HMICFRS

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services

Evaluation of fire and rescue service inspections

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HM Inspector's foreword

Evaluating how we carry out inspections is essential to understand their impact and to continue to make improvements for future inspection cycles. This approach will also reassure the public we are holding ourselves to account and shining a light, not only on the fire and rescue services (FRSs) and police forces we inspect, but also on how we carry out those inspections.

I am therefore pleased to share this evaluation of our second FRS inspection cycle and highlight changes made as a result of the evaluation. The evaluation represents a substantial piece of work for the inspectorate. Social researchers in our Insight portfolio carried it out over a two-year period, between April 2021 and March 2023. Although the report is only now being published, the findings have contributed to ongoing improvements of our inspection processes and have been considered in the design and planning of subsequent FRS programme cycles.

In 2018 and 2019, we carried out our first FRS inspection cycle in England. This was the first time in over a decade that all services in England had been independently inspected. In 2021 and 2022 we carried out our second inspection cycle, which our researchers evaluated. They collected feedback on how we were implementing the FRS inspection programme. This has helped us improve our internal processes, our communication with the FRS sector and the well-being of our staff and FRS staff.

The evaluation also explored impact, and the role we play in supporting improvements across the sector. Researchers collected feedback on how the inspectorate has an impact and what helps to bring about sector change.

While it has been three years since the evaluation was completed, this report describes the improvements we have made to the FRS inspection programme. I am pleased to share the findings and learning from this review, as well as an assessment of the impact our FRS programme has made in contributing to continuous improvements in FRSs.

Roy Wilsher OBE QFSM

His Majesty's Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Acknowledgements

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who gave up their time to share their experiences to inform this evaluation. These include HMICFRS staff, those working in the inspected services and those working in HMICFRS's stakeholder organisations. We recognise their contribution, honesty and commitment. The feedback they provided was invaluable, and we would like to thank everyone who took the time to contribute.

We would also like to thank our two academic peer reviewers, Professor Rowena Hill MBE and Dr Eleanor Abbott, for reviewing a draft of this evaluation report and providing valuable feedback.

Additionally, we would like to thank The King's Fund and Alliance Manchester Business School for developing a framework for understanding the impact of regulation. This research helped validate our impact findings.

FRS analysis and research team, HMICFRS Insight portfolio

Summary

Introduction

The fire and rescue service (FRS) inspection programme is an assessment of the effectiveness, efficiency and people of the 44 FRSs in England. FRS inspections are carried out by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS). They have been running since 2018.

The HMICFRS Insight portfolio is an analytical and research unit that supports HMICFRS inspections. Social researchers in the Insight portfolio evaluated the second cycle of FRS inspections (which took place in 2021 and 2022) from a total of three cycles at the time of publication of this report. The aim was to evaluate whether inspection processes had been implemented as intended; what was working well and what were the areas for improvement; and how inspection activity leads to change in services and the FRS sector.

There were two broad questions that the evaluation aimed to answer:

1. Have the FRS inspections been implemented in the way intended?
2. What outcomes are being achieved as a result of the inspection activities?

This report summarises the evaluation and the changes that HMICFRS made because of the findings.

HMICFRS reviews inspection methodology between inspection cycles. It is important to note the inspection processes described throughout this report are historical and relate to the second inspection cycle (2021−22) only. In addition, the changes reported here include only those HMICFRS made in response to the evaluation findings. It has made other changes to FRS inspection processes and methodology since this evaluation which aren't reported here.

Methodology

A mixed-methods, self-reported, theory-based evaluation method was selected.

The evaluation involved:

- interviews, focus groups and surveys with service staff, including senior staff;
- focus groups with FRS portfolio and inspection staff;
- interviews with sector stakeholder groups (such as the National Fire Chiefs Council, the Home Office and union representatives);
- researcher observations of HMICFRS internal and external meetings and events; and
- analysis of administrative data.

The evaluation findings are mostly qualitative and based on primary research with services and stakeholders. They improve HMICFRS's understanding of the impact of FRS inspections. While this method doesn't provide a representation of experiences across all services or stakeholders, it does provide an in-depth understanding of how the inspections have been implemented and their outcomes across a range of stakeholder experiences. The findings reported here are the views of individuals who took part in the evaluation. Any impact is self-reported and reflects participants' perception.

HMICFRS has amended FRS inspection methodology as appropriate to address the evaluation findings that are detailed throughout the report.

Conclusions

The evaluation showed FRS inspections are among several factors contributing to sector improvement. Other contributing factors include service-initiated improvements.

It also identified strengths of the inspection processes at the time. And it identified areas where HMICFRS could further improve how inspections are implemented. These improvements would benefit the well-being of FRS and inspectorate staff, the robustness of evidence recording, and the communication with services before, during and after inspection.

Inspectorate participants felt confident in triangulating evidence (combining evidence from different sources). Inspection meetings such as moderation were found to ensure fairness and consistency when forming inspection judgments.

However, some aspects of inspection were constrained by limited time or staffing. HMICFRS has since made changes to address this.

Service participants found publication of inspection reports in three large batches to be too slow. They felt timelier and more detailed reporting could increase the impact of findings. HMICFRS has since decreased the time between inspection and report publication. But it remains committed to balancing timeliness with the time needed to report high-quality findings.

Service participants identified that inspections had impact before, during and after inspection fieldwork. Before inspections, services start to self-reflect in anticipation of their upcoming inspection. Inspection outcomes had a direct impact, with services learning about their own performance and directed to act on findings and recommendations. Services felt they were also held to account to act in response to inspections by their governance arrangements. And service participants reported looking to the inspection findings of other services and national reporting by HMICFRS to inform their learning and help them improve.

Sector participants identified aspects of FRS inspections that helped bring about improvement. The relationships fostered between HMICFRS and service staff at all levels were central to understanding and accepting recommendations and making changes following an inspection. Independence was also identified as key to HMICFRS's role and remit in the sector.

However, service participants also identified barriers to improvement which, if overcome, could further increase the impact of the inspectorate's work. For example, they reported feeling stretched to respond to inspection findings, alongside other sector improvement work, given the time and staffing available to them. A lack of governmental national prioritisation of FRS reform was also felt to stifle improvement.

Overall, though, FRS inspections were found to be a catalyst for change in services and the sector.

Introduction

The fire and rescue service (FRS) inspection programme is an assessment of the effectiveness, efficiency and people of the 44 FRSs in England. FRS inspections are carried out by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS). They have been running since 2018. When they began, it was the first time in over a decade that all services had been independently inspected.

Ahead of each FRS inspection cycle, HMICFRS publishes the inspection questions in the FRS assessment framework. FRS inspections are structured around three pillars – effectiveness, efficiency and people. You can find more detailed information about the inspection methodology on the HMICFRS website.

As part of FRS inspections, inspectors identify areas for improvement, causes of concern and recommendations, and promising and innovative practice. They award graded judgments (from 'inadequate' to 'outstanding'). They verbally report the inspection findings to services at the end of the inspection evidence collection period in a service debrief. HMICFRS then publishes them in an FRS inspection report.

