

SICI

The Standing International
Conference of **Inspectorates**
Better Inspection, Better Learning



The Bratislava Memorandum on Inspection and Innovation

The Standing International Conference of Inspectorates

Edinburgh – July 2013



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Preface

I am delighted to present the Bratislava Memorandum on Inspection and Innovation. The Memorandum is one result of considerable discussion, debate and sharing of ideas among SICI members over a two-year period, culminating in the SICI Workshop in Bratislava in June 2013, at which the key aspects of the issues were debated and summarised. On behalf of the SICI Executive Committee, I would like to express our gratitude to Professor Graham Donaldson, former SICI President, who was given the unenviable task of translating our deliberations into a coherent and useful paper.

As I indicated at the SICI General Assembly in Edinburgh in October 2013, when the Memorandum was adopted by you the membership, its publication might be seen as ‘the end of the beginning’ – not an end in itself but a platform to stimulate further debate and activity. It constitutes an information paper for members for internal discussions, a source of arguments which can be presented in discussions with others in members’ individual contexts and a reference point for SICI in its contacts with other agencies and organisations. Where necessary, support will be offered to those of you who wish to translate the Memorandum into your own language.

The Memorandum is not a SICI program to be fulfilled by the members. It summarizes a long discussion process, collects ideas and offers possibilities for argumentation. If and how it is adopted in the individual inspectorate is up to each of the members and depends on each member's individual circumstances, role and task in their country's educational system.

SICI hopes that the Memorandum will be of use to members in a broad variety of ways and according to each member’s unique circumstances. Therefore, in addition to this preface and the Memorandum itself, at the end of this document we give some explanations and report some of the central remarks of members out of the adoption process on the GA in Edinburgh which give some hints of how the Memorandum might be used.

The adoption of the Memorandum means that I and other members of the SICI Executive Committee will continue to promote it in as many ways as possible and will ask you for information on how you may be using it.

Wulf Homeier
SICI President



The Standing International Conference of Inspectorates

The Memorandum on Inspection and Innovation

Introduction

The Standing International Conference of Inspectorates (SICI) came into being in 1995 and represents 33 education inspectorates and evaluation bodies from across Europe. It provides support to its members through conferences, workshops and projects and provides a forum for the discussion of educational policy with a particular focus on inspection and evaluation.

One of the key issues concerning members has been to determine the ways in which inspection might develop as the need for education systems and schools to improve and innovate has become central to the educational policy of governments across the world. Of course, innovation is not an end in itself and doing different things or doing things differently are not automatically beneficial. Schools and even education systems can adopt innovative projects, often attracted by commercial forces, without first testing the significance of the gains which, it is claimed, would result for young people.

The terms 'innovation', 'improvement' and 'change' can sometimes be used interchangeably. What is meant by innovation may be different for policy makers, local managers, schools and teachers. Schools are always in a process of adaptation as they develop new approaches to learning and teaching and respond to the changing needs of their pupils. Increasingly, external developments, in for example society and in technology, are creating pressure for more radical change. Inspection, across Europe and beyond, is focusing increasingly on the promotion of continuous improvement but it can also help schools and education systems more generally to consider the need for, and the implications of, more fundamental change.

These deliberations culminated in a major workshop in Bratislava in June 2013 which led to the development of a memorandum outlining SICI's views on this vital topic. The 'Bratislava Memorandum' puts forward 10 propositions on the theme of inspection and innovation. It seeks to make a direct contribution to education policy and practice as the drive to improve the quality of education gathers momentum. By putting education and inspection in a broader perspective it is hoped that the Memorandum can make a direct contribution to education policy and stimulate inspectorates to reflect upon and, if needed, change their own practice. For SICI itself, the purpose of the Memorandum is to provide a platform for planning future activities in the organisation and to act as a support to members in developing and strengthening their inspection systems.

