

A sector in freefall? English and maths take their toll

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The FE and skills sector is performing worse in Ofsted inspections this academic year than last year, *FE Week* research has uncovered.

The research shows the proportion of general FE and tertiary colleges inspected so far in 2014/15 and graded inadequate or told to improve is up 27 percentage points on last year, while the percentage of sixth form colleges and independent learning providers with grade three or four inspection results also increased.

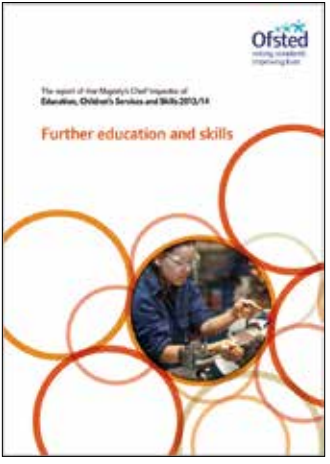
Last year, 36 per cent of inspections across the sector resulted in providers being rated as inadequate or requires improvement — it stands at 66 per cent so far this year.

Of the 23 GFE colleges inspected so far this academic year, 66 per cent have been given grade three or four ratings, compared to 39 per cent in the whole of 2013/14.

So far, 9 per cent of GFE college inspections have resulted in an inadequate grading, compared to 5 per cent in 2013/14, and the percentage told they require improvement so far has more than doubled — from 26 per cent to 57 per cent.

But Gill Clipson, deputy chief executive at the Association of Colleges (AoC), defended her members, claiming increased pressure with higher numbers of learners needing to study English and maths qualifications as part of new study programmes was to blame.

“We know that the emphasis on foundation English and maths from Ofsted inspectors has been crucial in influencing final inspection outcomes this year,” she told *FE Week*.



Ofsted annual report 2013/2014

“Colleges are dealing with increased enrolments of young people who have failed to achieve grade A* to C in English and maths GCSE after 11 years of schooling. There has been an average 47 per cent increase in maths enrolments alone.

“There has been some help from the government to recruit and train additional teachers in this area. We would like to see recognition of the capacity building that colleges are undertaking to respond to this challenge in Ofsted inspections.

“There is no quick fix to the maths and English challenge facing the whole education system, both today and in the future. The next government should work with employers in the public and private sector and colleges to develop new maths and English qualifications which are rigorous and related to the world of work.”

However, Ofsted director of FE and skills Lorna Fitzjohn told MPs on the House of Commons

Education Select Committee on Wednesday (January 28) that she had seen an improvement in teaching and learning at colleges after focusing on it in recent years.

She said: “We have seen a clear impact, particularly on teaching and learning, over the last two years. We have said clearly that hasn’t been good enough within the sector. We are now seeing that clearly improved so I do think we are having an impact.

“We do see clearly there is a need for a very clear national strategy for FE. I agree there is lots of competition — a lack of collaboration in the sector.

“We have also said clearly in our annual report last year that there needs to be a better structure at local levels to make sure the range of provision is there to meet the needs of employers and

arrangement for those organisations to collaborate would I think improve the sector.”

Dr Lynne Sedgmore, 157 Group executive director, said: “It is important not to draw long-term conclusions about quality from a snapshot of recent inspections which are, after all, based on Ofsted’s usual assessment of risk. We are particularly pleased to see that Ofsted continues to view quality as a whole system issue, and agree that the performance of colleges cannot be looked at in isolation from the performance of schools or, indeed, the levels of support provided by employer organisations and local enterprise partnerships.”

The *FE Week* research also showed that of the five sixth form colleges inspected so far, just one had been rated good, while two required improvement and two others were inadequate. In



Lorna Fitzjohn

2013/14, 67 per cent of sixth form colleges inspected were good or outstanding.

Sixth Form Colleges’ Association deputy chief executive James Kewin said: “We still have a greater proportion (87 per cent) of good or outstanding institutions than any other sector and we have seen a lot of inspections over the past couple of years.

“I’m confident that the three sixth form colleges that have dropped a grade or two in recent inspections will bounce back as Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form College has.”