HMICFRS carries out FRS inspections in two-year cycles:

- The first inspection cycle (2018−19) was carried out between July 2018 and December 2019.
- Between September and November 2020, HMICFRS inspected services remotely online as part of the 'Responding to the pandemic' inspection.
- The second inspection cycle (2021−22) was carried out between February 2021 and December 2022.
- The third inspection cycle (2023−25) was carried out between February 2023 and June 2025.
- The fourth inspection cycle (2025−27) began in August 2025 and is ongoing.

This evaluation covers the second inspection cycle (2021−22) only. In this cycle, HMICFRS inspected the first 13 services remotely online. It inspected the remaining 31 services using a hybrid methodology, in person and online.

Aims

The evaluation of FRS inspections aimed to:

- understand if inspection processes had been implemented as intended; and
- identify how inspection activity leads to change in services and the FRS sector.

The research questions reflected the aims of the evaluation and were as follows:

1. Have the FRS inspections been implemented in the way intended?
2. What outcomes are being achieved as a result of the inspection activities?

To support data collection and analysis for the research questions, a set of sub-questions was developed. These are outlined in Annex A. They provided an analytical framework for the evaluation research materials. However, they aren't discussed individually in the main findings of the report. Instead, findings are presented thematically in response to the research questions.

Methodology

Social researchers in the HMICFRS Insight portfolio evaluated the second FRS inspection cycle between April 2021 and March 2023. (The portfolio is an analytical and research unit that supports HMICFRS inspections.)

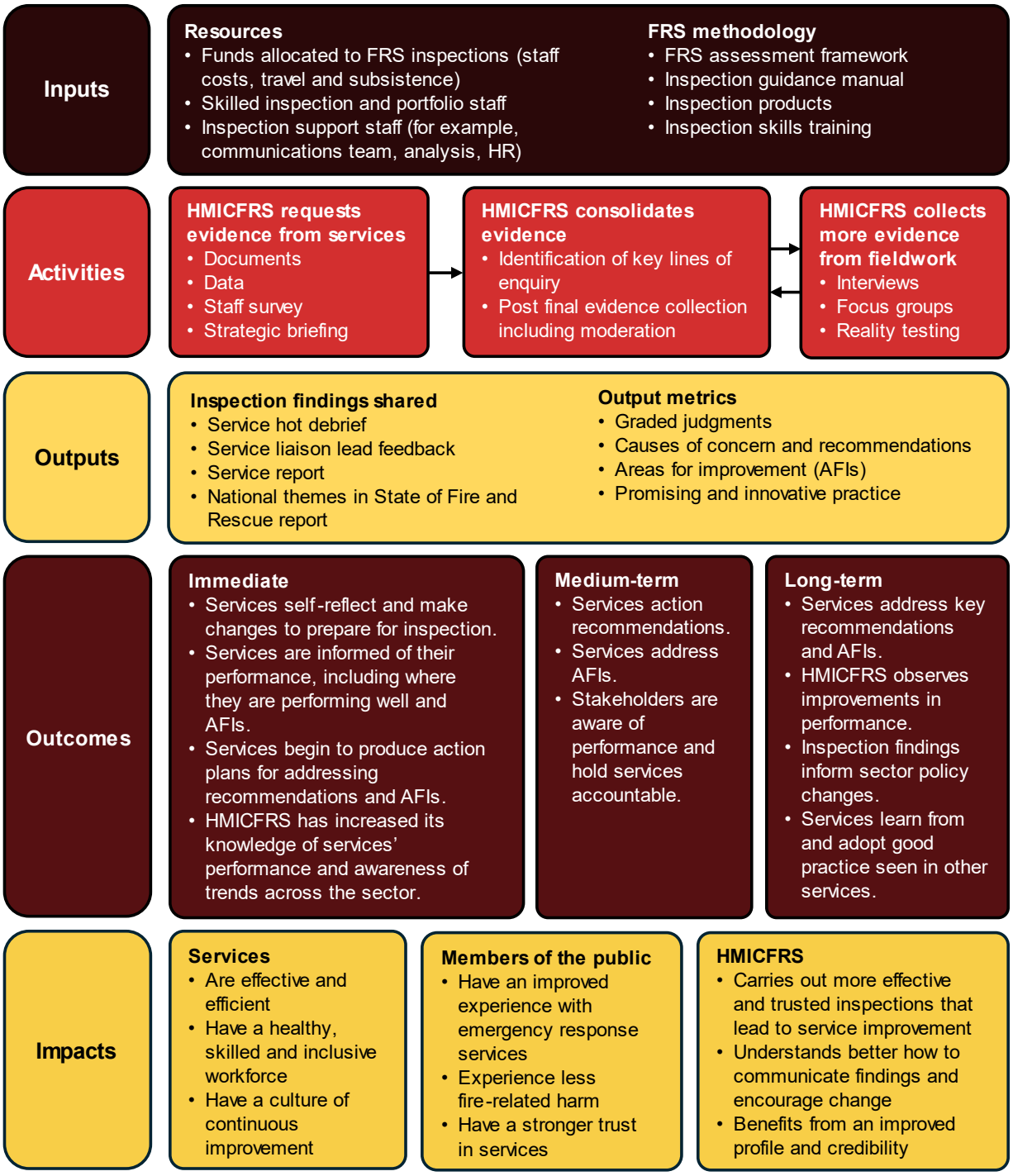
Designing the evaluation

The evaluation was built around a theory of change (explained in the Magenta Book) for the FRS inspections.

The theory of change (Figure 1) outlines the planned inputs, activities and outputs of the inspections, as well as the outcomes and impacts.

The research sub-questions (Annex A) were used to develop the research tools for the evaluation – the surveys, and interview and focus group topic guides that were used to collect the evaluation data. The theory of change was refined throughout the evaluation.

Figure 1: Theory of change for HMICFRS FRS inspections



Source: HMICFRS FRS analysis and research team

An accessible version of the FRS theory of change is available in Annex C.

A mixed-methods, self-reported, theory-based design was selected for the evaluation as it was the most suitable approach for the evaluation aims and research questions. Most of the data was based on self-reported, qualitative data from participants.

Collecting the data

The following methods were used to collect data:

- 19 interviews with senior staff (chief fire officers and fire and rescue authority chairs);
- 9 focus groups with 30 FRS workforce participants (non-senior staff) in total;
- 8 interviews with national representatives from FRS sector stakeholder groups (such as the National Fire Chiefs Council, the Home Office and unions);
- 4 focus groups with 20 FRS portfolio and inspection staff participants in total;
- surveys with service staff;
- researcher observations of HMICFRS internal and external meetings and events;
- analysis of administrative data; and
- evidence and document reviews.

All services in England were invited to participate in the evaluation following the publication of their inspection reports.

However, participation in surveys, interviews and focus groups was voluntary. And observations and evidence and document reviews were carried out with a subset of the services. So not all services are represented across all aspects of the data.