Propositions

1. Inspection, which has been a strong feature of educational practice for over two centuries, has in recent years become more prominent and now occupies a central position in education systems in many European countries and beyond.
2. The purposes and nature of inspection are generally to act as a quality evaluator, as a quality assurer and as an agent of accountability. Specific arrangements are rooted in the culture and traditions of individual countries and have conventionally included contributions to the effective delivery of educational policy sometimes as direct enforcers of that policy or, more commonly, by using evaluation to give assurance and to help steer changes in the policy itself.
3. An essential feature of inspection is its direct focus on evidence of learning and on the need for teaching of the highest quality.
4. Important trends in inspection are emerging, partly in response to the tendency towards the internationalisation of education policy. These trends have emphasised the need for inspectorates to be agile and have led to a stronger focus on risk and proportionality. As a result, there has been a tendency towards strengthening the catalytic and capacity-building contributions of inspection at both school and system level.
5. Inspection must not take the responsibility for achieving high quality away from schools themselves. Self-evaluation leading to improvement rather than passive compliance with an externally determined agenda is central to sustained enhancement in the quality of students' learning.
6. As the need for greater flexibility and innovation in education systems has become central to educational policy, inspection needs to achieve a balance between its traditional roles and helping to stimulate well-founded innovation. Inspection itself must be flexible and innovative as it meets the challenges of the changing educational context.
7. The ways in which inspection can support innovation in education will be circumscribed by policy and practice within individual countries. Inspection will always be only one element in a complex process. However, irrespective of such constraints, its influence can be profound, particularly in its potential to challenge thinking, evaluate impact, and stimulate improvement.
8. The relationship between inspection and innovation can be complex. Innovation will only be successful if it is embraced by teachers and the strong focus of inspection on classroom practice can both highlight and illuminate the impact of innovation on learning.
9. The image of inspection should be positive and constructive; media representation of its impact is often unbalanced, highlighting negative findings and casting inspection in an exclusively 'watchdog' role. The potential positive impact of inspection will best be realised when inspectors have high professional credibility and their role is fully understood.
10. Governments should ensure that the potential of inspection to make a major beneficial contribution to innovation is built into improvement and innovation strategies from the outset.

Background

Inspection has been an important and established part of the education systems of many European countries stretching back at least to the start of the nineteenth century. The precise nature and purpose of inspection inevitably reflects the traditions and policies of each country and changes over time. For some inspectorates, the main purpose is to ensure compliance with legal and policy requirements, while others are more explicitly directed towards improvement and capacity building. The prime focus of the inspection process also varies. Sometimes the teacher is the key actor, while others adopt approaches which centre on the school and its overall effectiveness. In recent years, partly as a reflection of the emergence of international comparative performance data such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) assessments, there has been a growth in inspection activity and a re-examination of the role which inspection can and should play in raising quality and standards of achievement.

These developments in inspection should be seen in the context of transformational changes in economies, societies and global relationships partly driven by technological innovation on an unprecedented scale. The OECD publication, *Trends Shaping Education 2013*¹, helpfully examines the forces which are shaping twenty-first century economies and societies and which also pose significant and sustained challenges for school education. Technological advances are changing fundamentally the nature of both work and leisure and contributing to societal shifts already affected by migration and demographic change. The skills required of the twenty-first century workforce are changing and increasingly associated with the creative use of technology. Far from being immune to such forces, education lies at the heart of any response to this challenging context. Twenty-first century teachers must help to equip future generations to thrive in an environment of fast, continuous and fundamental change and must themselves capitalise on potentially far-reaching implications for teaching and learning.

At the same time, across the world, there has been a growing acceptance of the importance of school education for individual and collective wellbeing, social cohesion and economic success. The politics of education have moved centre stage and many governments now promote innovation in education in pursuit of competitive advantage and to better meet the twenty-first century needs and challenges of their citizens.

