Planning and preparing for inspection

This booklet gives an overview of what happens from the first contact with your lead inspector to the start of the inspection.
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Introduction

A good inspection depends on good planning and communication. A lead inspector will be allocated to manage your inspection and will work closely with your nominee to plan and prepare for the inspection.

We recognise that being inspected can be stressful and that much can hang on the result. We want our inspections to be thorough, fair and effective and for their results to lead to improvements that benefit both learners and providers. We have produced this booklet so that you can help us achieve this by preparing for your inspection effectively. We hope that it will help you to make best use of our inspectors’ time with you.

You may find it helpful to start by looking at the three planners provided to guide you through the early stages of inspection, and at the Overview of the inspection process wallchart.

Support

If you would like additional support, it is available through:

- the A-Z section of this toolkit, which should answer some of your general enquiries
- Preparing for Inspection events for nominees, held soon after notification. These cover a great deal of practical information and more to help you throughout the inspection
- your lead inspector, once allocated, who will answer questions specific to your own inspection
- for other or urgent enquiries, contact our inspection planning helpline on 02476 716640. Just leave a message and the most appropriate person will return your call
The key stages of inspection

What are the key stages in inspection planning?

For providers, inspection planning generally consists of actions clustered around several key stages, all of which have implications for preparation and planning:

- notification, and the initial actions that must be taken
- initial contact by the lead inspector
- the planning meeting
- preparation for the inspection visits

The overall inspection process usually takes place over a period of four to eight months. The level of intensity of inspection-related activity will vary greatly during that period, with inspection visits taking the most time.

How do the different stages fit together?

You can gain an overview of the inspection process through:

- the Overview of inspection chart in this toolkit
- reading The nominee booklet in this toolkit, which gives an overview of all the nominee’s tasks
- the wall charts provided in this toolkit to help plan the early stages
- the Handbook for Inspectors gives more background details of the overall planning process
- your lead inspector will work with you to co-ordinate the different aspects of inspection

Take a look at the various wall charts and planners provided in this toolkit, they will give you a useful overview of the whole inspection process. You may find it useful to start using the planners as early on in the inspection process as you can. Further background information on how the ALI goes about planning inspections can be found in our Handbook for Inspectors.
Notification

The actions you need to take at notification are outlined in the notification section of the toolkit. These are usually carried out by the nominee. The information you return at this early stage helps the ALI with the initial planning of your inspection. More detailed planning will take place once your inspection dates are confirmed and you are allocated a lead inspector.

What do we have to do at notification?

- complete and return the acknowledgement form
- let us know of dates to avoid for your inspection
- complete and return learner numbers forms if applicable to your provision
- book attendance at a Preparing for Inspection event
- send in your self-assessment report or an update

Return the acknowledgement form

The nominee or another member of your organisation must return the acknowledgement form that accompanies your letter of notification. If you think the lead inspector may have difficulty contacting the right person for your organisation, please provide the ALI with details of who they should contact and how.

Inform us about dates

In general, it is very difficult to change dates for inspection once these have been set, and especially once planning is at an advanced stage. However, if there are inspection dates within the inspection quarter that would cause particular difficulties for you, please let us know. You need to do this immediately, as any delay reduces the chance of us being able to alter the inspection date. We do our best to avoid these dates where we can, but this is not always possible.

Learner numbers forms

Some funding bodies now send us details about providers’ learner numbers; other providers must send in their learner numbers themselves. A booklet and CD are provided in this toolkit to give you more information about the data you need to send in now. You will also need to read the more detailed guidance for your type(s) of provision on the Right Touch Inspection Toolkit CD which you will find in this toolkit. All the necessary forms are provided on the CD.
Preparing for Inspection events

You are strongly recommended to attend a Preparing for Inspection event before your inspection. These events are held within a few weeks of your notification. At these, you find out what the inspection will be like and how to prepare for it. You will hear from a nominee who has recently been through inspection, and have a chance to ask questions.

A free place is offered to providers notified of inspection. You can bring colleagues to this event but there is a charge for any additional places. Booking information for these events is on the Excalibur section of the ALI's website www.ali.gov.uk/excalibur.

Self-assessment report and action plan

Your self-assessment report plays an important part in the planning for your inspection. Methods of sending in the self-assessment report vary depending on the funding body. Please check that the current versions of your report and action plan have been submitted, in line with your funding body's requirements, and that your self-assessment report is clearly dated.

If you wish to provide updates to your self-assessment report and action plan, confirm with your lead inspector the best time and methods for doing this for your inspection. All changes to the self-assessment report must be clearly highlighted and dated, so inspectors know when they were made.

Initial contact by the lead inspector

When will the lead inspector contact us?

- the lead inspector will contact you about a month after notification
- they will contact the person named as nominee

Several weeks after your organisation has been notified of inspection, a lead inspector will be allocated to your inspection and will make contact with your nominee. This contact is usually referred to as the initial phone call. It forms an important part of the planning process.

What happens in the initial phone call?

