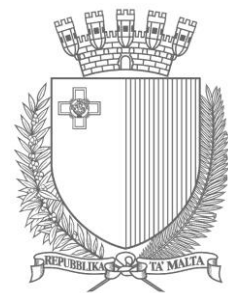


SICI Workshop Report

Thursday 28th – Friday 29th March 2014

School Evaluation for Improvement and Accountability:
striking the right balance

Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education
MINISTRY FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT



The Quality Assurance Department
2014

Workshop report prepared by:
Ms Pauline Caruana
Assistant Director Quality Assurance

On behalf of, and endorsed by:
Mr Ian Mifsud
Director Quality Assurance
Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education
Great Siege Road
Floriana
Malta



Background and Introduction:

The Quality Assurance Department in Malta organised the SICI workshop “*School Evaluation for Improvement and Accountability: striking the right balance*” between the 28th and the 29th March 2014. The workshop brought together 81 participants divided as follows:

Participant Group	Number of Participants
Keynote Speakers	5
Non-Maltese (SICI Members) coming from 13 different Countries	34
Maltese Participants – QAD Members (SICI Members)	14
Maltese Participants – Local Educational Leaders	26
Non-SICI Members (& Non-Maltese)	2
Total	81

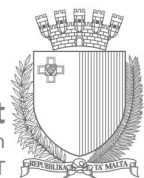
This mix of participants provided an opportunity to get to know about different practices, to discuss emerging issues and challenges in School Evaluation and the sharing of good practices.

Mr Ian Mifsud, Director for Quality Assurance in Education in Malta, extended a warm welcome to all the participants and introduced The Hon Minister of Education. The Hon Minister acknowledged the work being done by the participants for the benefit of the various client groups, particularly students. The Minister acknowledged that despite its importance, many people find quality education an enigmatic concept. It is perplexing to define and often difficult to measure. One person’s idea of quality often conflicts with another and no two experts ever come to the same conclusion when discussing what makes an excellent school or college. He made particular reference to the need of reviewing schools and systems so as to assist them in achieving greater relevance of their educational provision to every individual student, a challenge which is overtly evident in the alarming number of students who throughout schooling become disengaged with education. Mr Wulf Homeier, the SICI President linked the message delivered by the Minister with the Bratislava Memorandum and the commitment that each SICI member has embarked upon in upholding such principles. Mr Homeier concluded that notwithstanding the Minister’s request to find answers to daunting and perplexing questions, such workshops and conferences would usually lead to raising more fundamental questions.

The workshop was enriched by educational and cultural activities. The participants were taken on a visit to different schools in Malta which have been reviewed recently. In these schools they visited various classes and also had time to discuss with the school staff the effect of the review on their school. A Gala Dinner and a cultural tour to the pre-historic temples were also organised.

The workshop started with presentations from 5 keynote speakers (Sides of each of these presentations are being sent as appendices to this report);

Claire Shewbridge - analyst OECD,
Ian Mifsud – Director Quality Assurance, Malta
Harold Hislop – Chief Inspector, Department of Education and Skills, Ireland,
Juhani Rautopuro – Finnish National Board of Education,
Kari Kivinin – Secretary General, European Schools.



OECD reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education – Claire Shewbridge

The OECD conducted a 3 year review of evaluation and assessment policies and practices in 28 countries. The international comparative report *Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment* was published in April 2013 and provides analysis and policy advice to countries on how evaluation and assessment can bring about real gains in performance across the school system. This drew on 14 in-depth reviews of evaluation and assessment policies in Australia, the Flemish Community of Belgium, Chile, Czech Republic, Denmark, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Sweden and Northern Ireland, United Kingdom. Countries have different traditions in evaluation and assessment and take different approaches; most have a range of provisions for student assessment, teacher appraisal, school evaluation and school system evaluation that have developed quite independently of each other. A key concern is to bring these pieces together in a coherent framework so as to avoid duplication of tasks and inconsistencies across different evaluation and assessment efforts. The OECD's recommendations for school evaluation policies are set in this broader context and include: ensure the focus is on improving teaching, learning and student outcomes; evaluate and adapt external evaluation to reflect the maturity of the school evaluation culture; raise the profile of school self-evaluation. The OECD provides advice on different school evaluation procedures, capacity to undertake school evaluation and the use of school evaluation results. Previous work by SICI has been invaluable in helping inform and shape the OECD's analysis and policy advice for school evaluation.