You can find further information about the data sources used to inform the findings in this report in Annex B: Evaluation data sources.

Quality assurance

This evaluation was carried out by researchers in the HMICFRS Insight portfolio. This team was chosen in order to draw on HMICFRS's strong relationships with services and stakeholders, as well as the team's detailed knowledge and expertise concerning the inspection process. The researchers emphasised their independence from the FRS inspection staff, to both HMICFRS and external participants, and made sure findings were reported anonymously. In addition, no one outside the research team was told (at the time of the evaluation or since) the identity of any participants. The researchers reported that they felt people were open and honest with them (including raising negative findings).

To support credibility and minimise any bias, rigorous quality assurance processes, including a systematic, team-based approach, were implemented when analysing the data. Various HMICFRS staff and two external, academic peer reviewers reviewed the report.

The King's Fund and Alliance Manchester Business School developed a framework that outlines ways in which regulators (such as the Care Quality Commission) can affect provider performance. Although the framework cannot be directly applied because HMICFRS is an inspectorate, not a regulator, their research helped validate our impact findings.

Interpreting the research findings

The findings are mostly qualitative and based on research with services in England and with members of stakeholder organisations. The findings improve HMICFRS's understanding of fire and rescue service (FRS) inspection impact and how this is achieved. However, they aren't necessarily representative of all services or stakeholders.

The qualitative approach allowed researchers to explore **how** impact was achieved, not just **what** impact was achieved. It helped make sure participants focused on the impact of FRS inspections and not other factors contributing to change. However, due to the nature of FRS sector improvement work, participants sometimes found it hard to differentiate between work generated by FRS inspections and improvement work initiated by a service or the FRS sector.

It is important to note that most of the findings on impact are based on self-reported data and the perceptions of the participants. The scope of this work, with an emphasis on how impact is achieved, didn't include a quantitative assessment of impact.

Detailed findings from the process evaluation were shared internally with the FRS portfolio and inspection staff throughout the evaluation to inform timely changes to future inspections. They have informed inspection design for the third and fourth inspection cycles. This report summarises the findings for the public, including action HMICFRS has taken in response.

The findings reported here are the views of individuals who took part in the evaluation.

Where the term 'workforce' is used in the report, it refers to all staff in all services apart from chief fire officers and chairs of the fire and rescue authority.

You can find further information about the analysis used to produce the findings in this report in Annex B: Analysis methods.

Findings: have the fire and rescue service inspections been implemented in the way intended?

The evaluation assessed whether the fire and rescue service (FRS) inspection framework had been implemented as intended: what was working well and why, alongside areas for improvement.

The research sub-questions (Annex A) focused on three main areas of the inspection process:

- robustness of the evidence gathering, triangulation (combining evidence from different sources) and judgment-forming processes;
- communication of inspection findings; and
- the well-being of staff, both in HMICFRS and the inspected FRS sector.

Evidence gathering, triangulation and judgment-forming processes

The inspection process starts with collecting evidence relevant to the inspection questions set out in the FRS assessment framework. Evidence should be from a broad range of sources and recorded in HMICFRS's evidence database. Evidence entries are triangulated to form balanced judgments. Triangulation should give greater validity and credibility to the findings, as supporting evidence has come from different sources. The graded judgments that are given are then moderated, which should ensure fairness and consistency across services.

The end-to-end process was reviewed, and this subsection summarises the findings around three main themes:

- time and resource;
- recording and documentation; and
- actual and perceived rigour of processes.

This subsection also includes other specific findings that emerged strongly and relate to the implementation of the second inspection cycle.

Time and resource

Time and resource are important factors in collecting, recording and triangulating evidence. Participants identified some aspects of the process that were challenging because of limited time or the inspection staff resource available to them.

Inspection staff are given a timetable to guide their activity and protect their time for inspection activities. However, inspection staff felt some activities such as document reviews needed more time than was scheduled, and other activities such as reviewing data weren't accounted for at all on the timetable.

The inspection teams are small and include staff from a variety of employment backgrounds, with the intention this benefits diversity of thought. However, some staff have very short contracts, such as secondees from services who are brought in to support inspections for a brief period. The service liaison leads (SLLs) felt too many short-term staff in one team was a burden as they needed additional training, support and oversight during evidence collection. SLLs lead a service inspection and are the inspectorate's expert on a particular service.

Most SLLs reported being confident in triangulating evidence. But they felt the post-fieldwork meeting, where they are expected to present their conclusions, was too soon after fieldwork. They felt they didn't always have enough time to review all evidence before the meeting, and some consolidation happened after the meeting, during moderation or during report writing. His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) are involved throughout the evidence consolidation processes to inform their final judgments.

To address this feedback, HMICFRS has made changes to the timetable. These include a dedicated two-week window to review documents and data before fieldwork, and reduced activity in the middle of fieldwork to allow the SLL to consolidate the evidence to date. And now, inspection teams typically don't include more than one short-term member to limit the additional oversight for the SLL.

Recording and documentation

HMICFRS has an evidence database where inspection staff record all evidence in a consistent and detailed way. The database is a rich data source and can be used to assure internal processes.

Analysis of the database found evidence of triangulation by source. For example, as shown in Figure 2 (Annex B), in 90 percent of cases the evidence relating to 1 inspection question came from at least 3 different types of inspection activity. This gives assurance that a range of evidence from different data sources is being used across inspection questions.

However, the evidence reviews found inconsistencies in the documentation of triangulation outside the database. Documentation shows how an SLL has weighed individual pieces of evidence against one another and consolidated them to form their narrative. SLLs reported taking different approaches to documenting their process. Although some were exceptionally good, others were more difficult to follow. Reassuringly, SLLs reported high confidence in their ability to triangulate evidence, even if they took different approaches.

Analysis of the database also showed evidence of consistent and fair grading. For example, as shown in Figure 3 (Annex B), the rating of evidence as positive or negative aligned to the grades given, with higher grades having more positive-rated evidence than lower grades.

To address the feedback about different approaches to triangulation, HMICFRS has introduced a mandatory gap analysis template (a systematic approach to identify patterns and gaps in evidence) to ensure consistency in approach and documentation.

Actual and perceived rigour of processes

Within HMICFRS, the same group of people (HMIs, FRS portfolio and inspection staff) are involved in scrutinising evidence and contributing to the judgment-forming process for all FRSs, to remove bias and ensure consistency.

FRS portfolio staff independently scrutinise the evidence in the evidence database. SLLs found inspection meetings valuable for asking for reassurance from other portfolio staff about their early lines of enquiry and, in later meetings, their conclusions about a service's performance. During inspection meetings, portfolio staff were observed advising that additional evidence gathering was required and supporting SLLs with their evidence triangulation.

Services are referred to a moderation process if inspection evidence or graded judgments need to be circulated to other inspection staff and senior colleagues. For example, this happens if there has been a two-grade increase between inspection cycles, or the grade is considered borderline. It was found that in moderation meetings the rationale for grades was debated and comparisons with other services in similar situations were drawn from the breadth of experience in the meeting. The HMIs were key contributors at moderation, scrutinising judgments and considering the local and national context of the services they were responsible for.