And the proportion of independent learning providers rated inadequate or requiring improvement also increased, from 35 per cent of all providers inspected in 2013/14 to 54 per cent of the 44 providers inspected so far in 2014/15 — although the proportion rated outstanding also increased, from 4 per cent to



Stewart Segal

7 per cent. Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief executive Stewart Segal said the results reflected a “challenging environment”.

He said: “This is a very small sample so it is dangerous to make too many assumptions but providers have had to manage through period of huge change with new programmes such as study programmes, traineeships, English and maths and apprenticeships at the same time as managing budget and funding rate cuts.

“Ofsted has recognised that with any new programmes, there is a period where providers adapt their delivery models. We need to work with Ofsted to ensure that this period of change is recognised in the inspections.”

INSPECTORS’ BUSINESS FOCUS ‘MUST BE FOR ALL’

Association of Colleges chief executive Martin Doel (pictured) has called on Ofsted boss Sir Michael Wilshaw to ensure inspectors’ increasing focus on employer engagement is extended to all FE and skills providers.

Mr Doel said he was “pleased” Sir Michael wanted to look at the “economic responsiveness of colleges” — but that he “trusted” it would “apply to all providers of 16 to 18 and adult education”.

He also took a swipe at Ofsted’s “cadre of inspectors” in an echo of University and College Union (UCU) concerns about Sir Michael’s staff.

“We are pleased that the chief inspector is giving notice of greater focus on the economic responsiveness of colleges,” said Mr Doel.

“We trust that this increased scrutiny will apply to all providers of 16 to 18 and adult education.

and employer need is a complex matter. “Like UCU we are concerned that the current cadre of Ofsted inspectors may not have the necessary expertise to exercise reliable judgements in this area.”

Ofsted chief inspector Sir Michael had told the House of Commons Education Select Committee on Wednesday that colleges not engaging effectively with employers risked failing their inspections.

He said: “We are going to be a lot more critical of the FE sector and colleges in particular if they’re not doing that. They will fail their inspection if they don’t do it.”

And when asked by Labour MP Alex Cunningham how he would respond to UCU claims of “serious flaws in the way Ofsted inspects colleges under the current inspection regime” and that Ofsted “appears to lack any empathy or understanding of FE”, Sir Michael said: “That’s a bit of a cheek. We’ve just said nice things about them for the first time in ages.”

Stewart Segal, Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) chief executive, said: “All training providers have to work closely with employers to deliver effective apprenticeship programmes and AELP continues to run support programmes for providers on employer engagement.”

The education committee hearing was called to discuss Ofsted’s 2013/14 annual report, which painted a mixed picture for