Trends shaping education

"Countries throughout the world...are engulfed in rapid economic and social change. Everywhere, education is seen as the main way of enabling individuals and nations alike to meet these changes".² This quotation from the English National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education

¹ Trends Shaping Education OECD 2013

² 'All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education', DfEE, 2000



chaired by Sir Ken Robinson highlights the extent to which education is inextricably linked to changes in the economy and in wider society.

The nature and extent of these changes have been well documented in the OECD's publication, 'Trends Shaping Education 2013'³. It identifies five areas where wider social, economic and technological changes have direct relevance for education: globalisation, technology, skills and work, societies and the family.

Globalisation is giving rise to new and growing expectations of education policy and of schools. Broader, deeper and faster connections across countries and continents are leading to both increasing interdependence and greater competition. The skills required to compete in such environments are different in kind and require faster responses as demands change at an ever increasing pace. "Skills have become the global currency of twenty-first century economies. Without sufficient investment in skills, people languish on the margins of society, technological progress does not translate into productivity growth, and countries can no longer compete in an increasingly knowledge-based global economy. As transport prices have fallen and trade barriers are lifted, a substantial share of the production of basic goods has been taken over by developing countries with lower wage costs. This has tended to drive OECD countries seeking to maintain their competitive edge towards the production of good and services that require high levels of knowledge and skill, creativity and innovation."⁴

Developments in information and communications technology (ICT) are having a profound effect on all areas of twenty-first century life. The world is connected in ways which can both empower and threaten individuals. Social networking is transforming daily life, enhanced by the increasing and pervasive influence of portable devices. Such developments pose challenges for traditional models of schooling and of the capacity of teachers to respond to fast-changing demands on their expertise. That in turn raises issues about what kinds of teachers are needed and equal access to learning opportunities, as well as major issues associated with digital safety.

Patterns of migration are leading to greater ethnic and cultural diversity in national populations, raising difficult issues relating to educational opportunity. Political and ethical questions pose challenges for twenty-first century citizens such as those posed by environmental change as weather patterns shift and pollution crosses national boundaries. Instrumental pressures associated with economic and employment imperatives must be balanced against the wider social and cultural purposes of education.

The shifting demographic balance in many populations is changing as people live longer and birth rates fall. Ageing populations bring new challenges in terms of increasing dependency, particularly health related, and reducing tax revenues and consequent inter-generational competition for resources. In addition, the importance of social background in shaping attainment remains powerful and pervasive.

³ OECD op cit

⁴ OECD op cit



As the OECD publication makes clear, these trends, individually and collectively, have profound implications for education and education in turn impacts on the trends themselves. Yet the OECD reported in 2008 that schools had not changed significantly.

“..many of today’s schools have not caught up as they continue to operate as they did in the earlier decades of the 20th Century. How can learning within and outside schools be reconfigured in environments that foster the deeper knowledge and skills so crucial in our new century? To succeed in this is not only important for a successful economy, but also for effective cultural and social participation and for citizens to live fulfilling lives.”

Changing Policy Agenda

At the same time there has been a significant growth in the impact of comparative international performance (e. g. PISA, PIRLS, TIMMS) on education policy. The results of these studies have challenged assumptions about relative educational performance and provided new policy insights or even direct policy borrowing as countries sought to learn from practice in the most successful countries.

Against this background of increasingly powerful forces shaping education policy across the world, governments have become significantly more active in finding ways to influence school systems. The last 50 years have seen increasing efforts to improve the quality of education and raise the attainments of young people. The emphasis has shifted from an assumption that more investment in education would be self-evidently positive to a focus on ensuring improved outcomes for young people and increased attention to quality and equity. Much of the effort has been devoted to identifying good or best practice and to promoting its widespread adoption. Increased school effectiveness has been the goal. However, more recently, established assumptions about the governance and practice of schooling have themselves been challenged and the emphasis has shifted to more radical attempts to innovate. Innovation is increasingly seen as essential to achieving the kind of education which the new twenty-first century economic and social environment is thought to require.