However, even though the internal processes were found to be robust and designed to ensure rigour in judgments, there were concerns from the sector about the robustness of the HMICFRS findings. This was due to a perceived lack of transparency with the sector. For example, some service participants reported being unclear how some evidence sources, such as the staff survey, contributed to the inspection findings.

One participant shared that, whether or not they agreed with the judgment, they trusted the process that HMICFRS goes through to arrive at it. Sector stakeholders were also confident that graded judgments were grounded in evidence.
Some concerns were also raised about attempts by services to mislead or influence inspection activities. Service participants shared examples of staff being "cherry picked" to attend focus groups or "planted" to report back to senior staff on what was said. Despite this, senior service staff expressed their confidence in the inspection process being able to overcome any attempts to hide evidence.

HMICFRS continually encourages chief fire officers to urge their workforces to be open and honest with the inspectorate, to benefit from the process. The inspectorate is clear that means of deception are unacceptable, and it has identified and addressed this behaviour where it has occurred. The triangulation of multiple sources of evidence is one way it aims to mitigate any attempts at deception. Additionally, the anonymous staff survey and inspection reporting line give all staff safe ways to share their views openly, without concern that their comments can be attributed to them.

Communication of inspection findings

Senior service staff first hear about the early inspection findings during a debrief, which happens shortly after inspection fieldwork ends. The SLL summarises the findings to indicate how the service performed. They don't share specifics, such as graded judgments or whether they intend to issue an area for improvement. At this point the evidence hasn't been fully consolidated or moderated.

Some senior staff said they acted following the debrief. Others waited to see the inspection report because they felt they didn't have enough information to act on from the debrief alone.

HMICFRS shares a first draft of the inspection report with the service ahead of publication. This is called the pre-publication check (although it has been renamed since our evaluation). It is an opportunity for the service to read the full report, digest the judgments and provide HMICFRS with comments on the factual accuracy of the report. It is not an opportunity for the service to challenge evidence or request changes to the judgments.

Senior staff recognised the benefit of being able to give HMICFRS constructive feedback, and mostly felt their feedback was listened to and acted on. However, some felt disappointed at the lack of changes to the report narrative in response to their feedback.

HMICFRS publishes each service's inspection report. The reports include graded judgments, causes of concern, areas for improvement, promising and innovative practice, and narrative summarising the evidence for the grades.

The inspection reports were widely read. Participants generally praised them for being a balanced and true reflection of the services. However, service participants felt reports were better at identifying issues than praising positives. They felt HMICFRS could do more in the reports to promote good practice. Some service participants felt more detailed information and context in the report narrative would help the service and the public understand the findings and the rationale for judgments.

Similarly, some senior staff felt the report narrative alone wasn't enough for them to act. They found action was more successfully directed through understanding the findings further in discussion with the SLL, after report publication. This is discussed later in the section 'Facilitators of improvements in FRSs'.

Participants also widely criticised the length of time it takes HMICFRS to publish inspection reports. Senior staff were concerned the slow process limited the report's impact as findings are quickly out of date.

To address this feedback, HMICFRS has changed how often it publishes inspection reports. This is to make sure findings are timelier for services and the public, while still maintaining the robustness of the inspection and judgment-forming process. For the 2023−25 inspection cycle onwards, it scheduled and managed inspections in smaller batches throughout the inspection cycle rather than in three large groups. This helps to publish reports more quickly.

Staff well-being

Service staff well-being

Service participants said inspections gave them a voice. But they also described how they could have a negative effect on their well-being.

Many participants recognised and appreciated the importance of being involved in the inspections. But some felt it was a strain to carry out their usual role as well as meet inspection requests. Several participants described the inspection activity as intimidating. There were fears of saying the "wrong" thing during fieldwork, as well as concerns about a lack of anonymity or potential reprisal. Some of the workforce also speculated their senior staff were fearful of HMICFRS. Others expressed anxiety about the outcome of their inspection, and speculated negative outcomes could be attributed to specific subgroups in the workforce. Participants also reported that poor inspection outcomes were damaging for the pride and morale of individuals in the service.

Following these findings, HMICFRS has strengthened its processes to support service staff well-being. Individuals can raise concerns or complaints about the inspection process through the inspection reporting line on the HMICFRS website, or by contacting their service's HMI or chief of staff. All complaints are processed according to internal HMICFRS policies. Mental health first aid-trained inspection staff have also provided welfare support to service staff where concerns about well-being were raised. Further, HMICFRS is committed to 'no surprises' inspections, being open about the findings of concern as they emerge throughout the inspection.

Inspection staff well-being

The well-being of HMICFRS inspection staff was considered in the inspection design, with processes in place to monitor and gather feedback to protect staff well-being.

Inspection staff reported feeling well-supported by their managers and colleagues. They also shared that other inspection team members were a constant source of support. However, some support processes varied over time, leading to some participants feeling there were gaps at times in the feedback processes and available support.

Inspection staff identified some aspects of the inspection design that were having a particularly negative impact on their well-being:

- Overlapping inspections led to feelings of relentlessness and fatigue.
- The inspection timetable didn't allow for important team admin and management tasks.
- Entering evidence into the evidence database was a time-consuming task that meant some staff worked excessive hours.

As shown in Figure 4 (Annex B), analysis of the evidence database found that most inspection staff (69 percent) were entering evidence into the database outside typical working hours (7am to 7pm).

To address these concerns, HMICFRS has made changes to inspection design and planning. First, it no longer divides inspections into three large groups, which means there is less overlap of inspections for the SLL. Second, there is reduced activity in the middle of the inspection timetable. This allows SLLs to carry out administrative and management tasks, including consolidating and recording evidence in the database. Third, analysis of the evidence database has informed improvements to the database. For example, features that added no clear benefit to the judgment-forming process are no longer mandatory fields, making recording evidence faster. And the time of day that staff enter evidence is now more routinely monitored to allow for resource intervention.

HMICFRS offers employees a range of resources to support their well-being. These include access to an employee assistance programme and mental health first aiders.

Other inspection process findings

Outside the main themes that emerged above, researchers observed specific findings relating to the implementation of the 2021−22 inspections.

Graded judgments

Despite the evaluation not being about inspection outcomes, many service participants spoke about their service's graded judgments.

Some senior staff felt there was a big difference between the 'good' and 'requires improvement' grades. Some welcomed the idea of a fifth, middle grade, while others were concerned about the reputational risk for those services perceived to go "backwards" from 'good' to 'adequate'. As shown in Figure 3 (Annex B), analysis of the evidence database found 'good' grades had a statistically significantly higher ratio of positive to negative evidence than 'requires improvement'. While this finding assured HMICFRS that the evidence underlying different graded judgments was distinctly different, it also showed a gap where a fifth graded judgment could be appropriate.

