

Driving Positive Change through  
Expert Intervention



# ORGANISATIONAL HEALTH CHECK (OHC)

# ORGANISATION HANDBOOK

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## The LSIS Organisational Health Check



I am delighted that you have committed to participating in, or are considering undertaking an organisational health check. Organisational health checks are just one way the sector can use its undoubted ability to help itself improve.

The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) developed this model of organisational health check (OHC) during 2010 with significant contributions from across the sector. David Collins, my predecessor, was part of the original pilot team, and HOLEX, one of the foremost adult learning bodies, trialled the OHC across their own and other parts of the sector, with much success and appreciative feedback. The contributions of the sector to continuously inform how OHC's develop are invaluable to their ongoing success.

Pilots and subsequent take-up have indicated that the process and outcomes were highly valued by participants, team members and the organisations concerned. I would emphasise the value to those participating of experiencing an impartial and external, professional challenge, and hearing the voice of the 'critical friend'. Whilst the reports are private to the organisations that participate, I am also aware that the feedback from the participants in the first full phase has been overwhelmingly positive. These organisations have, and continue to, recommend the service to their peers.

During 2012 onwards, we will continue to prioritise organisational health check's with those organisations that are two years or more since their last inspection, covering those across the spectrum of performance, from outstanding to inadequate. We will continue to work with you to analyse the whole organisation and identify opportunities to improve and suggest further action that can be taken.

I am sure these improvements will help the whole of your organisation change and drive the efficiency of your performance. Together, and with other organisations, this will help us together respond to the New Challenges, New Chances agenda, as set out by Government.

So, I commend to you the benefits of a health check and we would be most grateful if you would be prepared to share individual outcomes more widely. Together, we can exemplify the improved, modernised learning and skills sector: the sector that continues to deliver best value, high quality provision to every individual learner.

Rob Wye  
Chief Executive, LSIS

## **Background to the Organisational Health Check programme**

The Organisational Health Check (OHC) is part of the Improvement and Development Service (IDS) and is available to all Further Education & Skills providers funded via the Skills Funding Agency. The OHC has been developed following extensive research and evaluation, it is important to note that the model will still be reviewed regularly and improvements made to enhance the experiences of organisations.

The OHC process and outcomes to date have been highly valued by all participants, team members and the organisations concerned. In particular, the benefits are seen to be:

- The provision of an impartial and external, professional challenge, which can operate beyond the requirements of the inspection framework
- The opportunity for organisations to re-consider their strategic positioning with regard to priorities and future directions
- A “measure” that is non-threatening and honest for senior management teams
- A report that is presented in language that is acceptable to the organisation and is not automatically in the public domain
- The identification of any serious areas of weakness that had not been apparent gives the provider the basis for an immediate action plan.

### **Feedback from organisations who participated in OHC’s during 2011**

- The whole process was excellent; the team members were highly skilled and got to the heart of the matter very quickly despite the shortness of the process.
- Very helpful process. Helped the service take a step back and look objectively at the SAR.
- We were entirely satisfied with the OHC. The team were at all times professional and supportive. They challenged with detailed questioning when appropriate. The report, whilst not telling us anything that we were not expecting, is a useful prompt for further action.
- The report was thorough, wide ranging and robust. The process of agreeing the report with college is important to enable it to be used as a shared document.
- The report has already had a profound effect. It is being used to inform the SAR.
- The report exceeded our expectations. The process that led to the report being produced was thorough and conducted in a professional manner. The report provided valuable feedback for the college to consider and act upon. An excellent service that should be expanded.
- Very good process that has impacted across the whole service. Reflective/critical friend good approach. Would be happy to pay for the support in the future.

## Introduction

An LSIS Organisational Health Check (OHC) offers Further Education & Skills sector organisations an opportunity to receive objective feedback about their organisation, in relation to meeting their current and future strategic requirements. The team will consist of trained senior practitioners drawn from the Further Education and Skills sector and may include LSIS specialist staff. Where feasible, LSIS programmes and services will be recommended as part of the support and development package following an OHC.

An OHC is intended to:

- Help prepare for self assessment
- Help plan for a quality review
- Look at plans for organisational development and offer a critique
- Provide an impartial, external, professional challenge
- Help identify strengths, weaknesses and opportunities, to enable the organisation to respond within its own quality improvement plan.

An OHC is *neither an inspection nor a benchmarking process*, designed to compare organisations to its peers. It will not intrude into the performance management or day to day governance of the organisation. An OHC will not look in detail at finances, capital projects, health and safety, equal opportunities, safeguarding or detailed data issues although these areas may be highlighted. An OHC is a dialogue between the organisation and the visiting team and it is not a paperwork check or review, however documentation will be reviewed to support the overall process and may be commented upon if relevant to the theme of the visit.

## The team and how it operates

Your Regional Development Manager (RDM) will agree the dates for the visit and they will also finalise arrangements for the OHC application and answer any queries you may have. The RDM may not always form part of the OHC team, but they will remain in communication with you and with the OHC team throughout and they will manage and oversee the process, if you have any queries or concerns throughout the process, you should contact your RDM.

