



Arolygiaeth Ei Fawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru  
His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

**Report:**

**Analysis of responses to Estyn's consultation on  
inspection arrangements for post-16 education and  
training sectors from September 2024**

**December 2023**

**This report is also available in Welsh.**

## Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Methodology</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>3. Profile of respondents</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>4. Results</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>4.1 Responses to Proposals</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>4.2 Effects of the proposals</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>5. Next Steps</b> .....	<b>24</b>

# **Responses to Estyn's consultation on inspection arrangements for post-16 education and training sectors from September 2024**

## **1. Introduction**

This document contains a detailed analysis of the Responses to Estyn's inspection arrangements for post-16 education and training sectors from September 2024

## **2. Methodology**

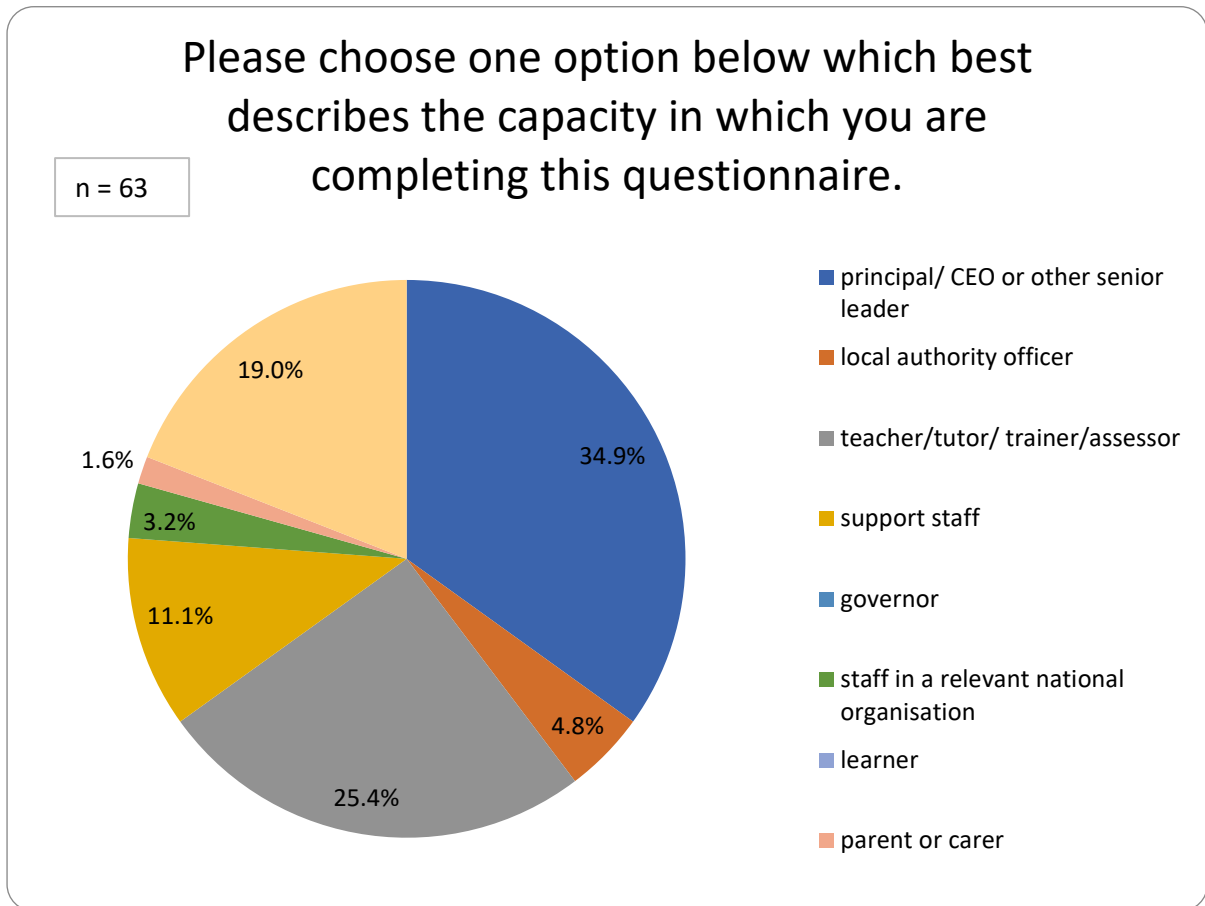
The consultation took the form of a questionnaire that was available to complete either online or offline (a PDF document to be completed and returned via e-mail or post). We launched the survey on 29 September 2023, and it closed on 30 November 2023.

The responses to the free-text questions were grouped into themes. Common responses have been included in this report to convey the key themes associated with each question – although the numbers of free-text responses are typically low and are not necessarily representative of the total population. These included a mixture of direct quotes and paraphrasing (where elements from several responses were summarised). The Estyn Writing Guide was followed when describing the proportions of responses (e.g., 'few' equates to less than 20% of respondents).

## **3. Profile of respondents**

We received a total of 64 responses to the consultation questionnaire. Of these respondents, one did not record responses to any of the questions. Nearly all respondents (well over 90%) provided responses to all of the 'menu questions' (i.e. those with a set of pre-defined answers). The number of responses to individual free-text questions varied from 7 to 47 (i.e. 11% to 70% of respondents). The specific response rates will be included when discussing individual questions throughout the report.

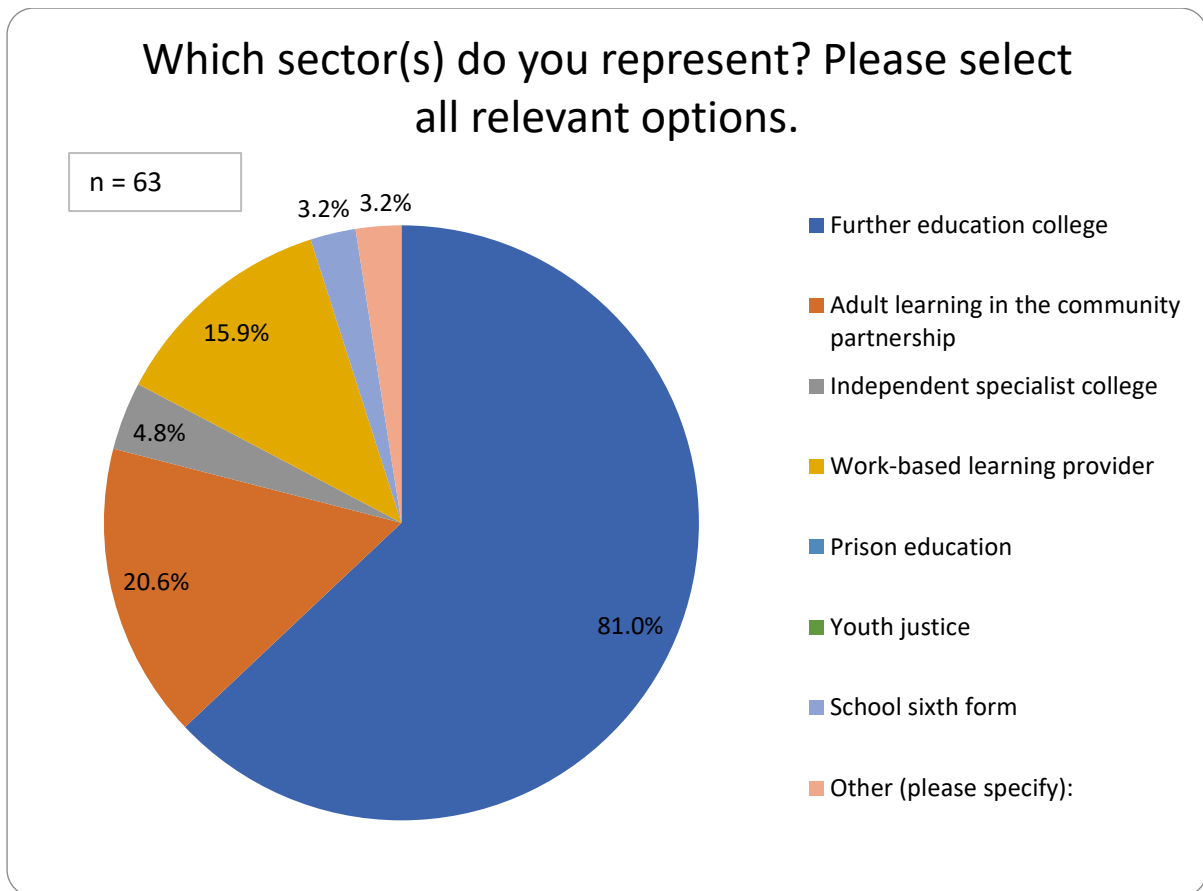
**Figure 1: Please choose one option below which best describes the capacity in which you are completing this questionnaire.**



Of the 19% who responded 'other' there was close to a 50/50 split between Heads of Departments and Middle Management.

We also asked respondents which sector they represented.

**Figure 2: Which sector(s) do you represent? Please select all relevant options.**



No responses were received from individuals representing the prison education nor the youth justice sectors. We did not expect responses from these sectors as we will be consulting separately on arrangements for the learning in the justice sector later in 2024.