The lead inspector will:
- tell you the date set for your inspection
- ask you for information to help plan the inspection
- discuss whether inspection over time applies
- discuss whether Right Touch inspection applies
- agree the scope of the inspection
- agree a date for the planning meeting
Contact by the lead inspector

The lead inspector will contact you by telephone once they are informed that they will be leading your inspection. They will ask to speak to the nominee. Once in contact with the nominee, they will exchange contact details. The phone call may go into a great deal of detail and take some time. If this is not a good time for the call, you and the lead inspector can arrange a mutually convenient time and postpone it until then.

Information about exact dates

The lead inspector will tell you the exact dates for your inspection. At this stage, it is very unlikely that inspection dates can be changed, so you need to let us know at notification if any dates will cause problems: don’t wait for the phone call from the lead inspector.

Requests for information

The lead inspector will ask you for detailed information about the numbers and locations of learners on all programmes, including those in any provision you subcontract in or out. They will be keen to understand:

- the size and nature of your provision, including areas that are not in scope for inspection
- the numbers at each level for each programme and contributory area of learning
- the geographical spread of learners, work placements and other sites they attend
- travelling time required to visit learners
- any specific needs of learners and staff, such as British Sign Language interpreters
- other information that helps them understand your provision

Inspection over time

The lead inspector will ask you what there is to observe during inspection and also in the eight weeks leading up to your inspection, if this cannot be seen during the main visit. If there are key aspects of your provision that cannot be covered during the main inspection visit, then inspection over time may be appropriate.

Right Touch inspection

The lead will discuss with you whether Right Touch inspection applies. They will discuss which aspects of your provision will be inspected and what will not.

The scope of the inspection

The inspector will aim to agree during the initial phone call which areas will be in scope for inspection. Please let the inspector know of everything you provide including subcontracted provision and private work. If further information is needed to determine the scope, this may be discussed in further calls and confirmed during the planning meeting.
Self-assessment report

The lead inspector will also check whether you have sent in your self-assessment report and whether this is still up to date. If not, they will advise on how to send in updates.

Other information

Let the lead inspector know of anything you feel is essential to understanding your inspection and which may affect inspection planning. If in doubt, ask. The lead will also want to know information such as:

- parking arrangements for the planning meeting
- details of the contract managers at your funding body so that they can invite them to the planning meeting
- health and safety considerations relevant to the planning meeting
- reasonable local hotels so that these can be booked early for the inspection team

You should tell the lead inspector about anything else that might affect the scope of the inspection or the selection of the inspection team. This might include other important sources of funding, subcontracting arrangements, evening or weekend provision, or potential problems with transport or access to premises.

Specialist expertise

Let the lead inspector know if specialist communicators and interpreters are needed, such as for British Sign Language, as these usually need to be booked early. The ALI will cover the cost of these. You will need to discuss who will book these and how arrangements for payment will be made.

The lead inspector can also arrange for a specialist to advise the team about aspects of the area of learning, if this is necessary.
Preparing for the initial phone call

**How can I prepare for the initial phone call?**
- read the toolkit and make a list of questions
- look at your self-assessment report again
- collect information ready for the lead inspector
- collect information to help make the decision about inspection over time
- consider whether Right Touch inspection applies

Prepare your own questions
Read the toolkit and see whether everything makes sense to you and, if not, jot down a list of questions. The lead inspector will be happy to answer your queries during this phone call, as well as after the call if other questions arise.

Re-read your self-assessment report
Familiarise yourself with your self-assessment report and find out where you are in your self-assessment cycle. It is useful to have a copy of the report to hand for the phone call.

Collect information
The forms in Appendices 1 and 2 of this booklet will help you collect information ready for the lead inspector’s phone call.

Subcontractors
Make sure you have detailed information to hand about learners in provision that you:
- subcontract to other providers
- subcontract from other providers

Consider inspection over time
Inspection over time is the exception rather than the norm, and must add significantly to the evidence base for it to be worthwhile. You and the lead inspector will discuss whether this aspect of inspection would make a substantial contribution to the outcome of the inspection. If something can be observed during the main inspection visit, then this will not be observed in an interim visit.

Consider whether there are key aspects of your provision that inspectors might not be able to see during a single four- or five-day inspection. For example, check whether there is teaching, training, assessment, support or induction that takes place only on Thursday afternoons, Fridays, weekends, or outside of the inspection dates. Appendix 2 will help you put together the information needed to decide whether this applies to your inspection.
Reduced intensity inspection

Your lead inspector will let you know whether the pre-inspection analysis suggests that a reduced intensity inspection applies in your case. The final decision on what will be inspected lies with the ALI.

Before the lead inspector contacts you, consider whether a reduced intensity inspection is likely to apply to you. If your grades were good or outstanding at the previous inspection, then you may have a reduced intensity inspection.

In order to confirm whether a reduced intensity inspection applies, the lead inspector will need to know whether:

- you provide exactly the same programmes and contributory areas as at the previous inspection
- the numbers of learners on these are the same
- there are any major changes to the way these programmes are run

If reduced intensity inspection applies, then the team will look at only some areas of learning and contributory areas and the inspection team may be much smaller.

