

Summary report of the SICI Conference held in Edinburgh, Scotland, in October 2013

Transforming inspection to support improvement

Education Scotland, the Scottish national improvement agency, hosted a very successful Conference and General Assembly for SICI in Edinburgh in October 2013. The open components of the Conference were attended by 42 SICI participants, representing 21 SICI member countries or regions, five guest representatives of the Turkish Inspectorate of Education, 20 inspectors and officers from Education Scotland, and an additional 20 representatives of the Scottish Government and of other Scottish national organisations and agencies involved in education.

The Conference was enriched by various cultural and educational activities, such as a visit to the Scottish Parliament and tour of the historic Royal Mile, a Gala Dinner held in Edinburgh Castle and a visit to Edinburgh educational establishments, for which SICI and Education Scotland wish to thank the school establishments concerned, the education department of Edinburgh City Council, and Edinburgh College of Further Education. SICI is very grateful to all those concerned in the planning and organisation of the Conference and General Assembly, and in particular to the host, Dr Bill Maxwell, Chief Executive Officer of Education Scotland, and his team, led by Anna Boni HMI.

The full programme of the Conference and the General Assembly, with notes, is available separately. Also included are a number of the country posters on inspection processes offered by some SICI members and on display throughout the Conference.

CONFERENCE DAY 1

Scottish school children and young people opened proceedings with a broad range of music and dance items. The Conference was then launched by **Dr Alasdair Allan**, Scottish Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's languages.

Dr Alasdair Allan : Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages

Thanking the many young people for their performances, Dr Allan expressed the honour he felt at addressing the Conference. He stressed that Scotland is very keen to learn from other countries and systems as it goes through a period of great change. He hoped that the Conference would offer the opportunity to Scottish colleagues and all present from other countries to listen, learn and above all improve the educational outcomes for all learners.

Dr Allan stressed the Scottish Inspectorate's move away from control towards an approach focussed on improvement and support. Over the last 50 years, education had become one of the most important Government policy areas across many countries. He indicated that Scotland is a country which highly values education. The education system's strong and distinctive roots are globally recognised. That said, Scotland's education had recently been through an ambitious and wide-reaching change. Scotland recognises that its future economic prosperity requires an education

system within which the population will develop the kinds of knowledge, attributes and skills to equip learners personally, socially and economically in the 21st century. The key reform programme – *Curriculum for Excellence* – is in place and will ensure a better platform for all young people to develop to their full potential, maximise their chances of success in the global jobs market and help Scotland become the best place for young people to live, to learn and to start their working lives. Dr Allan indicated that alongside the curriculum reform, other educational priorities in Scotland were to improve community learning and provision for children below school age.

As a result of the reforms, Scottish education is improving. However, more is needed. The aim is to build on the reform and develop a world-class system. Education in Scotland is good, performing well in many respects. Dr Allan saw the challenge as how to move on the journey from good to great across every educational establishment, achieving a consistently better performance at all stages across the educational landscape. It is clear that Scotland is not yet meeting the needs of all learners all the time. The Scottish Government is therefore focussed on tackling under-achievement and delivering more equitable outcomes for all learners.

Dr Allan concluded by indicating that the Conference offered the opportunity to share the many educational achievements found across the SICI community. He repeated that Scotland is keen to listen and learn from its SICI partners. He recognised that this was a prestigious and persuasive gathering, with significant influence across Europe. As discussions proceed, all should remember that at stake are our young people's futures and that it is important that we succeed in delivering improved outcomes for all.

Dr Bill Maxwell, Chief Executive Officer, Education Scotland

Improving Education.....the Scottish Way

Dr Maxwell welcomed participants, indicating that it was a privilege and a pleasure for Scotland to host the annual SICI Conference and General Assembly. He wished to start off the international debate of the next days by trying to capture for the Conference the key elements of Scotland's approach to educational improvement and the role the new national improvement agency is designed to play. A number of significant building blocks were now in place to create a coherent strategy for improvement.

In 2000, legislation from the Scottish Parliament (newly re-established after 300 years) had increased pressure on all parties involved in education – schools, education authorities and national agencies – to generate improvement. The legislation also sparked off a national debate which gave a very clear steer on the broad purposes of education and what the outcomes for young people should be. That then led on to the development of *Curriculum for Excellence*, a complete reform of the curriculum framework for learners aged 3 to 18. Scotland was able to build on positive contextual factors in moving forward into the new era. These included its existing and new curriculum design and assessment strategies, features of which had benefitted from the experiences of other countries, and its approach to inspection and self-evaluation, which has a strong

international reputation for the way in which it aims to make schools as strong as they can be in driving their own improvement.