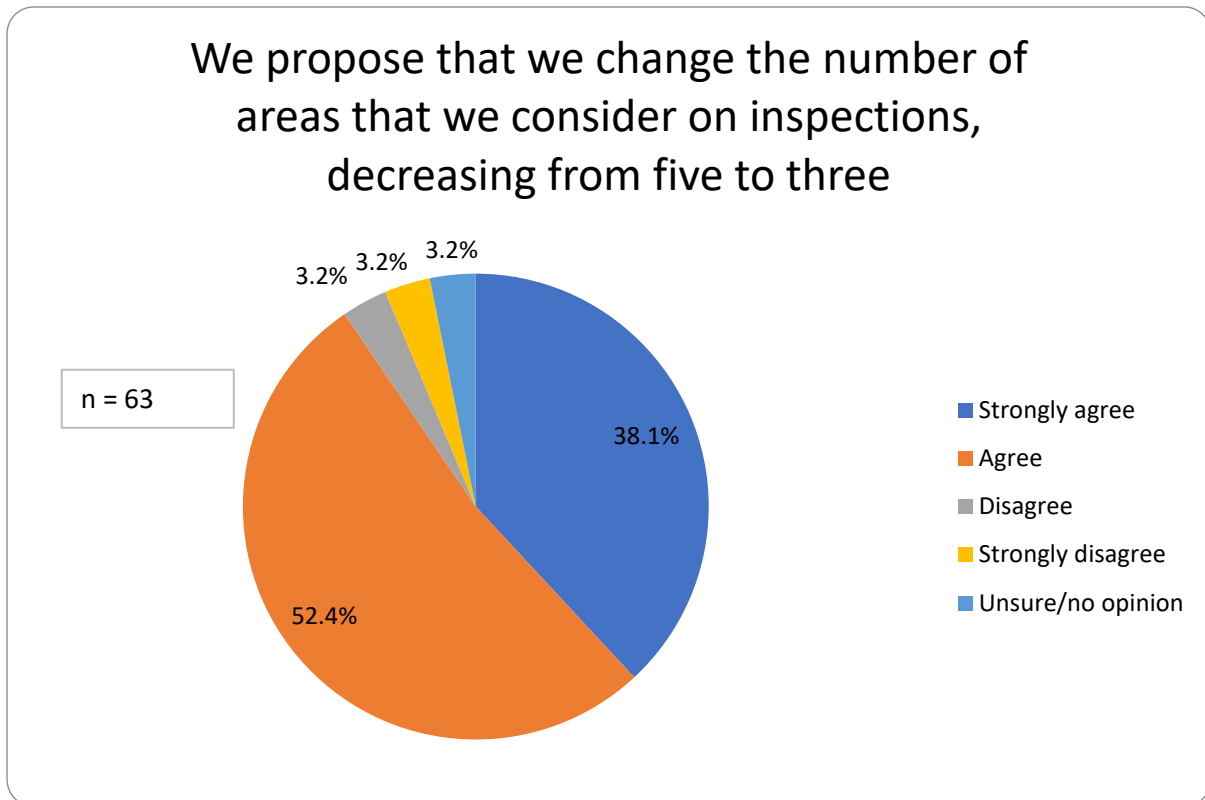
Many of the responses received were from individuals representing further education colleges. Only 4.8% of responses were from individuals representing the independent specialist college sector. Where there are questions later in the survey asking specific responses relating to this sector, the responses reflect a limited understanding of this sector.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Responses to Proposals

Firstly, we asked respondents what their views were on the proposal that the number of inspection areas that are considered during inspections is changed from five to three.

**Figure 3: We propose that we change the number of inspection areas that we consider on inspections from five to three.**

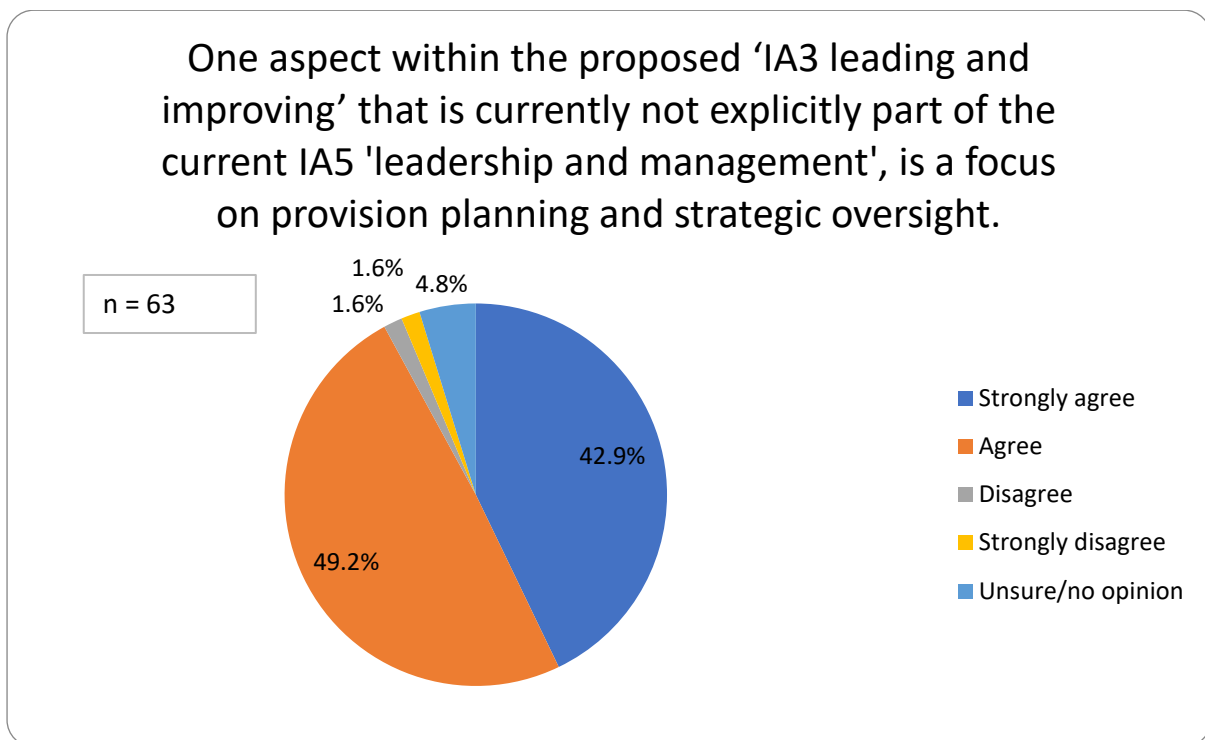


There was a strong level of support for this proposal – with over 90% of those who answered agreeing (either strongly agreeing or agreeing). Only 6% of those who answered, disagreed with the proposal (either strongly disagreeing or disagreeing).

37 out of 64 (58%) respondents provided opinions and stated the reason(s) why they chose the option above. By far the strongest ‘theme’ in the free-text responses related to the overlap and repetition that exists within the current system and that moving to three well-defined areas would remove much of this duplication – around two-thirds of the comments received mentioned that the new process would be *more streamlined / have increased focus*.

We then asked about the opinion on the following statement: **One aspect within the proposed 'IA3 leading and improving' that is currently not explicitly part of the current IA5 'leadership and management', is a focus on provision planning and strategic oversight. This has been included to consider how effectively leaders and managers ensure that provision is reviewed and planned strategically in collaboration with other relevant providers, stakeholders and partnerships to ensure that a coherent provision offer is in place locally and regionally. This provision offer should meet the needs of learners, employers and communities.**

**Figure 4: What are your views?**

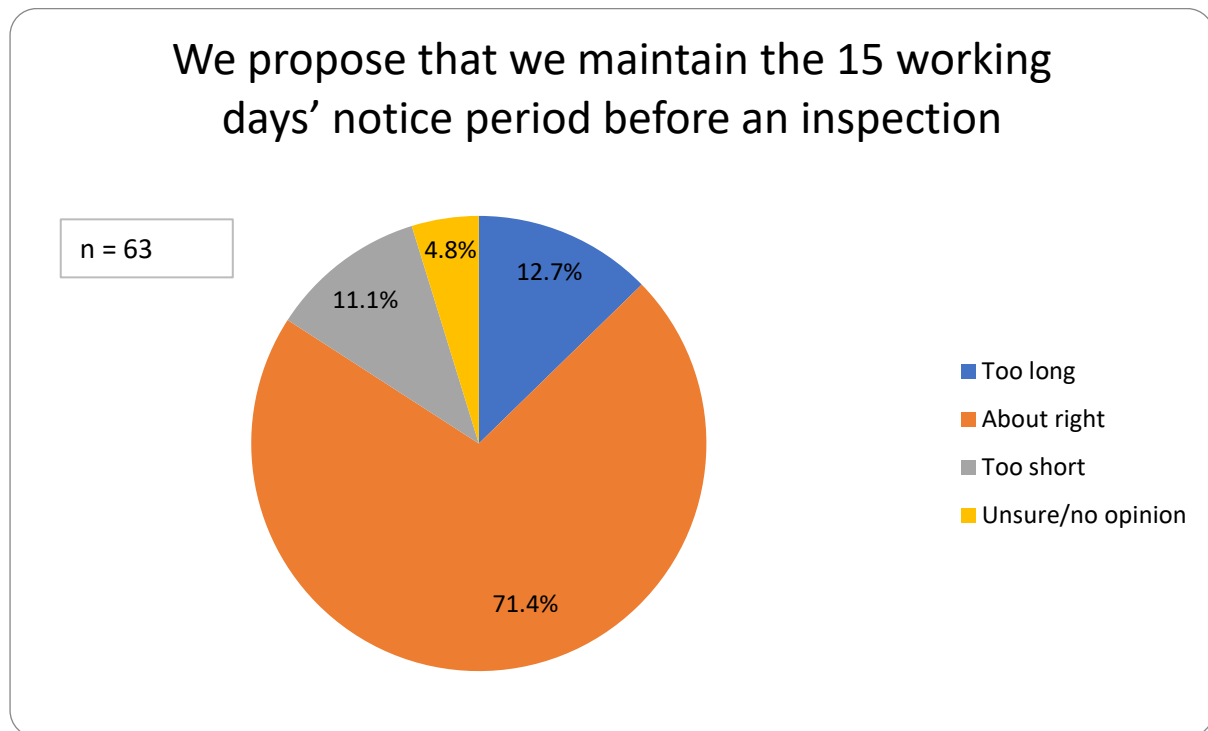


There was a strong level of support for this proposal – with 92% of those who answered agreeing (either strongly agreeing or agreeing). Only 3% of those who answered, disagreed with the proposal (either strongly disagreeing or disagreeing).

28 out of 64 (44%) respondents provided opinions and stated the reason(s) why they chose the option above. There was a general level of support in the comments, but no themes stood out. A minority (21%) of the comments mentioned the importance of *collaboration*. A minority (21%) mentioned the positive effects of building relationships between *education providers, learners, employers and communities*.

We then asked about the proposal to maintain the 15 working days' notice period before an inspection.

**Figure 5: We propose that we maintain the 15 working days' notice period before an inspection. This gives us sufficient time to arrange the pre-inspection questionnaires and liaise with the provider about arrangements to visit learners, staff, employers (where relevant) during the inspection activity period, as well as time for providers to upload relevant documentation etc. What are your views on this notice period?**



There was a level of support for this proposal – with 71% of those who answered agreeing that the 15 day notice period was 'About right'. Of the minority who disagreed (24%) there was an almost even split with 11% stating that the proposal was 'Too short' and 13% stating that it was 'Too long'.

