

# The unintended consequences of school inspections

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European  
Commission  
funded project



Durham  
University,  
England

# Overview

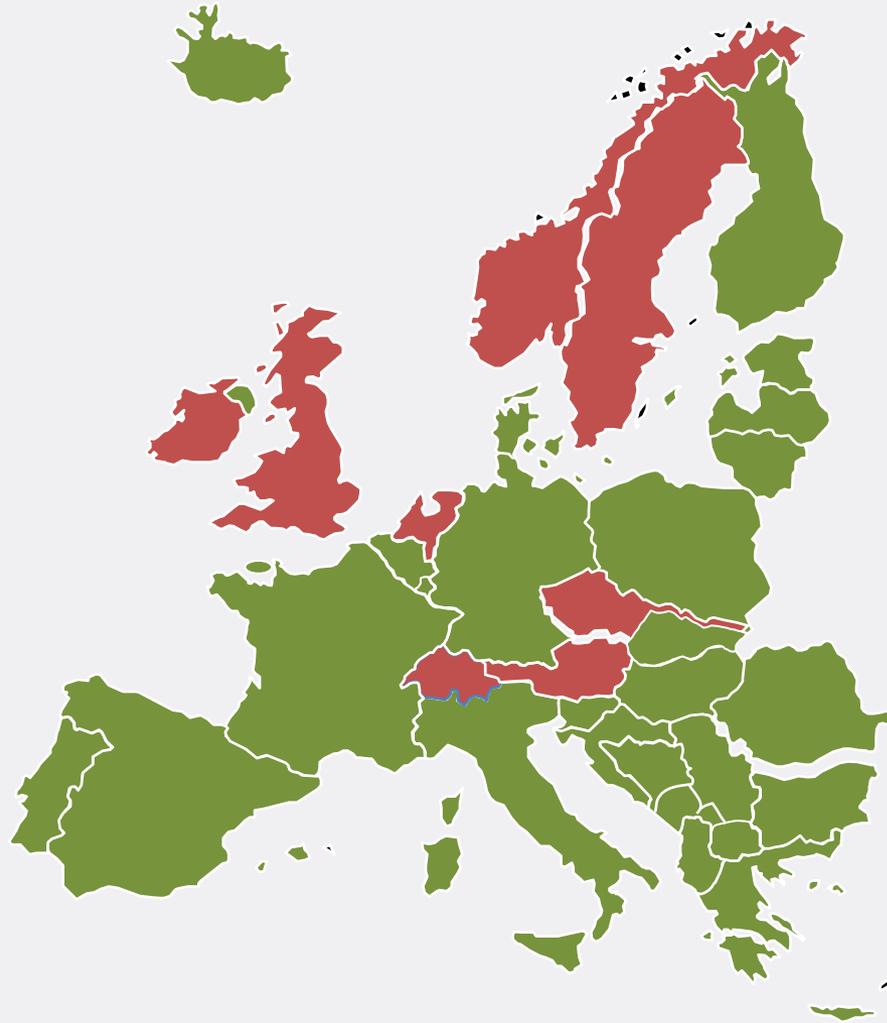
- Context of the paper
- Inspection in Europe (2009/10)
- Background literature and rationale
- Research Questions
- Method/survey instrument
- Results
- Summary
- Hot of the press – teacher survey results

# Context of the paper

- **Part of an EU funded project**
  - “The impact of school inspections on teaching and learning”
- **Rationale:**
  - Empirical evidence limited and inconclusive.
- **Project Aims:**
  1. To measure the effects of school inspection
  2. Discover what aspects of inspections work

# Countries in the project

- Netherlands
- England
- Ireland
- Sweden
- Austria
- Czech Republic
- Switzerland
- Norway



# Inspection in Europe (2009/10)

## Common to all

- Aim for good education
- Use cyclical inspection of all schools
- Use self-evaluation
- Provide feedback

