

Summary report of the SICI Conference *Facing 21st Century Challenges in Education*, Prague, Czech Republic, October 2012

The Czech Republic and the Czech Inspectorate of Education hosted a very successful Conference and General Assembly for SICI in Prague in October 2012. The Conference was attended by some 44 SICI participants, representing 20 SICI member countries or regions and also by some 30 members of the Czech inspectorate.

Day 1

Olga Hofmannová, Chief School Inspector opened proceedings by welcoming participants and expressing the honour she felt in hosting the Conference and General Assembly. She looked forward to the various presentations and discussions to come and to herself presenting information about on-going developments in the Czech Inspectorate within the European context.

An official national welcome was provided by **Jindřich Fryč**, Deputy Minister of Education, Youth and Sports on behalf of the Minister. He mentioned a number of challenges facing education across Europe, such as ensuring high literacy levels and responding appropriately to the technological changes which have characterised the recent transformation of schools. He informed SICI visitors that the clear priority in Czech education is to improve quality, through reform of the curriculum and of assessments – both in content and in methods. Further priorities included attention to vocational education and enhanced collaboration between schools and the business world. A short-term challenge, he indicated, is to motivate teachers to improve their own education. He expressed thanks to Paulo Santiago for the Czech Republic's involvement in the OECD review (see below).

Paulo Santiago, Senior Analyst, Directorate for Education, OECD.

Mr Santiago noted that it was a privilege and pleasure to be invited to the SICI Conference to present the main conclusions from the *OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes*. He indicated that it was a particular pleasure to return to the Czech Republic, a country which had been so active in the Review. SICI itself had been deeply involved in the project, through participation by SICI President Graham Donaldson in meetings of the Governing Board, and through the participation of individual inspectors in those countries which had opted for a country review. These had included inspectors from Scotland (including the SICI President), Netherlands and England. It was therefore possible for Mr Santiago to say that many of the conclusions in the section of the Report on school evaluation came from SICI inputs.

The slides from Paulo Santiago's presentation are available separately.

Graham Donaldson, SICI President: Official welcome and response to Paulo Santiago

Mr Donaldson welcomed all present to the 2012 Conference and General Assembly on *Facing 21st Century Challenges in Education*. He expressed his gratitude to the Czech Republic for their hospitality and for the organisation of the event. The Czech Republic was a founder member and backbone of SICI. He paid a particular tribute to Petr Drábek who had worked extremely hard in SICI over many years.

The President thanked Paulo Santiago most sincerely for contributing to the SICI conference, paid tribute to the level and quality of work which he had shown as OECD project leader and looked forward eagerly to the publication of the report.

In summary, the President expanded on four areas: the importance of the OECD study; the opportunity it gives for all SICI members to reflect on what is possible and what needs to be done; the focus on certain key words, messages and concepts; and how the report may allow inspectorates to contribute to national policies. In studying the report and listening to Paulo Santiago, he picked up on certain key words which should be at the forefront of consideration.

- **Purpose** – that all stakeholders should be clear about why evaluation is being undertaken
- **Balance** – that aspects such as inspection and self-evaluation should be in balance
- **Alignment** – that different forms of evaluation (teachers, schools, system) should be coherent
- **Synergies** – that there should be links and cross-influences among different elements
- **Capacity** – that a key aim should be to build capacity in the system and especially in teachers, which is not always achievable in the short term but which eventually brings rewards for learners
- **Focus** – which should be on what happens in the classroom, on the nature of young people's learning
- **Impact** – that inspection / evaluation should have a real impact on learning, and that learning should not be narrowly interpreted as solely the results of tests

In conclusion, the President suggested that SICI members should engage very directly with the report, and not only at head of inspectorate level. He left members with 3 key messages: that it is important to release the power and capacity locked up in inspectors; that members should not be wary of bringing the key messages to politicians; and finally that inspection is about shaping the future, not just preserving the past.

The slides from Graham Donaldson's presentation are available separately.

A lively and interesting question and answer session followed these two key presentations.

The second part of the afternoon's proceedings was devoted to presentations relating to the Czech School Inspectorate (CSI) as below.

1) **Olga Hofmannová**, Chief School Inspector, gave a comprehensive account of the work of the CSI and the ways in which they evaluate quality in educational establishments. Much work had been done to modernise this very well-established inspectorate and equip it to face the exigencies of inspection in the 21st century. She indicated that changes had already shown signs of positive outcomes in, for example, the image of the inspectorate and recognitions of outcomes achieved while enhancing partnership with schools and reducing considerably the paperwork associated with inspection.

2) **Kamil Melichárek**, Director of the CSI ICT Department offered a very interesting 'live' tour around the impressive work of the CSI in preparing a new interactive on-line tool, serving many purposes, including on-line assessment and immediate feedback to students on performance and useful summaries for teachers and schools, and the capacity to collect data from each school inspection and immediately summarise them in different ways.