Inspectors want to see a representative sample. If you are allocated a reduced intensity inspection, give some thought to which areas of learning you would most like inspectors to see and discuss this with the lead inspector.

Consider areas of learning that:

- are new or have expanded or contracted significantly since the last inspection
- have improved considerably as a result of your own quality improvement activities
- have changed significantly since the last inspection

Data

Look at the data booklets and forms on the CD and consider whether there are any initial questions about the forms that the lead inspector could assist you with.
**After the initial phone call**

### Can I contact my lead inspector after the first telephone call?

You should contact your lead inspector with any questions or concerns.

Inspections need good planning and communication in order to run well, so any questions you have about the process are worth asking. Your lead inspector may not always be able to take calls straight away. If this happens, please leave a message and they will call you back as soon as possible.

### What do I need to do after the phone call?

- provide the information requested
- keep your staff and partners informed
- prepare for the planning meeting

After the phone call, you may need to gather more information to send to the lead inspector straight away. You also need to start preparing for the planning meeting.
The planning meeting

What is a planning meeting?

- this is a meeting with your lead inspector to plan the inspection, normally lasting about two hours
- it is usually held at your premises
- a planning meeting is held before all inspections
- larger or more complex inspections may have two or more planning meetings

The lead inspector sets the date for the planning meeting with you in their first phone call. They will talk through with you what they will need for the planning meeting.

What happens at the planning meeting?

- planning meetings follow set agendas
- the lead inspector will explain the inspection process
- you and the lead inspector will discuss the inspection plan and the evidence base for the inspection
- you and the lead inspector will agree the sample of learners
- you confirm practical and domestic arrangements
- you consider the inspection team

The planning meeting is the main opportunity for the lead inspector to meet you and other key staff before your inspection. They will go through the inspection plan in detail with you. Your funding body can help you prepare for these meetings and your contract managers may attend it. A typical agenda for a planning meeting is provided in Appendix 3.

Who attends the planning meeting?

- the nominee
- contract managers from your funding body
- the senior manager for your organisation
- anyone else you wish to invite

The nominee can invite staff, partners, contractors and whoever they feel should usefully attend. However, it is best if the numbers are kept reasonably small so that the meeting is effective.
Make the most of the planning meeting

We need you to help us to get the planning right and the planning meeting provides a good opportunity for you to provide background information and to influence the planning and decision-making.

### How can you make the most of the planning meeting?

- Be prepared
- Offer suggestions
- Check the professional profiles of the team
- Show the lead inspector around
- Introduce the lead inspector to your staff

#### Be prepared

Use the time between the initial phone call and the planning meeting to find out as much as you can about your programmes, learners, staff, partners and subcontractors. Talk to your staff and make sure you know what they are most keen for inspectors to see, who they feel inspectors should interview, and what there is for inspectors to observe.

Check with staff for any difficulties they anticipate, such as learners or employers on holiday, learners that are due to leave, or aspects of the provision that it will not be possible to observe during the main inspection visit.

#### Offer suggestions

Draw our attention to work that you think is particularly interesting or problematic. For example:

- Identify learners for the sample
- Identify people you would like us to interview
- Identify sites you would particularly like us to visit
- Identify what you would like us to observe
- If you will be having a reduced intensity inspection, identify the areas you most want us to observe
- Draw attention to significant improvements

The lead inspector will aim to include some of your suggestions in what is inspected. Although we reserve the right to inspect any aspect of your government-funded provision, with your help we can develop an inspection plan that matches not only your provision but also your priorities. This will make best use of inspectors’ time and maximise the value of the report in your post-inspection action-planning.

#### Inspection over time

Draw the lead inspector’s attention to opportunities for inspection over time. Identify any aspects of the provision they could inspect on the day of the planning meeting.
Check for conflicts of interest

At the planning meeting, or shortly afterwards, your lead inspector will give you professional profiles for all inspection team members. This will enable you to check for any conflicts of interest, such as where a provisional member of the team may previously have worked for you or has been a recent external examiner. If you identify any conflicts of interest, then you should discuss this with your lead inspector as soon as possible.

Show the lead inspector around

Take advantage of the planning meeting to show the lead inspector around your premises. Point out those aspects of which you are particularly proud. Give them a feel for the organisation and raise issues that you think would be useful to include in their briefing to the inspection team.

Show the lead inspector the base room

Let the lead inspector see the room or rooms you propose for the base room. Point out any features of the room such as power points and lighting, and let them know if there are any restrictions on using the room during the week.

Make informal introductions

If there is time and you consider it appropriate, introduce the lead inspector to key staff and to learners as you show them around. This informal meeting can help to break the ice for those who may be anxious about inspection and inspectors.
The planning meeting: setting the scene

What will we find out about our inspection?

At the planning meeting, the lead inspector will:
- describe the basis and the scope of the inspection
- give you details of the inspection team
- go through the details of the inspection plan
- discuss details of schedules and the sample
- discuss the evidence base

Basis of inspection

The lead inspector will confirm that the inspection is based on the Common Inspection Framework and that the focus for inspection is the individual learner. As well as assessing the quality of provision, inspectors also seek to validate the provider’s self-assessment process and report, and to determine the provider’s capacity to make further improvements.

