

KEYNOTE ADDRESS TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STANDING INTERNATIONAL
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Inspection and self-evaluation – alternative futures.

I would like to start by thanking SICI for the opportunity to give this keynote address to the SICI General Assembly.

It comes at a perfect time for some personal reflection from my point of view. In June, I retired from the role of Chief of the national education improvement agency in my own home nation after a career spanning nearly a quarter of a century in the inspection and education improvement business. Most of that time was spent in Scotland, but I also had the privilege of serving for two years as Chief Inspector for another part of the UK, Wales. Working at that level in two different education systems, I certainly learnt a great deal from experiencing, at first hand, how the development of inspectorates is both enabled and constrained by the wider political and cultural context in which they operate. I also want to argue, however, that influence should cut both ways, and that inspectorates should also work hard to be key players in influencing the national strategies that they operate within.

Picking up on the theme of this year's General Assembly in particular, I want to highlight some diverging trends that I think we have seen emerging internationally in the development of inspection and its relationship to self-evaluation, and to set these trends in the context of the broader national strategies for education improvement in which they exist.

I'll then conclude by sharing some thoughts about what this might mean for the way ahead and link that back to the role of inspectorates in influencing the policy thinking underlying the overall approach to driving improvement in their education system.

One fundamental idea that I want to use as a core theme throughout this talk is the idea that, in order to understand how inspection and self-evaluation have evolved in any nation, state, or any other administrative division with responsibility for its own education policy (I'll henceforth refer to states for convenience) you need to understand the dominant 'theory of change' which underpins thinking about how public service improvement can best be achieved amongst those who hold political and official power in the state concerned.

I think it was Deming, that great guru of quality improvement in the business world, who said that the first question that anyone planning a new change programme should be asked before they start is 'what is your theory of change?'

That 'theory of change' may or may not be very clearly articulated on a day to day basis, and it may or may not be very openly debated or contested in any particular state at any particular point in time, but whether they are very clearly set out or not, a broad set of assumptions and beliefs about how improvement is best generated will, to some extent, be underpinning the development of policy and structures, including the role, if any, for inspection, in every instance.

That influence may well be somewhat loose and incoherent in some cases. In other cases, where national political leaders have clearly articulated their 'theory of change' and translated it directly into a clear national strategy and set of organisational roles and responsibilities for its delivery, it may be very direct indeed.

And of course, you don't have to go too far into history, in many parts of the world, to find a time when national politicians and their policy officials tended not to engage very directly in matters of educational quality improvement.

That's not because there was a complete absence of a 'theory of change' amongst politicians, but rather because the dominant 'theory of change' was essentially based on the principle that the most appropriate way of securing high quality in professional areas like medicine and education was to ensure that there was national provision for good quality training and professional regulation, and then, for the most part, let the profession get on with it.

From a quality management point of view, you could characterise that approach as putting the main focus on ensuring good quality 'inputs', that is well trained teachers, good quality buildings and resources etc., and then working on the basis that good quality processes and outcomes would then naturally follow.

That conventional 'theory of change' came under sustained attack in the post-war period as governments across the world reacted to a growing perception that public services were inefficient and were failing to deliver consistently high quality.

In the 1970s and '80s, and in the '90s when I started my career in the Scottish inspectorate, a new wave of public service improvement policy thinking was setting the pace, certainly in the UK led initially by the Thatcher government, and also in the USA and in many other developed nations across the world.

That meant that Government Ministers and their policy advisors became much more involved in developing policies and strategies designed to drive improvement in accordance with new 'theories of change', and, as they moved to implement these policies and strategies, the role of inspection was often subject to substantial re-design as a result.

The re-shaping of HM Inspectorate into OfSTED in England in 1992 would be one particularly obvious example of such a major change, but in plenty of other nations and states, the functions of inspectorates were also being re-shaped in major ways. In Scotland, for example, the inspectorate was charged with setting up an Audit Unit to collate and publish statistical information on individual schools and the inspectorate moved from national

sampling to a commitment to inspect every individual school on a cyclical basis for a period of time.