Dr Maxwell went on to mention the international evidence, notably through the McKinsey reports of OECD, that there is no 'one size fits all' in improvement, and that countries are at different stages, from 'poor' to 'excellent'. Scotland is in the 'good' category and is on the journey from good to great and thence to excellence. So the Scottish strategy is one which aims to:

- give professionals more scope to exercise professional judgement and innovate;
- ensure they have the skills necessary to do so;
- promote engagement in collaborative learning and enquiry at all levels of the system;
- create a strong culture of evidence-based evaluation - from local to national level;
- build 'intelligent' accountability systems which support improvement.

The Scottish strategy is based on these basic principles. The aim is to create a 'learning' educational system in which there is a virtuous cycle of improvement, continuously driving innovation, learning and the spread of new knowledge across the system through the research messages from Universities in Scotland and from other countries. Dr Maxwell then went on to sketch out five steps through which he hoped that Scotland would achieve this virtuous cycle and provided a short commentary on each.

Step 1: *Curriculum for Excellence*, developed through broad engagement with all the key stakeholders, is fundamentally based on defining broad experiences, outcomes and skills. It is deliberately non-prescriptive about detailed content, leaving much more scope than previous frameworks for teachers to design the curriculum to suit their own local circumstances and the most appropriate methodologies for their learners. It is an enabling framework which actively encourages flexibility and diversity.

Step 2: For this to work, there is need of a high-level professional capacity in the educational workforce. *Teaching Scotland's Future* was a review of professional development undertaken by Graham Donaldson, previous head of the Scottish inspectorate and ex-President of SICI. It is now the second central plank – a whole reform programme around developing the teaching profession further. There is an existing tradition of a strong teaching force in Scotland but the reform programme aims to strengthen what is now called career-long professional development, linked to continued registration as a teacher throughout the teacher's career and involving collaborative professional learning at all stages. In addition a new Scottish College for Educational Leadership is being established, accessible for all teachers, not only those in promoted positions.

Dr Maxwell outlined the ways in which the remaining steps were being tackled in Scotland, many of which build on the very good work already done in promoting improvement through self-evaluation and building capacity in the system, notably through various facets of the inspection system. At national levels, Scotland is seeking further involvement with OECD and using PISA and other data to inform the system. At the upper secondary school level, a new senior-phase benchmarking tool will provide schools with detailed information about their students' qualifications and achievements.

New technologies have allowed the development of a national educational intranet, with a broad range of support for schools and teachers (and indeed students).

Finally, Dr Maxwell turned to the role of the national improvement agency, Education Scotland, and outlined its vision and six associated strategic objectives as presented in its Corporate Plan, which was made available to Conference participants. Specifically relating to inspection processes, he indicated that inspection is changing (though had in fact been changing for a number of years already), in that it provides a national sample rather than a cycle, is intelligence-led, is 'done with' rather than 'done to' schools and involves staff and students to a greater extent.

He concluded by saying that achievement of Education Scotland's vision would mean that the educational outcomes for all learners are improving, that inequality in educational outcomes is eradicated and that public confidence in education is high. Most effort is currently about reducing inequity, an issue which is of fundamental importance for overall improvement.

The powerpoint presentation accompanying Dr Maxwell's address is available separately.

Petr Drábek: SICI Executive Committee

Official welcome on behalf of SICI

Mr Drábek of the Czech School Inspectorate welcomed all present to the 2013 Conference and General Assembly on behalf of SICI. He explained that SICI's president, Marie-Hélène Ahnberg, had recently taken up a new position representing Sweden at UNESCO and that her new duties had made it impossible for her to attend the Conference. She would be stepping down as President. In addition, the Secretary-General, Yvan Verbauwhe, was ill and unable to attend. It therefore fell to himself, as the longest-serving member of the Executive Committee, to step in to speak on behalf of SICI.

On behalf of the Executive Committee and all visitors, Mr Drábek thanked the Scottish education agency for all the preparations and arrangements for the Conference. He also thanked the singers and dancers, remarking that often SICI Workshops began with musical and dramatic items, in fortunate preference to PISA results and other quantitative outcome data. He remarked that Scotland had been a major player in the 18-year history of SICI, recalling the meeting in October 1995 when Scotland was represented by inspector Walter Beveridge who became the first President. SICI later changed and developed, especially under the presidency of a former head of the inspectorate in Scotland, Douglas Osler. Petr had always appreciated his precision, his turn of phrase and his Scottish sense of humour. Finally, he wished to mention Graham Donaldson, the President of SICI from 2009 to 2012. Under his leadership, SICI had become a modern organisation, with representative from 31 countries and regions. Mr Drábek felt that the Scottish Inspectorate was the Rolls Royce among inspectorates, with *How Good is our School* and the *Journey to Excellence*, among other influences. The presentations from the Minister, Dr Allan, and from Bill Maxwell had confirmed the Scottish forward momentum. Thus, he found it symbolically important that the SICI Conference and General Assembly had at last come to Edinburgh. The Conference theme underlined that improvement is at the heart of activity and discussion among inspectorates. He wished all participants pleasant days, information-exchange, useful contacts and friendship.