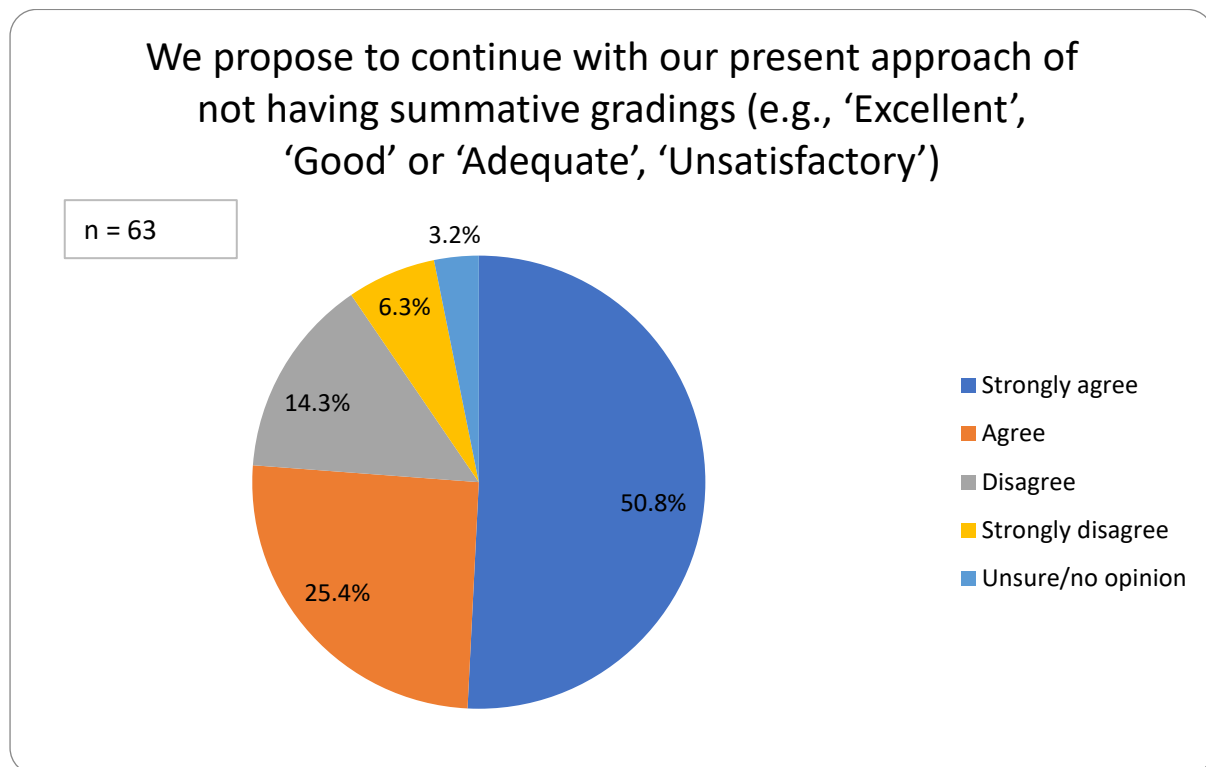
30 out of 64 (47%) respondents provided opinions and stated the reason(s) why they chose the option above. Around half of those who provided responses (16 out of 30 – 53%) felt that a 15 day notice period was sufficient to prepare the logistics and the required information for the inspection.

A few (4 out of 30 – 13%) felt that larger organisations or those situated across multiple sites would need additional time to prepare adequately.



The next question focused on the proposal to continue with our present approach of not having summative gradings (e.g., ‘Excellent’, ‘Good’ or ‘Adequate’, ‘Unsatisfactory’) in our inspection reports for further education, adult learning in the community, independent specialist colleges and work-based learning apprenticeship sectors. This will be in line with most other sectors we inspect. Rather than focusing on grades, our reports will detail how well providers are helping learners to learn, and make clear what the strengths and areas for improvement are in each of the inspection areas.

**Figure 6: What are your views on this proposal?**



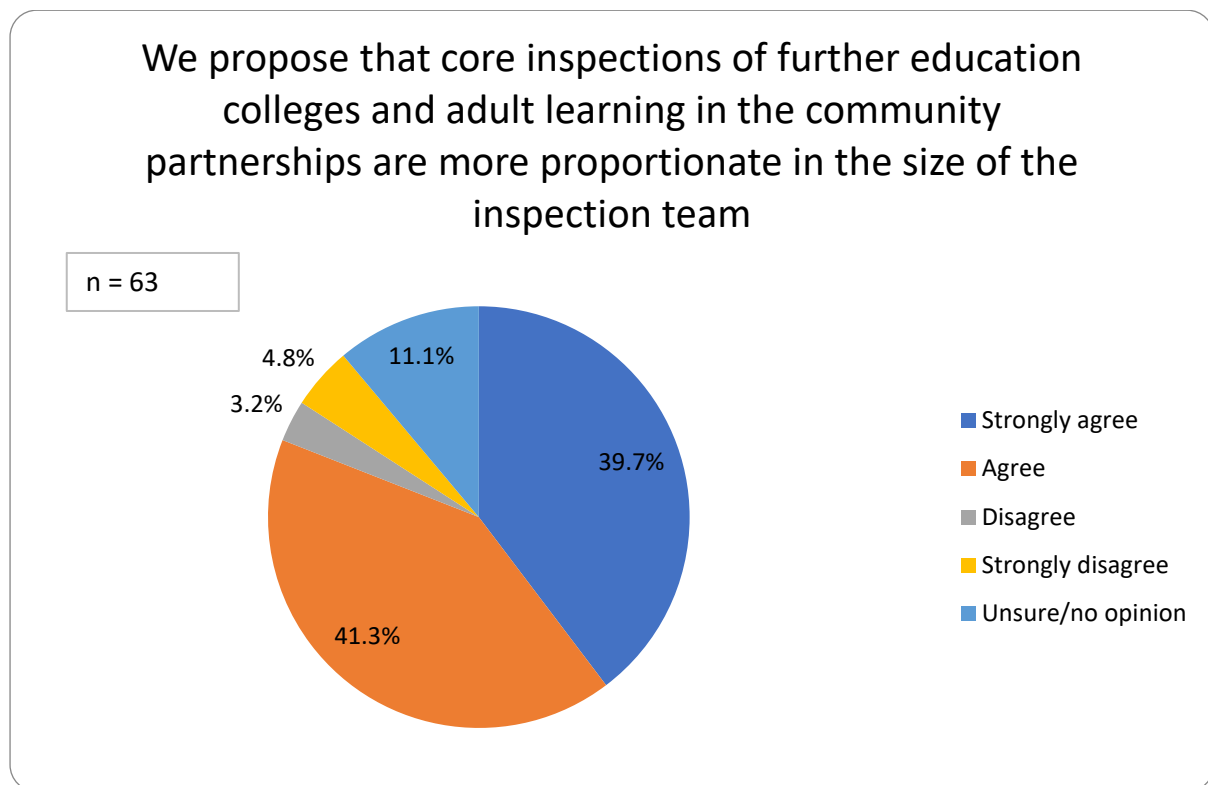
There was a level of support for this proposal – with 76% of those who answered agreeing (either strongly agreeing or agreeing). 21% of those who answered, disagreed with the proposal (either strongly disagreeing or disagreeing).

37 out of 64 (58%) respondents provided opinions and stated the reason(s) why they chose the option above. Around half the comments received (19 out of 37 – 51%) supported the proposal on the basis that the report should be used as a means of *continuous improvement and dialogue*. Respondents suggested that focussing on a grade detracts from the detailed information provided in the reports and is not an effective way to improve standards.

A minority (11 out of 37 – 30%) felt that for *the lay-person, parents and learners*, a summative grading is by far the best way of *comparing* institutions. We cannot expect these individuals to *trawl through a report* in order to *pick out the salient points* in order to *make decisions*.

We then asked for views on the following: **We propose that core inspections of further education colleges and adult learning in the community partnerships are more proportionate in the size of the inspection team related to the complexity, size and scale of the provider. Broadly this would mean that colleges with several campuses, or covering a large geographical area, or in group structures would have a longer on-site inspection period, such as 8 or 9 days, with a larger team of HMI and peer inspectors. Colleges with a smaller geographical footprint or just one or two campuses, would have a smaller inspection team for a five day on-site inspection.**

**Figure 7: What are your views on this proposal for further education?**

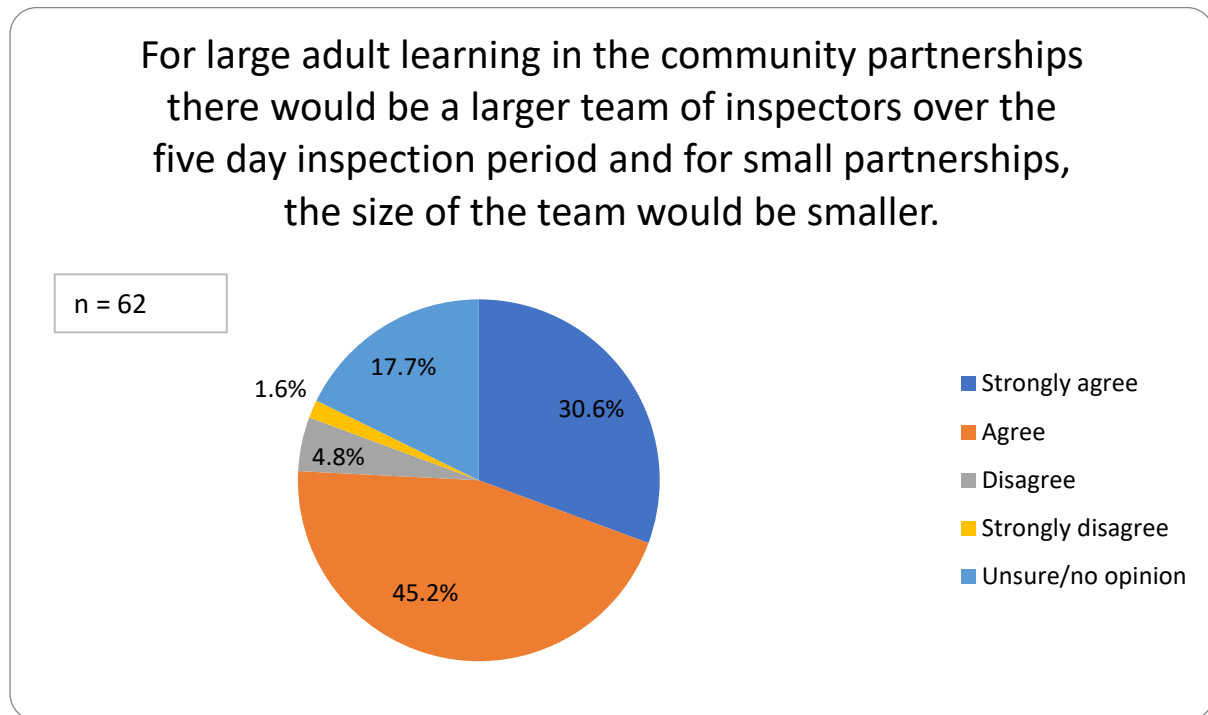


There was a level of support for this proposal – with 81% of those who answered agreeing (either strongly agreeing or agreeing). Only 8% of those who answered, disagreed with the proposal (either strongly disagreeing or disagreeing).