Three broad and overlapping policy approaches have emerged. First, an increased emphasis on improved management, leading to an emphasis on effectiveness, planning, self evaluation, value for money (vfm), and various forms of measurement, audit and control. Second, what is sometimes referred to as ‘New Public Sector Management’, leading to a move from focus on inputs and process to outcomes, greater diversity of schools, subsidiarity, devolution of decision making and an emphasis on accountability to stakeholders. And third, greater competition between schools, leading to demand-led responsiveness, strengthened ‘customer voice’ and explicit marketisation, creating an impetus to improve partly through an existential threat to the school itself.

Recent attention has moved from attempts to influence education from the outside to an understanding that if “...the quality of education cannot exceed the quality of its teachers...” (McKinsey 2007)⁵ then deep and sustained educational change will to a significant extent depend on how far teachers are themselves engaged in the change process and have the necessary capacity to make it happen. ‘Teachers Matter’⁶, a 2005 report from the OECD, drew together a wide body of research evidence which suggested that teacher quality was one of the most significant factors

⁵ World’s Best Performing Education Systems, McKinsey Corporation 2007

⁶ Teachers Matter, OECD 2005



affecting successful student learning and this represents the policy direction most likely to lead to substantial gains in school performance. Similarly, in 2007 the McKinsey Corporation published a highly influential report⁷ which reinforced the centrality of teacher quality in the world's best performing school systems. It claimed that, over three years, learning with a high-performing teacher instead of a low-performing teacher can make a 53 percentile difference in student achievement. That report memorably concluded that the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers.

The OECD, together with Education International, has now held three international summits on the teaching profession; the most recent being held in Amsterdam in April 2013. These summits are all predicated on the assumption that the key to high quality education lies in high quality teachers. Similarly, a European Commission Staff Working Document⁸ included amongst its conclusions the following two statements:

“The teaching professions now face rapidly changing demands, which require a new set of competences.”

“Europe’s teaching professions have an exceptional impact on education”.

The evidence and argument above emphasises the centrality of high quality teaching to successful learning and that sustained and positive change will require the active engagement of teachers. It also suggests that the nature of the challenges facing education will require skilled and well-educated teachers who continue to grow and develop professionally throughout their careers.

Implications for Inspection

The international policy agenda seems to be focusing increasingly on innovation and on ways of influencing classroom practice more directly. Inspection has traditionally been seen as one of the ways in which governments influence or even control what is happening in schools. How far does this new emphasis on innovation and on the gatekeeping role of the teacher have significant implications for inspection itself?

The 2010 McKinsey Report, “How the World’s Most Improved Systems Keep Getting Better”⁹ suggests that different clusters of interventions are appropriate for different stages in improvement. Thus the move from poor to fair, fair to good, good to great, and great to excellent all require different types of intervention to secure progress. The report talks about a move from prescribing improvement to unleashing greatness. McKinsey believes that inspection should take on different forms and purposes according to the existing characteristics and performance of an education system. Essentially, the move for external inspection is from being an agent of compliance and driver of improvement through to being more of a partner with the school and a knowledge broker or mobiliser in the quest for innovative ways of meeting twenty-first century needs.

⁷McKinsey Corporation 2007 op cit

⁸ Supporting the Teaching Profession for Better Learning Outcomes, EU Commission 2012

⁹ How the World’s Most Improved Systems Keep Getting Better, McKinsey Corporation 2009



In a similar vein, a paper presented to the SICI General Assembly in 2009¹⁰ talked about the plasticity of inspection. Inspection is often associated in the public mind with a rather narrow set of activities which involve notions of compliance and audit. In fact, it is a very plastic concept which takes and has taken many forms and which can serve many different purposes. What is the range of the potential contributions of inspection to education policy?