Timing and scope of the inspection

Your lead inspector will confirm the inspection dates and the dates of any agreed interim visits, and will explain the outcomes of the pre-inspection analysis. They will already have formed a view as to which areas of learning are to be inspected and will discuss these with you in order to hear your views and agree the scope of the inspection.

Lead inspectors will also use the pre-inspection analysis in order to identify potential themes and issues to be investigated during the inspection. They may discuss some of these at the planning meeting. Your lead inspector will ask you if there are matters of particular interest or concern to your organisation, with a view to including some of these in the inspection if suitable.

The role of the nominee and the inspection team

The lead inspector will go over the role of the nominee, confirm the importance of the nominee to the inspection team and assure themselves of the nominee’s availability during inspection visits. They will also clarify the roles of the different inspectors on the team.

Outline of the inspection

The lead will provide an outline of the inspection, showing the dates, the start and end times for each day, and the times of meetings. The plan may also indicate times when the team is required in the base room or when it would be especially useful to hold certain meetings.
Inspection schedules

The lead inspector may have started to develop the schedule, especially if you have agreed the sample before the meeting. They will ask you to prepare the individual timetables for each inspector for an agreed date following the planning meeting. Interviews with learners and staff usually last about 20 to 30 minutes, but can be longer and may need to include breaks if they use a communicator or interpreter. Interviews with key managers may take longer than this.

The evidence base

The lead inspector will discuss with you the evidence required for the inspection, including the sample of learners, and will ask you for suggestions for relevant evidence. For example, there may be off-site resources that your learners use a great deal, or a support agency that provides additional support to a significant proportion of your learners, or electronic resources used by learners. Let the lead inspector know about these.

The data tables and/or measures for success, if applicable, will form an important part of the evidence base. Let the lead inspector know if you have any queries or concerns about these. Appendix 4 provides a list of the kinds of evidence that inspectors are likely to ask for. This is not an exhaustive list, so do provide additional evidence if you think inspectors need to see it.
Selecting the sample

**What is the sample?**

- inspectors base their judgements on a small selection of your provision, known as a sample

The lead inspector decides on the sample after negotiation and discussion with the nominee.

**What information is needed for the sample?**

- details of learners for all programmes and contributory areas
- details of learners in subcontracted provision
- details of staff, employers, partners, subcontractors and other relevant people to interview
- details of what there is to observe and visit and which learners will be present
- other information to help select the right sample

**Selecting a representative sample**

We aim to make the sample as representative of your provision and learner profile as we can. The lead inspector needs details of each learner’s level, year, gender, ethnicity, and any disability, as well as information about where they are located, names of sites, employers or work-placement providers. The lead inspector may ask for these details early on, in order to make a provisional sample to discuss at the planning meeting. Where learners are on shorter programmes, the lead inspector may propose different arrangements.

**Samples for subcontracts**

Discuss with the lead inspector any provision you subcontract in or out, and they will let you know which details to provide for learners and for other people they may wish to interview.

**Samples for interview**

It is unlikely that inspectors will be able to interview everyone. They will aim to interview all key managers, and a selection of other staff, employers, partners, subcontractors and other people you consider relevant. The nominee should have a good overview of everyone who may be relevant to interview, including support workers, senior managers, and those with overall responsibility for areas such as equality of opportunity, quality improvement, support for literacy, numeracy and language, health and safety, and, if applicable, child protection.
Details of what there is to observe and visit

Where there are many lessons or sessions taking place, inspectors will require timetables for all sessions in their area of learning. They select lessons when they arrive, and do not give advance notice of what they inspect. If there are few formal sessions, these are likely to be observed.

Visits to workplaces usually need to be arranged in advance. The lead inspector needs details of all training, placements, induction events, assessments, monitoring visits, progress visits, support sessions and anything else provided for learners during the period of inspection.

Other information to help select the right sample

Providers are encouraged to provide brief background information that helps to provide a sensible, manageable and representative sample. You will know your provision and the geographical area better than the lead inspector. Consider whether the proposed sample gives a true picture of your provision. Let the lead inspector know if distances are unreasonable or, alternatively, if there are opportunities to interview several learners at one location.

The lead inspector will be interested to know if there are learners, staff, or aspects of your provision that you would like inspected. Tell us about learners you have supported or support agencies you have used. Conversely, inform us if a particular person is likely to be unavailable during the inspection.
Practical and domestic arrangements

What practical aspects need to be considered before the planning meeting?

- the base room
- health and safety considerations
- basic refreshments and local facilities for lunch
- parking facilities and transport arrangements
- photocopying facilities
- local hotels

We will discuss practical arrangements for the inspection, so it is helpful if you can bring information to the planning meeting about the items listed above, unless these have already been agreed with the lead inspector.

What sort of base room should we provide?