Michael Davidson OECD Director of Education

Synergies for Better Learning

Mr Davidson opened his address by indicating his pleasure at being back in his homeland of Scotland and meeting up with a playground friend not seen for 40 years and now a Scottish HM Inspector. The theme of his presentation was the recently-published OECD report *Synergies for Better Learning*. He started by paying tribute to Paulo Santiago of OECD, the leader of the whole evaluation and assessment project (who had addressed the SICI Conference in 2012 in Prague).

Twenty-six countries had provided a self-evaluation country report, tailored to the framework drawn up by the project. Fourteen of these countries had opted for a country review, carried out by a team of two or three OECD personnel along with a small number of external experts. Mr Davidson noted that among the external experts were three representatives of the Scottish inspectorate – Bill Maxwell himself, Graham Donaldson and Isobel McGregor. He also indicated that there were echoes of the Scottish approach from countries across the world which had recognised the particular contribution Scotland had made to this aspect of education.

The review findings and the final report recognised that countries were at different stages of development in this field and that policy recommendations took that context into account. The review covered student assessment, teacher evaluation, school evaluation and system evaluation. In his presentation he would focus particularly on school evaluation, both external and as self-evaluation. However he stressed the importance of a holistic approach and advised countries considering any changes to look at all aspects of assessment and evaluation in the round, considering the effect of changes in one aspect on all the others – hence the title of the review *Synergies for Better Learning*.

The key principles of an effective evaluation system as found by OECD were the following :

- The centrality of teaching and learning : classroom observation should be at the heart of evaluation here, for both external and self-evaluation purposes. Peer-to-peer observation and learning among teachers was still relatively rare.
- The importance of school leadership : at the centre also should be the recruiting, developing, attracting and retaining of those who lead our education in schools.
- Equity as a key dimension : this aspect was often forgotten. It was good to have heard Dr Allan and Bill Maxwell indicating that this dimension is a clear focus in Scotland's journey.
- Integrate accountability and development : the central importance of achieving a balance between these two aspects of evaluation.
- Commitment to transparency : which should feature across all aspects, such as in inspection and in the use of data, so that all actors and stakeholders could achieve clear understanding of evaluations.

In the section of his address dealing with external evaluation of schools, Mr Davidson indicated that school evaluation is an evaluation of :

- the effectiveness of the structures and processes in place within a school



- the implementation of national policies and regulations within the school and
- the quality of student learning outcomes at the school.

Within those broad parameters, there could be different emphases, which Mr Davidson presented in the following table

Accountability purpose “School effectiveness”	Development purpose “School improvement”
Focus on schools	Focus on teachers
Focus on school organisation	Focus on school processes
Data-driven, with the emphasis on outcomes	Empirical evaluation of effects of changes
Quantitative in orientation	Qualitative in orientation
Lack of knowledge about how to implement change strategies	Exclusively concerned with change in schools
More concerned with change in student outcomes	More concerned with journey of school improvement than its destination
More concerned with schools at one point in time	More concerned with schools as changing
Based on research knowledge	Focused on practitioner knowledge
Concerned with schools that are effective	Concerned with how schools become effective
Static orientation (school as it is)	Dynamic orientation (school as it has been, or might be)

The question for each system is about the balance among such parameters, which might change in time depending on the country’s context and the length of time that school evaluation has been carried out. He stressed that the review had shown countries at different points in the balance over the last decade – for example Sweden had moved somewhat to the left column with the recent creation of an inspectorate, while South Korea had moved towards the right column from compliance to sharing data and encouraging self-evaluation.

In his comments on a country’s capacity for external school evaluation, Mr Davidson postulated that the priorities were to ensure the credibility of external school evaluators and sufficient capacity and retraining as necessary. He mentioned the following pointers to achieve these priorities :

- There should be demanding criteria for selecting evaluators.
- Evaluators should be sufficiently ‘distant’.
- The team should be broadly composed.
- There should be specific training for inspectors.
- Inspection teams should be organised for coherence, it being very important that there is a system to ensure coherence and consistency across inspections.
- Inspectors should themselves be subject to scrutiny.
- There should be a properly-resourced external evaluation body. This had been a strong OECD policy recommendation.
- There should be re-training for inspectors.