For the 2023−25 inspection cycle, HMICFRS introduced a fifth graded judgment. To align grading with that of PEEL inspections, the 'adequate' grade lies between 'good' and 'requires improvement' to state more precisely where improvement is needed.

Remote inspection methodology

As noted in the introduction, in the second inspection cycle HMICFRS inspected the first 13 services remotely online. It inspected the remaining 31 services using a hybrid methodology, in person and online. Throughout the evaluation, the perception of participants from the first 13 services tended to be more negative than that of participants from the remaining 31. Participants whose inspection was remote felt disadvantaged by the difference in methodology. For example, they felt it limited their ability to form as strong a relationship with their SLL. This is discussed in the section 'Facilitators of improvements in FRSs' as an influence on impact.

HMICFRS used the remote-only methodology out of necessity as per public health requirements immediately after COVID-19. It now uses a hybrid inspection methodology as standard.

Findings: what outcomes are being achieved as a result of inspection activities?

The outcomes anticipated from fire and rescue service (FRS) inspections were identified in the theory of change (Figure 1). Services and stakeholders were asked whether they had made any improvements as a result of the FRS inspection programme, to establish whether the anticipated outcomes had been achieved.

Overall, participants described the FRS inspection programme as a "lever", "catalyst" or "driver" of improvement. They viewed HMICFRS as having a positive impact on the FRS sector, alongside other factors contributing to change.

This evaluation identified that several of the FRS inspection outcomes had been successfully achieved:

- Services reflect and make changes to prepare for inspection.
- Services learn about their own performance.
- Services address inspection findings.
- Services learn from each other.
- Stakeholders are aware of performance and hold services to account.
- State of Fire and Rescue reports inform sector reform.

Services reflect and make changes to prepare for inspection

Service participants reported that they anticipated their next inspection and started to consider the assessment framework and characteristics of good to understand the focus of the inspection. This helped them prioritise what improvements to make. For some, this was an opportunity to assess their current performance and even pre-empt the outcome of their upcoming inspection. Senior staff also began to give feedback to staff on the progress the service had made since the last inspection and allocate staff to tackle their upcoming inspection. The service workforce echoed these findings by saying they knew an inspection was approaching because they saw the service preparing.

Services learn about their own performance

To make improvements, services first need to understand where they are performing well and where improvements are needed. Many service participants shared that inspections identified relevant issues and informed the service about them. Almost all senior staff surveyed agreed their inspection identified where improvements could be made. During interviews and focus groups many described it as an assurance process that “holds a mirror up to the service”. It highlighted where they could improve. This included finding new issues that the service was overlooking and validating or adding weight to existing issues.

Some senior staff felt inspections accelerated change in the sector by exposing the extent of issues they were already aware of or by helping to raise their profile to aid senior staff prioritisation.

In addition to highlighting where improvements were needed, most sector stakeholders and the workforce agreed FRS inspections identified good practice across the sector. Where good practice was identified in reports, the workforce in those services was proud to have its work highlighted.

Services address inspection findings

Inspection findings gave services the power to take positive action to improve the service. Three quarters of respondents to the staff survey carried out during inspection agreed that their service had made positive changes as a result of its HMICFRS inspection feedback (see Figure 5 in Annex B). This varied from 42 to 93 percent of respondents in individual services.

Many services reported starting to compile an action plan in response to the inspection findings after the debrief at the end of inspection fieldwork. Senior staff described how they used their action plan to feed into future business planning, community risk management plans, strategy and budgeting. Tasks from the action plans were shared with the teams and individuals in the service who were responsible for implementing the improvements. The workforce observed positive changes as a direct result of their service’s action plan. The action plan was described as the “golden thread that runs through the service”.

It was also noted that services looked back at their last inspection findings before their next inspection. They focused their attention on actioning any outstanding recommendations or areas for improvement from the previous inspection, acknowledging that they started to “sort the service out” ahead of fieldwork starting.

In particular, services shared that they acted quickly in response to a cause of concern (CoC). Senior staff viewed CoCs as the most important aspect of an inspection to action quickly. It was felt that they couldn't ignore a CoC issued through their inspection. Services that had received a CoC said it gave focus and unified their leadership on an urgent matter. They reprioritised to close the CoC as soon as possible. Senior staff also recalled using it to justify additional funding to address the underlying problem. But that was only possible if the timing of the report and the service's financial planning year aligned.

Senior staff described how inspection findings, or self-reflection prompted by the inspection process, led to specific examples of organisation-wide work and improvements:

- changes to performance reviews or the performance framework;
- review of existing, or implementation of new, processes to support individuals in the service, including support lines and mental health policies;
- application of HMICFRS action plan to other areas of the organisation, such as culture;
- creation of new staff networks and community groups;
- introduction of an internal assurance board to sign off improvements;
- review of use of existing data or collection of new data;
- securing of additional funding from the governing authority to recruit more firefighters; and
- implementation of leadership training at lower ranks.

Services perceived there were consequences of not acting on the inspection findings. Despite HMICFRS holding no legal powers to force services to act, the senior staff, the workforce and sector stakeholders all felt there would be serious consequences if a service continually failed to improve.

Services learn from each other

Most participants reported that they learned from other services by comparing their own service against others. During interviews, senior staff reported reading reports of services similar to their own or those that performed particularly well in an area. The purpose of reading other reports was to look for learning and apply it to their own service, sometimes through working directly with other senior staff from the sector. The workforce felt it was useful for a service to be able to compare itself against a known standard in other services. Similarly, stakeholders from the sector looked for commonalities and national themes that they could apply to their own area of the sector or learn from.

As well as learning from other FRS inspection reports, senior staff and stakeholders also described reading additional reports and learning from them:

- reports of others in the sector, such as Scottish FRSs;
- reports from other relevant inspectorates, such as Ofsted for a school in their local area; and
- HMICFRS PEEL inspection reports for their local area.

Stakeholders are aware of performance and hold services to account

As a result of the inspection process, service performance is made visible to stakeholders in inspection reports. Service participants felt public visibility held their services to account, resulting in a stronger commitment to acting on recommendations and addressing areas for improvement. Senior staff described having to "answer to" their authority or governing body about their action following an inspection. Some noted that receiving a CoC prompted them to consider the reaction of their governing body. They also felt an expectation from their political stakeholders that they would implement the recommendations in the report.

Service participants also felt the public availability of inspection reports further reinforced accountability, particularly for senior staff, through scrutiny from the media, the wider sector and local communities. Supporting evidence from academic research also highlights HMICFRS's role in contributing to the professional accountability of the sector.

State of Fire and Rescue reports inform sector reform

The annual State of Fire and Rescue report provides a national overview of inspection findings and highlights important themes and trends across services. Participants shared that it influenced their service's strategic thinking. They praised it for identifying national themes and demonstrating the breadth of the work carried out by services. They felt this helped the Government recognise the need for increased funding and supported efforts to achieve change through reform, such as the 2022 Fire Reform White Paper.