Having rejected the idea that just focusing on the 'inputs' and trusting the professionals to deliver was the route to ensuring high quality, the new 'theories of change' which emerged as replacements tended initially to move into more active intervention to prescribe centrally aspects of the key 'processes', such as the curriculum and pedagogy, as well as finding ways of measuring and benchmarking key 'outputs' and 'outcomes'.

Initially, in many states, this led to attempts to standardise key educational processes, for example through highly prescriptive curriculum frameworks. It also led, in some cases, to strong central guidance, in both positive and negative directions, about specific teaching methods – specific methods for teaching reading for example. Governments then naturally looked to their inspectorates to drive compliance with these new levels of national prescription, so close attention to how well schools were implementing these national expectations tended to become a key focus of inspectorates' activities in such circumstances.

But thinking about public services improvement in general, and about system-level strategies for improving education in particular, moved on rapidly in the 1990s and into the 'noughties'. A whole new body of thinking and analysis emerged from government organisations such as the Delivery Unit led by Michael Barber¹ in the UK government, from some academic sources and from influential international bodies such as the OECD and of course the seminal reports published by McKinsey consultants².

On a broad front, the thinking about how best to drive system-wide improvement tended to move away from seeking to centrally prescribe and control the key 'processes' towards new approaches which certainly still focused on ensuring high quality inputs such as teacher quality, but which now also shifted the focus very strongly onto benchmarking schools on

¹ See Barber, M. (2007), *Instruction to Deliver*, Methuen, York.

² e.g. Mourshed, M., Chijioke, C., and Barber, M. (2010) *How the World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better*, McKinsey and company.

key outputs and outcomes. These new approaches were intended to allow schools much more local flexibility about how they go about designing and implementing learning experiences which they believe will result in high quality outcomes being achieved.

In the broader quality improvement literature, this is sometimes referred to as the 'tight/loose' approach, that is 'tight' on the outcomes that service providers are expected to achieve, but 'loose' in terms of giving providers lots of freedom about how they set about achieving those outcomes as efficiently and effectively as possible.

The point about the importance of high quality inputs can be illustrated by the oft-quoted statement from the influential first McKinsey report³ that proposed that 'the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers'. Whilst different education systems may have very different ideas about what teacher quality looks like and exactly how it can best be secured, nonetheless most if not all tend to agree with the principle that it is vitally important.

The point about being 'looser' about processes, that is allowing schools more flexibility over the curriculum and pedagogy, can also be traced directly to the influential McKinsey reports, as well as a range of publications from the OECD and others, where the concept of increasing school 'autonomy' has been promoted strongly as an important feature of successful education systems. Again, as with raising teacher quality, 'autonomy' has been interpreted and operationalised in different ways, reflecting other aspects of the 'theory of change' that is dominant in any particular education system. However, a move away from promoting central prescription of processes is now pretty widespread, with the only exceptions perhaps being in systems which are in an extremely primitive or chaotic state and where the establishment of some basic fundamentals of effective practice is the absolute priority.

³ McKinsey and company (2007) *How the World's Best-performing School Systems Come out on Top*, McKinsey and company.

And then thirdly, also reflecting this 'tight/loose' trend, there was a very clear trend over the last two decades towards an increasing focus on using the measurement of outputs and outcomes to secure improvement. This is illustrated very clearly, of course, by the huge impact now felt internationally by the OECD's PISA study. It has also been reflected in the growth of systems at national level to gather and analyse school-level data on key outcomes, such as test scores and exam results, which can be analysed, benchmarked and used in various ways to help secure improvement. Again, the specific nature of the arrangements through which outcome data and evidence is gathered, and the way they are used, varies dramatically from system to system, depending on the dominant 'theory of change' in the locality, but most education systems do subscribe to a common belief that having some good quality national evidence on key outcomes is an essential component of their overall approach to achieving system-wide improvement.