PLEASE NOTE: Cancellation within 10 days of the planned OHC visit may incur a charge to the provider.

Once your application has been processed, you will be contacted initially by our IDS contractor, Tribal, who will confirm receipt of your application and then inform you of the names and details of the team members. The OHC team will comprise of up to three members. At least one of the team will have had previous experience of undertaking OHC's.

There will be a lead team member nominated and this will be someone with the sector or subject expertise as identified by the main focus of the OHC. The role of the OHC lead team member is to have a detailed conversation with the organisation to further develop the focus and arrangements for the visit and to ensure that all team members are fully briefed. The lead team

member usually contacts the organisation as soon as the team is confirmed, they will then remain in contact with you until the date of the visit.

### **Pre-visit preparation**

At least 15 working days before the OHC, your RDM will request copies of key documents relating to the organisation. These could include, depending on availability, a structure chart detailing key personnel, the self-assessment report, most recent inspection report, quality improvement plan, annual report, Minimum Levels of Performance (MLP) and Qualification Success Rate (QSR) reports and any relevant local reports and a structure chart with the names of key personnel. This documentation will be shared and reviewed by the OHC team in order to support their preparation for the visit.

The team will require a minimum of two meeting rooms for their meetings. There is no need to prepare documents or materials for a base room, the lead team member will request any additional documentation should the team wish to review it. A day to day contact person should be identified before the visit in order to negotiate and agree any possible changes to the timetable during the OHC.

We request that you kindly provide the visiting team with refreshments throughout the two day visit, to include hot drinks, drinking water and a lunch suitable for eating whilst working if required. The lead team member will inform you of any special dietary requests.

We also request that where possible parking spaces are reserved and arranged on site.

### **During the OHC**

The OHC is a two day process and will usually commence between 08.30 and 09.00 on day one and will conclude on day two with feedback between 15.00 and 16.00. The lead team member will liaise and agree final timings with the other team members and the lead contact from your organisation.

The main activity across the two days is a series of meetings which are undertaken by team members. Meetings may be carried out with all team members present or the lead team member may decide for each member to carry out separate meetings, the format for meetings is flexible and should be agreed between the team members and the organisation. Team members will meet with groups of staff and stakeholders throughout the day, inviting them to talk openly about their work. Meetings with learners may be included if it has been previously agreed with the organisation that their perspective will add value.

The first meeting of day one is scheduled to be with the lead contact within your organisation in order to raise any issues that emerge from the key documents previously issued and to further clarify the focus of the visit. This is followed by a meeting with the full senior management team which gives an opportunity to test out their expectations of the OHC and to confirm the focus of the meetings which follow.

The OHC visit is by invitation and is not an inspection. The resulting feedback and report will be aimed at helping your organisation to improve. It is therefore vital to create a relaxed atmosphere, the OHC team members are dependent on people being open and honest to ensure the report is an accurate reflection. Anything identified in the report will not be attributed to a named individual.

The OHC team will endeavour to keep strictly to the timetable for everyone's convenience but if a meeting indicates that further exploration with a particular person would be beneficial, it is possible to consider further meetings, which can be arranged at a separate time, possibly on the final morning.

There is an example timetable on page 9 but the exact start time on day one and end time on day two may vary slightly by agreement. The lead team member will discuss and confirm final times with you before the OHC begins.

During the OHC, team members will record their findings and keep notes from meetings in order to support the detail and production of the report. These will be kept confidentially until the final report is agreed upon at which point they will be shredded by the team members.

### **Emerging Findings**

At the beginning of day two, there will be a meeting with the lead contact and/or head of your organisation to share emerging findings. At this point, the lead team member will ask you to confirm who the audience will be for the formal verbal feedback session planned later in the day. It is important to consider who will attend this meeting and therefore what key messages will be heard and by whom.

### **Verbal Feedback meeting**

The verbal feedback meeting is best arranged in an informal setting. The findings will be presented in the format of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats and will be based on the supporting information gathered throughout the process. The OHC team will not be leaving any formal written documentation with your organisation at this stage, although you may wish to take notes during the feedback session. The report will not be delivered verbatim as to encourage dialogue and questions. This is your opportunity to clarify any points made, whilst the team is present. Your RDM may also attend the verbal feedback meeting.

### **The OHC report**

Once the visit has concluded, the team members will finalise the report. The report will be internally quality assured and moderated by LSIS and your RDM will send you the final report 10 working days after the end of the OHC for your review. We ask that you check the report for factual accuracy.

LSIS will not present the report in the public domain without agreement from your organisation. The role of LSIS is to maintain an overview of the process and the key messages emerging from the sector in terms of further development needs.

## **Evaluation and Impact**

Your RDM will be in contact with you once the report is issued in order to gather feedback on your experience of the OHC and will signpost you to other sources of support available via LSIS.

Your RDM will also make contact with your organisation within a six month period to assess impact and to identify any further LSIS support activity required.

