

Sir Martyn Oliver  
OFSTED  
Clive House, Ministry of Justice  
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28<sup>th</sup> March 2024

Dear Sir Martyn

I write with regard to Ofsted's recently launched 'Big Listen' survey.

As you will know from our previous conversations and my public statements on the matter, NAHT welcome the fact that Ofsted is seeking feedback on how inspections operate.

We do, however, have some significant concerns about the design of the consultation that I wanted to raise with you. In the interests of brevity, I will not share all our concerns with you, but I do wish to highlight a number of them.

Our primary concern is that many of the aspects of the current approach to inspection that our members are most concerned about are not addressed through the sections of the survey that will produce quantitative data. The most obvious example of this is the lack of any direct or clear question about the use of single word/phrase judgements to describe a school's performance. Whilst there are free text boxes provided, our concern is this will only provide qualitative information, which could get easily lost or overlooked in comparison with the far easier to present results derived from the multiple-choice questions.

There are many such missed opportunities to really understand what respondents think about key issues relating to inspection. For example, the questions on notice periods have been drafted in an extremely vague manner, whereas there was an opportunity to directly ask something far more precise such as "how much notice should a school / setting be given before an inspection is carried out?"

We also have significant concerns about the way some questions have been designed and framed. For example, the initial set of questions invite respondents to indicate 'how important' they rate different aspects of the current approach to inspection. There are major problems with this from a survey-design perspective. By framing the questions in such a leading way, respondents are being encouraged to confirm the importance of core

aspects of the *existing* inspection model. More importantly, respondents are not being asked how *effective* the current approach to inspection is at measuring these things, or about the very different forms a 'clear judgement' could take. For example, a respondent might well indicate that it is *very important* that inspection 'gives a clear judgement on the quality of education at a school' but not agree with the current approach to doing that. Our concern is that the data from such questions could easily lead to erroneous or misleading conclusions being drawn.

We are also concerned that, due to the way many of the questions have been phrased, it will be very difficult to draw accurate conclusions about what respondents are trying to communicate. For example, a question on notice periods asks: "*How important is it to you that the time between notifying an early years setting about a forthcoming inspection and carrying out the inspection is short but appropriate.*" Given that there is no definition of either 'short' or 'appropriate', it will be very difficult to know what respondents are trying to communicate in their response to this question. For example, one person may define short as a week, whereas another could define it as 24 hours. Such differences are highly important for those on the receiving end of inspections. Furthermore, it seems highly unlikely that anyone responding will indicate that a notice period should be 'inappropriate'.

I know you are personally very committed to engaging deeply with all the different stakeholders that are impacted by inspection and hope that you find the issues I have highlighted above useful to the process you are now undertaking.

I look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Yours sincerely



Paul Whiteman  
General Secretary | NAHT