So, having taken you on a brief historical tour, I want to come right up to date and highlight two current but contrasting 'theories of change' which I believe are being influential in setting the context in which inspection and self-evaluation are developing right now. Both have roots in the broad historical trends I have just described, but they have each developed in very separate ways. Although the influence on policy and practice may not always be simple and straightforward and the theories certainly have 'harder' and 'softer' variants, I believe that the extent to which one rather than the other of these 'theories of change' has become dominant in policy thinking within any particular education system has a deep influence on the role of inspection and inspectorates. Similarly, they have very contrasting implications for the development of self-evaluation and how it interacts with the work of the inspectorate.

The multiple purposes of inspection

But before I do that, let me start by presenting a simple model of the purposes of inspection.

According to this model, inspection tends to serve three main purposes within an education system. Individual inspectorates operate very differently across, within and beyond Europe, so the extent to which any one inspectorate puts effort into fulfilling each of these three purposes varies, depending on the role it is seeking to play in the system.

The first of these purposes is the role of providing public assurance and accountability, which can range from providing the public and parents with reports on individual schools, colleges and other types of education provision, to reports on regional areas or specific themes, through to reports on the performance of the education system across the education system as a whole. The particular value added by a system-level inspectorate is, of course, that it can provide external professional evaluations of the quality of provision which command a high degree of trust as a result of the fact that the inspectorate operates independently of the schools and the organisations that fund and manage them.

The second purpose of inspection in the model involves playing an active role in spreading what is considered to be effective or innovative practice around the system. This could be spreading practice about general education practice such as teaching and learning, or, at a more specific level, inspectorates using their core expertise in quality evaluation to promote the spread of high quality self-evaluation approaches in schools. Again, the extent to which inspectorates pursue this purpose actively can vary widely.

The third purpose in the model is the purpose of informing the development of national policy. In some cases, such as in the post I recently left, the head of the inspectorate is very explicitly ascribed the function of being chief adviser to Ministers on matters of professional education and will draw on the breadth of expertise within the inspectorate to fulfil that function. In practice, however, the depth to which an inspectorate is closely engaged in the policy design and development process can vary very substantially indeed, from inspectors being routinely within the internal circle of discussion and debate at the policy formulation stages, to the chief inspector being seen as almost an external commentator. However, the principle of inspectorates providing a source of evidence and advice that feeds into the policy-making process at some level is generally pretty universal.

Each individual inspectorate has a unique profile in terms of the relative priority given to each of these three purposes, and in terms of the specific activities it has developed to fulfil them. That individual profile has almost certainly been strongly influenced, I believe, by the particular 'theory of change' that holds sway in the education system to which they belong.

So, let me outline the two current and competing 'theories of change' and set out some observations about the ways in which they influence the development of inspection and self-evaluation systems designed to serve them.

The 'market competition' theory of change and its implications for inspection and self-evaluation

The first 'theory of change' can be characterised as the 'market competition' model albeit 'quasi-market competition' might be more accurate given that most of its proponents would readily recognise that public services like education and health are not pure markets in the conventional commercial sense.

The theory goes broadly along these lines, as applied to schools. To drive continuous improvement, you need first to ensure you define clearly the core outcomes that you are expecting schools to deliver. You then need to find reliable ways of regularly measuring the extent to which each provider is delivering these specified outcomes, and put the results into the public domain in an easily accessible and conspicuous manner. Alongside this you need to encourage the growth of a 'market' of highly autonomous schools free to pursue their own approaches to improving their outcomes, and then make it easy for parents and pupils to have a free choice of schools, so that the most successful schools grow and prosper and the less successful schools are highlighted and feel strong pressure to change in order to compete and survive. Even where the likelihood of parents exercising choice and moving their children to another school is very slim, the assumption is that the glare of public transparency on a poorly performing school will result in parental pressure to take action, countering complacency of inertia that might otherwise impede progress.