## Differentiated

- Thresholds
- Publication
- Carrots and sticks

# Inspection in Europe (2009/10)

- Thresholds (pass/fail)

Netherlands

England

Czech Republic

Sweden

Ireland

Austria

Switzerland

- Public Reporting

Netherlands

England

Ireland

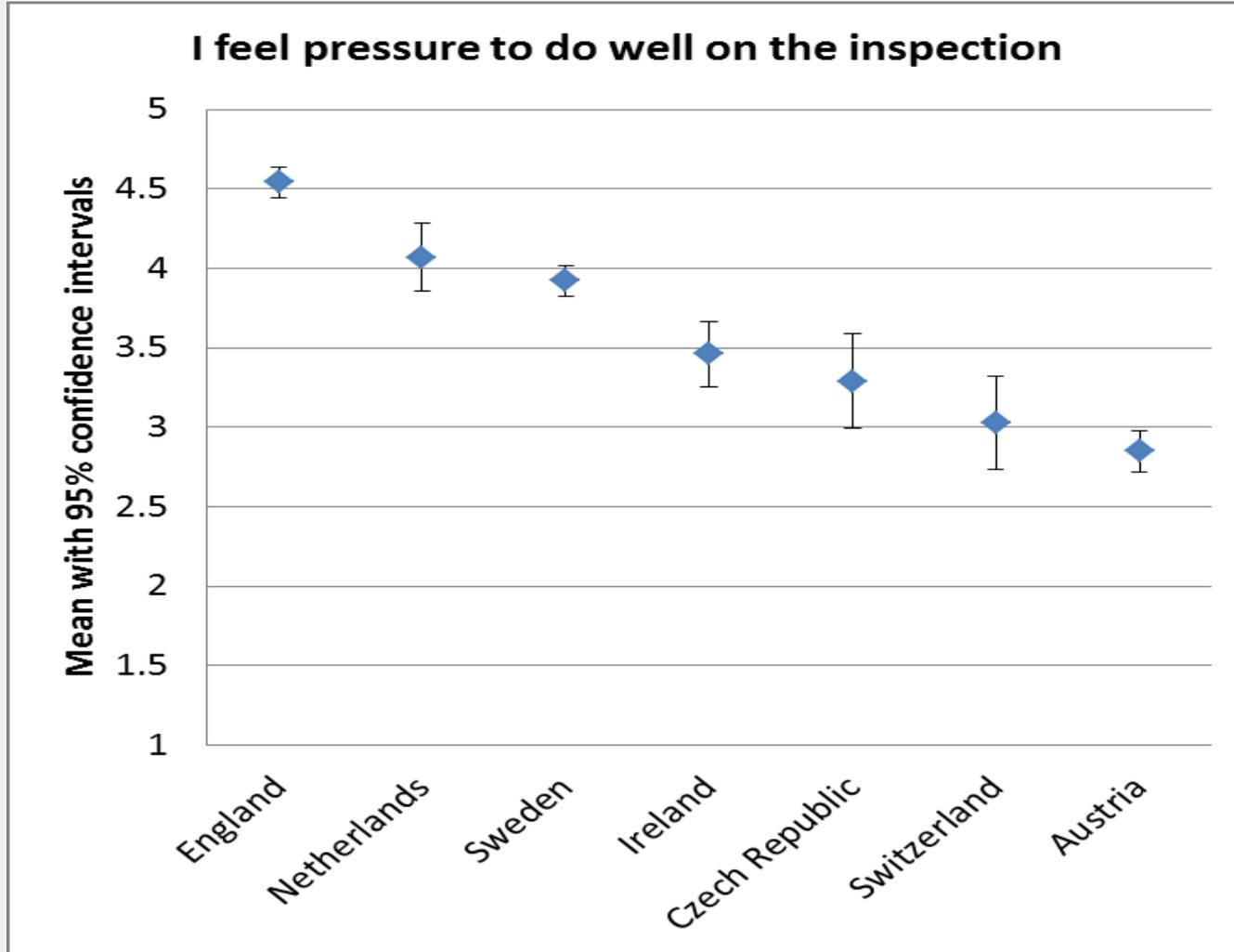
Sweden

Czech Republic

Austria

Switzerland

# Literature: Pressure



Altrichter, H.  
and  
Kemethofer,  
D. (2013)