The External Review of Schools in Malta – Ian Mifsud

The Maltese Educational System, regards the educational journey to start at 0 to lifelong. Compulsory Education (and Kindergarten) in Malta is provided for in the State, Church (Roman Catholic) and Independent Sectors. The National Curriculum Framework published in 2012 sets the principles, aims and outcomes of compulsory education in Malta. Some facts, figures and an outline of recent reforms gave an overview of the context in which External School Reviews in Malta operate. It was acknowledged that in an ideal world External School Reviews would not be required as it would be the same institution who would be ensuring that it is offering the best possible educational provision to meet the needs of its community, however in view of the State's responsibility of ensuring quality provision for all, and the fact that schools vary in their capacity to meet expectations, the external reviews occupies a critical function to support internal review mechanisms which need to be strengthened. After having hinted at the legislation determining the scope for external reviewing, the presentation delved into the actual structure, processes and tools adopted by the Maltese External Review system. Perceived strengths, areas for improvement and the proposed way forward were also discussed emphasising on the current work on the Integrated School Improvement Framework that is underway. In conclusion, it was asserted that as much as the role of reviews should be to support education and not control it, similarly, education should ensure that is not manipulating individuals but supporting them for life and beyond.

Inspection of Schools In Ireland – Harold Hislop

This presentation outlined the significant reforms that have been made to the inspection of schools in Ireland focussing in particular on the period 2010-2014. These reforms have included a diversification in the inspection models used, an increase in the frequency of inspection and a reconsideration of the balances that the Inspectorate maintains between its statutory evaluative and advisory roles and between its accountability and improvement goals. Ireland contributed to the research carried out as part of the OECD's recent review of evaluation and assessment systems and the presentation will also refer briefly to aspects of the wider assessment and evaluation context in Ireland and how lessons from the OECD review are influencing developments in Ireland.

The Finnish school evaluation system – Juhani Rautopuro

The Finnish education system encompasses a nine-year compulsory basic education for the whole age cohort, preceded by one year voluntary pre-primary education. After comprehensive school, students have a possibility to continue their studies by selecting either vocational education and training, or upper secondary general education. Upper secondary general education is the most common route to higher education.

There has been a change of the educational steering system in Finland from centralised control and decision making in 1970's and 1980's to the devolution of power from 1990's. This has, for example, meant a shift from centralised curricula to local and school-based curricula based on the national core curriculum and transition from inspections to evaluation of learning outcomes.

At the moment, there are no national tests for the whole age group at the end of the basic education. However, the education providers have the responsibility to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the education they offer. In practise this means that education providers have to participate in external evaluations of learning outcomes in schools.

In Finland, sample based assessment procedures are applied when evaluating national learning outcomes. This enables the use of various assessment tools in schools and avoids the possibility of making ranking lists. The aim of the evaluation system is to provide reliable and up-to-date information in order to support policy makers, education providers, schools and individual teachers in the development of schools.

The presentation gave an overview of the evaluation system of learning outcomes and quality assurance of the information provided by the evaluations in Finland.

The European Schools Inspection System: from Inspection to Quality Assurance – Kari Kivinen

The 60-year-old European School system is a multi-governmental organisation of the 28 EU Member States. There are 14 traditional European Schools in seven countries and 10 Accredited European Schools in six additional countries.



Each Member State is represented by one Inspector on the Nursery/Primary and Secondary Board of Inspectors respectively. These 56 inspectors are the interface between national systems and the European School system. They allow exchange of good practice and flow of expertise between these systems.