There are a number of common features associated with the 'market competition' theory of change.

- The weakening or removal of the role of traditional 'middle layers' of government such as local authorities or municipalities, where these exist, as they are seen to be 'local monopolies' and an obstacle to the desired level of autonomy amongst schools.
- Alongside this, the encouragement of the growth a wide variety of new independent education providers, freed up to operate with high degrees of autonomy.
- The de-regulation of entry routes and conditions of service in the teaching profession on the basis that teaching quality will rise if schools have freedom to make their own decisions about hiring and firing and conditions of service and if there are multiple ways through which individuals who might not have applied for conventional teacher training can enter the profession.
- The development of nationally standardised testing and analyses of national qualification results which are used pro-actively to generate and promote 'league tables' and other 'high stakes' comparative analyses of school performance.
- And of course, the active encouragement of parents to exercise choice as consumers amongst the mixed-economy of schools available in their locality, so far as that actually exists.

The application of this broad 'theory of change' to the improvement of education systems, and indeed to other public services, remains a strong trend in many nations and states internationally, with strong political proponents. Whilst modifications to earlier 'harder' versions of strategies based on this model have often been made over time, to help manage or minimise some of the unintended consequences that have come with it, the basic principles of the model can generally still be seen very clearly.

So, what are the implications for the development of inspection and self-evaluation in a state which has adopted fully the 'market competition' theory of change?

I think a number of them are pretty clear.

I should start by saying that, in such a scenario, inspection and inspectorates have a very strong and important role to play, always assuming that the state concerned subscribes to the view that professional inspection reports provide substantial added value to the information that would be available to parents about school performance if they had to rely on data and statistics alone. That's not a given, of course - some states do, of course, rely on data alone to inform a 'market place' of school choice.

The 'market competition' approach provides a relatively clear and sharply focused mission for inspectorates.

With regard to the three purposes of inspection I outlined earlier, I think it means that the public assurance and accountability purpose becomes paramount in the work of the inspectorate. This is especially so, as any 'middle layers' of quality assurance from local authorities of municipalities are unlikely to remain, if indeed they existed before. That places a high premium on the national or state inspectorate being able to provide regular, cyclical inspections of every individual provider to complement the statistical data that will also be made available to the public.

That's vital because the outcomes of inspections provide a key source of information to drive the process of parental choice (whether real or just threatened) that is at the heart of the 'market' model. As the stakes riding on inspection outcomes for school leaders and staff become very high, a context is set in which there is a high risk of the climate in which inspection is undertaken becoming relatively tense, and at times even confrontational. Associated with that, there is likely to be a strong pressure towards standardisation of inspection processes and high levels of 'double banking' and additional evidence collecting to protect inspectors' judgements against challenge.

Also, reflecting the high stakes attached to inspection results, and the regularity with which they expect to be inspected, school leaders will be very focused on anticipating what inspectors will want to see when they visit. Indeed, a healthy market may well grow up for consultants training schools in how to maximise their chances of a good inspection.

Furthermore, the inspectorate's role as regulator, to ensure schools are not competing with each other unfairly or dishonestly in this high-stakes environment, is likely to be much more significant. That means inspectorates need to develop approaches to detecting 'gaming' and other practices which schools or individuals may have deployed to manipulate their outcome measures, for example using discriminatory selection processes for pupils at the entry stage or subtly shifting poorer attaining pupils off the school roll. The 'high stakes' environment heightens the temptation to engage in underhand practices, and inspection will be expected to play an important role as a deterrent to such bad practice, providing some reassurance to the public.

In this scenario where they have a highly regulatory role, inspectorates, in common with other types of market regulators, will naturally, I would suggest, tend to place a particularly high priority on demonstrating their independence, both from government, and from the providers of front-line education services.

That is likely to condition the way in which the inspectorate addresses both of the other two purposes of inspection.