# Research Questions

- 1. What part does pressure play in precipitating unintended consequences?*

# Literature: Categories of unintended effects

## 1. Intended strategic behaviour / gaming

- window dressing
- misrepresentation
- fraud and deception
- orchestration of peer review
- reshaping the test pool

## 2. Unintended strategic behaviour

- formalisation & proceduralisation
- teaching to the test
- teaching to inspection
- tunnel vision
- indicator fixation
- sub-optimisation
- myopia
- convergence
- ossification
- isomorphism

## 3. Other side effects

- stress
- good schools 'resting on their laurels'
- market effects

*De Wolf & Janssens (2007)*

# Literature: Empirical evidence

## 1. Intended strategic behaviour / gaming

window dressing  
misrepresentation  
fraud and deception  
orchestration of peer review  
reshaping the test pool

England  
Netherlands  
US  
  
US, Netherlands

## 2. Unintended strategic behaviour

formalisation & proceduralisation  
teaching to the test  
teaching to inspection  
tunnel vision  
indicator fixation  
sub-optimisation  
myopia  
convergence  
ossification  
isomorphism

England  
  
  
  
  
  
  
England, US

## 3. Other side effects

stress  
good schools 'resting on their laurels'  
market effects

England

# Research Questions

- 1. What part does pressure play in precipitating unintended consequences?*
- 2. What is the prevalence of unintended consequences of school inspections?*

# Method: survey items

1. I discourage teachers to experiment with new teaching methods that do not fit the scoring rubric of the Inspectorate
2. School inspections have resulted in narrowing curriculum and instructional strategies in my school
3. School inspections have resulted in refocusing curriculum and teaching and learning strategies in my school
4. The latest documents/facts and figures we sent to the Inspectorate present a more positive picture of the quality of our school than how we are really doing
5. Preparation for school inspection is mainly about putting protocols and procedures in writing that are in place in the school and gathering documents and data.