21 out of 64 (33%) respondents provided opinions and stated the reason(s) why they chose the option above. A majority of the comments (14 out of 21 – 67%) stated that this approach *makes sense, is logical and can't be argued with*. A minority (5 out of 21 – 24%) agreed with elements of the approach but argued that an increase to the length of inspections would *potentially have a negative effect on both staff and on teaching*.

We then asked for views on the following: **For large adult learning in the community partnerships there would be a larger team of inspectors over the five day inspection period and for small partnerships, the size of the team would be smaller. We also propose having a bespoke inspection model for Adult Learning Wales, recognising its unique position as a further education institution delivering part-time adult learning.**

**Figure 8: What are your views on this proposal for adult learning in the community partnerships?**

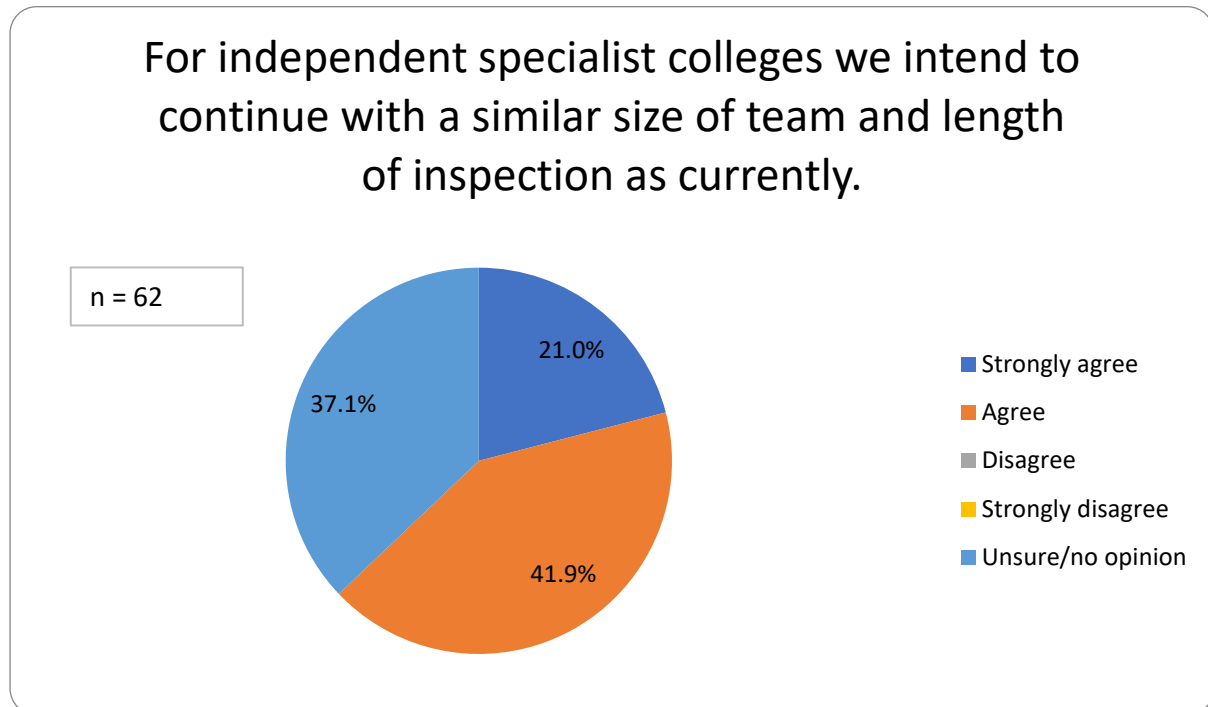


There was a level of support for this proposal – with 76% of those who answered agreeing (either strongly agreeing or agreeing). Only 7% of those who answered, disagreed with the proposal (either strongly disagreeing or disagreeing).

14 out of 64 (22%) respondents provided opinions and stated the reason(s) why they chose the option above. A majority of the comments (10 out of 14 – 71%) stated that this approach *makes sense and is sensible*. A minority (3 out of 14 – 21%) felt that *Adult Learning Wales should be inspected in line with other adult learning partnerships*.

We then asked for views on the proposal for independent specialist colleges.

**Figure 9: For independent specialist colleges we intend to continue with a similar size of team and length of inspection as currently. What are your views on this proposal for independent specialist colleges?**

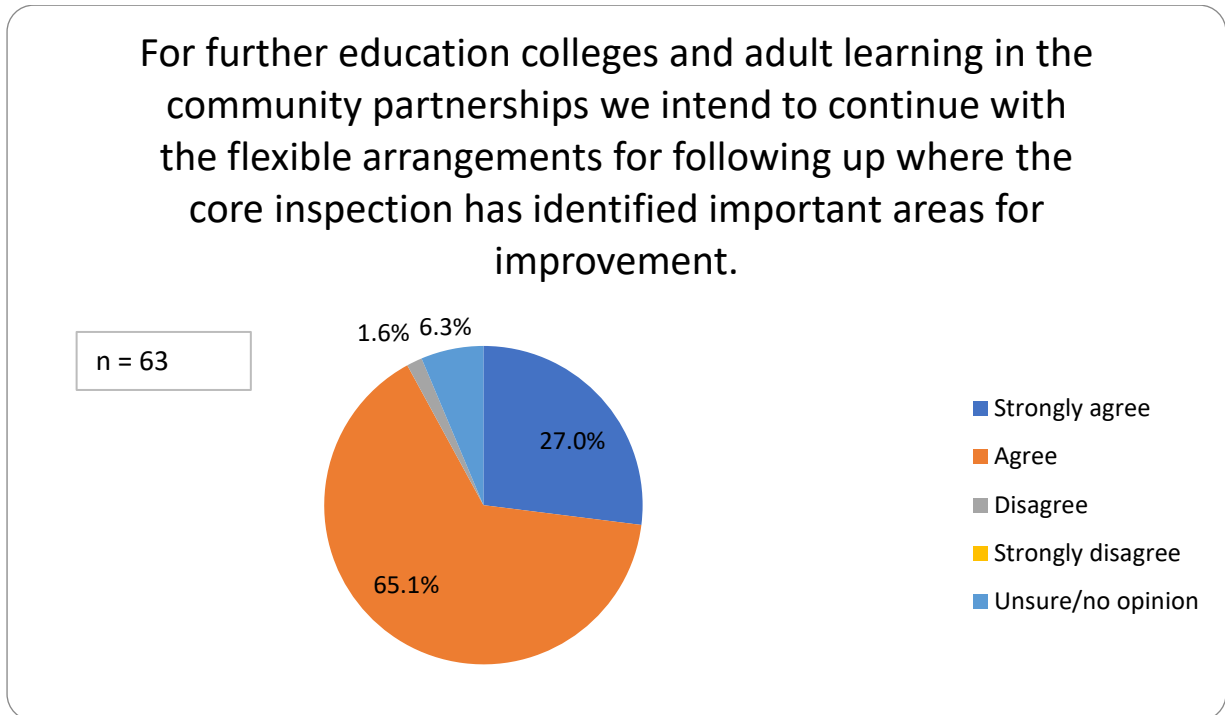


There was a level of support for this proposal – with 63% of those who answered agreeing (either strongly agreeing or agreeing). No one disagreed with the proposal but 37% were unsure or had no opinion.

There were only 7 out of 64 (11%) respondents who provided opinions and stated the reason(s) why they chose the option above. Most of these comments supported the proposal.

We then asked for views on the following: **For further education colleges and adult learning in the community partnerships we intend to continue with the flexible arrangements for following up where the core inspection has identified important areas for improvement.**

**Figure 10: What are your views on this proposal?**

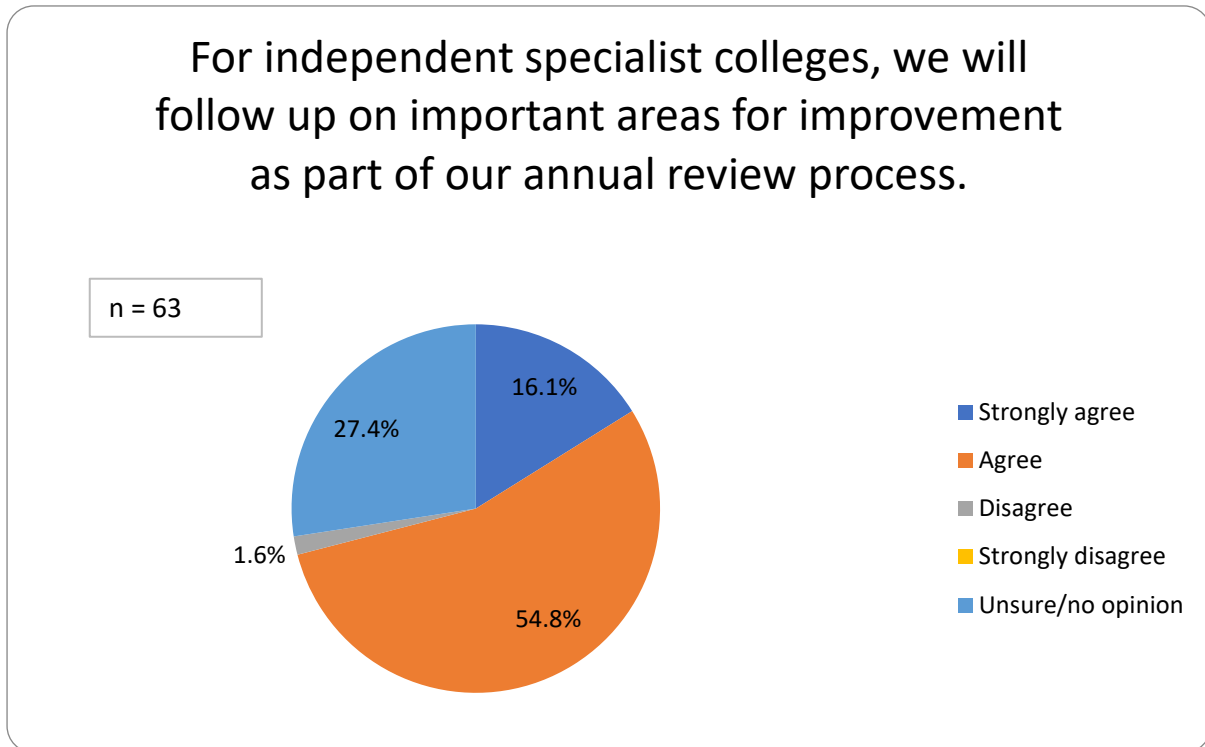


There was a strong level of support for this proposal – with 92% of those who answered agreeing (either strongly agreeing or agreeing). Only 2% of those who answered, disagreed with the proposal (either strongly disagreeing or disagreeing).