With regard to the purpose of providing advice to inform government policy, the inspectorate is likely to be firmly positioned in a relatively distanced 'arm's length' relationship with government, reflecting the importance placed on publicly demonstrating its independence. As a result, it is less likely to be involved closely in the internal processes of designing and debating new policy ideas. It is more likely to be involved in seeking to influence policy by making external public comment rather than engaging internally in its creation and design.

With regard to the purpose of spreading effective practice across education providers, the inspectorate is not likely to see this as a major part of its role. That responsibility will be seen as lying elsewhere in the system. So, whilst the inspectorate may publish occasional publications to stimulate discussion and showcase effective practice at a more generic national level, it is likely to be particularly careful to ensure individual inspections of schools

operate at an evaluative level and cannot be perceived as drifting into providing advice or development support.

And what of self-evaluation?

In this scenario, self-evaluation may well be encouraged generally in the system, although there will be pressure for it to evolve in particular ways in adaptation to the circumstances created by the 'market competition' theory of change.

A standard format for self-evaluation reporting may well be created and implemented across the system, aligned closely to inspection frameworks, so that parents and others can use this information to easily compare school performance and inspectors can readily cross-check schools' judgements on specific indicators during inspections.

Given the 'high stakes' environment created by the market competition model, I would suggest that a particularly strong tendency is likely to develop for schools to present an unrealistically positive picture in the self-evaluation reports they present to the public and inspectors.

That then naturally results in inspectors treating the self-evaluation reports they receive with a high degree of caution, often finding that they need to challenge and correct an over-positive self-evaluation.

The 'high stakes' market competition 'theory of change' has attracted powerful critiques from a number of prominent commentators, for example from Sahlberg⁴, who has characterised this broad philosophy as the Global Education Reform Movement or 'GERM' movement. Critics argue that using this approach has resulted in a range of adverse consequences which mean it is not appropriate if the aim is to create an education system that generates excellence and equity for all. They suggest that applying this approach tends

⁴ Sahlberg, P. (2011) *Finnish Lessons: What can the World Learn from Educational Change in Finland?*, Teachers' College Press, New York.

to result in a range of negative outcomes including, narrowing of the curriculum as schools focus on high stakes' outcome measures, incoherent networks of school provision, polarisation of performance as successful schools attract staff and pupils away from struggling ones, excessive testing and pressure on pupils and staff, and poorer provision for more vulnerable pupils as some schools seek to improve their league table provision by avoiding pupils they perceive as less likely to attain highly.

The 'collective capacity building' theory of change and its implications for inspection and self-evaluation

In response to those concerns, an alternative 'theory of change' has been developed and increasingly clearly articulated in recent years. This theoretical model could be characterised as the 'collective capacity building' approach to improving education systems and it differs from the 'market competition' approach in a number of important ways.

- It places a much stronger emphasis on education being a 'common societal good', serving the needs of society as a whole as well as giving benefits to individuals, rather than seeing it as primarily a service for individual consumers who will engage with the market for the greatest individual benefit.
- There is a strong emphasis on aligning the system around a broad and comprehensive view of the purposes and aims of education, with a premium on achieving strong stakeholder consensus and buy-in across society.
- There is strong commitment to the state investing systematically in building professional capital of teachers and school leaders, rather than relying on market mechanisms to raise teacher quality and performance.
- An important role is certainly given to data about pupil and school performance, but with the focus primarily on data being generated and used in a wide variety of ways for self-evaluation and improvement within the system, rather than to drive nationally consistent comparative analysis for public consumption.
- There is little interest in promoting parental choice and movement between schools as a deliberate strategy.

- There is a greater readiness to invest trust in schools and professionals.

This theory of change values increased school 'autonomy' to the extent that it looks to teachers and school leaders to take a high level of professional responsibility in designing and delivering curricula that meet their local needs, but it stresses the need for schools to engage in collaborative activity with others, rather than act as competitors, as a key mechanism for driving improvement.