In the past few years the European Union and the European School system have both seen rapid enlargement and the Inspectors' role has gradually shifted from traditional school/teacher control/evaluation to curriculum and syllabus development and quality assurance – putting in place, at system level, pedagogical guidelines and policies and also analysis instruments and assessment criteria enabling the quality and harmonisation of the education provided to be ensured. In that context the Boards of Inspectors have recently created several useful tools, such as Teaching Standards for European Schools, Accredited School Audits and Whole School Inspection instruments.

In his presentation Dr Kivinen shared with the audience the latest developments and trends in the European Schools and the tools used by them.

Key note presentations were distributed to the SICI Workshop participants on the day and have been given to the SICI executive for their perusal.

Workshops followed. The main theme addressed by this workshop was to explore the ideas or reflections emerging from the keynote presentations and discussions that followed, would the members be taking with them and possibly adopting in their institution/country.

All participants were divided into five groups.

All groups had to answer one common question:

What is the aim of external reviews/inspections in your country?

Each group was given an additional question to discuss, again related to the review process in their respective country. As often happens, it was reported that time for such discussion to unfold was rather limited.

Group 1: What kind of criteria are used for the evaluation of schools?

- All inspectors present used set criteria for their inspection activity.
- Some of the frameworks allowed for tailoring to local circumstances. Some were set nationally.
- All had criteria which were shared with schools and services.
- Some frameworks were more focused on compliance with statutory aspects, example documentation and continuous professional development. Others were more focused on quality and outcomes of learning.
- All took account of self-evaluation but to varying degrees.
- All frameworks and inspection approaches were constantly changing to adapt to local circumstances example political changes, reduction in resources, improved self-evaluation. So it is important to have constant, up-to-date sharing amongst SICI members.

Group 2: What is done with the final report?

- Reports vary in length.
- Countries which started with a long detailed report changed to a much shorter version (2-12 page report), with key findings represented in diagrams and bullets, to make it easier to read and follow.
- All reviews are followed by oral feedback to the Head of School.
- The information is then uploaded on the school website and information is also passed on to the parents.
- Reports are sent to schools but in most countries they are not followed up by the inspectors.
- Not all countries publish the full report.

Group 3: How is the internal evaluation process supported by the national inspectorate?

- In Malta the national inspectorate are supporting schools with their school improvement plans. For this purpose a focal person from the QAD team has been assigned to each college to support the various schools in the college with their internal evaluation and to support NQTs. The focal person does not inspect the schools in his college.
- In Scotland the national inspectorate also provides support to schools pre and post inspection as the school requests.
- The Netherland Inspector has had various experiences ranging from primary to vocational to the special needs sector. He has worked on a project “Behind Closed Doors” exploring the education of troubled children.
- The SICI president, who took part in this workshop, said that now inspections are taking on more of a supportive role and the new inspection regime is proving to be popular.

Group 4: What is the relation between the external and internal evaluation processes?

- Countries are at different stages in the implementation of self-evaluation and external evaluation. Some are well established, some are new but they are all developing.
- The linking of external evaluators and those supporting improvement in schools was discussed. It was agreed that it must be a good way to enhance communication and to create a sense partnership for improvement.
- Guidelines and language of quality are best shared to ensure communication between the external evaluators and the schools.
- It is also important to ensure that the external evaluation process leaves key responsibilities with the schools (or municipalities or governing bodies) to take forward their own actions leading to improvement (external not dictating)
- In the Netherlands inspectors have a copy of the school self evaluation before they enter the school. This is valued by the schools.
- In Portugal a pre-inspection meetings provide a framework to give high levels messages for focus of discussions. These can be used to build on the school development plan. Schools are visited 3 times per year. After inspections the improvement plan is developed further.
- In Belgium the schools are not expected to have a process of self-evaluation in place. After inspection, the school will start thinking about how to improve.
- To summarise there is a varied picture across countries with regards to self evaluation ranging from no self-evaluation to sophisticated self-evaluation with national benchmarks.