3) **Ondřej Andrys**, Deputy Chief School Inspector, provided information about the introduction of the new national system of evaluation in the Czech Republic, started in 2005. The project (NIQES) has 4 key activities – the development of an integrated system, the response of the CSI to schools' development of their own programmes, training inspectors in new methods, and establishing a new national survey of students' results (as previously described and demonstrated by Kamil Melichárek).

4) This first part of the SICI Conference was closed by **Petr Drábek**, CSI Inspector and member of SICI's Executive Committee. He wished to stress his pleasure in the discussions around innovation and, as usual and most particularly, the collaboration among SICI members, to be continued at the Gala Dinner later in the evening.

Formal cultural components of the Conference also included a sightseeing tour (on foot) around the Historic Centre of Prague and a visit to the Senate of the Czech Republic.

Day 2

The second day of the Conference included visits to local schools so that SICI participants could gain an insight into some aspects of Czech education. Varied and very interesting establishments were chosen – a primary school, a secondary school (Gymnasium), a secondary technical school of civil engineering, a business academy, a higher vocational medical college and secondary medical school and, for a particularly lucky group, the Czech dance conservatoire, a visit which included a showcasing performance by students of different ages from 12 to 18. Later, the visits provided the context for lively group and plenary discussions of aspects relating to innovation and challenge.

The last part of the Conference was devoted to exchanges of information among members on current challenges within inspectorates. In particular, members appreciated inputs from **Adrian Gray** of Ofsted, England and **Helder Guerreiro** of the Portuguese inspectorate. Copies of their presentations are available separately.

A number of other SICI members had responded to the request to provide information about innovations or challenges facing their inspectorates or their education systems in general. A copy of each individual contribution is available separately. A summarising analysis of common themes across these inputs can be found in the Appendix to this brief report.

Concluding the Conference part of the Conference and General Assembly, **Graham Donaldson**, retiring as President of SICI, speculated on change and innovation, wondering when change becomes innovation and whether innovation per se is a good thing. Different does not necessarily mean better and issues around this theme need to be unpacked further. If we as inspectors are to be engaged more proactively in looking at innovations in schools, we need to understand the underlying issues. Innovation may not be unique per se, but unique rather to a specific context. Innovation is perhaps about purpose, about doing something consciously to bring about change in order to make things better. 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. SICI will be following up this theme which has formed the context for a number of workshops over 2012, from Tallinn, through London, here in Prague and through the SICI workshop in Paris in November which will focus on teachers and their role. In Bratislava in 2013 we will look back across this series of workshops and try to produce some kind of statement of common understanding of the relationship between inspection and innovation – an important and difficult task.

Graham concluded by again expressing his thanks to Petr for the fine organisation of the Conference.

APPENDIX

Members were asked to provide a poster presentation in 2 parts, the first indicating any key news, changes or innovations in their inspectorates over the last 2-3 years. Eight member countries or regions responded: Berlin – guest member 2012 (Germany), England (Ofsted), Estonia, Flanders (Flemish Inspectorate, Belgium), France (IGEN / IGAENR), Netherlands, Scotland (Education Scotland), Slovak Republic, Wales (Estyn). An analysis of their responses follows.

Aspect of recent changes or innovations	Member country / region and nature of aspect
Start of a new or changed round of inspections – some involving change to the nature of the coverage of schools	<p>Berlin – <i>second round,</i> England – <i>risk-based assessment scheduling of inspections – focus on schools which are not good enough / greater proportionality in inspection</i> Flanders – <i>third round – differentiated,</i> Netherlands – <i>risk-based inspections (but see later),</i> Slovak Republic – <i>first round of full inspections,</i> Wales – <i>core inspection plus follow-up / six-year cycle</i></p>
Opening up to public / making inspection more transparent	<p>Berlin – <i>publication of inspection reports online</i> Slovak Republic – <i>more information / publishing quality criteria and inspection plans</i></p>
Responding to Government policy changes / developments / initiatives	<p>England – <i>academies and free schools</i> Estonia – <i>introduction of advisory service for school internal evaluation,</i> Flanders – <i>adjustments in the context of the right-orientation / response to report of the Court of Accounts</i> France – <i>support for schools in the dual context of greater local and school autonomy and curricular and structural reforms, involving production of progress or interim reports to the Minister</i></p>
New agency, new organisation for inspection or new leadership of inspection body	<p>Flanders – <i>new structure 2009 /new leadership 2011 /move to establishing an external agency 2012</i> Scotland – <i>new national agency to support quality and improvement – Education Scotland as amalgamation of former inspection agency (HMIE) and former curriculum agency (LTS)</i></p>
Enhanced links to / involvement with stakeholders	<p>Berlin – <i>online questionnaires</i> England – <i>online survey of parents / links to local authorities strengthened</i> Netherlands – <i>cooperation with other national inspectorates</i> Scotland – <i>efforts to engage all stakeholders more and to ensure inspection is done ‘with’ schools rather than ‘to’ them</i> Wales – <i>more learner involvement in inspection and local authority on follow-up</i></p>