The base room should:

- provide a suitable office for inspectors
- be large enough for the daily team meetings
- have desks or tables and electric sockets for inspectors’ computers
- be secure
- be near a kettle, milk, tea, coffee and water

Health and safety considerations

The ALI has a legal obligation to undertake assessments of all significant risks. Your lead inspector will carry out a health and safety risk assessment for each member of the inspection team. They will also monitor all activities, and update the risk assessment whenever circumstances or information changes. Your lead inspector will talk to you about this and ensure that you are aware of your responsibility to give the inspectors a health and safety briefing at each site. Any employers they visit should also give them a health and safety briefing.
Following the planning meeting

What happens after the planning meeting?

- you will receive notes of the meeting
- the lead inspector will inform you if there are any changes
- you should keep your lead inspector informed of any changes
- preparation for inspection visits begins

The lead inspector sets the date for the planning meeting with you in their first phone call. They will talk through with you what they will need for the planning meeting.

Notes of the meeting

Following the planning meeting, your lead inspector will send notes of the meeting to you and your contract manager/s. The lead inspector will produce a pre-inspection report for the inspection team. When it is ready you will also be sent a copy, before the inspection begins.

Notification of any changes

It is possible that your lead inspector, as a result of discussions at the planning meeting, will decide that the pre-inspection analysis has resulted in an inappropriate resource being allocated to your organisation. They will refer this back to the ALI for a decision. Any proposed changes to the intensity of inspection will be subject to the ALI’s available resources.

Keep the lead inspector informed

On occasions the scope of the inspection will change between the planning meeting and the actual inspection. This may be the result of significant changes in learner numbers or other unexpected circumstances. This may affect decisions about what will be inspected, the size of the team and whether inspection over time is appropriate. Your lead inspector will always discuss with you, at the earliest opportunity, any proposed changes to the scope of the inspection.

Preparation for inspection visits begins

Your lead inspector maintains contact with you to finalise the planning arrangements. The extent of this contact will vary depending on the scale of the inspection. For large inspections, further planning meetings may be necessary. Always ask the lead inspector if you are unsure what is needed.
Preparing for interim inspection visits

What planning is needed for interim visits?

- this varies greatly depending on the aim of the visit
- planning for interim visits should be kept to a minimum
- staff should be available for briefings and feedback

Each interim visit is different, so planning arrangements will vary. It is useful if there is someone present at the beginning of each visit to brief the inspectors, and at the end of the day to receive feedback on emerging findings. It may be necessary to book rooms, brief staff and learners, organise visits to placements or provide timetables, depending on the purpose of the visit.

What evidence do we need for interim visits?

- you need evidence that helps inspectors put their observations and other evidence into context
- generally, keep documentary evidence to a minimum
- the lead inspector will discuss this with you

Documentation

You should not overprepare the paperwork for interim visits. The focus of these visits is very specific to the activities taking place on that particular day and inspectors normally wish to see paperwork relating only to those activities or learners. It is unlikely that inspectors will look at any material that they can view on the final visit. However, if you are a multisite provider and inspectors will not be returning to that particular venue, then all relevant paperwork should be available for them to see.

Communication

Interim inspection visits are likely to raise issues and requests for additional evidence for future visits. A key role for the nominee is to pass on feedback from the visits to the colleagues who need it and make sure they know what they have to do in preparation for the next visit.
Planning for the main inspection visit

How can we prepare for the inspection?
- organise support for the nominee
- brief and reassure staff, learners and partners
- plan individual timetables for inspectors
- prepare the evidence for the base room
- organise maps and/or transport
- finalise practical arrangements

Support for the nominee

This is likely to be a particularly busy time for the nominee. It can be helpful if the nominee starts to involve staff and partners early, so that they are well briefed and understand how they can contribute to the inspection process from the earliest stages.

What support can staff give the nominee?
- gathering and organising evidence
- briefing their learners and relevant contacts
- providing information
- managing some of the domestic arrangements for the inspection
- covering aspects of the nominee’s work

Some organisations give everyone a role in preparation for inspection so that they feel involved; others use support teams, a steering group, or a combination of methods.

Key staff are likely to know their own areas of work, the staff they manage, their data, and the issues that affect their departments and learners better than the nominee. Information they provide could affect the shape of the inspection. They are best placed to identify who needs to be interviewed, what there is to see, and the relevant paperwork. They can help to organise and label documents and files, brief their own learners and contacts and offer to cover aspects of inspection preparation.
Brief and reassure participants

Brief staff, partners, employers and subcontractors about the inspection

Make sure that staff, partners and others know which people in your organisation they can talk to about the inspection and how to express their concerns and get support. It is helpful if staff understand that inspectors ultimately want the same results as they do – good provision for learners. Ensure that partners and employers understand that it is your organisation that is being inspected, not their organisations, but we are interested in their views and will want to see the different contexts in which learners work and learn.

Reassure staff that inspectors will treat them professionally and aim to make them less anxious. We may not meet all staff in person, but all staff may contribute to the inspection in some way. For example, they could be observed carrying out their work, and inspectors may request additional interviews with people not on the inspection schedule.