Findings: facilitators of improvements in fire and rescue services and barriers to improvements

Participants identified several facilitators of improvements in services and barriers to improvements following inspections.

Facilitators of improvements in fire and rescue services

Participants highlighted the following as key factors that supported fire and rescue service (FRS) improvements following inspections:

- strong relationships between HMICFRS, services and FRS sector stakeholders; and
- the independence of HMICFRS.

Strong professional relationships between HMICFRS, services and FRS sector stakeholders

Participants saw the relationships formed between HMICFRS, the services and stakeholders as vital for achieving improvement. Services told us engagement and improvement were related. The way HMICFRS treated service staff positively and forged relationships during an inspection produced a better response from a service to act on the findings.

The service's relationship with the service liaison lead (SLL) was vital for service improvement. Those with strong relationships found their SLL helped them to prepare and understand aspects of the process better and reassured them through the findings process. Participants noted the SLL and service liaison officer relationships were key. They felt that relationships between HMICFRS and service staff grew over time. Therefore, services found it difficult to rebuild relationships when their SLLs changed. Those who didn't feel they had a good relationship with their SLL attributed it to remote working, being too busy on other inspections or a change to the SLL at a critical point in the inspection. Despite most senior staff reporting a good relationship with their SLL, many would have liked more meetings with them, especially face to face.

Many service participants felt HMICFRS met primarily with their liaison officer and senior staff, but they wanted more direct meetings with HMICFRS.

Senior staff valued their relationships with His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) and felt they worked together well. They valued the time set aside by the HMIs to meet, for example, to reassure them about their inspection findings following the factual accuracy check. But levels of reported involvement with the HMIs varied between sector stakeholders, which had an impact on the relationship they felt they had with HMICFRS. Some sector stakeholders had worked with the HMIs previously and felt they had good professional relationships to build on and met regularly. Others reported little to no involvement with the HMIs.

HMICFRS has since strengthened expectations for at least monthly meetings between SLLs and services, and between HMIs and chiefs, to ensure structured and frequent communication.

Independence of HMICFRS

Participants saw the independence of HMICFRS as a strength, and many described having trust in, and being committed to, the independent process. Senior staff reported how improvements in services were helped by the independent power of HMICFRS's voice, as it gave the chief's voice more power and weight. Stakeholders also noted that HMICFRS's independence contributed to public accountability and attention on the report findings and was necessary for national findings to have impact independently of the Home Secretary.

Barriers to improvements in FRSs

Despite the changes that have occurred as a result of FRS inspections, some service participants were disappointed at the lack of action. Some felt their service was reactive to the inspection findings in the short term but failed to maintain longer-term improvements by addressing the inspection findings fully. And senior staff shared reasons for not always acting on inspection findings.

The following barriers to improvements were identified:

- lack of time to act and implement changes;
- lack of acceptance of poor inspection findings;
- not enough sharing of learning in the sector;
- reduced capacity and competing priorities;
- lack of national prioritisation; and
- diminishing returns over time.

Lack of time to act and implement changes

HMICFRS inspects services once per inspection cycle, about every two years. Services felt having more time to act on findings would increase HMICFRS's impact. Stakeholders felt it was too soon to assess the impact of the FRS inspections on the sector as it takes time to act on findings. Senior staff felt some recommendations, for example, those relating to culture, are long-term deliverables and it is difficult to show progress against these in the short term.

Knowledge of an upcoming inspection can also limit impact or prevent timely action to improve. Service participants felt preparation for an inspection was the most time-consuming element; the workforce felt the additional processes were a burden on some individuals or teams. Some senior staff also described considering when to make difficult decisions that could affect their workforce. For example, they might avoid acting before an inspection as they didn't want this to influence their workforce for the duration of the inspection and negatively affect the staff survey results.

Participants felt inspection reports not being timely enough and scheduling changes, such as the order of inspections being changed within the two-year cycle, reduced their time to act. Some senior staff felt there was a lack of support to implement areas for improvement and recommendations from the first inspection cycle through revisits, ahead of the next cycle starting. Inspection staff felt more progress could have been made in some services if there had been a longer gap between inspection cycles. They too felt services needed more time to learn, share and improve based on existing recommendations through revisits before starting a new cycle.

Lack of acceptance of poor inspection findings

Services' initial response to inspection findings was influenced by the outcome of the inspection. The workforce described that when findings were poor, services might experience demotivation and disappointment, which could delay meaningful action. Participants acknowledged it took time to accept, digest and act on the findings. While all senior staff ultimately recognised the value of the inspection report and took partial action, the initial emotional response acted as a barrier to immediate action.

Not enough sharing of learning in the sector

Participants identified limited sharing of learning as a barrier to improvement. Senior staff felt they had to "extract" information from the reports of other services themselves. Services identified that HMICFRS was ideally positioned to consolidate learning across the sector. They felt the inspectorate could do more to bring out good practice and what is working well and share it across the sector more or encourage senior staff to do so.

Participants shared that they wanted more open discussion about thematic findings and national sector trends during engagement events. They mentioned that some issues raised at the service level were felt to be sector-level issues and would be

better actioned at that level. They felt impact was limited because of the differences between services, which made it hard to apply to their service something good that had been done elsewhere.

HMICFRS has since worked to share positive practice, that is highlighted in inspection reports, in other ways:

- Its monitoring system for tracking services' progress in addressing causes of concern, recommendations and areas for improvement is visible to all services.
- It has co-hosted positive practice events for the sector.
- It is supporting the National Fire Chiefs Council positive practice portal.

Reduced capacity and competing priorities

Services reported having an increasing amount of improvement work with limited staff. There are official inquiries, policy departments and other organisations, such as the National Fire Chiefs Council, that also recommend or issue changes in the sector. Senior staff felt they had to balance the demands of HMICFRS inspection findings against other standards, guidance and inquiry recommendations. This limited how much action they could take on each. In addition, stakeholders speculated that senior staff considered inspection findings in isolation, which could distract them from local priorities or lead to an overfocus on achieving a particular grade. Furthermore, reductions in service finances and people were raised as a barrier to improvement. Many senior staff expressed concerns before the 2023−25 inspections, given the economic pressures and industrial unrest in the sector before the inspection cycle.

Lack of national prioritisation

A lack of sector action was attributed to a lack of pressure from the Government at a national level. Although HMICFRS is an inspectorate rather than a regulator, some senior staff wanted HMICFRS to put more pressure on the Government and unions to promote reform in the sector.

Diminishing returns over time

Over time, it was felt repeating the same inspection programme would yield less impact as improvements are made. The workforce felt the sector's response to the first inspection cycle's findings was more substantial and widespread than the response to the findings of the second cycle. Senior staff felt that inspection design should be refocused to ensure continual benefit.

Between inspection cycles, HMICFRS reflects on sector priorities and changes and consults stakeholders on the inspection framework. The ongoing 2025−27 inspection programme has an increased focus on governance, culture and misconduct, and leadership.