# Sample sizes and response rates

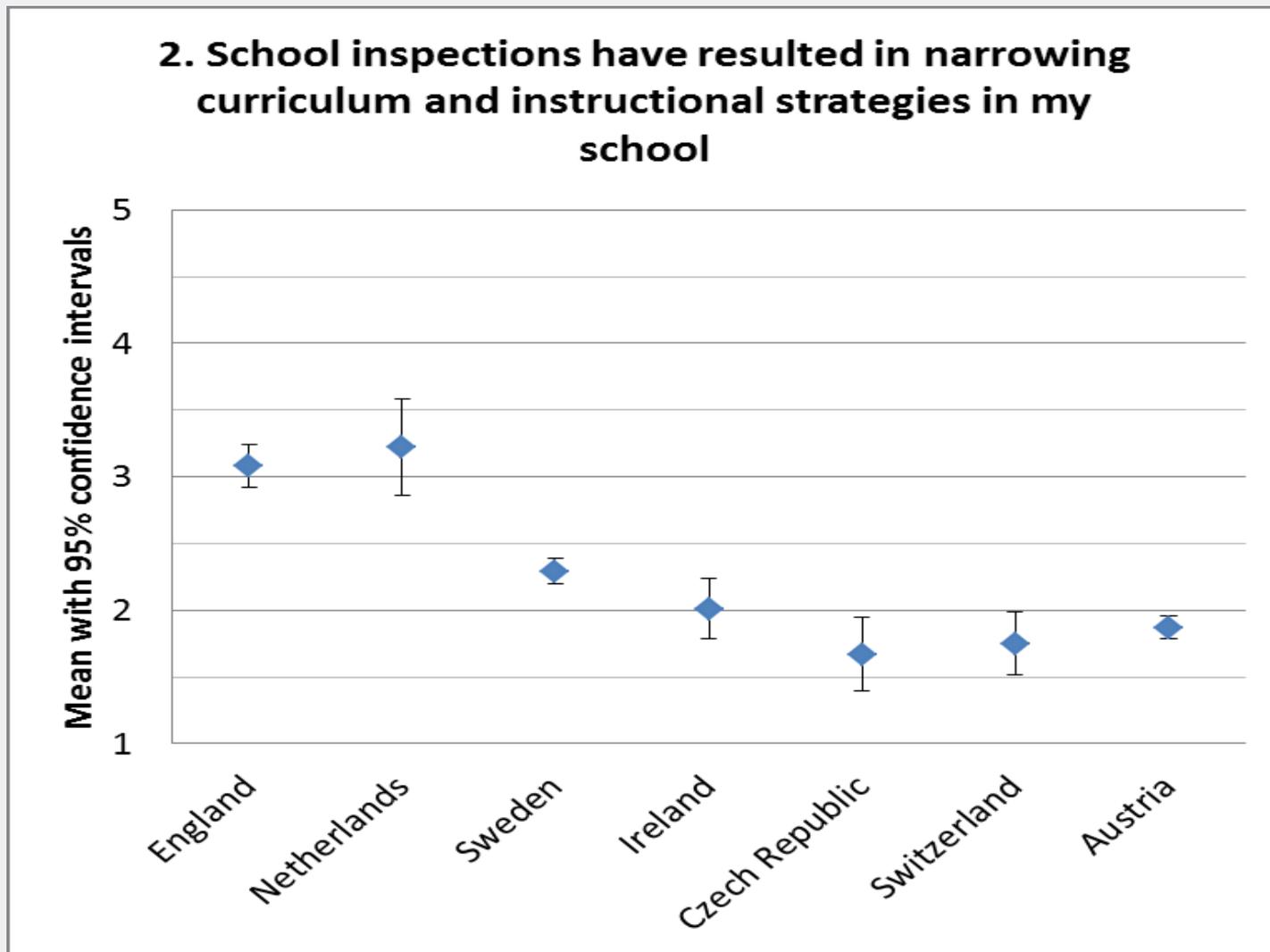
| Country          | Targeted Sample |           | Actual sample - Year 1 (response rate in brackets) |       |           |          |             |
|------------------|-----------------|-----------|--|-------|-----------|----------|-------------|
|                  | Primary         | Secondary | Primary  |       | Secondary | Combined |             |
| Netherlands      | 408             | 359       | 73   | (18%) | 15        | (4%)     | 88          |
| England          | 1422            | 637       | 189  | (13%) | 101       | (16%)    | 290         |
| Sweden           | 1167            | 987       | 567  | (49%) | 464       | (47%)    | 1031        |
| Ireland          | 3200            | 729       | 123  | (4%)  | 42        | (6%)     | 165         |
| Austria (Styria) | 503             | 194       | 345  | (68%) | 149       | (77%)    | 494         |
| Czech republic   | 150             | 170       | 56   | (37%) | 69        | (41%)    | 125         |
| Switzerland      |                 |           |  |       |           |          | 132         |
| <b>Total</b>     |                 |           |  |       |           |          | <b>2325</b> |