- ▶ **Enforcer.** In contexts where expectations of schools are explicit and enshrined in laws, regulations or detailed policies, then inspection can be used to promote compliance with such expectations.
- ▶ **Assurer.** Inspection can and should provide assurance that the ways in which the intentions of public policy and associated resources are being put into practice meet expectations. That simple idea begs many questions and can range from compliance with defined standards through assessments of the competence of individuals to more subtle ways in which expectations are realised in practice.
- ▶ **Mitigator of risk.** An increasingly common role for inspection is as a mitigator of risk. The definition of risk can vary from those associated with serious service failure, such as in child protection services, through to wider interpretations of underperformance in relation to potential or aspirational goals – the risk of complacency.
- ▶ **Catalyst.** Inspection is often seen as something which injects energy into a situation which, left to itself, would remain static or unwilling to change. Sometimes this may take the form as inspection as a kind of ‘cattle prod’ or, more positively, as a source of inspiration or awakening.
- ▶ **Knowledge broker.** Inspection can bring wider perspectives to bear, drawing on experience from having evaluated many different settings and approaches and introducing fresh insights from research or scholarship.
- ▶ **Capacity builder.** An emerging role for inspection relates to its ability to build capacity by: modelling processes of evaluation which will endure beyond the period of the inspection itself; helping to establish improved ways of working through professional dialogue which takes place within inspection activity; and by identifying and publicising examples of good practice from which others can learn and so improve their practice.
- ▶ **Partnership builder.** Inspection, by explicitly looking outwards, can help to open perspectives towards working with parents or other services and help to establish new and more integrated ways of working with stakeholders and across professional boundaries.
- ▶ **Agenda setter.** By focusing on impact and outcomes and identifying areas where improvement is needed, inspection can contribute directly to policy formulation at the establishment, local area and national levels. That may relate to questions of resource provision or use through to more fundamental debates about strategic direction.
- ▶ **Preserver/creator of the space for innovation.** One of the main inhibitors of innovation can be the concerns which parents or education managers might have about ‘experimentation’ with young people. Inspection can help to create the space for a school to innovate by building confidence that the approach is well managed and potentially beneficial.

¹⁰The strategic role that inspection can play in delivering better public education, SICI Dublin Paper, Donaldson 2009



The above list is not comprehensive, nor are the contributions which it identifies mutually exclusive. Many inspectorates would seek to contribute to all or most of them in some way. At the same time inspection can be seen as an inhibitor of innovation, giving approval to what it values and taking responsibility for determining how to ensure quality and relevance away from the school. Too often, debate focuses on the specifics of what inspectors are perceived to do rather than on how inspection fits within the 'gestalt' of public policy and practice. At its heart is the fact that, as Malcolm Sparrow¹¹ has pointed out, inspection operates in that area of state activity which is about imposing obligations rather than delivering services. That is, inspection concerns itself, either implicitly or explicitly, with requiring deliverers of services or citizens themselves to conform to certain expectations. Because of this, inspection will always have to overcome a degree of scepticism or even resistance. Its authority must therefore derive not just from its own credibility and from doing what it has traditionally done, but from wider political support. Its activities may well give rise to opposition or controversy and all inspectorates have to be very conscious of the need to operate within a clear authorising environment.

Given a background of economic restriction allied to continuing pressure for educational and wider public service reform, what are the implications for inspectorates and inspection?

A key question lies in the extent to which inspection might itself be seen as a luxury which consumes, either directly or indirectly, resources which might be better devoted to front-line services. In a very constrained resource environment, it is inevitable and appropriate that hard questions should be asked about the opportunity cost of inspection. That means that inspectorates must be very clear about their purposes, sparing in their use of resources and rigorous in measuring their impact. Learning from what makes the greatest impact on outcomes for learners and focusing attention on key dependencies are likely to be central to the way that inspection can add value in the future.

More specifically, the following features seem to characterise effective inspection.