<p>Adjustments to existing inspection procedures / new aspects of inspection</p>	<p>Berlin – comparisons with overall state averages / core plus optional aspects to be inspected / school report on developments since last inspection</p> <p>England – half-day notice of inspection / change of wording of quality level ('satisfactory' becomes 'requires improvement') / greater focus on the performance of teachers / student achievement as the key indicator / much quicker return to schools which fail the inspection</p> <p>Flanders – some adjustments to the way of auditing</p> <p>Netherlands – more attention to quality of teachers and school leaders / responsibility for financial supervision of schools / big emphasis on student achievement</p> <p>Scotland – greater focus on using professional dialogue during inspection to provide constructive challenge and support / involvement of school personnel in inspection process</p> <p>Wales – peer involvement in inspections / stronger role for self-evaluation / simplified framework/ simplified grading system / shorter notice of inspection/ use of nominees and lay inspector</p>
<p>Other aspects mentioned on posters and not covered above</p>	<p>Flanders – focus on professionalising the inspection corps</p> <p>Netherlands – maintaining laws and regulations and sanctioning task / better relationship between Ministry and inspectorate / effects of economic crisis and budget cuts</p> <p>Slovak Republic – involvement in EU project to produce a Model and Manual of Self-evaluation / active participation in conferences and involvement in pedagogic issues and events</p>

The second part of the poster/ presentation was to produce a list of upcoming innovations, changes and challenges. The same eight member countries or regions responded: Berlin – guest member 2012 (Germany), England (Ofsted), Estonia, Flanders (Flemish Inspectorate, Belgium), France (IGEN / IGAENR), Netherlands, Scotland (Education Scotland), Slovak Republic, Wales (Estyn). An analysis of their responses follows.

<p>Aspect of upcoming innovations, changes or challenges</p>	<p>Member country / region and nature of aspect</p>
<p>Challenges of the economic climate and limited resources</p>	<p>Specifically mentioned in this context by England but no doubt applicable to all inspectorates</p>
<p>Responses to system changes or new responsibilities</p>	<p>Berlin – responding to the new school structure in Berlin with two types of schools only – 'Gymnasium' (academic) and 'integrierte Schule' (comprehensive); ensuring fair comparison of schools and inclusion of students with special needs</p> <p>England – dealing with the implications of free schools and chains and federations of schools</p> <p>Estonia – responding to change in the provision of advice to schools – which schools themselves will now organise</p> <p>Flanders – adapting to the new inspectorate organisation</p> <p>France – responding to new requirements of the inspection bodies which will include: contributing to new laws on school</p>

	<p><i>education, higher education and research; clear role in evaluating the implementation of new policies (with reports to be made public); establishing new internal auditing processes in the Ministries of National Education and Higher Education; reflecting on the necessary evaluation of their own mission and organisation.</i></p> <p>Netherlands – <i>integrating new financial inspection with inspection of quality / responding to changes in special education / including inspections of School Boards alongside inspection of schools / reflecting the more important role of the Inspectorate in Higher Education</i></p> <p>Scotland – <i>adapting to the new quality improvement agency, including developing a new code of practice for inspection and review / supporting innovative and transformational change in schools and further education colleges</i></p> <p>Slovak Republic – <i>adapting to the new concept of the State Inspectorate as defined under the new Administration (2012 – 2016), which will entail changes in the legal, professional and work conditions</i></p>
<p>Aspects relating to changes in direction or development of procedures within the inspectorate</p>	<p>England – <i>engaging in targeted school improvement work</i></p> <p>Flanders – <i>piloting new ways of linking to research on quality</i></p> <p>Scotland – <i>making the best use of evidence from inspection to support the overall work of the new agency</i></p> <p>Slovak Republic – <i>developing data processing and interpretation / developing analytical concepts / professional staff development to that end / being pro-active in cooperating with schools, local administration and other stakeholders</i></p> <p>Wales – <i>under consideration : moving away from a cycle of inspections / being less predictable / engaging in more capacity-building work</i></p>
<p>Aspects relating to curriculum and / or assessment</p>	<p>England – <i>responding to curriculum changes / responding to proposed and recent changes in examinations</i></p>
<p>Other aspects related to education at school, local or national levels</p>	<p>Netherlands – <i>reporting on school excellence / reporting on the quality of the education system as a whole</i></p> <p>Slovak Republic – <i>stimulating school quality improvement through self-evaluation</i></p> <p>Wales – <i>engaging in more capacity-building work / working with local authorities to develop system leaders</i></p>
<p>Other aspects mentioned in responses</p>	<p>Flanders – <i>considering similarities and difference with other national inspectorates</i></p> <p>Slovak Republic – <i>continuing the development of bilateral and mutual international cooperation within SICI</i></p>

SICI is very grateful to the members who produced this information. Individual presentations are available separately.