Ongoing evaluation work

HMICFRS has already published evaluations of the PEEL, custody and national child protection inspection programmes and the use of remote inspection methods.

HMICFRS monitors progress against all areas for improvement, causes of concern and recommendations it has issued to services via its monitoring portal. Along with this, it used the evaluation findings on how impact is achieved to develop a set of metrics to monitor its own performance, risk and assurance. It regularly reports on these to the HMICFRS board.

Annex A: Evaluation questions

Have the FRS inspections been implemented in the way intended?

Quality of evidence and judgments in inspections

- How does HMICFRS assure sufficient investigation to address all inspection criteria?
- Are all inspection criteria sufficiently investigated?
- Is there sufficient triangulation of evidence?
- Are judgments supported by triangulated evidence?
- How does HMICFRS assure fair and consistent grading and moderation of grading?
- Are graded judgment decisions fair and consistent?

Communication with services

- How does HMICFRS assure reports adequately reflect inspection findings and fulfil their purpose of informing/promoting improvements?
- Are reports informative and constructive?
- Does HMICFRS assure timely, effective and appropriate communication of urgent and non-urgent findings with services?

Supporting staff well-being

- How does HMICFRS consider staff well-being and ensure the inspection process does not have a negative impact on staff well-being?

What outcomes are being achieved as a result of the inspection activities?

- Are changes perceived to have been made in FRSs as a direct result of HMICFRS's inspection?
- How does HMICFRS ensure the inspection process successfully promotes improvements?
- Has HMICFRS maintained successful and appropriate engagement with the sector?
- Does the inspection process successfully identify and inform key persons and the sector of issues and/or good practice?

Annex B: Evaluation methodology – accompanying information

Alternative approaches

The researchers explored impacts from the theory of change that could be measured quantitatively. However, they recognised several other processes contribute to changes in the fire and rescue service (FRS) sector overall. So, focus on the processes the inspectorate has available to it and the perceived impact was felt to be appropriate.

An experimental approach wasn't used due to the lack of an available counterfactual (a scenario where inspection didn't take place) for comparison. Because of inspections potentially highlighting public safety issues, it wouldn't be appropriate for a service to remain uninspected to act as a comparison. Also, at the time of the evaluation design, FRS inspections had been ongoing for several years, meaning a comparison of services post-inspection with the same services pre-inspection wasn't possible.

Evaluation data sources

Inspection evidence database

HMICFRS logs all evidence it collects during inspection in an evidence database. Each piece of evidence is referred to as an evidence entry. The database records information such as which service, inspection framework question and evidence source it relates to; who it was created by; and how important it is considered to be. Around 52,000 entries were analysed from the 2021−22 inspections.

Surveys

Weekly inspection staff well-being survey

HMICFRS inspection staff were surveyed weekly between August and November 2021. The survey included questions on training for, completion of, and time for inspection activity. Staff were also asked what was working well and what needed to improve about the inspection process. The total number of weekly responses for all inspections running at the time ranged between five and nine.

Editors and proofreaders survey

HMICFRS associate editors and proofreaders were surveyed in August 2022. The survey included questions on the appropriateness of the report content and effectiveness of the report writing process including training, scheduling and working with the inspection staff. There were nine responses.

FRS staff survey

All 44 services in England have a staff survey as part of their inspection. The 2021−22 staff surveys happened between February 2021 and July 2022, depending on when the service was being inspected. The survey received a total of 11,486 responses across the cycle. Responses to two questions were considered as part of the evaluation:

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements:

- My service has made positive changes as a result of HMICFRS inspection feedback.
- My service has made negative changes as a result of HMICFRS inspection feedback.

Primary activity recruitment survey

Following the publication of each service's inspection report, the service was invited to complete a survey for the evaluation. The purpose of this survey was to allow people to self-select for further primary activity (such as a focus group). The survey also included questions on the individual's experience of inspection; how they heard about or from HMICFRS; their opinion of their service's report; and their perception of any changes or impact following their service's most recent inspection.

There were 366 responses from the workforce, including operational and non-operational staff, liaison officers and local representatives. There were also 38 responses from senior staff, including chiefs and chairs of the fire and rescue authority (or equivalent).

Focus groups

HMICFRS focus groups

Four focus groups with a total of 20 participants from the FRS portfolio and inspection staff were run online between January and February 2022. One further focus group of analysts from the Insight portfolio was run in August 2022. The groups focused on process and explored:

- inspection scheduling, organisation and logistics including meetings;
- the evidence gathering and report writing processes and materials; and
- opportunities for learning, support and feedback, including staff well-being.

FRS focus groups

Nine focus groups with a total of 30 participants from FRS workforces were run online between May 2022 and February 2023. Groups were scheduled at least one month after the publication of the corresponding services' inspection reports. They included people with similar roles (for example, wholetime firefighters), with each group limited to one person per service. They covered both process and impact and explored:

- how HMICFRS communicated with them and the effectiveness of communication;
- any impacts seen in their service; and
- what their perception of HMICFRS inspection processes was.

Interviews

Twenty-seven interviews with senior staff from the sector were held online between May 2022 and March 2023. Participants included 16 chief fire officers, 3 fire and rescue authority chairs (or equivalent) and 8 stakeholders from other organisations in the sector. Interviews with those in a service were scheduled at least one month after the publication of the service's inspection report. Interviews with stakeholders were held at the end of the 2021−22 inspection cycle. Interviews covered both process and impact and explored:

- their service's experience of being inspected: how it prepared and found the fieldwork processes;
- how HMICFRS engaged with them and the effectiveness of communication;
- the consequences or impacts of inspection: how findings were brought to the service's and the sector's attention, what action the service took in response, what determined service action or how it used the findings; and
- what their perception of HMICFRS inspection processes was.

Observations

Within HMICFRS

Throughout the 2021−22 inspection cycle, researchers observed inspection and FRS portfolio meetings. The aim of these observations was to understand the processes followed and what impact these were having on staff well-being and to receive real-time staff feedback. Observations took place at weekly team meetings, internal end of inspection debriefs and feedback sessions.

With the FRS sector

Throughout the 2021−22 inspection cycle, researchers also observed meetings and engagement events between HMICFRS and the sector. The aim of these observations was to understand how effectively HMICFRS communicated and worked with the sector, and how the sector responded during these meetings and events. They included the annual Chief and Chairs event, and regular external reference and technical advisory group meetings throughout the cycle.

Inspection evidence review

In addition to the observations just described, researchers observed every inspection meeting for a sample of the services as part of the evidence review. They selected services using a random stratified sample, separating them out into groups by their region (Northern, Eastern, Southern and Western). Consideration was then given to the service liaison lead (SLL) for each service, as well as the service's position in the inspection timetable. This was so the sample included services with different SLLs and services inspected at different times during the two-year inspection cycle. Observation notes were later used as part of a document review to follow the journey inspection evidence makes through the inspection process and review how it is triangulated and how graded judgments are formed. Documents reviewed and meetings attended were as follows:

- evidence database entries;
- gap analysis document;
- pre-fieldwork meeting and PowerPoint;
- post-fieldwork meeting and PowerPoint;
- moderation form and moderation meeting;
- cause of concern letter (if applicable);
- action plan; and
- published inspection report.