### **Briefing note – for OHC participants from within your organisation**

**It is important that all participants from within your organisation are fully briefed and aware of the purpose and the process of the OHC and what is required of them during the visit. Organisations may wish to use this information as an overview of the OHC, when confirming arrangements with colleagues for their meeting time and venue.**

The purpose of the Organisational Health Check (OHC) is to give us objective feedback about our organisation, in relation to meeting our current and future strategic requirements.

The visiting team will be with us for two days and, in addition to reviewing key documentation in advance of the visit, they will be conducting a series of meetings. They will be meeting groups of staff, learners and stakeholders, all of whom will bring a different perspective. The OHC team should be viewed as external professionals and as perhaps “critical friends”. Members of the team are likely to be from organisations similar to ours.

During the OHC, you are urged to be frank and open in your responses to questions. There is no need to prepare for the meetings but if there are any papers that might be of interest to the OHC team, do please bring them along.

Unlike inspection, where inspectors are making judgements on everything they see, the OHC team will be assisting us to identify our strengths and address any weaknesses, at the same time looking at how to prepare for the opportunities that are out there and avoid any external threats that may be on the horizon. Nothing that you say will be attributable.

The outcome of the OHC visit will be a report which will identify the team’s perception of our main strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and this will support us in our development and improvement.



## SAMPLE TIMETABLE FOR ORGANISATIONAL HEALTH CHECK (OHC)

### DAY ONE

*OHC team members to conduct series of meetings as described below:  
Suggested timings (may vary slightly by agreement)*

Time	Activity	Purpose/areas for discussion
08.30	OHC team members meeting	Finalise the programme Discuss expectations and outcomes
09.00	Meeting with Head of Organisation and/or lead contact	Finalise the programme Discuss expectations and outcomes
09.30	Meeting with SMT or equivalent	Identify key issues in the organisation Identify key objectives of each member
10.30 – 17.00	Meeting(s) with groups of managers: e.g. Finance, MIS, Resources/Premises	Resource management Data Management Marketing Key issues and challenges
	Meeting(s) with programme development managers or equivalent	Programme planning; Quality assurance Staffing issues Resource monitoring Funding issues Innovation Key issues and challenges
	Meeting(s) with quality managers or equivalent	Ownership Control Assurance Improvement Strategy Key issues and challenges
	Meeting(s) with stakeholders (e.g. trustees/governors/funding agency)	Assessment of provider from their perspective Key issues and challenges
	Meeting(s) with key partners (e.g. sub-contracted providers, employers, community organisations – where considered relevant)	Assessment of provider from their perspective Key issues and challenges
	Meetings with individual managers	A focus on staff development and wider HR issues Managers from other areas if relevant Key issues and challenges
17.00	Team depart	Prepare outline of draft report during the evening

**DAY TWO**

*The team members may work together on day two, or there may be individual deployment to separate tasks if required*

*Suggested timings (may vary slightly by agreement)*

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Purpose/areas for discussion</b>
09.00	Meeting with lead contact and/or Head of Organisation	Discussion about emerging findings to consider if further meetings need to be arranged
09.30	Further meetings(s) with SMT or individual SMT members	Check on emerging findings
10.00 – 13.00	Further meetings – for example: stakeholders/partners, teachers/trainers, learners, support staff.	Further explorations Key issues and challenges
13.30	Team reflection	Preparation for verbal feedback session One team member to start finalising the report
15.00	Feedback session	Verbal feedback shared Opportunity for question and answer session and or clarification.
16.00	Team depart	Moderated report presented to organisation within 10 working days

## Who is my Regional Development Manager?

### East Midlands

Lorna Freakley

[Lorna.freakley@lisis.org.uk](mailto:Lorna.freakley@lisis.org.uk)

07799 478215

### East of England

Mark Barnsley

[Mark.barnsley@lisis.org.uk](mailto:Mark.barnsley@lisis.org.uk)

07920 710652

### London

Abigail Lammas

[Abigail.lammas@lisis.org.uk](mailto:Abigail.lammas@lisis.org.uk)

07825 933774

### North East

Jane Thompson

[Jane.thompson@lisis.org.uk](mailto:Jane.thompson@lisis.org.uk)

07826 537508

### North West

Jo Higgins

[Jo.higgins@lisis.org.uk](mailto:Jo.higgins@lisis.org.uk)

07770 488854

### South East

Rebecca Foreman

[Rebecca.foreman@lisis.org.uk](mailto:Rebecca.foreman@lisis.org.uk)

07795 496256

### South West

Deborah Farley

[Deborah.farley@lisis.org.uk](mailto:Deborah.farley@lisis.org.uk)

07825 933772

### West Midlands

Sue Blake

[Sue.blake@lisis.org.uk](mailto:Sue.blake@lisis.org.uk)

07920 710584

### Yorkshire and Humberside

Colin Forrest

[Colin.forrest@lisis.org.uk](mailto:Colin.forrest@lisis.org.uk)

07795 496262

## Where can I get more information and application forms?

Please visit the link below:

[Improvement and Development Service](#)

Completed forms and must be emailed to [IDS@lisis.org.uk](mailto:IDS@lisis.org.uk) and a copy sent to the appropriate Regional Development Manager