19 out of 64 (30%) respondents provided opinions and stated the reason(s) why they chose the option above. The most popular theme in the responses was that this approach would work well provided that there is *supportive follow up*.

We then asked about our proposed approach for independent specialist colleges: **For independent specialist colleges, we will follow up on important areas for improvement as part of our annual review process. This may involve a monitoring visit to the college or a desk-based review of evidence provided by the college.**

**Figure 11: What are your views on this proposal?**

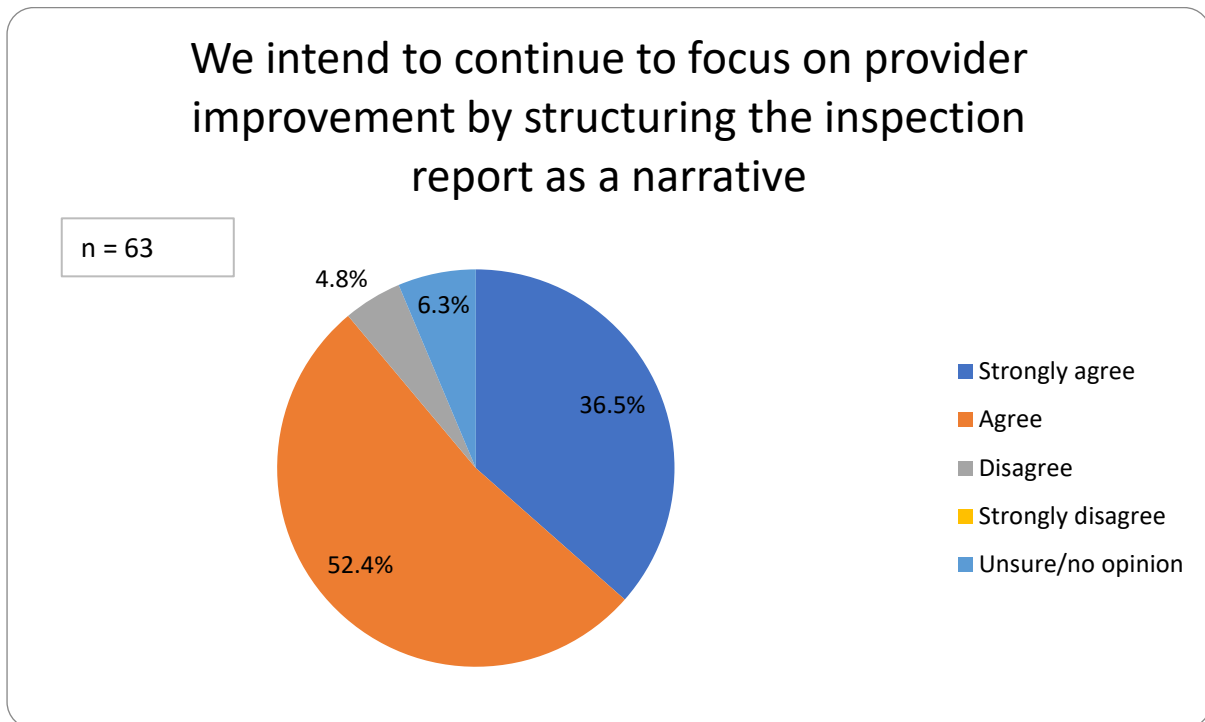


There was a level of support for this proposal – with 71% of those who answered agreeing (either strongly agreeing or agreeing). Only 2% of those who answered, disagreed with the proposal (either strongly disagreeing or disagreeing), however, 27% were unsure or had no opinion. This is likely to be due to the small number of respondents from this sector. We have engaged separately with organisations representing independent specialist colleges.

Only 8 out of 64 (13%) of respondents provided opinions and stated the reason(s) why they chose the option above. 4 of the comments were about the *lack of robustness* which could ensue from desk-based reviews.

The next proposal was: **We intend to continue to focus on provider improvement by structuring the inspection report as a narrative which evaluates the strengths and areas for improvement in each inspection area and also includes a summary overview. The changes we propose making to the report format would be in having cameo boxes to highlight strengths and innovative or interesting practice and to include areas for improvement as bullet points for each inspection area.**

**Figure 12: What are your views on this proposal?**

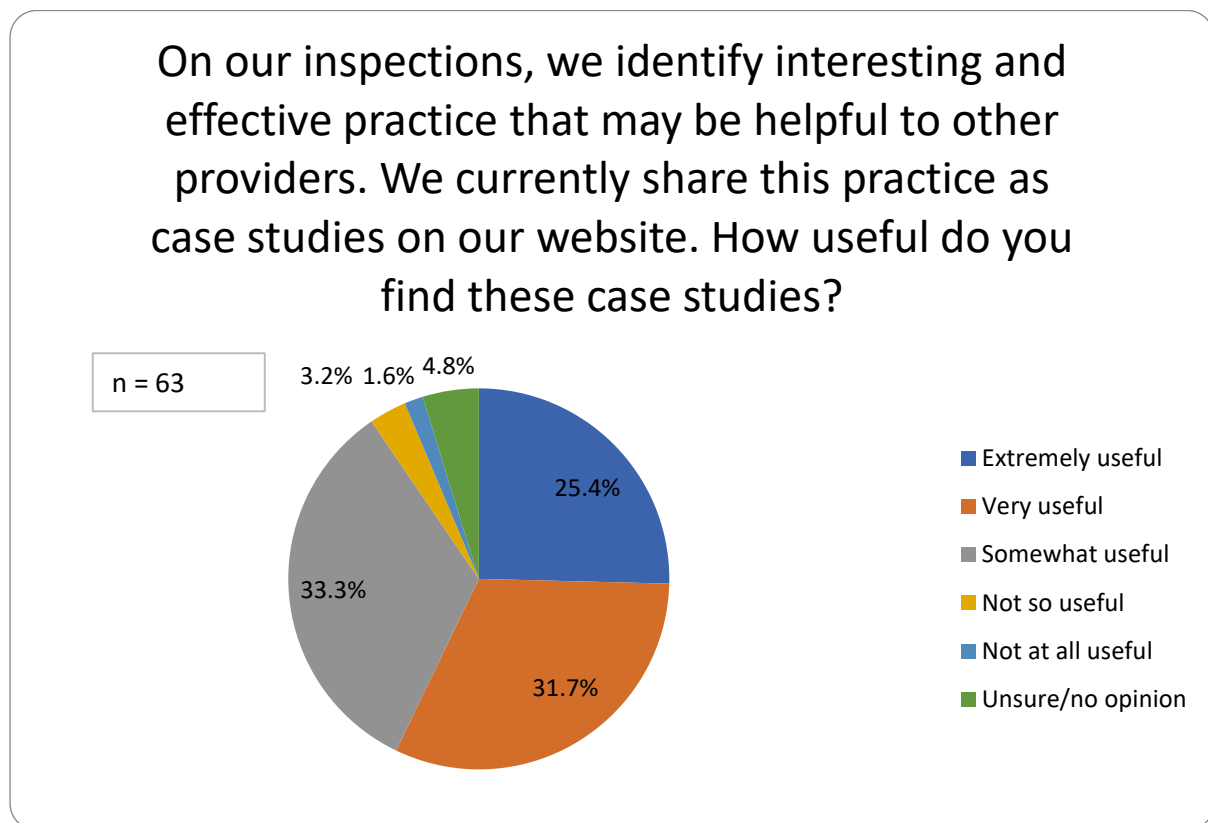


There was a strong level of support for this proposal – with 89% of those who answered agreeing (either strongly agreeing or agreeing). Only 5% of those who answered, disagreed with the proposal (either strongly disagreeing or disagreeing).

19 out of 64 (30%) respondents provided opinions and stated the reason(s) why they chose the option above. The key theme, mentioned in slightly more than half the comments (11 out of 19 - 58%) was that *Action Plans are very useful and need to be targeted to ensure they help deliver maximum benefit.*

We then asked about the Case Studies we share online in order to share interesting and effective practice.