One particularly clear example of this type of approach is provided by the proposals for a 'Fourth Way' of driving public service reform, articulated by Hargreaves and Shirley⁵ and then further developed in Hargreaves and Fullan⁶.

At a crude level, the contrast could be drawn by saying that, whilst the 'market competition' theory of change sees the role of central government as establishing the conditions which allow parents and pupils to act as informed consumers in an appropriately regulated market for schools, and then getting out of the way, the 'collective capacity building' theory sees a more continuing role for government, not through central prescription and compliance control, but by aligning stakeholders around aims and purposes, fostering innovation and evaluation, and investing as a priority in coherent actions to build professional capacity for improvement, at individual level, at school leadership level, and at the level of collaborative networks of schools.

Looked at another way, this 'collective capacity building' approach can be seen as essentially trying to foster a 'learning system', or as I have put it on this diagram a 'virtuous cycle of improvement', through which new learning about how to improve educational practice is continuously generated and spread through the system.

That's a cycle in which schools operate within a clearly understood context of nationally shared aims and goals, but are empowered then to interpret national guidance locally with

⁵ Hargreaves, A. and Shirley, D. (2009), *The Fourth Way*, Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks.

⁶ Hargreaves, A. and Fullan, M. (2012), *Professional Capital*, Teachers' College Press, New York.

a high degree of freedom and flexibility, and to develop new and innovative approaches. The system then operates to ensure that there are multiple forms of evaluation, starting with school evaluation by schools themselves, which generate evidence about the success or otherwise of the wide variety of practice innovations emerging across the system. That intelligence is then fed back to schools and is used to inform their next steps in the improvement cycle.

An improvement cycle of this sort will not just come into place by accident. It requires a national infrastructure to be put in place and maintained if it is to work well.

Firstly, government needs to work to establish strong stakeholder consensus around some core national guidance which sets out a shared set of aims and goals, typically including a framework which sets out core principles, experiences and outcomes which schools are expected to use as a reference point in developing their own local curriculum and pedagogy. This guidance should be outcome-focused, with clarity about core aims and standards but relatively low on prescription about teaching content and process.

Government then also needs to invest in sustained action to ensure that all schools acquire the capacity to confidently grasp and run with the degree of professional responsibility and innovation being expected of them. That means investing to ensure schools all have a high quality professional workforce with strong leadership and a commitment to evidence-based practice – essentially investing in building professional capacity.

Action then needs to be taken to ensure schools have the incentives and skills to engage routinely in high quality self-evaluation and effective management of improvement projects. That includes ensuring schools have access to good data and the skills to use it well, and it is also a clear principle of the ‘collective capacity building’ theory of change, building on recent research evidence, that systematic collaboration between schools can add substantial value to what might be achieved through schools working on their own.

Furthermore, in this model, the government needs to ensure there is a proportionate element of national external evaluation which then generates and draws together evidence

from activity at school and local level, to identify learning of relevance at a system-wide level.

And finally, the learning emerging from within the system needs to be integrated with learning from broader research and international sources, and if the cycle is to work effectively, arrangements need to be established which ensure that the resulting knowledge is processed, packaged and transmitted back to teachers at the front line in an easily and widely accessible manner. If that doesn't happen then the learning system will be incomplete and schools will not be building the next steps in improving their practice on the best analysis of what others have learnt before.

There are also a range of specific risks that can be associated with this 'theory of change', for example the risk that the emphasis on sustaining broad consensus with all stakeholders across the system leads to excessive 'risk aversion' and a lack of variety and innovation, however a number of states are now clearly aligning their improvement strategies with this broad approach, to varying degrees.

So, how might the development of inspection and self-evaluation be influenced by the adoption of a 'collective capacity building' theory of change in their host state?

I would argue that inspection and inspectorates still have a strong role to play in making this type of improvement strategy come to life, but in this case the nature of that role will be quite different from the role of inspectorates within the 'market competition' approach.

Whereas in the 'market competition' context, the public assurance and accountability function was predominant amongst the three purposes of inspection, in this scenario, all three purposes are likely to be given strong focus.

