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|  **Summary report SICI workshop** |

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| **Title of workshop:** *Making the most of our insights: How research informs the work of education inspectorates* |
| **Date: (00:00)** |
| **Venue:** The Institute of Contemporary Arts in London |
| **Number of participants:** 60 |
| **Number of participating countries/members:** Ofsted hosted delegates from 19 countries on 22 and 23 June 2023. These were: Austria, the Basque country, Bavaria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, England (the Independent Schools Inspectorate), Flanders, France, Germany, Ireland, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Portugal, Scotland, Spain, Sweden and Wales. |

What was the aim of the workshop and to what extent has it been achieved?

Three main aims guided the workshop:

Aim 1: To identify the ways in which research and inspection interplay to inform the work of an inspectorate (with examples across SICI inspectorates)

Aim 2: To identify ethical, practical and validity considerations for rigorous research in an inspectorate

Aim 3: To identify the challenges and opportunities of doing research in an inspectorate.

To address the first aim, the panel discussion on Thursday provided a broad overview of how research and inspection interact. Representatives from Ireland, Flanders, the Netherlands and the Basque country shared perspectives and practices from their inspectorates. Individual presentations on the same day illustrated specific examples of research that had influenced the work of Bavarian, Swedish, Dutch, and Scottish inspectorates, as well as Ofsted.

To address the second aim, the morning sessions on Friday focused on considerations for rigorous research in Ofsted. The presenters covered ethical processes and structures in Ofsted and Government Social Research principles. They also explored the roles of researchers and inspectors in research projects. The benefits of drawing on research and inspection expertise were discussed from the perspectives of practicality and research validity.

The panel discussion on Thursday and small group discussions on Friday fed into the final aim. The panel discussion addressed the following questions:

* What are the avenues, challenges and opportunities for research to feed into policy or inspection in your context?
* What capabilities can research give an inspectorate?
* What are your research priorities?

The small group discussions centred on the challenges and opportunities of doing research in individual inspectorates.

What lessons have we learned as a result of this workshop?

Lessons concerning the first workshop aim

We found that research and inspection interact and support each other across and within SICI inspectorates. Together, they deliver valuable outcomes in different ways.

 Research influences inspection in SICI inspectorates by:

* feeding into new inspection frameworks or refining the existing ones. The delegates from Flanders, the Netherlands, Bavaria, Scotland and Ofsted discussed this
* informing evidence-gathering on inspections. Research principles guide sampling for inspection, evidence collection tools and triangulation of inspection findings
* informing inspector training (as discussed by the delegates from Ireland and Ofsted). Discussions highlighted that inspectors should be both ‘data literate’ and ‘quality literate’. With support from research teams, inspectors could interpret research data. They could also understand what constitutes quality education
* contextualising inspection findings. The Irish inspectorate uses external research to help school leaders appreciate the credibility of inspection findings
* providing pre-inspection information to inspectors (as showed by Ofsted and Sweden)
* enabling risk assessment for strategic selection of schools for inspection. Swedish and Ofsted delegates discussed this. For example, the Swedish inspectorate runs an annual survey to identify the schools which require improvement. The survey also informs the inspectorate’s risk-assessment model and provides pre-inspection information.

In turn, inspection informs research. Emerging issues noticed on inspection may feed into research programmes. Inspectors sometimes advise researchers on research projects by providing sector and policy expertise. Inspectors sometimes work as field researchers.

In relation to the first aim, delegates discussed the benefits of collaborating with external researchers. They also talked about the benefits of an internal research unit. Both models of doing research are present across SICI inspectorates.

Delegates suggested that commissioning research externally was beneficial when specific expertise did not exist internally. Another benefit was building the right relationships for enacting positive change in practice.

Delegates suggested that having an internal research unit was useful for several reasons:

* it enables inspectorates to be more responsive and produce research faster
* it builds internal expertise, as the knowledge stays and grows in the team
* it can lead to more insightful findings, as one draws on both research and inspection/policy expertise.

Lessons concerning the second workshop aim

When designing research projects in an inspectorate, it is crucial to consider validity, practicality and ethics.

Validity: For a piece of research to be valid, it must be rooted in research principles. It must also be based on a sound understanding of subject matter. This requires the expertise of researchers within SICI inspectorates. This also requires the unique sector knowledge that inspectors bring. In Ofsted's ‘Independent review of careers guidance in schools and further education and skills providers’, inspectors with specialist roles enriched research with their sector knowledge. That knowledge included understanding:

* the evolving government policy context
* the broader sector context
* the context of different education institution
* how things work ‘on the ground’.

