

## Opening remarks Workshop Edinburgh

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am standing here as representative of the Executive Committee of SICI to say a few words at the beginning of this workshop. I have been asked by Ferry de Rijcke, the SICI chairman, to apologise on his behalf for him not being able to be here. Ferry is part of a group of experts working on OECD reviews of digital learning resources in the Nordic countries and at this moment the visits to Denmark and Norway are taking place. He has assured that he will provide insights in this work on the SICI website.

We have in the past year, as some of you may know, selected a number of topics that are of special interest to SICI members. Among these is the professional development of inspectors. This has always been at the focus of attention for SICI: most of our workshops have contributed to the expertise of inspectors, by sharing experiences, but also through exchanges on new challenges.

Inspection today is at a crossroads in many countries. This is not an isolated phenomenon: the role of inspection is discussed in wider debates on the governance of schools, on the relationships between governments and schools, and on the objectives of learning and schooling in the near and farther future. In our countries the thinking about these topics does not depart from the same starting point and is absolutely not going to lead to identical conclusions.

The dilemmas include the degree of proportionality of inspection, the balance between evaluation and advisory functions, the degree of independence of inspectorates vis á vis the minister of education, and the task of whole-school evaluation as opposed to responsibilities of inspectorates in school staff affairs. Even though these debates are not the subject of this workshop, there is no doubt that they will come up in our discussions and in our exchanges in the corridors. They all have consequences for the professional skills of inspectors, and by their nature these consequences will vary considerably between countries. But we can also identify some common elements that will have impact on all inspectorates.

First of all, education is more in the forefront of public debates than has sometimes been the case in the past. This is good. It means that the contributions of inspectorates will be judged also by their relevance for these public concerns. If there ever was a place for us in any ivory towers: no more.

At the same time inspectorates must ensure that their products and services, their descriptions and analyses are solid, evidence based and intelligent, as well as responding to acute debates. Most people think they know about education and a lot of ill-informed opinions are entered into debates, without any restraint. Inspectors have an important role in bringing evidence, expert analysis and balanced opinions to education debates.

Thirdly, there is a call for 'back to basics' as well as calls for meeting new social and economical challenges. The stress on PISA results seems to lead to a political preference for concentrating on language and arithmetic while at the same time it is obvious that traditional knowledge and skills will not be enough for the society our children will live in. What does this mean for quality assurance and for evaluation of quality is by no means clear.

Finally, the role of inspectorates is not self-evident. There is a lot of competition on the evaluation market, so to speak. Inspectorates will have to make good use of our unique selling point: inspectors are the only evaluators, who base their assessments on direct and intensive observation of what is happening in schools every day, in classrooms, and on face-to-face interviews with those involved.

We are looking forward to a number of workshops in the near future that address topics we find on our paths:

Our Czech colleagues invite us to Prague in September for a workshop on ICT as a tool for inspectorates.

In the same month, the results of the P2V project: a set of tested tools to assess ICT-developments in schools, will be presented in Brussels, organised by the Dutch inspectorate together with European SchoolNet and the European Commission.

In November we will have a workshop by our French colleagues on developments in governance and the consequences for inspection.

The General Assembly in October will also look into this, and into strategic options for inspectorates.

I want to thank the Scots on behalf of all of us here present, and on behalf of SICI for organising this workshop, and for being such active members of SICI. The programme looks excellent. It is now up to us to be excellent as well.

Let's roll!