Certainly, the public assurance and accountability function will still be significant. However, as this approach generally places more trust in schools, and the system does not require the inspectorate to provide recent information on every individual school to feed a market of school choice, in this scenario the inspectorate can move away from an approach based on

inspecting every individual school on a rigid cyclical basis, and move more strongly towards what has sometimes been termed an 'intelligent accountability' approach. Such an approach may be based on drawing a nationally representative sample of schools for inspection each year, thereby enabling a degree of national monitoring of trends in performance, and supplementing that with 'risk-based' triggers to ensure schools that are causing concern are also inspected in a timely fashion.

In states where a functional 'middle layer' also exists, this may develop further to a 'three lines of defence' assurance model, to borrow a term from the audit and risk business. In this model, the school reporting to its own parents and governing body forms the first line, the local authorities or municipalities monitoring and intervening to support their own schools forms a second line, and the national inspectorate, through sampling and risk-based triggers, forms the third line.

The ways in which inspections are designed and conducted are also likely to be influenced strongly by the adoption of a 'collective capacity building' approach at state level, reflecting the fact that the inspectorate are likely to see individual inspections as one important mechanism through which it can pursue the second purpose of inspection I outlined earlier, the purpose of spreading effective practice and building professional capacity in schools.

A focus on inspection as capacity building for providers could be reflected in a number of ways:

- A strong emphasis on doing inspection 'with' schools rather than 'to' them, including more negotiation about the agenda for the inspection, with reference to the school's current and recent improvement activities.
- Creating more time for professional dialogue during inspection including the sharing of practice seen elsewhere by inspectors.
- A strong emphasis on routinely involving current leaders from other schools as peer inspectors on inspection teams to promote cross-fertilisation and spread evaluative expertise.

- Inspection reports moving increasingly away from awarding large numbers of finely detailed grades towards giving a more holistic and customised narrative about the school and its improvement journey.

Inspectorates operating in the context of this type of ‘theory of change’ are also, I would suggest, likely to be more engaged in taking active steps to promote and spread expertise, and the most interesting and effective practice they have seen, across the system. Beyond involving peer practitioners in the inspection process, itself, they may well develop strong programmes of activity in providing training and development for school and local authority staff, developing web-based resources showcasing positive or promising practice seen across the system, and publishing toolkits and resources for schools to use in their own self-evaluation and improvement activities.

A closer link with policy development at the centre of government may also result in a strong programme of national thematic inspection activity, closely aligned with nationally-led strategic initiatives in key areas, and designed to both promote effective implementation and provide feedback which can guide the development of the strategy going forward. Indeed, national thematic inspection activity of this sort may be seen as being as important, and possibly even more important, than the routine programme of inspection of individual schools.

And what about self-evaluation?

In the ‘collective capacity building’ model, schools will probably be expected to undertake self-evaluation and improvement activities on a regular basis, but the emphasis may tend to shift to more targeted activity relating to a few key themes determined by the school itself, rather than comprehensive self-assessment and reporting for public accountability or inspection purposes.

Indeed, there should be an increasingly strong focus on helping schools move on from building competence in self-evaluation to building competence in self-improvement. That means that in addition to being good at self-assessments there should be nationally

supported initiatives to help teachers develop the skills and techniques of systematic professional enquiry, often in collaboration with others, with evaluation built into the improvement projects that result.

The emphasis on collaboration between schools to support each other in self-evaluation and improvement is a growing trend in many systems, based on evidence about the value it can add compared to schools simply working on their own. It seems to me much more likely to thrive on a system-wide basis in an environment in which schools are encouraged to embrace a shared, collective accountability for improving young people's outcomes, rather than one in which schools are pitched into competition with each other.