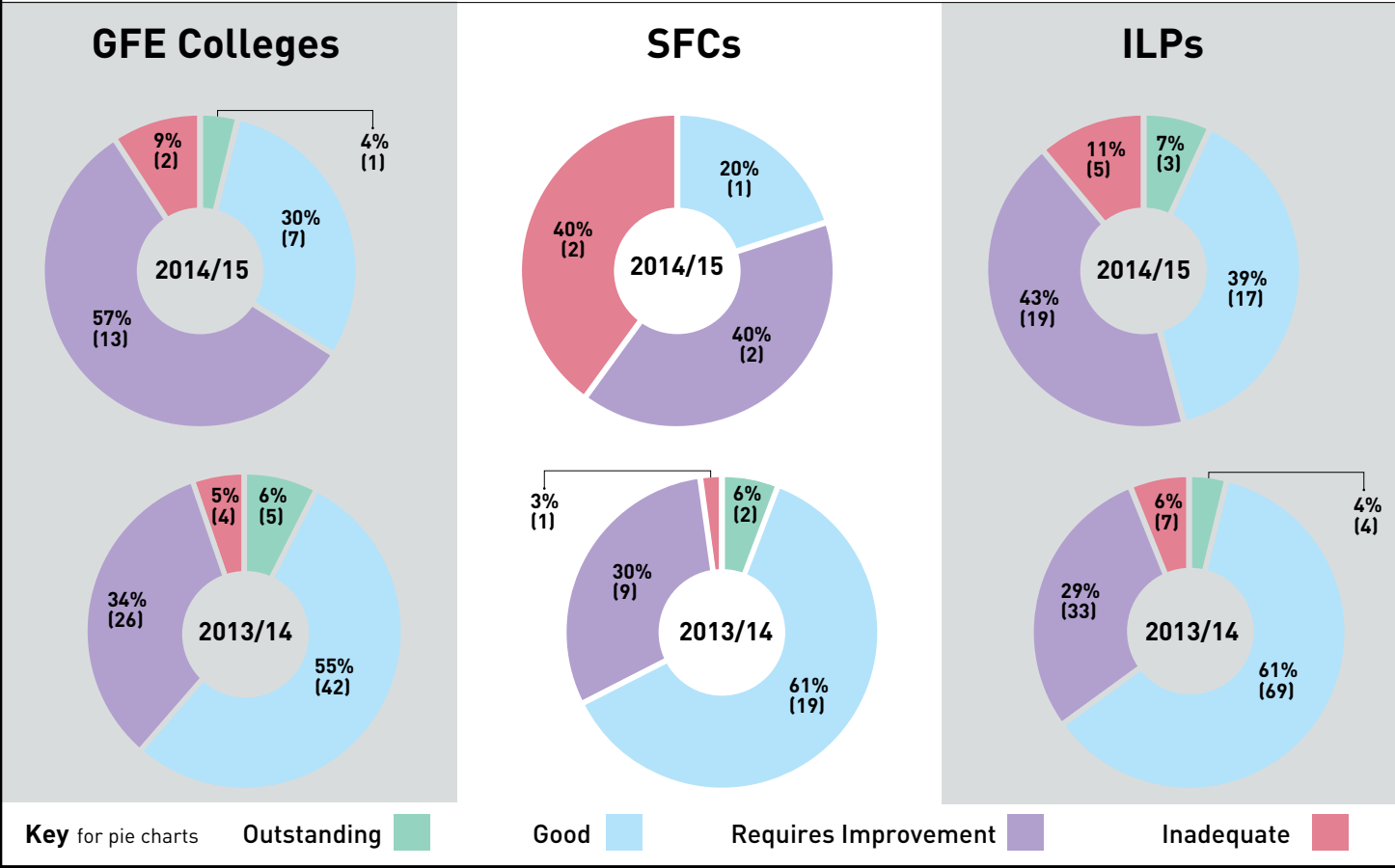


Martin Doel

“Even more critically, it is essential that Ofsted works with the sector to identify ‘what good looks like’.

“Understanding labour market intelligence in a sophisticated way and relating this to student demand

FE AND SKILLS INSPECTIONS — THE TALE OF THE TAPE



General FE & tertiary colleges (GFE colleges)	Date of inspection	Grade	Date of previous inspection	Grade	+/-
Lambeth College	8/12/2014	3	18/3/2013	3	0
East Surrey College	9/12/2014	2	12/1/2009	2	0
Stockport College	8/12/2014	3	30/9/13	4	+1
Lowestoft College	2/12/14	3	10/6/13	3	0
New College Swindon	1/12/14	2	19/1/09	2	0
Barnfield College	17/11/14	4	23/4/12	3	-1
South Leicestershire College	24/11/14	2	10/6/13	3	+1
South Gloucestershire and Stroud College	17/11/14	2	NPI	N/A	N/A
Greenwich Community College	10/11/14	4	20/5/13	3	-1
Central College Nottingham	10/11/14	3	20/5/13	3	0
Huntingdon Regional College	17/11/14	3	4/6/13	3	0
Amersham and Wycombe College	3/11/14	3	3/6/13	3	0
City of Wolverhampton College	20/10/14	2	29/4/13	3	+1
Central Sussex College	20/10/14	3	22/4/13	3	0
Warrington Collegiate	20/10/14	3	18/10/10	2	-1
Epping Forest College	20/10/14	3	13/5/13	3	0
Walford and North Shropshire College	14/10/14	3	30/4/13	3	0
Waltham Forest College	13/10/14	3	13/5/13	3	0
Stafford College	6/10/14	3	15/4/13	3	0
Worthing College	7/10/14	3	23/4/13	3	0
Kingston Maurward College	30/9/14	2	30/4/13	3	+1
Strode College	23/9/14	1	1/10/08	2	+1
Bradford College	22/9/14	2	6/10/08	2	0