**Figure 13: On our inspections, we identify interesting and effective practice that may be helpful to other providers. We currently share this practice as case studies on our website. How useful do you find these case studies?**



Most respondents found the case studies useful:

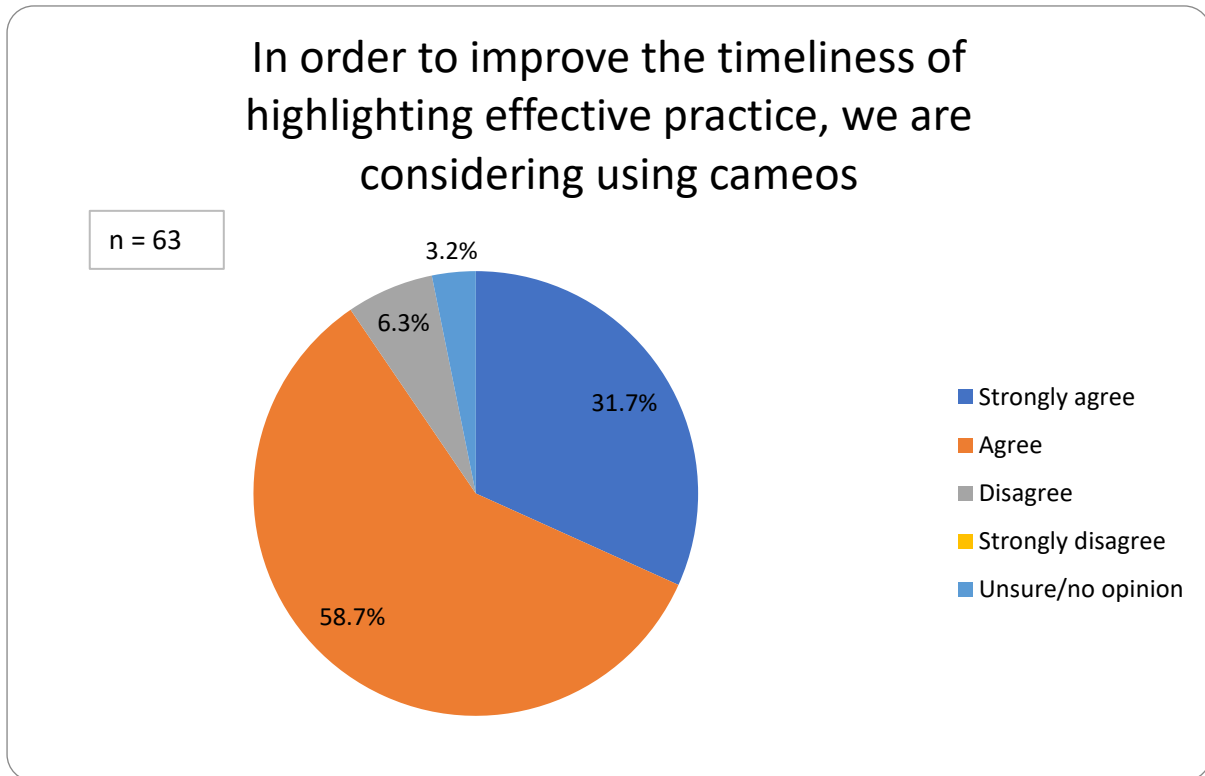
- 25% *Extremely useful*
- 32% *Very useful*
- 33% *Somewhat useful*

There were no additional comments in response to this question.



The next question was about the use of cameos: **In order to improve the timeliness of highlighting effective practice, we are considering using cameos to highlight interesting, innovative or effective practice within the narrative of the inspection report, such as using a highlighted box in the text, instead of requesting case studies from providers.**

**Figure 14: What are your views on this proposal?**



There was a strong level of support for this proposal – with 91% of those who answered agreeing (either strongly agreeing or agreeing). 6% of those who answered, disagreed with the proposal (either strongly disagreeing or disagreeing)

15 out of 64 (23%) respondents provided opinions and stated the reason(s) why they chose the option above. The key theme, mentioned in slightly less than half the comments (7 out of 15 - 47%) was that *sharing best practice in a timely manner can only bring benefit*.

We followed up by asking: **What do you think is the best way we could share effective practice to have most impact?**

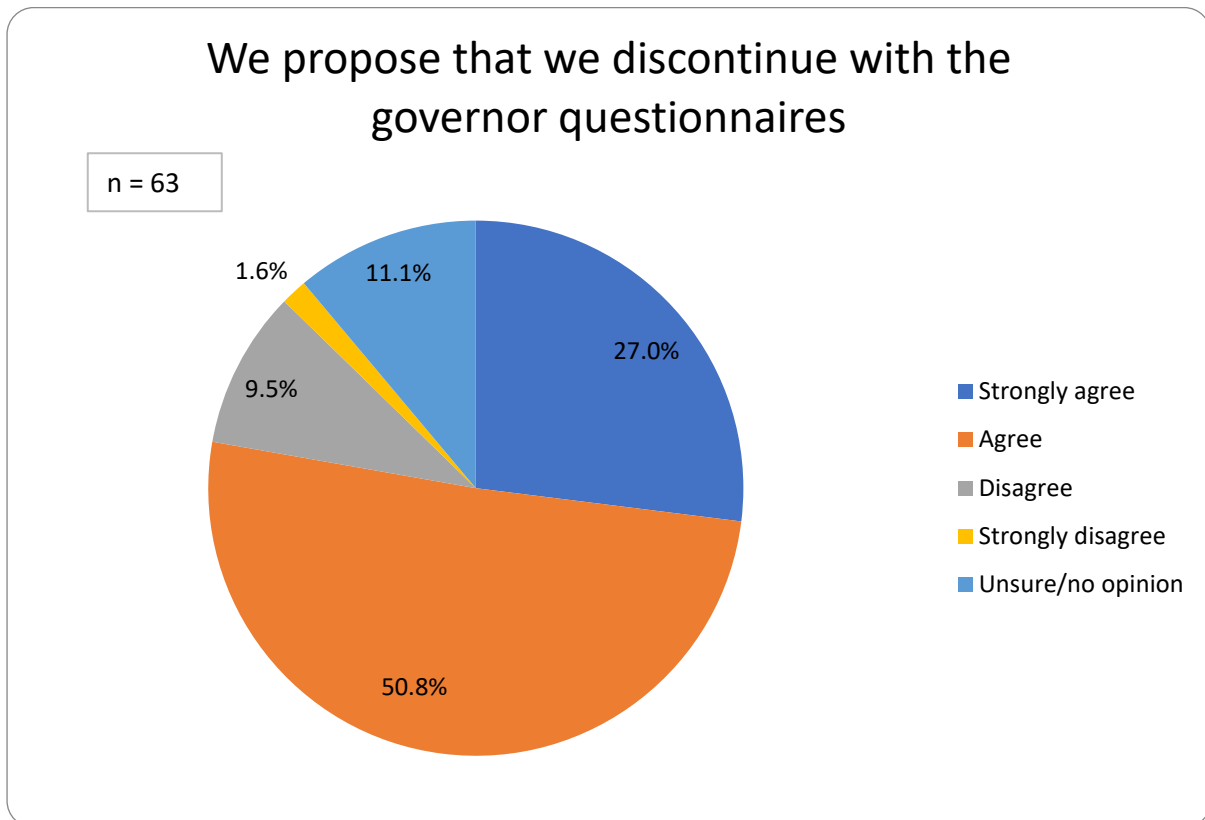
48 out of 64 (75%) respondents provided opinions.

The two most popular responses were:

- 14 out of 47 (30%) of respondents – Online via the Website, Webinars, HWB. Including links to best practice videos and cameos
- 12 out of 47 (26%) of respondents – Events including conferences and training. Both face to face and online

The next proposal was to do with governor questionnaires: **Before the on-site activity for an inspection, we gather information from pre-inspection questionnaires for learners, staff, governors (where relevant), parents (independent specialist colleges only) and employers (work-based learning apprenticeships only). We propose that we discontinue with the governor questionnaires, and instead engage more with governors during the on-site inspection activity.**

**Figure 16: What are your views on this proposal?**

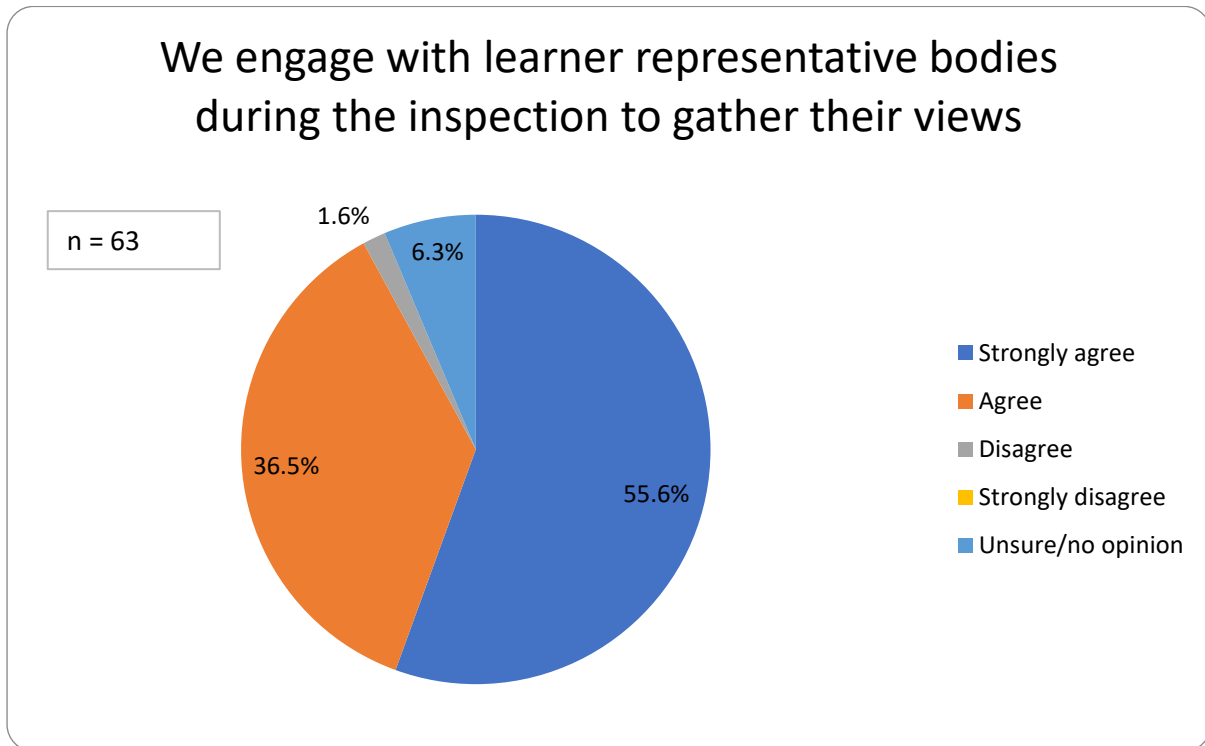


There was a level of support for this proposal – with 78% of those who answered agreeing (either strongly agreeing or agreeing). 11% of those who answered, disagreed with the proposal (either strongly disagreeing or disagreeing).

23 out of 64 (36%) respondents provided opinions and stated the reason(s) why they chose the option above. 9 of the 23 comments (39%) were of the opinion that *you would obtain a far greater insight from talking to governors directly*. However, a minority (5 out of 23 – 22%) highlighted the *practical problems of ensuring governors are available on site during the period of inspection*.