Interviewees

Let those who are going to be interviewed know when and where they will be interviewed, and what the inspection is for. We do not ask trick questions or seek to compromise staff with off-the-record questions. Ensure they are aware that the interviews can be cancelled for various reasons. Provide a briefing for those not scheduled to be interviewed or visited, in case inspectors request additional interviews during the inspection.

Inspectors will understand that interviewees may be nervous and will generally try to put them at their ease, especially learners. Inspectors will not report back what named individuals say and will treat information confidentially. If the interviewee doesn’t understand a question, they should say so and the inspector will rephrase it. The nominee should let inspectors know if an individual has particular support needs for the interview.

Those being observed teaching and training

Reassure staff that inspectors are not there to inspect them as individuals: it is the organisation as a whole that is being inspected. If inspectors observe a member of staff teaching, or in any other aspect of their work, they provide brief, confidential feedback soon afterwards to that individual as a courtesy, and to help them to consider personal improvements. However, inspectors do not divulge any grades or report back about individual staff.

Inspectors usually sit where they can see learners and teachers. They may speak to learners or staff, if this does not disrupt the session in any way, but otherwise they do not participate in sessions and, as far as is possible, teachers should act as if they were not there.

For all taught sessions during inspection week, teachers and trainers should place a completed register or attendance list, as well as session plans and schemes of work where inspectors can see them easily. Where relevant, learners should bring their portfolios with them and inspectors may look at some of these.
**Brief learners**

Inspectors will be interested in talking to learners and hearing what they have to say. They will treat what learners say confidentially, but will include a summary of learners’ views in the report.

Make sure that learners are aware that inspectors are visiting the organisation and that the focus is on how well you are supporting them to achieve. Explain that inspectors may want to talk to them, see their portfolios and observe their work. Reassure learners that inspectors don’t ask trick questions, and will rephrase questions if a learner says they don’t understand.

Learners can see the views of other learners about their organisations in published ALI reports, at [www.ali.gov.uk](http://www.ali.gov.uk) or in examples on the *Good Practice Database: [www.ali.gov.uk/excalibur/goodpractice](http://www.ali.gov.uk/excalibur/goodpractice)*
Preparing timetables for inspectors

How do we plan timetables for inspectors?

- use the outline of the inspection
- avoid all inspection team meeting times
- consider distances and times carefully

Make good use of the outline of the inspection that the lead inspector will give you at the planning meeting. If you ask, the lead inspector may send this to you electronically. Some lead inspectors have particular preferences about the way timetables look and will provide templates.

It is most important that you do not plan other activities into time the lead inspector has set aside for meetings. If this is likely to cause difficulties, then talk to the lead inspector, who will discuss the best course of action to take.

Remember not to schedule any inspection activity after the last team meeting before the grading meeting unless this has been agreed in advance with the lead inspector. If, when drawing up the timetables, you realise there are substantial aspects of the provision that fall outside of the inspection visit, let the lead inspector know about this immediately. It may be possible to arrange an interim visit.

When should we prepare the timetables?

- this should be done as agreed with the lead inspector
- you should prepare the timetables as early as possible, so the lead inspector can check them and discuss them with you
- this may depend on when learners are recruited

The nominee draws up individual timetables for inspectors. These should include, where feasible:

- chances to observe lessons, assessments, progress reviews, work placements and support
- relevant interviews for each inspector
- time to look at documents
- time to draw together their ideas for meetings and discuss aspects with the nominee
- time for travel and breaks for lunch
How long do interviews and observations last?

- 20 to 30 minutes for most interviews
- longer interviews with key managers
- usually 30 to 45 minutes for observations

Most interviews last between 20 and 30 minutes, depending on the interviewee. Interviews with staff who have responsibility for many aspects of the provision may take longer. If a briefer interview is all that is possible, let the lead inspector know. Allow more time if you know the interviewee uses an interpreter, has communication difficulties or would need additional time for a particular reason. Make sure the interviewee’s needs are explained to the inspector involved.

Are group interviews possible?

Learners, staff or others may be interviewed in groups.

Let the lead inspector know if there are opportunities to see several learners or several staff or partners. You will know best if a particular combination of partners or subcontractors would be useful to help inspectors understand an aspect of your provision.

Can staff, employers or parents be present during interviews with learners?

- interviews are confidential so staff and employers should not be present
- learners may request independent support

Normally, learners are interviewed without others present. Even learners who are considered to be very anxious usually cope very well with interviews. However, if a learner wishes for a parent, carer, trade union representative or an independent support worker to be present, let the lead inspector know. This can usually be agreed.
Preparing the base room

What should we put in the base room?

- all the key evidence requirements as agreed with the lead inspector
- not everything has to be in the base room

In general, providers collate, file and label their documentary evidence in the base room so that it is easy for inspectors to use. It helps if files contain a list of their contents. Discuss with the lead inspector any evidence that may be difficult to move to the base room.

Some types of evidence, such as posters, learning resources and confidential files, are best viewed in their usual context. Inspectors generally prefer learners to bring their current work with them so that they can talk about it with the learner. The lead may ask for a certain number of learner files and portfolios for each area of learning to be placed in the base room.

