

HIDDEN IMPLICATIONS: OFSTED 2025 FES INSPECTION TOOLKIT



A new Ofsted inspection framework triggers speculation and anxiety across the sector. Former HMI and Ofsted consultant Richard Moore lifts the lid on some key areas to watch out for.

[Watch the full webinar recording](#)



The Planning Meeting

Under the new toolkit, Ofsted will ask you to articulate:

- ✓ Your key strengths
- ✓ Priority areas for improvement
- ✓ Your own self-assessed grades for each evaluation area



Providers who “over-declare” weaknesses risk being boxed into lower grades from day one. Providers who gloss over issues risk being penalised for “not knowing themselves.” A poorly prepared response can unintentionally steer inspectors straight toward the weakest parts of your provision.

Action plan:

- Prepare “oven-ready” position papers for each evaluation area.
- Brief all staff and governors on your declared strengths + areas for improvement before inspectors arrive.

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Secure Fit: What's Changed?

Secure Fit means inspectors must see all criteria in a grade band met before awarding that grade.

This is particularly challenging for providers with multiple delivery models, large curriculum footprints, and achievement variability across cohorts.



A single underperforming apprenticeship, skills programme or cohort could, in theory, prevent you achieving Strong Standard in Achievement or Curriculum.

Action plan:

- Review each evaluation area against Secure Fit descriptors.
- Identify inconsistency hot spots across delivery routes.
- Strengthen evidence for progress, especially “extensive progress.”
- Develop a confident narrative for any programmes below national averages.

Inclusion: The New Centre of Gravity?

Not new... but newly weighted. While inclusion has always been part of inspection, it is now:

- ✓ Both a standalone evaluation area and a red thread throughout the inspection
- ✓ A driver of case-sampling selection
- ✓ A significant indicator of provider culture and capability



Early indications suggest that Ofsted will scrutinise how you “Assess, Plan, Do, and Review”. Inclusion scores will impact judgment across other areas: Curriculum, Teaching & Training, Leadership & Governance, Achievement

Action plan:

- Audit enrolment + initial assessment processes for rigour.
- Train staff to articulate adaptations and contextual rationale.
- Decide in advance which learners are appropriate for case sampling.
- Make sure you can evidence how you assess & identify ‘disadvantaged’ learners, plan and deliver support throughout their learning journey, and review and adapt that support based on evidentiary data.

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Achievement Rates, Back in the Spotlight

They matter across multiple judgments, not just one. Under the new toolkit:

- ✓ Achievement is a full evaluation area
- ✓ Providers must evidence both completion and meaningful progression
- ✓ National averages by standard will be used more rigorously



If you receive Needs Attention here, other grades may fall with it. Inspectors will seek to understand why achievement is low, and that can influence Curriculum, Teaching & Training & Leadership & Governance.

Action plan:

- Know the national average for every standard you deliver.
- Prepare an evidence-based narrative explaining variability.
- Focus on destination data, particularly for short programmes.
- Avoid relying on “predicted” achievement, because inspectors likely won’t.
- Monitor PPEDs and BiLs carefully, because inspectors will care.

Learning Walks are the New Deep Dives

But they function differently:

Deep Dives = mile deep, inch wide

Learning Walks = mile wide, inch deep

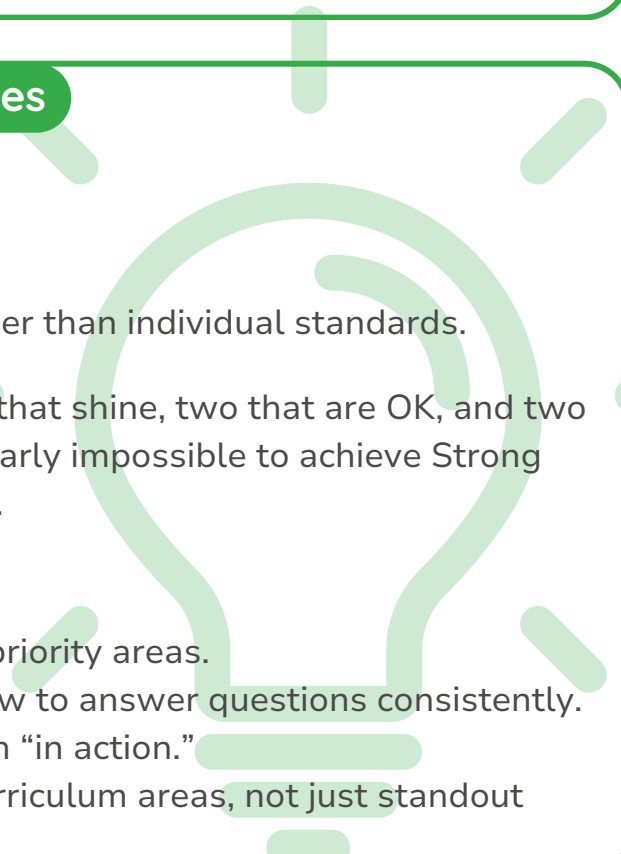
Inspectors now explore curriculum areas rather than individual standards.



If you have two curriculum areas that shine, two that are OK, and two that are weak... it will likely be nearly impossible to achieve Strong standard across evaluation areas.

Action plan:

- Ensure all staff know your strengths and priority areas.
- Brief staff accompanying inspectors on how to answer questions consistently.
- Prepare examples demonstrating inclusion “in action.”
- Coordinate evidence availability across curriculum areas, not just standout teams.



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Context is Important

During our webinar, Richard emphasised that context still matters. Some examples:

- A 1-week bootcamp will not provide the same depth of learning support as a 2-year FE programme. Support should be appropriate for your specific context.
- Online delivery requires different approaches to adapting teaching for learners with barriers

So equip staff with the ability to articulate why your approaches are appropriate and proportional, and anticipate how inspectors will perceive both your constraints and your solutions.

The New Toolkit: Really A Radical Change?

It doesn't seem so. The toolkit doesn't rewrite inspection methodology, but it's important providers pay attention to the focus areas and the most effective ways to prepare. If you:

- Know your strengths
- Understand your weaknesses
- Support learners with barriers effectively
- Track achievement intelligently
- Communicate consistently

Then we anticipate that you will be well positioned to navigate the new inspection landscape confidently!

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