The next question was about learners and learner representative bodies: **We piloted the use of student inspectors on a few further education college inspections. We did not feel that taking further education learners as student inspectors out with the inspection team added enough value to the inspection process. Instead, we will ensure that during the onsite inspection we engage with learner representative bodies, have focus groups of learners and continue with our practice of speaking to as many learners as possible during the inspection to gather their views.**

**Figure 17: What are your views on this proposal?**



There was a strong level of support for this proposal – with 92% of those who answered agreeing (either strongly agreeing or agreeing). Only 2% of those who answered, disagreed with the proposal (either strongly disagreeing or disagreeing).

21 out of 64 (33%) respondents provided opinions and stated the reason(s) why they chose the option above. Almost half (10 out of 21 – 48%) of the comments stated how it is *important for the learners and their representatives to be heard during the process*. A minority (8 out of 21 – 38%) of comments suggested that learners would be of *minimal value* during the process for a range of reasons – *quality of learner, limited knowledge, influences (online and other) or being coached to give answers*.

We followed that up by asking about ways of getting learners involved in the inspection process: **Do you have any other suggestions of how we can involve learners in the inspection process?**

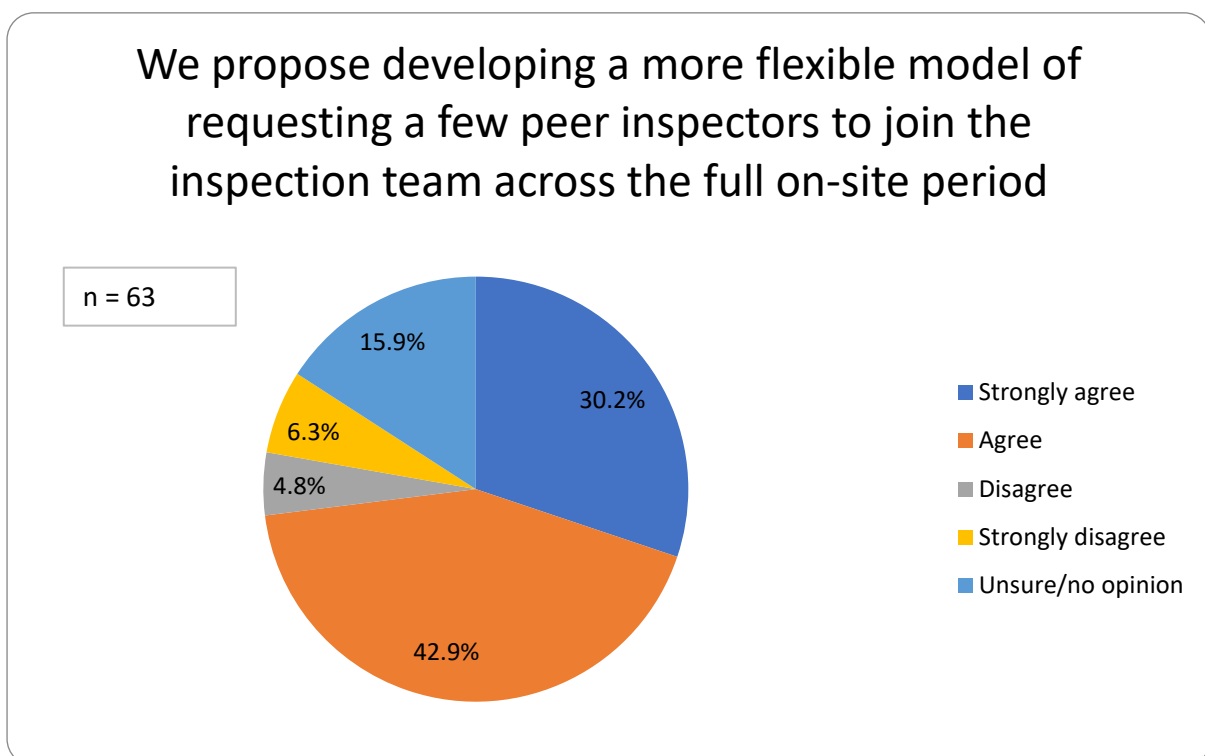
31 out of 64 (48%) respondents provided opinions.

By far the most popular theme in the comments was the need to *talk and engage* with learners rather than surveys and questionnaires – and to talk to a *range of*

learners, to get a fuller picture of what's going on. Individuals or small groups might not reflect the wider body.

The next question was about peer inspectors: **We value the role that peer inspectors bring to our inspection process but we are aware of the difficulty of releasing peer inspectors for up to two weeks on core inspections in further education. On inspections of further education colleges, we propose developing a more flexible model of requesting a few peer inspectors to join the inspection team across the full on-site period (up to eight or nine days) and having other peer inspectors join the team for five days/one week to reduce the commitment required for many peer inspectors.**

**Figure 19: What are your views on this proposal for further education colleges?**

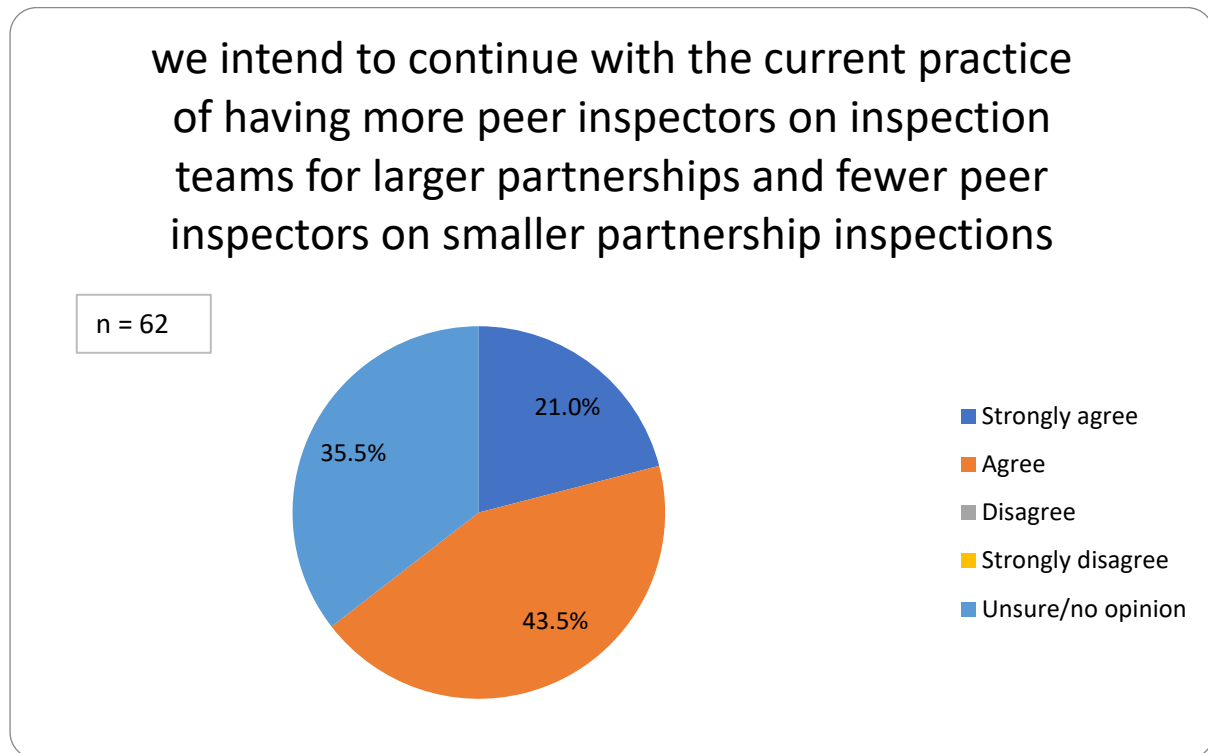


There was a level of support for this proposal – with 73% of those who answered agreeing (either strongly agreeing or agreeing). 11% of those who answered, disagreed with the proposal (either strongly disagreeing or disagreeing).

23 out of 64 (36%) respondents provided opinions and stated the reason(s) why they chose the option above. A majority of comments (14 out of 23 – 61%) agreed with this proposal and stated that *given the time pressures this seems a sensible compromise*. There was a minority (7 out of 23 – 30%) of comments about the *possible negative effect on consistency*.

The next proposal was: **On inspections of adult learning in the community partnerships we intend to continue with the current practice of having more peer inspectors on inspection teams for larger partnerships and fewer peer inspectors on smaller partnership inspections. On inspections of independent specialist colleges we intend to continue with current practice of inviting one peer inspector to join the inspection team.**

**Figure 20: What are your views on this proposal for adult learning in the community partnership and independent specialist colleges?**

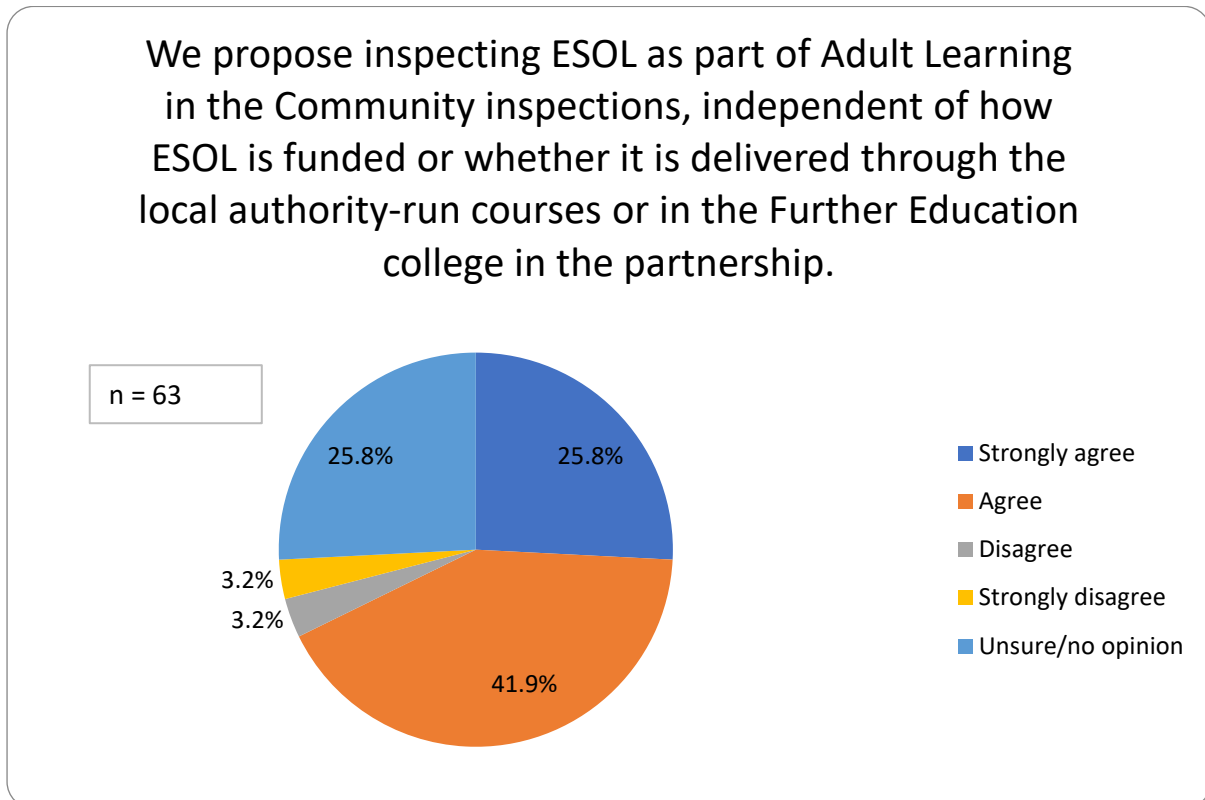


There was a level of support for this proposal – with 65% of those who answered agreeing (either strongly agreeing or agreeing). No one disagreed with the proposal but 35% of those who answered were unsure or had no opinion,