What is the best way to organise the evidence?

Evidence is best organised:

- in a way that reduces disruption to the provider
- so that the nominee and inspectors can quickly find what they need

During the inspection, the team works very quickly through paper-based and, if relevant, electronic evidence. Sometimes they have only minutes between interviews or visits in which to find the material they need, read it and make notes. Anything which helps inspectors to find evidence quickly and easily is welcomed.

It is useful if information is organised according to each area of learning and separate aspects of leadership and management. However, do not rearrange all your files for the benefit of inspectors, if they can look through them easily in their current location. Details of what is available and where to look may suffice.

What else do we need in the base room?

- basics such as tables, chairs, electric sockets
- flip chart and pens
- access to basic refreshments
Base rooms don’t need to be luxurious. Inspectors are used to working in a very wide variety of settings. However, the base room should take health and safety considerations, including temperature and lighting, into account.

Inspectors will work on laptops and some will bring printers, so they need access to electric sockets. Consideration needs to be given to trailing wires and ensuring these are anchored down. Inspectors will have their own phones but you may wish to provide an internal or external phone connection if this assists the inspection.

Most inspection teams will also want to use a flip chart for team meetings and will need to make use of dark ink marker pens. It is helpful if inspectors can make themselves a hot drink between interviews.

**How do inspectors prepare for inspection?**

- they review all the information they have about your organisation
- they identify themes and questions

Before the inspection, the inspection team receives a briefing from your lead inspector, known as the pre-inspection report. They also receive a copy of your self-assessment report and other information provided by your organisation, including data on retention and achievement and staff qualifications. Inspectors familiarise themselves with this material and identify themes and questions.
# Appendix

## 1 Checklist of information for the first telephone contact with the lead inspector

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>What are your main sources of funding/your main contracts? For example, local LSC for WBL, E2E, ACL, European Social Fund (ESF)?</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>What other funded activity takes place? For example, ESF, Single Regeneration Budget etc.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>What subcontracting arrangements are you involved in? Do you subcontract any of your activities, or do you act as a subcontractor to another provider?</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>How many learners do you have in each area of learning and contributory area of learning?</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>What programmes are they on, and what qualifications (if any) are they working towards? For example, apprenticeships in hairdressing and advanced apprenticeships in early years, New Deal for Young People, CLAIT, ECDL.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>How many learners do you think you will have at the time of inspection?</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Where are they based?</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Are there several learners working for the same company who could be seen in a single visit?</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>What learning activities will be taking place during the course of the inspection, and where and when will they happen? (See Appendix 2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>What other learning activities will be taking place in the eight weeks before the inspection which it might be helpful for inspectors to see? (See Appendix 2)</td>
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### Appendix 1 (continued)

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| 11 | Are there any other activities planned which could be observed, for example:  
• assessment or internal verification  
• new learner activities, for example induction or initial assessment  
• staff or management meetings |
| 12 | Are there any quality assurance activities taking place such as observation of staff? |
| 13 | How many sites do you have, and where are they? |
| 14 | Who are your employers or work-placement providers? Do you work with any large or national employers? |
| 15 | Are there any dates when you wouldn’t be available for the planning meeting? |
| 16 | Who are your local LSC or Jobcentre Plus contacts, and how can we reach them? |
| 17 | Have you been to a Preparing for Inspection event? |
| 18 | What is the date of your most recent self-assessment report? Will you want to provide an update? |
| 19 | Do you have spare parking spaces for visitors? |
| 20 | Can you recommend convenient local hotels? |
| 21 | Are there any health and safety or equal opportunities issues we should know about? |
| 22 | Do any learners or other people we may wish to interview use British Sign Language or require interpreters? |
| 23 | Will you be able to provide a base room for inspectors to work in? |
### 2 Opportunities for observation of learning and other inspection activity

**Provider:** To be completed and returned to your lead inspector. Please include events which are within the eight weeks before your inspection dates, if they are different from those taking place during your inspection week(s).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course/Activity</th>
<th>No. or name of learners</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Venue (address; tel. no.; contact name)</th>
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Appendix

3 Typical agenda for the planning meeting

Planning Meeting Agenda
(Name of Provider)

Date and time of meeting:
Location:

1. Introductions
2. Identity and role of nominee
3. The basis for the inspection
4. Scope of the inspection (areas of learning, contributory areas of learning, funding routes etc.)
5. Proposed inspection team (if known)
6. Opportunities for observing key learning processes (including those for inspection over time if they will add value)
7. Sample selection (learners, employers, provider staff)
8. Agreement of an outline inspection schedule (including inspection over time if it adds value to the inspection process, daily team meetings, grading meetings, etc)
9. Document and evidence requirements
10. Data validation, process for gathering data on learner retention and achievement
11. Base room, car parking and domestic arrangements
12. Health and safety of inspectors
13. Feedback arrangements
14. Report
15. Evaluation
16. Arrangements for dealing with complaints
Appendix

4 Examples of evidence you could provide for inspectors

This section lists evidence that inspectors may require for inspection. We do not expect all providers to produce all of this evidence.