Group 5: How do assessment and learner attainment feature in your external evaluation system?

- In Malta, reviewers collect a copy of the annual results of the learners for the last 3 years. They also have statistical data available of the benchmark exam results and how these marks compare to the national mean. These results are analysed before the review week and the reviewers then ask and observe what is school is doing to raise performance. They observe whether the school has appropriate structures to keep records of attainment and achievement, they observe the learners' copybook and whether the learner is given formative feedback, the school's assessment policy and other areas related to assessment. The reviewers also refer to the School development plan to see whether the school has any action plans with regards to raising standards of achievement.
- Germany inspectors offer schools identical tools for external evaluation to be used for their internal evaluation. Schools find this valuable. Lesson evaluation sheets can be downloaded and used by the teachers. These evaluation sheets also have feedback from their students. There are also revised questionnaires to help promote and help support schools in their internal evaluation.



This day was open for SICI members and members from the Quality Assurance Department.

On the 2nd day of the workshops we started out by visiting different schools in Malta. These schools had all been reviewed in recent years. The foreign participants were divided into 5 groups according to the sector they had opted to visit and they were accompanied by 2 members from the QAD. During these visits the participants discussed the impact of the external review on the school.

The schools visited were:

2 state secondary schools, 1 state primary school, 1 church secondary school and 1 primary independent school.

These visits were then followed by workshops. The groups discussed their experiences in the schools visited. They commented generally positively on the arrangements Malta has for reviews and offered also some suggestions for future development.

Some positive comments:

- High quality facilities and well-resourced classrooms in schools.
- There is opportunity to share good practice better to address the few areas of development. The size of the island lends itself well to this.
- Collegiate working in teams.
- Questionnaires distributed before reviews help to ensure that the school policies are being implemented appropriately.
- Given the early stages of the development of the review process, it seems to be going in the right direction (bringing people with you).
- Teachers appreciate feedback from reviews.
- The visit is announced in advance.
- Ability to exchange teachers among schools.
- The ability to intervene when there are concerns.
- The capacity to follow-up with schools to see development.
- Clear procedures/mechanisms to provide support in schools for areas of improvement.
- The college system is a good potential motor for professional collaboration.
- The role of “critical friend” to support schools.
- structured system, clear functions for evaluators, procedures are clear.

Areas for improvement/suggestions:

- More pupil work on display to raise pupils’ confidence. This is difficult to achieve in schools where teachers do not have their own classrooms.
- Not all lessons were appropriately differentiated.
- There is room for improvement in making sure that the long term targets for improvement are implemented.
- The documentation to be prepared before the review is too lengthy. It is good to “lighten” the school profile.
- Optimising the use of College Principals. Possible review of college/principal policy strategy.
- Trying to establish some appraisal/accountability for students.
- Self-evaluation can be stimulated via thematic inspections. The school is notified on what it will be reviewed and it is given time to self-evaluate.
- Consider the level of feedback to teachers, students and parents.
- The central allocation of staff leaves state schools with no autonomy.



Comments about the systems in the different countries:

- Lower Saxony: Inspection and advisors are not in the same place in the corporate system. They would like to see them working more in tandem. It would be nice to be able to advice and provide support within the same department.
- Scotland: The inspection team offer both advice and guidance.
- Sweden: Inspectors give advice during the inspection. Next year there will be a change to move to an advisory and support role after the inspection.
- Inspectors agreed that they would like to have the opportunity to visit each other during inspections.
- Serbia: Would like to be able to support schools with improvement and to conduct follow-up visits after inspections.
- Norway: appreciated the importance of the mechanism to provide feedback to school professionals after inspections.

The feedback we got at the end of the 2 days was very positive and encouraging. The discussion time for the workshop held on Thursday afternoon was a little too short.