# Limitation, threats and mitigation

## Risk of bias from:

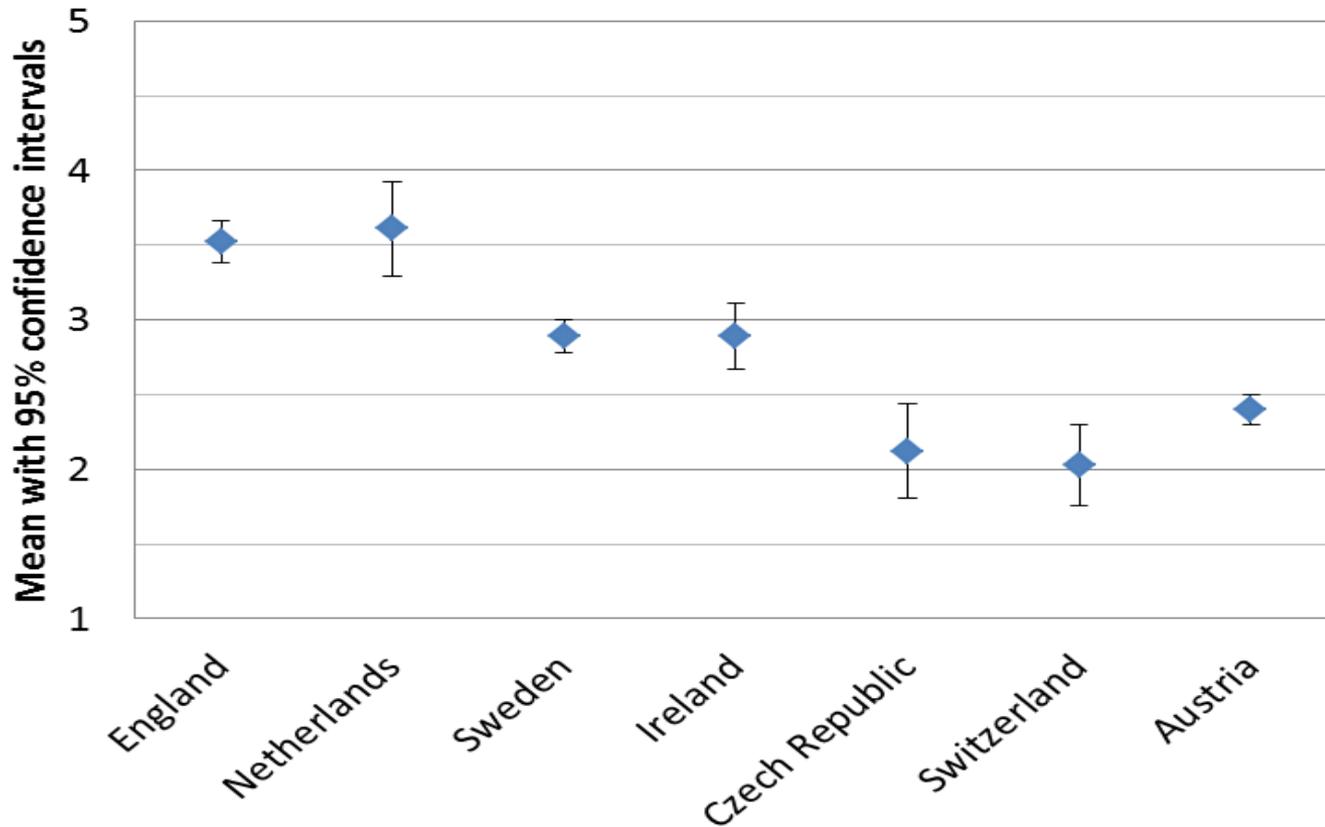
- sampling
- low response rates
- missing data
- wording and translation