9 out of 64 (14%) respondents provided opinions and stated the reason(s) why they chose the option above. A majority of comments (7 out of 9 – 78%) agreed with this proposal and stated that *it is proportionate and appropriate*.

The next proposal was: **We propose inspecting ESOL as part of Adult Learning in the Community inspections, independent of how ESOL is funded or whether it is delivered through the local authority-run courses or in the Further Education college in the partnership. This would give us a national picture of how these learners are supported. We also intend supplementing inspection evidence with a periodic national thematic review of ESOL provision to be able to have a strong focus on the quality of delivery and impact on the standards and progress of learners.**

**Figure 21: What are your views on this proposal?**

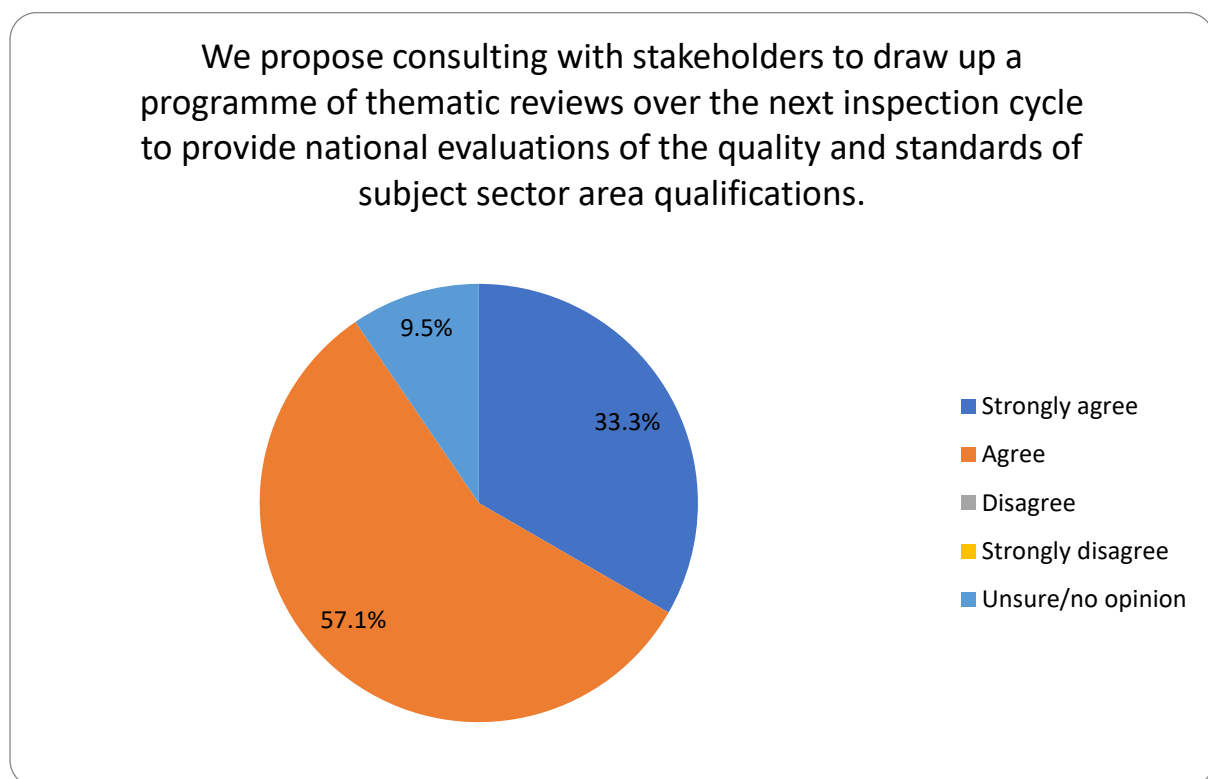


There was a level of support for this proposal – with 68% of those who answered agreeing (either strongly agreeing or agreeing). 6% of those who answered, disagreed with the proposal (either strongly disagreeing or disagreeing), with 26% of those who answered unsure or had no opinion.

16 out of 64 (25%) respondents provided opinions and stated the reason(s) why they chose the option above. More than half the comments (9 out of 16 – 56%) felt *that a thematic review of ESOL provision would be useful. There are currently a wide range of issues in teaching ESOL in the community and these need to be addressed against a background of increasing demand for ESOL courses.*

The next proposal was: **We propose consulting with stakeholders to draw up a programme of thematic reviews over the next inspection cycle to provide national evaluations of the quality and standards of subject sector area qualifications. For example, if we were to review engineering, this could focus on the quality of teaching, learning and delivery of qualifications in this subject area through thematic visits to a range of providers from further education colleges, school sixth forms and work-based learning providers. We would work closely with Qualifications Wales to ensure that the reviews complemented the sector reviews and provided a national evaluation of the quality of delivery of these sector subject areas and impact on learners. We propose using peer inspectors with subject specialisms to support HMI in conducting these reviews.**

**Figure 22: What are your views on this proposal?**



There was a strong level of support for this proposal – with 91% of those who answered agreeing (either strongly agreeing or agreeing). No one disagreed with the proposal, and 9% of those who answered were unsure or had no opinion.

18 out of 64 (28%) respondents provided opinions and stated the reason(s) why they chose the option above. There was no one theme that stood out but the majority of comments (13 out of 18 – 72%) were very positive and talked about things like *best practice, experts, industry, stakeholders, valuable process*.

We then asked: **We are committed to improving the way we work and are interested in your views on how we can carry out our work more effectively. Please use the box below to provide feedback on any other aspects of Estyn's inspection arrangements.**

20 out of 64 (31%) respondents provided comments.

There were two key themes:

- *6 out of 20 comments (30%) – Staffing and Training*
  - *Seems like you are going to require an awful lot of peer inspectors, how will you ensure quality or that the same peer inspectors are not constantly asked on inspection?*
  - *If the notice period is 2 weeks, then the pre inspection requirements must be reasonable, so that earner education and staff workloads are not adversely impacted during this time in order to gather the pre inspection evidence.*
  - *Training for new managers regarding expectations and what will be required for the inspection.*
  - *During the 1990's I went on several HMI run courses in England they were invaluable. I even today remember ideas, thoughts, changes etc such event brought to the table. they were often residential run over 4-5 days. Really enlightening and motivational I even worked with the Education Minister of Malta on one! Perhaps you do run such courses, but I have not seen any such courses within my field of teaching since the 90's, any chance of creating something new with similarities. yes, I know cost, but if you want quality it has to be paid for sometimes.*
  - *Offer PI opportunities to more FE staff.*
  - *Inclusion of support staff*
- *4 out of 20 comments (20%) – Positive Change*
  - *The culture change I have seen around inspections recently is to be applauded. Collaboration and partnership seem to have replaced confrontation and closed mindedness which is in stark contrast to England. This I believe is far more conducive to raising standards. I would like to see the culture shift developed further.*
  - *I feel that the new arrangements that are being considered from Sept '24 will bring about a more positive change to the way inspections are run, as it will ensure the focus is directed more on the key areas and allow there to be a more supportive environment/approach to the education providers who need it.*
  - *Striving to improve process is always an admirable task.*
  - *The questions included in this document assist. There needs to have opportunities for classroom practitioners to be involved.*



## 4.2 Effects of the proposals

**We would like to know your views on the effects that the proposals in this consultation would have on the Welsh language, specifically on:**

1. Opportunities for people to use Welsh.
2. Treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects mitigated?

27 out of 64 (42%) respondents provided comments.

There were four themes that were mentioned most, each mentioned 4 times (15% of comments each):

- *There needs to be (skilled) Welsh speaking staff available in order for this to work.*
- *Staff need to be given the opportunity to work in Welsh where possible – including inspection visits.*
- *The use of Welsh varies throughout Wales therefore it depends on which part of Wales you are as to how this impacts the Welsh language.*
- *We see no negative effect on Welsh from these proposals.*

**We would like to know your views on the effects that the proposals in this consultation would have on issues of equality, discrimination, promotion of equality of opportunity and fostering of good relationships between different people. What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?:**

17 out of 64 (27%) respondents provided comments.

There were two themes that were mentioned most:

- *Positive Impact (6 out of 17 – 35%), including;*
  - *A learning environment where equality, inclusion and diverse teaching strategies are implemented, ensures there is an equal learning platform and must be evident during observed session.*
  - *Having a framework that promotes improvements rather than judgements, makes the process more equitable.*
  - *Forming positive relationships and working together to support promotion of equality of opportunity.*
- *No Change (5 out of 17 – 29%), including;*
  - *The changes in themselves do not have positive or negative effects in terms of EDI. The positive and negative effects are dependent upon how the inspections are carried out. Minimising student input is a potential risk. Considering the how well the inspectorate reflects ESTYN’s ambition for diversity is also crucial.*

## **5. Next steps**

The findings of the consultation will help inform the new inspection arrangements for post-16 settings from 2024 onwards.