There were many more interesting and informative components of Mr Davidson's address, including some snapshots of arrangements in a number of countries. The powerpoint slides are available on the SICI website.

Distilling the over 500 pages of the final Synergies report, Mr Davidson came to the 'bottom line' – that school evaluation demands significant capacity at many levels of the system. It is crucial to ensure that school evaluation has a balance of external evaluation and self-evaluation, contributes towards school improvement and is not perceived as an exercise in compliance.

An engaging question and answer session followed Mr Davidson's very well-received address to the Conference.

The powerpoint presentation accompanying Mr Davidson's address is available separately

The Bratislava Memorandum

This session, open only to SICI member representatives was introduced by **Dr Wulf Homeier**, President of the State Institute for Quality Development in Schools in Lower Saxony and member of the SICI Executive Committee. He explained that the purpose of the session was to allow for the exchange of views and comments on the 'Bratislava Memorandum' on Inspection and Innovation. This document, originally created on behalf of SICI by its former President, Professor Graham Donaldson, had been previously circulated to all SICI members. The Memorandum was essentially a kind of position paper which set out some of the key issues discussed by SICI members on the theme of innovation in the course of Workshops in Estonia, England, Portugal, Paris and the 2012 Conference in Prague. Finally in Bratislava in June 2013, the key messages of the theme had been rehearsed and discussed. Dr Homeier handed over to **Isobel McGregor**, of the SICI Secretariat, who set up structured group discussions. Members spent some 50 minutes discussing and responding to the Memorandum, with Scottish inspectors facilitating and noting reactions. A synthesis of the outcomes of these discussions was presented at the General Assembly on Day 3 and will be incorporated into the Memorandum, to be circulated separately.

Day 1 of the SICI Conference was closed by **Bill Maxwell**, who thanked contributors and participants for a lively and stimulating afternoon's activities. He wished to stress his pleasure in the exchange of views and useful collaboration which was the hallmark of SICI events. He invited all to reconvene in Edinburgh Castle for the Gala Dinner. The evening would also feature a private viewing of the Honours of Scotland (crown jewels of Scottish monarchs), further musical entertainment from Scottish young people and a post-dinner talk by **Mr Norman Drummond, former headteacher and Founder of the Drummond International Leadership Centre**.

CONFERENCE DAY 2

School and College visits

The second day of the Conference started with SICI members visiting one of a variety of schools in Edinburgh. These schools – a nursery, a primary school, a secondary school and a special school – were chosen as examples of schools on an improvement journey and to demonstrate how schools might improve after inspection. One other group of participants visited Edinburgh College of Further Education, a recently established amalgamation of the separate colleges which had previously existed in Edinburgh. In all establishments, participants heard from senior staff, teachers / lecturers and students and young people about the establishments' self-evaluation processes, their most recent inspection and the links between the two. In addition, schools presented evidence of actions which they and their supportive education authority had taken as a consequence of inspection findings and the effects such actions had had.

A group session on return to the Conference centre offered an opportunity for each group to discuss what they had seen and pick out points which were surprising or memorable. A summary note of their deliberations indicated that they were impressed across the board with the extent of self-awareness which schools demonstrated, their understanding of self-evaluation and the clear motivation to improve, from whatever the starting point.

Workshops

A variety of workshops on various themes followed the group discussions. Titles of the Workshops were :

1. ***Access and Achievement : Hidden Children Report*** Adrian Gray, Divisional Manager, OFSTED England
2. ***Communication with Stakeholders*** Rick Steur, Chief Inspector, Netherlands Inspectorate of Education
3. ***Knowledge Management, Data and Research in Education Scotland and beyond*** Craig Munro, Strategic Direction, Education Scotland
4. ***Giving Feedback to Schools*** Wulf Homeier, President, State Institute for Quality Development in Schools, Lower Saxony
5. ***OFSTED's revised approach to challenging schools that do not improve*** David Townsend, Her Majesty's Inspector (Education), England
6. ***Where is inspection heading?*** Alasdair Delaney, Strategic Director and Director of Inspection, Education Scotland

A copy of the presentations made in a number of the Workshops is available separately, as is a brief description of the workshop content, provided by presenters.



Closure of the Conference

After a short commentary by the head of the guest Turkish delegation, which included an invitation to all SICI members to attend an Inspection Conference to be held in Turkey in June 2014, the Conference part of the Conference and General Assembly was closed by Bill Maxwell and Petr Drábek, who looked forward to reconvening in October 2014 in Dresden, Saxony.

Please note that a summary account of the General Assembly, which was held on Day 3, will be circulated separately to all SICI members.

SICI Secretariat

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