# Results

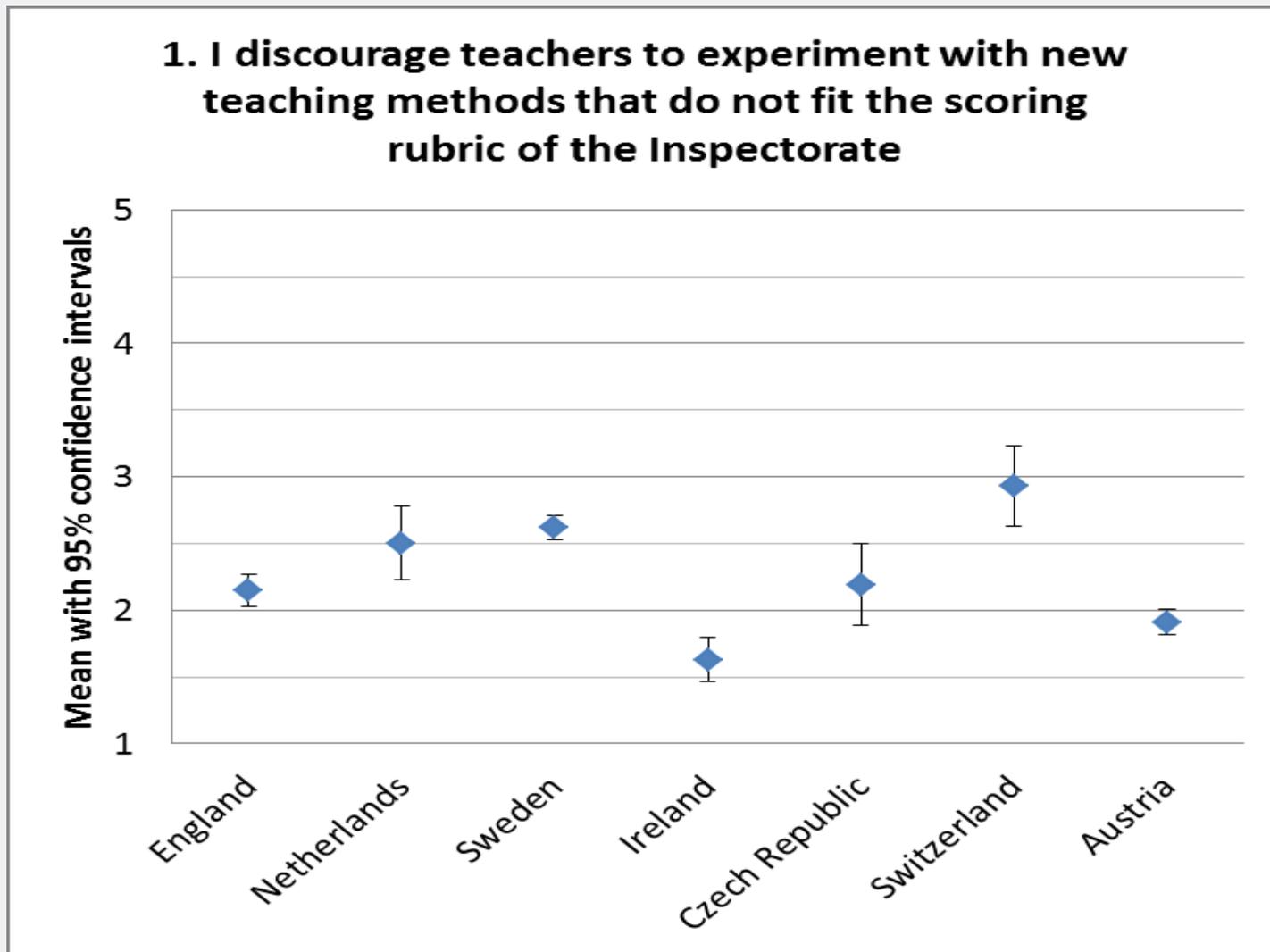


# Results

## 3. School inspections have resulted in refocusing curriculum and teaching and learning strategies in my school

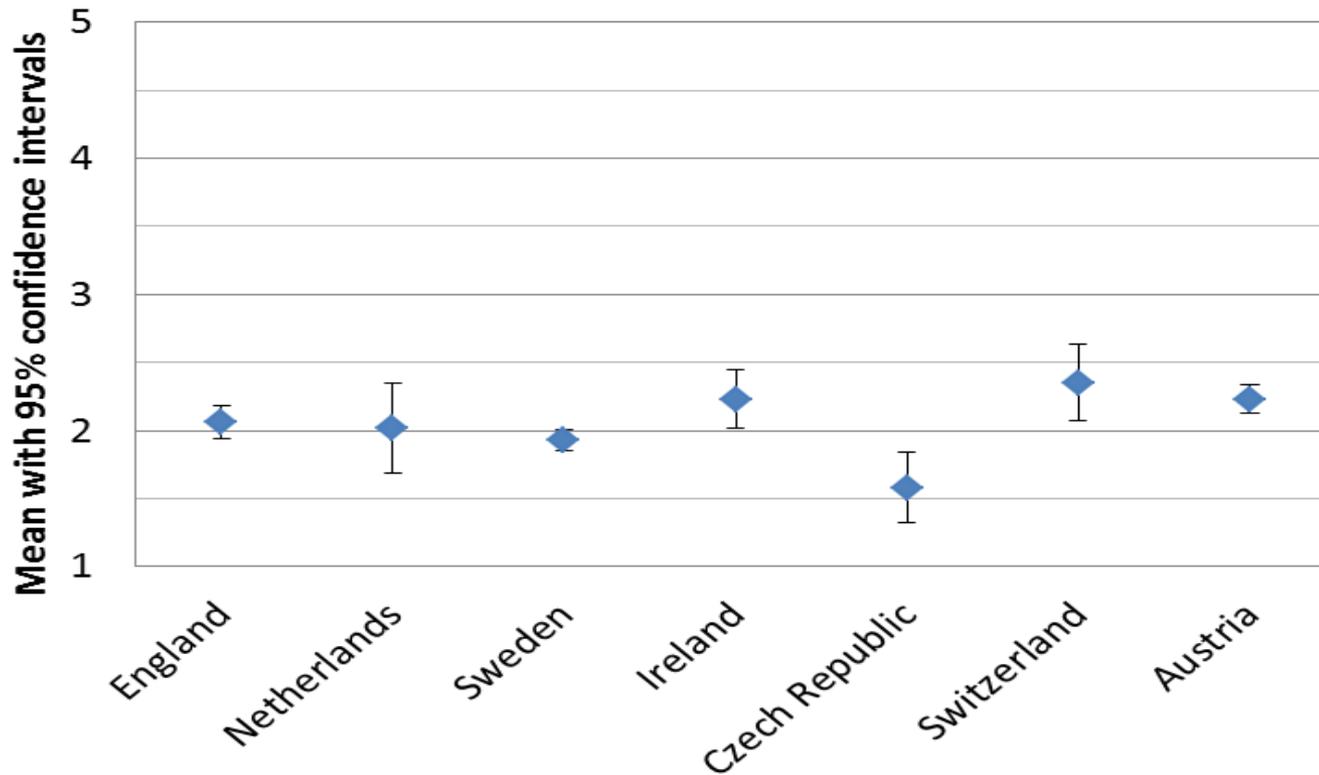


# Results



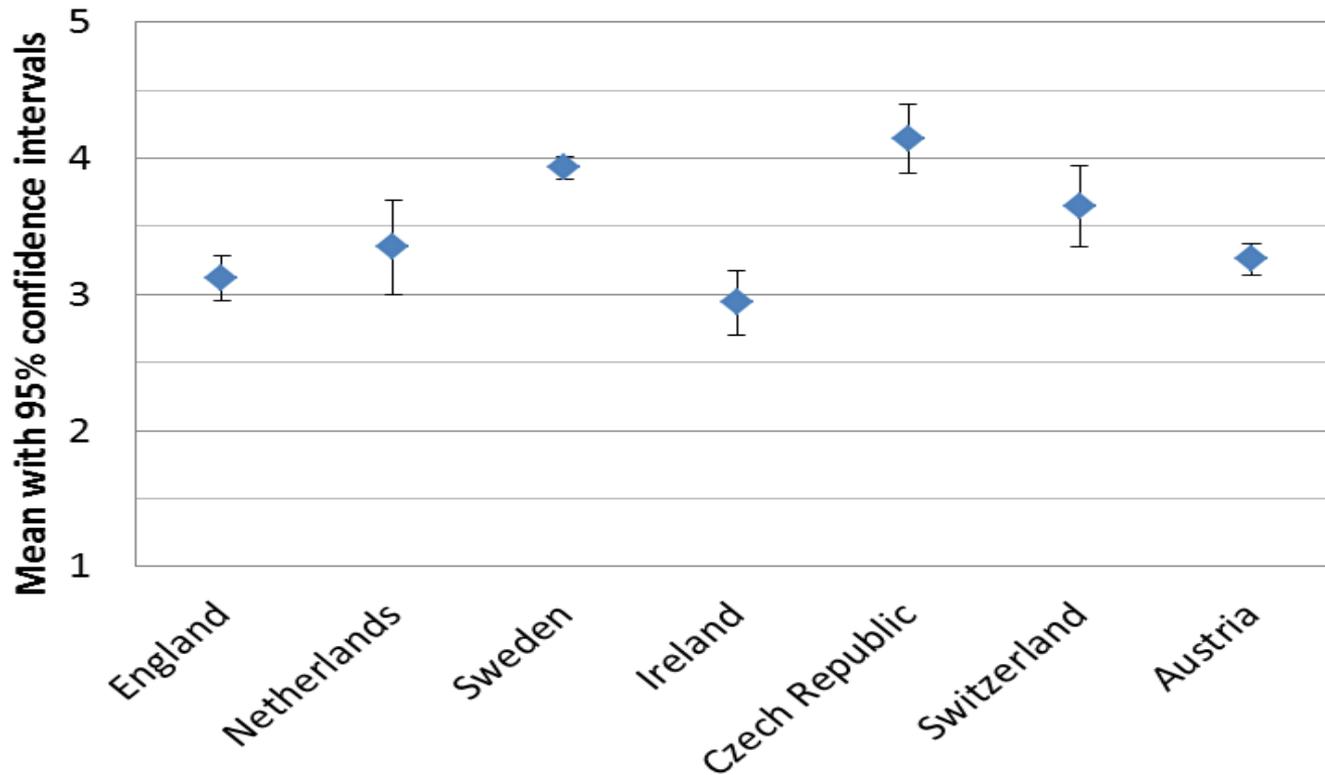
# Results

**4. The latest documents/facts and figures we sent to the Inspectorate present a more positive picture of the quality of our school than how we are really doing**



# Results

**5. Preparation for school inspection is mainly about putting protocols and procedures in writing that are in place in the school and gathering documents and data.**



# Key Findings

| Item  | % positive response<br>(agree/strongly agree) |
|---|---|
