

William Powell AM
Chair of the Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

28 July 2014

Dear William

Petition – P-04-538 Involving lecturers to ensure a Further Education Inspection Framework that is fit for purpose

Thank you for your recent letter requesting further clarification about Estyn's consultation arrangements in relation to making changes to the inspection of further education institutions.

I would like to assure the committee that Estyn is using a range of inclusive consultation arrangements, as I outlined in my previous letter. It has always been our practice to consult with a wide range of stakeholders when we make changes to our inspection model. The methodology, format and groupings of these consultations may, however, vary from time to time.

For example, this is not a 'big bang' change to further education institution (FEI) inspections in the sense that we are moving away from the common inspection framework. It is more about amending the inspection model to take account of how we will inspect and report on the impact of significant changes that are external to Estyn, namely:

- the FEI mergers
- the introduction of new 'learning area programmes'
- a new governance system in FE
- a new funding system for FE.

On this occasion, therefore, we decided to consult on the changes to inspections of further education institutions by using a series of small 'seminar' type groups and working parties of different groups of stakeholders as we feel that the more informal, small-scale discussions that arise as a result are more useful at this stage than a large formal consultation.

The strategic advisory group was set up specifically to take the views of FE principals and that is why we do not consider it 'relevant' to include staff representatives in the group. This group is not the only vehicle of consultation and advice of course. We have held and will continue to hold meetings with other groups, including curriculum managers and other staff members, some of which I describe below. It is important to remember that Estyn is an independent body and final decisions about methods of inspection are our responsibility although we naturally want those decisions to be informed by a balance of opinion from a variety of consultative processes.

The rationale for setting up advisory and consultative groups is inclusive and the groups we set up or are invited to meet certainly do not 'only represent employers and the Welsh Government' as you suggest. We set up meetings with a range of groups and are open to invitations from any interested groupings to attend meetings to discuss the progress of plans for inspection.

Let me outline some of the consultation meetings we have held:

HMI held several meetings with UCU officials, beginning with two in March (one on 5th March and another on 26th March) to discuss how Estyn would involve union members in the consultation and to allow the UCU to raise any points of concern.

Further to these meetings, on Saturday 21st July Lin Howells and Liam Kealy HMI met a larger group of UCU representatives from colleges across Wales, at the union headquarters in Tondy, Bridgend. The meeting was well attended and well received. Inspectors outlined the developing thinking about inspection arrangements and conducted a robust open discussion with union delegates. Inspectors noted the concerns raised by delegates and where these were not already factored into the changes, promised to consider the suggestions. For example, several delegates were keen on having unannounced inspections and this is currently under consideration.

Inspectors explained the different approach that will be taken to classroom observations such as the inclusion of 'learning walks' as carried out on the recent annual review of performance (ARP) visits to the colleges. Delegates generally considered learning walks to be an effective addition to the way that teaching and learning are observed during inspection.

Many of the issues discussed were not concerned with Estyn's procedures but with college's data handling, the use of observation for performance management purposes and the perceived excessive demand for paperwork. These are not areas over which Estyn has control. The HMI assured the meeting that Estyn's observations concentrate on quality improvement and that the inspectorate does not focus on the work of individual teachers but rather the learning that takes place across the college. Delegates were also reassured that Estyn does not require large amounts of paperwork, just evidence of good planning of teaching. The delegates and union officials thanked Estyn at the end of the meeting for the open discussion.

A further consultation session took place on 8th July in Cardiff. The meeting was attended by both practitioners and union representatives. The following issues were discussed in an open 'table discussion' format:

- an overview of the proposed changes;
- inspection of subject sector areas and how learning areas should be judged;
- classroom observations (covering a raft of issues);
- use of data; and
- the practicalities of inspection across multiple FEI sites.

The feedback from the session was overwhelmingly positive, with 100% of delegates scoring excellent (70%) or good (30%) for the event overall. The two inspectors who ran the session were congratulated on the format and content at the end of the session by a guest union representative with experience of inspections in England.

There has been no motive for changing the timing of some consultation events other than that of enabling us to hold more effective sessions. We postponed the generic post-16 stakeholder forum which includes delegates from further education, work-based learning, adult community learning, offender learning, careers and Welsh for adults providers and from national representative bodies as well as the trades unions as we were not at a suitable stage in the development of our work to have a meaningful discussion. Our intention was not to hide anything but to use scarce resources wisely.

We intend to continue with a couple more meetings with the group of principals and will also meet other groups of managers or staff but the main vehicle for consultation will be the post-16 stakeholder forum with a focus on further education. We plan to hold the post-16 stakeholder forum in the early autumn and invitations and the agenda will be sent out in due course.

We will also continue to work with the trades unions and the further education sector in a spirit of cooperation as we always have done in the past.

Yours sincerely



Ann Keane
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of
Education and Training in Wales

c.c. Huw Lewis AM, Minister for Education and Skills