- ▶ **Clarity about governance and the nature of independence.** Governance arrangements for inspection can and do vary widely in line with the nature of particular education systems. The extent to which inspectorates are or are perceived to be independent needs to be established clearly. Arrangements relating to distance from government, transparency of criteria and impartiality in judgement need to be clear. Similarly, the ways in which 'producer capture' arising from closeness to the education community can be avoided should also be explicit.
- ▶ **Having high credibility.** Inspectorates cannot rely on their established position to provide a protective shell in a harsh economic world. If they are to survive, both individual inspectors and inspectorates as a whole must demonstrate that they are equipped to make a difference for learners. That will require a capable workforce and high quality inspection activity.
- ▶ **Occupying a clear niche.** Inspectorates will need to be very clear about their 'unique selling point'. That should derive, at least in part, from their authoritative position in the education system and on their use of direct evidence arising from external evaluation to identify strengths and weaknesses and to bring about change for the better. The scope and nature of

¹¹ The Character of Harms, Sparrow 2008



activity will vary across time and countries, but a clear understanding of the particular contributions of inspection to adding public value will be essential everywhere.

- ▶ **Focusing on risk.** The business of education encompasses multiple outcomes and myriad activities. The task of inspection is to ensure that outcomes for learners are improving, so inspection activities must focus upon those aspects which make the greatest difference to those outcomes. Key dependencies must be examined and understood. Risk must be analysed and deconstructed in ways which will pinpoint areas requiring action. All of this requires a good and current understanding of what makes public services generally, and education in particular, effective and responsive.
- ▶ **Being agile.** Inspectorates must be highly sensitive to the environment within which they operate. While the 'toolkit' of inspection must be deployed in ways which meet current demands, inspection is not a fixed way of working which is simply applied to any circumstance. It is a flexible set of processes which should be combined in different ways for different purposes. Similarly, inspectorates must be configured to meet current needs but also must be ready to reconfigure themselves and develop their staff in ways which will meet changing circumstances and expectations.
- ▶ **Knowing who is the 'customer'.** Inspection has many potential customers – including individual learners and their parents, the teachers and other professionals who work with them, employers and the broader community, representatives of the democratic process and their officials. An environment where there is an increasing emphasis on localism and customer satisfaction poses particular challenges for inspection. Satisfying educational professionals is not the same as satisfying politicians or parents. Indeed, inspection is inevitably exposing the 'secret garden' of education to public scrutiny, so there are dangers in focusing too directly on satisfying a professional or even a parental audience. Expectations of those who are experiencing a service may well be different from those who deliver it, and those of a more detached citizen will be different again. Inspection must be very careful about tests of 'customer satisfaction' as evidence of effectiveness.
- ▶ **Communicating clearly.** The purposes and outcomes of inspection, including examples of good practice, need to be clearly articulated and communicated in ways which meet the needs of the intended audience, both professional and lay. Many, but not all, inspectorates publish reports, often using 'plain language' which can be understood by a non-professional reader. In England, inspectors go further and write directly to young people with the key findings of the inspection of their school. More widely, findings from the external evaluation of schools conducted at national level are routinely published in over one-third of European countries.
- ▶ **Promoting and using self evaluation.** In 2001 the European Parliament and Council issued a circular advising member states to establish quality evaluation systems and a framework that balances school self-evaluation with external evaluation. Increasingly achieving such a balance has become a central part of national policy in many states across Europe and beyond. Such an approach is associated with building capacity for improvement at school level and enables greater proportionality in external inspection. In Estonia, for example, all schools are obliged to undertake their own internal evaluations while a small team of inspectors can give general advice in support. In the UK all of the separate country inspection regimes explicitly promote self evaluation.
- ▶ **Wider involvement in inspection.** While inspection demands its own knowledge, skills and experience, the inclusion of serving headteachers or teachers on inspection teams can add important fresh perspectives to the process. It can also serve as powerful professional development in its own right.



