or not you were observed, it will be important to make time to reflect on the experience as an individual and in your team. You might not receive feedback on your individual performance, but changes could be being made elsewhere in your team, department or across the whole institution that could have an impact on your working life.

The final Ofsted report shows the headline grades and a summary on the front page. Ofsted also provides a short analysis of what should be done for the institution to improve, before going into the detail for the three headline judgement categories: outcomes for learners; quality of teaching, learning and assessment; and effectiveness of leadership and management.

A section of the report is dedicated to providing a summary of the evidence that led Ofsted to the judgement and grade that it gave for outcomes for learners; quality of teaching, learning and assessment; and effectiveness of leadership and management.

In summary: dos and don’ts after inspection

- Do see inspection as a learning opportunity, however tough you may think some of the messages are.
- Do look out for and support colleagues who may seem distressed: a kind word and feeling you have supportive colleagues can mean a great deal.
- Do reflect on the feedback about your session or sessions and the inspectorate’s findings for your subject area and overall teaching and learning to see what might be useful for your own professional development. For example, if there is feedback about the need to take account of each learners’ needs and abilities, this may be something you want to get better at. You may also wish to talk with others about how they do this and read relevant research, etc.
- Do remember that no teacher, however brilliant, is outstanding all the time. Inspection and observation give a snapshot at a point in time and do not make a judgement about your professional identity or effectiveness overall as a teacher or trainer.
Frequently asked questions to Ofsted from teachers and trainers

What are the most common areas for improvement inspectors in further education and skills see?

The revised common inspection framework for further education and skills, published in September 2012, included a change in the grade 3 descriptor from ‘satisfactory’ to ‘requires improvement’. Later in the autumn term, Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, extended the role of the inspectorate to work directly with providers judged to require improvement for overall effectiveness to support their improvement. In the first few months of this initiative, the most common areas for this work have been:

- The quality of teaching and learning
- Self-assessment and quality improvement
- Accountability for outcomes for learners
- Promoting English and maths skills
- Learners’ progress reviews and monitoring
- Staff training and performance management of staff
- Promotion of equality and diversity
- Target setting and action planning for learners.

How are observations arranged?

Inspectors use the timetable of sessions planned for the days of inspection to select which sessions to observe. They normally select a range of lessons or activities by subject, level, age group, topic and type of session, for example, in a classroom or workshop.

- Do remember too that as you develop your practice and try new methods – which you absolutely should do – there is very likely to be a dip in effectiveness before the extra benefits of a new and proven approach really work well.
- Don’t just carry on if the feedback has been negative: give yourself time to reflect and talk with others, focusing on how you want things to be in future in the light of the experience and findings of inspection. Give yourself space to move on positively.
- Don’t let managers overinterpret what may have been a 20-minute observation of your practice, whether highly positive or negative. Put inspection in its proper perspective.
It is unlikely that teachers or trainers will be observed more than once, unless they are teaching learners at different levels, in different contexts or where very few teachers teach a subject area selected for inspection. Generally, teachers will not know in advance if they are going to be observed during inspection.

**If my session is observed, what feedback will I receive?**

There are three types of observations:

1. An inspector observes a lesson for at least 30 minutes. The inspector gives the teacher a summary of the strengths and areas for development, and the grade.

2. An inspector visits a lesson for a short time, probably up to 20 minutes, to follow a specific theme, such as attendance or the use of resources. The teacher does not receive feedback after these short visits.

3. Joint observations by an inspector and a senior member of the provider’s staff with responsibility for monitoring the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

The teacher knows about this observation shortly beforehand. The main purpose is for the inspector to explore the effectiveness of the provider’s systems for evaluating and improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The teacher receives feedback from the provider’s member of staff. The inspectors usually observe this feedback session.

**Will I get downgraded for not having a lesson plan, even if the session was outstanding?**

No. If you do not have a lesson plan, the inspector will probably discuss with you how you have planned the lesson.

**How can I best prepare when my college or provider is given notice?**

Inspectors do not expect teachers or trainers to do anything differently for inspections. It is better if teachers continue with their lessons and learning activities as planned.

**Further reading**

- Ofsted inspection reports. Available to download from www.ofsted.gov.uk
- Ofsted best practice website: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/goodpractice
- IfL has a a growing online library of resources to support your professional development, including e-newsletters, the regular “Ask Geoff Petty” column and *InTuition*, our quarterly professional journal, which cover a range of topics connected to teaching, learning and assessment. www.ifl.ac.uk/cpd
- IfL membership gives teachers and trainers access to all of these CPD resources as well as research publications and professional development opportunities.
- For more information on IfL membership, visit www.ifl.ac.uk/membership