Practicality: A successful research project must be feasible. This requires considering factors like the research team's size and inspection teams' availability. It is often impractical for even the largest research teams to do all fieldwork nationwide. Hence, inspectors sometimes work as field researchers. In those roles, inspectors gather data through surveys, interviews and focus group discussions. This allows inspectorates to be responsive to research requests, which is critical for policy-making. This has been the case in Ireland, the Netherlands and Ofsted, for example.

Recruiting inspectors for research is not always straightforward. Inspectors' heavy workloads are a challenge. Occasionally, perceiving data collection as a less significant task is another challenge. To increase inspectors’ involvement in research, inspectorates could:

* emphasise the importance of research projects
* allow inspectors to contribute to research in view of their interests
* offer roles like co-leading research with researchers or acting in advisory capacities.

Ethics: In view of inspectorates' power in schools, it is vital to balance legal and ethical considerations. This ensures the protection of everyone involved, from researchers to participants. It is beneficial to train researchers and inspectors in ethical protocols. Given that the session on ethics represented Ofsted's practice, aim 2 could benefit from sharing of practice across inspectorates.

Lessons concerning the third workshop aim

The main benefits of doing research as an inspectorate included:

* influencing the education sector to improve education and raise standards. An example of this is research on the decline in basic numeracy and literacy by the Dutch and the Flemish inspectorates
* providing timely insights on critical issues. An example of this is the research of the Irish inspectorate on teacher supply or education during COVID-19
* refining inspection frameworks and methodologies
* enhanced credibility of an inspectorate as an evidence-based organisation
* enhancing the knowledge and skills of researchers and inspectors through mutual knowledge exchange.

However, there are notable challenges:

* the reception of an inspectorate’s research by the education sector. Reception may be influenced by perceptions of bias
* striking a balance between timely research and stability in the educational landscape
* navigating changing political priorities that can shift research focus
* resource constraints (due to small research teams or inspectors' limited availability)
* the risk of overwhelming schools with research visits in addition to inspection. We discussed that diversifying school samples can mitigate such concerns, and avoiding fieldwork in recently inspected schools
* the risk of overwhelming schools with too much research. We agreed that staggering research and doing it 'just in time' could reduce 'cognitive overload'.

The overall sentiment across SICI inspectorates is that research is invaluable. There is a shared understanding that it is equally crucial to consider how to maximise its impact. The challenges to maximising impact include:

* measuring the actual impact
* effectively reaching target audiences
* fostering meaningful engagement
* avoiding overburdening the educational sector.

Solutions include:

* timely research dissemination
* robust communication strategy
* tailoring research outputs to suit varied audiences (perhaps using more accessible language or formats like short written or video summaries).

The following contributions to the workshop were the most interesting:

Several presentations on the first day focused on research that has fed into inspection, mostly tied to Aim 1 of the workshop:

* Richard Kueh (Deputy Director of Insights and Research and Senior His Majesty’s Inspector, Ofsted) explored the interplay between Ofsted’s research and the continuous improvement of our inspection frameworks. He covered the education inspection framework (EIF), curriculum research, deep dive inspection methodology, and teacher development framework. [SICI website: link to the slides]
* Michael Howe (Head of Schools Data and Analysis, Ofsted), Gillian Churchill (Head of Research, Ofsted) and Richard Shiner (Head of Strategic Evaluation, Ofsted) co-delivered the presentation *The contribution of data and research evidence.* They introduced the work of the Insights & Research directorate. They discussed Data & Insights products and services, the purpose and principles of research at Ofsted, and the aims and processes of Ofsted’s internal evaluations. Each illustrated the contributions of their teams’ research and analysis projects to inspection. These presented examples were: inspection data summary report, the sexual abuse review, the early years review, evaluation of the education inspection framework and the care leavers project. [SICI website: link to the slides]
* Gisela Goegelein & Margit Schmidbauer (Speakers at the Quality agency at the Bavarian State Department of School Education) presented *Research and practice go together: Examples from the Bavarian system of school evaluation*. They took us through a historical journey, starting from the times when the concept of education quality was not well defined. In the present times, the concept of education quality is based on evidence, as illustrated through the Bavarian framework of school quality. They also discussed their large scale, mixed-methods study with parents, teachers, pupils and headteachers. The study set out to identify whether the goals of their new evaluation concepts were achieved. [SICI website: link to the slides]
* Hannah Bijlsma (Researcher at the Inspectorate of Education in the Netherlands) presented *Monitoring teacher quality: characteristics of effective teaching in Dutch schools*.This research study, co-run with the University of Twente, explored teaching quality from the perspectives of inspectors, teachers and pupils. It provided insights about the characteristics of effective teaching in Dutch schools and the factors associated with teaching quality.[SICI website: link to the slides]
* Jacqueline Gallagher (His Majesty’s Inspector at Education Scotland) delivered *Perspectives on research: Taking an inquiry-led approach to developing a new inspectorate in Scotland*. She discussed the major reform of the Scottish inspectorate, which was driven by research evidence. The inspectorate gathered evidence from policy makers, ‘critical friends’ in the research community, young people and their families. In addition, their inspectors carried out organisational analysis, along with the evaluation of school leaders and practitioners.[SICI website: link to the slides]
* Johan Gjersvold (Researcher), Cecilia Ledberg Buhlin (Researcher) and Lars Thornberg​ (Business Developer) from the Swedish Schools Inspectorate presented on *The use of school surveys to create a risk-based inspection*. Their large-scale annual survey of schools in Sweden collects pupils’, parents’ and teachers’ views through questionnaires about study environment, pupils’ safety, teaching, pupils’ health, specialist support, school leadership, critical thinking, etc. The survey findings feed into the inspectorate’s risk-assessment model to select schools for inspection. Findings are also shared with individual schools to give them an overview of their strengths and weaknesses. [SICI website: link to the slides]