Inspection and innovation

High quality, continuous improvement is now an integral part of educational culture and inspection has demonstrated its ability to stimulate or even promote improvement. However, the challenge for inspection, irrespective of its traditional roles, will increasingly be to promote or work with the grain of more explicitly innovative educational practice. The relationship between inspection and innovation has been a major theme of recent SICI workshops in Estonia, Portugal, England, and France and at the 2012 General Assembly in Prague.

A number of clear themes emerged from these events.

1. The powerful relationship between external and internal evaluation is central to stimulating improvement. Each can make a particular contribution, but the synergies arising from the combination of the two can bring particular benefits. Inspectorates are increasingly emphasising the importance of effective self-evaluation as a driver of improvement. But self-evaluation can become self-delusion or worse and must operate within a framework of accountability which both encourages its rigour and validates its authenticity. External evaluation can also provide the kind of stimulus to more radical, innovative thinking which is difficult to achieve through the more incremental process which often characterises self-evaluation.
2. The importance of focusing on learning, including direct observation of teaching. Innovation is ultimately tested by its beneficial impact on learning. Inspection should always focus on the key relationship of teaching to learning.
3. The need to understand the nature of innovation in the country context. There is no common starting point across schools or countries in terms of the need for innovation or for the shape and direction of that innovation. Inspection must be very clear about the nature of change, and how it is being managed and ensure that its contribution to beneficial outcomes for young people is maximised.
4. The need to be clear about risk as a guide to proportionality in inspection. Evaluation of any kind has an opportunity cost – time spent on evaluation has to be at the expense of other activities. The challenge is to identify what matters and to act on the points of greatest impact or traction.
5. The need for inspection to be flexible and adaptive. Inspection itself can and does take many different forms. If inspection does not adjust to the context but simply applies a predetermined template to whatever it sees then it will inevitably provide at best a partial picture or at worst totally distort reality.
6. The powerful impact of transparency – both positive and negative. Transparency in terms of the why, what, how and outcome of inspection provides a model of the kind of open learning system which is integral to building trust and modelling good practice. However, the ways in which the outcomes of inspection are made public can have perverse effects. The inspection report and its judgements are powerful players in the political arena.
7. The difficulty of influencing perceptions about inspection irrespective of the actual policy and practice. Inspectorates need to be politically aware and to have a media strategy which increases the likelihood of constructive coverage.
8. The importance of the teacher and different inspection traditions. While the focus recently has been on the school as the unit of inspection, a growing realisation that the teacher is a key innovation gatekeeper requires inspectorates to adopt approaches which will relate more directly to the classroom.

9. The need to generate and analyse valid and reliable data about educational outcomes. Numerical data are increasingly important as measures of educational success and inspection needs to be very clear about the integrity and relevance of the data which it uses to inform its work. However, not all outcomes lend themselves to valid and reliable quantification and the data set for inspection should include both quantitative and qualitative indicators.
10. The increasing importance of stakeholder engagement. Education is increasingly responsive to the needs of a wide range of stakeholders, not least young people and their parents. Similarly, inspection must determine the nature of its relationship to stakeholders and adopt approaches which meet diverse needs.
11. The importance of leadership as a driver of quality improvement. Leadership is one of the most important variables in a school's success. Inspection needs to promote the kinds of leadership which are associated with educational success.

Conclusion

SICI is committed to assisting its members and the wider political and educational community to achieve a better understanding of how inspection can continue to make a strong contribution to improving the quality of the educational experience of young people across Europe and to making that experience more relevant to their lives today and in the future. The 10 Propositions outlined at the start of this paper, together with its supporting analysis, are designed to help inform that process.

Professor Graham Donaldson
University of Glasgow July 2013



NOTES ON THE MEMORANDUM AND MEMBERS' COMMENTS FROM THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN EDINBURGH (OCTOBER 2013)

The Bratislava Memorandum is a SICI paper setting out issues relating to innovation and ways in which innovation may manifest itself within inspectorates and in the context of the external evaluation of educational establishments. In Edinburgh the General Assembly endorsed the Memorandum and made suggestions as to how it might be used.