Inspection is something we aim to do with you, not to you. Our aim is not to pick faults or catch you out with trick questions, but to make accurate judgements about your organisation. We can only do this if you help us gather the evidence we need. You may not always agree with our judgements, but we will always explain to you the reasons for them and give you opportunities to present further evidence if you think we are wrong.

- talk with your lead inspector about what evidence you can produce and what they will find useful
- focus on the evidence that is relevant to your organisation
- consider other important sources of evidence that are not listed here. Remember that inspectors will not have time to read every document about your organisation. We want to see material that shows us how you are managing your provision to improve learners’ experiences with you
- remember that all the information you give us should be accurate and up to date

General information

- your organisation’s three-year development plan
- your organisation’s adult learning plan (if appropriate)
- your self-assessment report, including any important updates
- organisational charts
- information about the number of staff and their status (full time, part time or paid by the hour)
- details of staff qualifications
- information about your fees and the percentage of learners or enrolments made by people entitled to concessionary fees
- important policy documents
- maps showing how to find your sites

Data

- an up-to-date version of the ALI’s learner numbers spreadsheet, giving an analysis of learners and/or enrolments by gender, ethnicity and additional learning and social needs
- an up-to-date version of the ALI’s learner progression and achievement (LPA) spreadsheet or other information previously provided if you are an adult and community learning provider
- any available data on learners’ destinations
- data on performance and an analysis of trends
an analysis of learners’ qualifications on entry
an analysis of the number of hours learners are participating in learning each week for each area of learning
information about participation by under-represented groups
information about the percentage of advertised programmes that are cancelled (if appropriate)
data about learners’ attendance and staff absences
data on assessment, support and achievement related to the development of learners’ literacy, numeracy, language and information and communications technology (ICT) skills

Inspection is something we aim to do with you, not to you. Our aim is not to pick faults or catch you out with trick questions, but to make accurate judgements about your organisation. We can only do this if you help us gather the evidence we need. You may not always agree with our judgements, but we will always explain to you the reasons for them and give you opportunities to present further evidence if you think we are wrong. Despite the inevitable stress of an inspection, we hope you will see the inspection as an opportunity to reflect on your organisation’s performance and find the inspection team’s judgements helpful in planning any future improvements.

Information for area of learning inspectors

Background information:
- the number of learners on each course and where and when learning takes place for each area of learning inspected
- the number, range, length and location of courses offered – do they take place at your main site, at work placements or at community venues?
- an analysis of learners or enrolments on each course by gender, ethnicity, age, disability and entitlement to concessionary fees, if appropriate
- information about how many weeks of the year the provision is offered
- information about when provision is offered – is it offered during the week or at weekends or both, and is it offered in the daytime, late in the afternoon or in the evening?
- information about whether it is possible to progress to higher levels within the area of learning
- the number of staff, the managers they report to, and whether they are full or part time – if you have part-time staff, how many hours does each of them work each week?
- information about who is responsible for managing the budget, managing the area of learning and assuring quality

Evidence:
- up-to-date data on achievement, progression and learner progress
- data on assessment, support and achievement related to the development of learners’ literacy, numeracy, language and ICT skills
- course timetables and class or group lists
- individual learning plans
- schemes of work and lesson plans
- induction materials
- learners’ work
- learners’ portfolios
- assessment plans and records of assessment
- records of learners’ progress and progress reviews
- minutes of meetings for the areas of learning
- paperwork for course reviews
- evidence related to the leadership and management of the area of learning, such as how equal opportunities matters are addressed through the curriculum and teaching materials, and how data is used to monitor learners’ experiences and achievements

Inspectors will want to meet learners, trainers, tutors, teachers, employers and managers. They will also want to observe teaching and learning.

**Information for inspectors of leadership and management**
- staff and learner handbooks
- minutes of staff and team meetings
- policy documents
- reports to managers, directors or trustees
- staff development plans and reports
- records of staff appraisals or performance reviews
- newsletters
- marketing and publicity documents

Inspectors will want to meet with a representative sample of staff, middle managers, senior managers, elected members (if appropriate), learners and partners.

**Information for inspectors of equality of opportunity**
- policy documents and procedures
- minutes of staff meetings
- reports to managers, directors or trustees
- publicity material
- induction programme and materials
- data analysis including:
  - participation rates among different groups
  - participation, retention and achievement of different groups of learners across the provision as a whole and in each area of learning

Inspectors will want to meet with the person responsible for equal opportunities and a representative sample of staff, middle managers and learners.

**Information for inspectors of quality assurance**
- policy documents and procedures
- complaints and compliments file
- reports to managers, directors or trustees
- results of surveys of students and staff
- minutes of staff meetings
- internal and external verification documents
- records of observations of teaching and learning

Inspectors will want to meet with the person responsible for quality assurance, the person responsible for self assessment and middle managers.
Through Excalibur, the Adult Learning Inspectorate aims to build a national quality community for everyone in the learning and skills sector.

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