The following presentations on the second day were mostly linked with Aim 2 of the workshop. Some focussed on practical and validity considerations when combining research and inspection expertise. Others focussed on ethical considerations.

* Joseph Mintz (Head of Rapid Response Unit, Ofsted) and Jos Parsons (Principal Officer, Further Education and Skills Policy team, Ofsted) presented on *Ofsted’s Review of Careers Guidance: Utilising Inspector and Policy Staff Expertise in Research.* They discussed a research study on careers guidance in England. The focus was on the symbiotic relationship between inspection and research. Researchers, inspectors and policy colleagues collaborated in this study. [SICI website: link to the slides]
* Heather Fearn (Senior His Majesty’s Inspector, Ofsted) and Alan Passingham (Senior Research Lead, Research and Evaluation, Ofsted) presented *Spotlight on subject work*. They spoke about collaboration between Ofsted’s Curriculum Unit and Ofsted’s research team on subject reviews and subject reports. The reviews and reports are evidence-based outputs on the quality of school curriculum in a range of subjects. The presenters covered the history of the Curriculum Unit, the theory behind Ofsted’s understanding of curriculum, as well as the purpose and principles of the work. [SICI website: link to the slides]
* Richard Shiner (Head of Strategic Evaluation, Ofsted) delivered a session on research ethics and integrity at Ofsted. He discussed Ofsted’s ethics committee and process, the six Government Social Research (GSR) principles, as well as inspectors’ involvement with research design and ethics. Delegates were curious about voluntary informed consent from children and young people, and how the ethical bar is different for research and inspection. [SICI website: link to the slides]

The panel discussion on the first day and small group discussion on the second day largely fed into Aim 3, and partly into Aim 1, of the workshop:

The panel discussion about the role of research in inspection featured colleagues from Ireland (Padraig Mac Fhlannchadha, Assistant Chief Inspector, Department of Education), the Basque Country (Maider Ituarte and Martin Casado, Inspectors, the Basque Inspectorate), the Netherlands (Matthijs van den Berg, Director of Research Department, the Dutch Inspectorate of Education), Flanders (Jeroen Lauwers, Inspector Research Expert, the Flemish inspectorate) and England (Richard Kueh, Deputy Director, Research & Evaluation, Ofsted). The panel discussed the following questions:

* How does research feed into policy or inspection in your context? What are the avenues, challenges and opportunities?
* What capabilities can research give an inspectorate?
* What are your research priorities?

The final session was a small group activity. There was lots of healthy debate and stimulating discussion. The delegates discussed the opportunities and challenges of conducting research in their education inspectorates, and ways of maximising the impact of their research. The insights from the panel discussion and the small group discussion are included in the earlier section of this summary ‘What lessons have we learnt as a result of this workshop?’

The following activity forms were very successful:

It was useful to have a variety of formats in this workshop. PowerPoint presentations, panel discussions and small group work complemented each other, while also keeping the participants engaged. We also had a Slido activity which succinctly captured the main take-home messages from the workshop.

What would be a good follow-up theme or activity?

The delegates told us they are interested in different ways of collaboration across SICI inspectorates:

* Workshops
* Job shadowing
* Online meetings and correspondence to share research plans, methodologies, and research findings

Ofsted would like to thank all the SICI members who participated in the event for their thought-provoking presentations and rich discussions. We found the event informative and valuable.

Please also add the agenda of your workshop and the list of participants to this document.