Key for tables Improved (Green) Stayed same (Blue) Got worse (Red)

Inspections started from August 1 and with subsequent reports published by time of going to press

Sixth form colleges (SFCs)	Date of inspection	Grade	Date of previous inspection	Grade	+/-
Hartlepool Sixth Form College	23/9/14	4	18/5/10	2	-2
King George V College	16/9/14	4	19/3/12	2	-2
SEEVIC College	29/9/14	3	15/4/13	3	0
Newham Sixth Form College	15/9/14	3	2/2/09	2	-1
Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form College	16/9/14	2	16/4/13	3	+1

Independent learning providers (ILPs)	Date of inspection	Grade	Date of previous inspection	Grade	+/-
Targeted Training Projects Limited	8/12/14	4	21/7/06	3	-1
Venture Learning Limited	1/12/14	4	13/1/09	1	-3
Four Counties Training Limited	1/12/14	4	5/2/08	1	-3
SBC Training Limited	8/12/14	3	6/7/10	2	-1
The Academy Hair & Beauty Ltd	9/12/14	1	12/1/08	1	0
Mainstream Training Limited	1/12/14	2	8/12/08	2	0
Strategic Training Solutions (Mansfield) Limited	2/12/14	3	25/6/13	3	0
Options 2 Workplace Learning Ltd	2/12/14	3	NPI	N/A	N/A
Expedient Training Services Limited	2/12/14	3	11/6/13	3	0
Barford Education and Training (North East) Limited	24/11/14	4	3/6/13	3	-1
GHQ Training Limited	17/11/14	2	22/11/11	2	0
Eco s Limited (Manchester Solutions)	24/11/14	3	25/6/12	2	-1
Rocket Training Limited	24/11/14	3	25/6/13	3	0
Brinsworth Training Limited	25/11/14	3	25/10/11	2	-1
Retail Motor Industry Training Limited	17/11/14	2	15/6/13	3	+1
In Touch Care Limited	10/11/14	3	13/5/13	2	-1
S.Y.T.G. Limited	11/11/14	2	14/5/13	3	+1
Norman Mackie & Associates Limited	10/11/14	2	NPI	N/A	N/A
CCP GRADUATE SCHOOL LTD	20/10/14	3	18/6/13	3	0
Bestland Solutions Limited	4/11/14	3	NPI	N/A	N/A
Team Enterprises Limited	27/10/14	3	3/5/11	2	-1
MI ComputoSolutions Incorporated	27/10/14	2	11/8/09	2	0
Skills Team Ltd	13/10/14	3	17/6/13	3	0
Succeed Limited	27/10/14	3	NPI	N/A	N/A
Aspire Achieve Advance Limited	20/10/14	1	NPI	N/A	N/A
Woodspen Training Limited	13/10/14	2	20/5/13	3	+1
Lawn Tennis Association Limited	6/10/14	1	10/11/08	2	+1
Matrix Training and Development Limited	14/10/14	2	14/1/08	2	0
Transplant Training Limited	30/9/14	3	NPI	N/A	N/A
TQ Workforce Development Limited	29/9/14	2	3/6/13	3	+1
Acacia Training Limited	29/9/14	3	15/4/13	3	0
The Learning Partnership for Cornwall and The Isles of Scilly Limited	16/9/14	3	NPI	N/A	N/A
Skills for Security Limited	22/9/14	3	22/6/13	3	0
JBC Computer Training Limited	17/9/14	2	NPI	N/A	N/A
Unique Training North East Limited	9/9/14	3	9/7/13	3	0
Career Development Center Limited	11/8/14	4	20/8/12	3	-1
Enlightenment Partnership Limited	18/8/14	2	26/11/12	3	+1
TheLightbulb Ltd	18/8/14	3	20/7/10	2	-1
5 E Ltd.	4/8/14	2	16/9/08	1	-1
Cheyne Training	18/8/14	2	18/2/13	3	+1
Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry	18/8/14	2	7/3/11	2	0
Prevista Ltd	4/8/14	2	14/1/14	4	+2
Rewards Training Recruitment Consultancy Limited	4/8/14	2	9/7/12	3	+1
TCV Employment & Training Services	5/8/14	2	6/8/12	3	+1