Other datasets

Other, smaller, internal sources of quantitative data were also analysed:

- inspection reporting line entries
- HMICFRS website metrics and social media statistics
- usage metrics from HMICFRS analytical dashboards.

Analysis methods

Most of the research methods contributed towards answering more than one research question. Analysis from numerous data sources was combined to produce themes, using thematic analysis rather than one method to answer one research question.

Thematic analysis

Transcripts from interviews and focus groups, notes from observations and free text survey responses were independently tagged with a code and quality assured by researchers. These codes were then grouped into emerging themes and sub-themes. Themes were mapped against the research question(s) they were contributing to or answering. Themes and sub-themes were later combined across different research methods and triangulated with quantitative evidence.

Researchers started with an inductive approach; producing new codes and themes as they emerged from the data. As the research progressed, researchers used a deductive approach; using previously determined codes and the research questions to build on themes that had already emerged.

Statistical analysis

The inspection evidence database was analysed using a range of descriptive and statistical techniques. These included the following:

- proportions of total evidence (for example, evidence entered during a particular time period, for a particular evidence source or by a particular person, to allow for comparison between groups);
- positive to negative ratio: dividing the total number of positive entries by the total number of negative entries (for example, calculating the positive to negative ratio by graded judgment to compare sentiment of evidence to sentiment of grade); and
- importance index: quantifying the inspector's assessment of whether the entry is high (3), medium (2) or low (1) importance (for example, calculating the average importance rating of entries by evidence source to identify collection methods that tend to yield evidence of low importance).

Statistical tests were used to look for differences between groups. The statistical test chosen varied according to the data structure and what difference was being explored. They included: ANOVA (Analysis of Variance), Grubbs' outlier test, binomial tests and two-tailed, unpaired t-tests. Where statistically the tests calculated a p-value to be less than alpha = 0.05, researchers concluded that the differences were statistically significant and not due to chance. An alpha value of 0.05 was chosen because it is the standard significance level used in statistics and gives a 5 percent chance of incorrectly concluding that a difference is statistically significant. A statistician carried out the analysis. An independent lead statistician from another HMICFRS team quality assured the methodological choices, analytical assumptions and findings.

Data tables

Figure 2: Number of different evidence sources used to answer each inspection question for each service

Category	Number of evidence database entries
Less than 3 different sources	285
3 or more different sources	2,507

Source: HMICFRS

Figure 3: Ratio of positive evidence to negative evidence per judgment grade

Judgment	Positive to negative evidence ratio
Outstanding	3.8
Good	2.3 (*)
Requires Improvement	1.2 (*)
Inadequate	0.8

Source: HMICFRS

Note: (*) A statistically significant difference was found between the positive to negative evidence ratio for ‘good’ and ‘requires improvement’ grades.

Figure 4: Number of inspection staff (sample size = 65) entering evidence into the evidence database by time of day (day or night)

Number of staff entering evidence during the day (7am to 7pm)	Number of staff entering evidence during the night (7pm to 7am)
65	45

Source: HMICFRS

Figure 5: FRS staff responses to survey question about changes made by their service

Survey question	Respondents agreed	Respondents disagreed
My service has made positive changes as a result of HMICFRS's inspection feedback	8,472	3,014
My service has made negative changes as a result of HMICFRS's inspection feedback	2,452	9,034

Source: 2021−22 inspection cycle staff survey results from HMICFRS

Limitations

There are some limitations to the data sources and analysis carried out that should be noted when interpreting the results.

Participants were explicitly informed that their involvement in evaluation activity had no bearing on judgments or their service's performance, as their service's report was already published. Furthermore, focus groups attendance was carefully considered (role, rank and service). However, there is still a risk that participants gave researchers socially desirable answers to try to show their service in a positive light. This could bias some of the data collected.

Researchers tried to give everyone in the sector the opportunity to be involved in this research. Multiple sources of data over time were used to gain a broad view. However, those who participated in the research were from a self-selecting sample. Those who volunteered for an interview, focus group or survey may not have held views or opinions representative of the whole workforce or sector.

Internal HMICFRS surveys had a small sample size because of the specific subgroups of staff being surveyed. For this reason, researchers put more emphasis on the qualitative findings than the quantitative.

The evidence database and inspection reporting line are administrative data sources. This data wasn't collected for the primary purpose of analysis. Therefore, the quality and completeness of the information is subject to variation.

Annex C: Accessible version of the fire and rescue service theory of change

A theory of change maps inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts.

The theory of change developed for the fire and rescue service (FRS) inspections includes the following elements:

Inputs

There are two groups of inputs identified in the theory of change: resources and FRS methodology.

Resources

- Funds allocated to FRS inspections (staff costs, travel and subsistence)
- Skilled inspection and portfolio staff
- Inspection support staff (for example, communications team, analysis, HR)

FRS methodology

- FRS assessment framework
- Inspection guidance manual
- Inspection products
- Inspection skills training

Activities

HMICFRS conducts a range of activities as part of its FRS inspections.

HMICFRS requests evidence from services

- Documents
- Data
- Staff survey
- Strategic briefing

HMICFRS consolidates evidence

- Identification of key lines of enquiry
- Post final evidence collection including moderation

HMICFRS collects more evidence from fieldwork

- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Reality testing

Outputs

Various outputs are produced as a result of FRS inspections. The inspection outputs are as follows:

Inspection findings shared

- Service hot debrief
- Service liaison lead feedback
- Service report
- National themes in State of Fire and Rescue report

Output metrics

- Graded judgments
- Causes of concern and recommendations
- Areas for improvement (AFIs)
- Promising and innovative practice

Outcomes

The theory of change identifies immediate, medium-term and long-term outcomes.

Immediate outcomes

- Services self-reflect and make changes to prepare for inspection.
- Services are informed of their performance, including where they are performing well and AFIs.
- Services begin to produce action plans for addressing recommendations and AFIs.
- HMICFRS has increased its knowledge of services' performance and awareness of trends across the sector.

Medium-term outcomes

- Services action recommendations.
- Services address AFIs.
- Stakeholders are aware of performance and hold services accountable.

Long-term outcomes

- Services address key recommendations and AFIs.
- HMICFRS observes improvements in performance.
- Inspection findings inform sector policy changes.
- Services learn from and adopt good practice seen in other services.

Impacts

The theory of change outlines the impacts expected from FRS inspections for services, the public and HMICFRS.

Services

- Are effective and efficient
- Have a healthy, skilled and inclusive workforce
- Have a culture of continuous improvement

Members of the public

- Have an improved experience with emergency response services
- Experience less fire-related harm
- Have a stronger trust in services

HMICFRS

- Carries out more effective and trusted inspections that lead to service improvement
- Understands better how to communicate findings and encourage change
- Benefits from an improved profile and credibility

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