In a system characterised by the 'collective capacity building' approach, there will also be a strong focus on creating a 'rich data' environment, as with the 'market' model, but the range and variety of data may be broader and more varied, ideally going beyond attainment into areas like wellbeing. There will also be much less focus on standardisation and use of the data for public reporting and comparison. The primary purpose of this 'rich data' is seen to be as a tool for schools and their staff to use for self-evaluation and improvement, and to use in ways which encourage open sharing and collaboration with other schools and partners to better understand the issues they are dealing with and how they might best be addressed.

Conclusions

So, let me turn to some brief conclusions from all of this.

I should start by emphasising that the diverging scenarios I have described are presented as stereotypes and are not, as they say in the publishing world, intended to represent any real states or inspectorates, alive or dead! They may appear extreme in order to sharpen the contrast, but I believe many of the specific characteristics described can be seen in various combinations and to varying extents in education systems across the world.

I hope I have made a convincing case for the notion that the future development of inspection and self-evaluation approaches in any particular nation or state will necessarily be strongly influenced by the dominant 'theory of change' which its government subscribes to, whether or not they have very clearly articulated that theory.

If I had to try to sum up the two directions of travel I have described in shorthand, I might describe them with reference to two of the three purposes of inspection I presented earlier on in this talk.

On the one hand, the 'market competition' approach to improvement sees the role of inspection predominantly in terms of the 'public assurance and regulation' purpose, with the role of spreading best practice and building capacity being relatively minor or in some respects totally out of scope. So you might call that 'inspection for assurance and regulation', with the balance weighted strongly in that direction.

On the other hand, the 'collective capacity building' approach sees the role of spreading effective practice and building capacity as a key purpose for inspectors, and the role of providing public assurance and accountability as significant, but not necessarily the dominant purpose. Let's call that 'inspection for capacity building and improvement', with a very differently weighted balance.

Of course, in reality it is not a black or white situation. There are all sorts of shades of grey between the most extreme variants of these models, with the balance more or less extremely weighted on either side. But I do think these contrasting scenarios reflect a genuine divergence of approach that we are seeing acted out internationally and I believe the 'theory of change' underpinning the policy in any particular state, will tend to push the balance pretty firmly in one direction or the other.

Of course, it is not for individual inspectorates to unilaterally determine policy on education improvement in your nations and states. That responsibility quite rightly lies with the elected government of the day.

But going back to the third of the three key purposes of inspection and inspectorates that I set out earlier, providing policy advice to government, I would suggest that doing that effectively is ever more important in the context in which we are now operating. It is vital that inspectorates in general, and chief inspectors in particular, exert a strong influence through providing expert professional advice to Ministers and their officials, based on the best available evidence, as they develop and refine their national policies.

Each inspectorate will engage with their own government and stakeholders, in their own context and in their own ways.

If your advice, and your vision for the development of inspection and self-evaluation, fits well with the theory of change underlying your government's strategy then you are in a very positive place albeit, given the conflicting pressures that come on governments at all times and in all directions, it will still be really important to articulate that clearly and invest strongly in supporting the government to hold a coherent course. I was lucky to be in that position in Scotland where the belief at political level in the 'collective capacity building' approach has allowed the environment to develop in which we even took the bold step of creating a new single improvement agency, bringing the inspection function together, with appropriate firewalls, with a range of other functions designed to provide key elements of a national infrastructure to drive the sort of 'virtuous cycle of improvement' I outlined earlier.

If, in your state or nation, your advice and vision does not sit comfortably well with your present government's theory of change, you have a much harder, but no less important job on your hands.

But one final question I will leave sticking to the wall is this. Do we believe we could or should seek to develop consensus across SICI, in order that the organisation could have a public view on the 'theories of change' which underlie governments' strategies for improving education systems, and which so directly impact on the role of inspection and inspectorates? Or are our views too varied for that to be feasible or appropriate.

A single position or view may well not be appropriate or even desirable, but at the least, I believe SICI should provide a forum in which to debate and explore these sort of issues, with a view to understanding more clearly the implications and the options available to governments and inspection agencies. So, I leave you with that question.

Thank you for listening.

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