Please note that the Memorandum uses the words 'inspectorate', 'inspection' and 'inspector' throughout. It should be assumed by the reader that these words could be replaced by whatever terminology is used in the various contexts represented by the SICI membership, such as 'external evaluation / evaluators', 'review / reviewers', 'audit/ auditors' and so on.

Interpretations of 'innovation'

The meaning of 'innovation' was a lively topic of debate in the discussions at the workshops and conferences leading to the production of the Memorandum. By definition, 'innovation' relates to something which is 'new'. SICI speculated on change and innovation, wondering when change becomes innovation and whether innovation per se is a good thing, since 'different' does not necessarily mean 'better'. It was agreed that innovation is not necessarily something which is unique across the board and in all circumstances, but may be unique to a specific context. Innovation is therefore perhaps about purpose, about doing something consciously to bring about the kind of change which makes things better. Inevitably, therefore, each SICI member could have a separate and distinct interpretation of what innovation means for them, given their own history, culture, stage of development and political context.

In addition, each SICI member might have in mind two broad contexts for 'innovation' within their own circumstances.

The first of these could relate to educational establishments and the role of inspectorates in stimulating, reacting to, evaluating, endorsing or showing hesitation towards innovations introduced in an individual school (or educational establishment). It is challenging for inspectors to make sure, through evaluation of all the factors, that the purpose for change is clear and positive and that change is not merely an end in itself. Inspectors must always have at the forefront of their deliberations the outcomes – and the unintended consequences – of any innovative activity. This task becomes more complex and indeed important the greater the autonomy of establishments to determine their own curriculum/learning programmes and the ways in which students experience learning. The second broad context relates to innovation in the ways in which inspection itself is planned, organised and realised. Here also there are issues to do with the extent of autonomy enjoyed by the inspectorate itself, its vision and capacity to plan towards the realisation of that vision and the extent to which issues relating to the impact of inspection and internal self-evaluation are of relevance. Again, each SICI member will have different responses to such matters depending on their own circumstances.



There is a third relevant context for innovation – innovation and change in government educational policy. A small number of inspectorates may have the function of commenting on the effectiveness of such changes, usually through monitoring and evaluating the outworking of innovations in individual educational establishments in terms of their effects on student learning, achievement and educational opportunity.

Members' comments on the Memorandum

At the General Assembly in Edinburgh, members offered their reactions to the Memorandum. In general, it was found to be ambitious and challenging, helpful and timely. Members felt that it provides a broad European view and useful summary of the issues, with an appropriate focus on learning and teaching. The ten principles proposed at the end of the Memorandum were found by many members to be particularly useful. A number of members noted that their position was to focus on consolidation of their own work rather than innovation of inspection at this stage in their development. However, for these members, the Memorandum was still seen as a helpful background to future considerations.

Members also discussed and debated how they might use the Memorandum. A number of possibilities emerged, which included using the contents of the Memorandum, with suitable adjustments to individual members' context, to:

- ▶ stimulate internal inspectorate discussions
- ▶ stimulate discussion about innovation among teachers
- ▶ support capacity-building among school leaders
- ▶ refocus attention on the basic purposes of education in a range of contexts
- ▶ influence educational policy in relevant contexts
- ▶ provide SICI-perspective arguments on occasions of challenge to the inspectorate
- ▶ offer a view of good practice based on this broad SICI-produced commentary on innovation
- ▶ provide a basic reference paper capable of being expanded in order to inform relevant stakeholders – such as School Boards, local authorities and other governing bodies

Finally, members made some suggestions as to how SICI as an association might take the Memorandum forward in the future. Suggestions included gathering information from members on how they had used it, engaging in further research on how inspectorates can capture and share approaches to innovation and their evaluation of it in school contexts, promoting the Memorandum and the ten principles more widely within Europe, using it in international conferences and presentations and sharing it with academics and researchers in appropriate ways.