| 1.I discourage teachers to experiment with new teaching methods that do not fit the scoring rubric of the Inspectorate  | 10  |
| 2.School inspections have resulted in narrowing curriculum and instructional strategies in my school  | 15  |
| 3.School inspections have resulted in refocusing curriculum and teaching and learning strategies in my school   | 31  |
| 4.The latest documents/facts and figures we sent to the Inspectorate present a more positive picture of the quality of our school then how we are really doing    | 7   |
| 5.Preparation for school inspection is mainly about putting protocols and procedures in writing that are in place in the school and gathering documents and data. | 58  |

# Key Findings

- Pressure is **associated** with narrowing of curriculum and refocussing of instructional strategies
- Some evidence for ossification
- Some evidence for misrepresentation
- Some evidence that inspection focuses on documents and procedures – a “tick box” exercise.

# Hot of the press – teacher survey results

- Teaching to the test
- Teaching to inspection
- Ossification/fear of experimenting
- Narrowing of curriculum/teaching strategies
- Misrepresentation

# Hot of the press – teacher survey result

Teaching to the test

Teaching to inspection

*“29% claim to be teaching test-taking skills almost every day or at least once a week”*

*“10% change their teaching during inspection”*

# Thank you

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- [schoolinspections.eu](http://schoolinspections.eu)

