# **SICI Conference – 23 & 24 September 2019 - Dublin**

1. Theme: **Embedding Innovative Inspection Practice**

The conference was held over two days and hosted by the Inspectorate - Ireland. Sixty-six representatives participated in the workshop representing nineteen Inspectorates. Included among the activities were opening addresses made by Pádraig Mac Fhlannchadha (Assistant Chief Inspector) and Chantal Manes-Bonnisseau, (SICI President) and keynote addresses from Dr Claire Shewbridge (Project Leader of Strategic Education Governance, OECD Directorate for Education and Skills) and Dr Harold Hislop (Chief Inspector- Ireland). Presentations on innovative practices were made by representatives of the Welsh, French, Icelandic, Swedish and Irish Inspectorates. Workshops for sharing of practice among the delegates from the representative countries were also facilitated.

## The conference aimed to explore:

* how innovative practices of inspection can support change and improvement in education systems in a changing education landscape
* how innovative inspection practice can be embedded and achieve the right balance between control and support of schools and teachers
* how to assess the impact of innovative inspection practice

## **2. Key messages from the conference**

* Innovation differs from change, it needs to be nurtured, encouraged and assessed. Embedding requires improving what is already established. While innovation often arises from reflection of teachers and schools, it may also be driven and supported externally arising from policy changes and demands of changing society. The onus on us is to encourage innovation, recognise and affirm it and facilitate learning settings to share it internally and with the wider educational system. We also need to be able to assess its impact on the quality of provision made for pupils and students.
* Dr Claire Shewbridge’s address: The PISA 2015 study found that innovation in inspection practices can bring about improvement. However, we need to be mindful of complexity in school systems and recognise the important role that all stakeholders have to play in promoting innovation. We need to foster support, shared responsibility, ownership and trust among the education partners. In our practice, we should strive to incorporate empowering messages and to take schools’ perspectives seriously proceeding towards shared goals in a mutually respectful manner. We need to constantly act on feedback received from forums where they are discussed and to facilitate these forums.

Effective external evaluation rests on a broader culture of evaluation (school and system). Inspectorates should think strategically, adapting to changing contexts and new knowledge and balancing urgencies with the long-term system vision. Supervision for compliance is not enough, it should also contribute to learning: a continuous cycle of test, learn, adapt (school and system).

External evaluation is a powerful tool –to promote it, we need to think strategically, aligning external evaluation to support a shared system vision, articulating it with other components of an evaluation and assessment framework and adapting to changing contexts and new knowledge.Research also indicates that better results are gleaned from integrating key stakeholders in external evaluation activities, co-creating standards, criteria and frameworks, integrating multiple perspectives, using the results of external evaluation as a source of knowledge for improvement and ensuring transparency of knowledge flows.

* Dr Harold Hislop’s address referred to the OECD 2030 Framework for Education and outlined changing landscapes that we need to respond to ensure that schools are prepared for 21st century learners. He outlined changes in teaching and learning in an innovative and improving school system. These would require schools to engage in challenging professional conversations as an effective form of continuing professional development, with collaborative professional practice placed at the heart of effective schools and improvements in learning.

Referring to innovation in inspection in Ireland, Dr Hislop outlined the changes in how the Irish Inspectorate devises its inspection models and the challenges that face us in ensuring that our models are responsive to changing environments. There will be a need to recognise that schools can be insightful in designing good evaluation approaches; to come to schools with *shared questions* rather than solutions; to acknowledge that school leaders have a positive influence on the views of management authorities and teacher unions towards inspections. Dr Hislop highlighted the importance of partnership and that, as inspectors, we need to engage in deep collaborative approaches to enhance our understanding of *what* we are evaluating and *how* our work is perceived.

Dr Hislop referred to the need to avoid the pitfalls of over-reliance on numerical data and labelling.

The process applied to the introduction of a new inspection model “Development of Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections” was shared as an example of lessons that have been learned from a collaborative design approach to devising a new inspection model. He also discussed the need to incorporate “Children’s Voice” to a much greater degree in our inspection processes, to the need for specific initiatives such as a career rendez-vous to engage in innovative practices. *The Centre for Real World Learning* model for creativity was shared as an example of the changing characteristics of learning. In our design of innovative inspection practices, we need to consider this and other research and in our inspection activities, we need to be aware of, acknowledge, affirm and support innovative practice in schools.

* The Icelandic presentation addressed “*The challenges and opportunities of being small*”. Icelandic colleagues shared recently introduced inspection processes and innovative approaches to same which included: informing parents of when inspection happens and incorporating complaints communicated into drafting of inspection processes, for example, questions for parents in questionnaires that address identified areas of concern; a visual, colour coded overview of the findings of the evaluation; incorporating student voice through the use of post-its in the course of focus group interviews; and a system of data gathering to identify schools at risk at policy level and school profiles incorporating the number of days pupils miss, number of lessons not delivered by teachers, teacher absences, special needs and newcomer pupil profiles.
* The French presentation “*Teacher evaluation and accompaniment: changes in the French Inspectorate's practices”* outlined innovative practices in the French Inspectorate’s inspection processes moving from compliance to supportive evaluations where principals have a role, while increasing inspector footfall in schools. A “career rendez-vous” approach where individual teachers are evaluated at key points in their career was  outlined. This approach is a collaborative one undertaken with the teacher, principal and inspector based on shared criteria of professional practice. The approach has been subject to technical amendments in light of feedback from inspectors and principals
* The Swedish presentation outlined newly introduced risk based assessments using higher quality data compiled on schools. This data is based on questionnaires issued to parents and students, attainment results and school self-evaluation reports submitted to the Ministry. The Inspectorate’s focus is on at risk schools with minimal visits to those schools whose performance is not a cause for concern. They assess the impact of this evaluation approach externally through surveys of and dialogue with principals, as well as follow-though visits where required. Internally, they monitor the implementation of this approach through systems for equivalence, piloting, focus group meetings of inspectors and the adaptation of inspection processes, depending on risks identified.
* The Welsh Inspectorate shared their experience of introducing peer inspectors and new evaluation tools and processes. The introduction of peer inspectors is now embedded in the inspection system and involves teachers in leadership roles, having received training, accompanying inspectors on evaluations (outside of the district in which they teach) as co-evaluators. Evaluation of this approach indicates that individual peer evaluators, school, principals and the Inspectorate have derived benefit from their engagement in the inspections. Among the new inspection tools and approaches set out were the role of the school’s nominee in inspection activities, learning walks by inspectors where all settings are visited briefly and where inspectors engage directly with learners, and, in collaboration with students, a conversation and review of the written work they have completed.
* The Irish presentation “Introducing education inspection in early learning and care sector in Ireland: Challenges and opportunities” outlined the rationale behind the introduction of education inspections in early years settings (3-5) in 2015. This was done in a context where provision is delivered pre-dominantly by the private sector and where no such inspections previously existed. This new inspection process was introduced alongside an emerging professional landscape with the introduction of curricula to inform provision, along with encouragement for those delivering provision to gain higher professional qualifications. The model was developed following extensive consultation, piloting, review and amendment and, finally, mainstreaming. The need for cross-departmental collaboration was outlined, as was the process engaged with, including extensive collaboration with the partners,

**3. Learning from workshops**

* Three work shops were facilitated where, in groups of fifteen, participants were asked to:

1. Reflect on effective ways to encourage and embed innovation in external evaluation
2. Discuss recently introduced innovative inspection practices in their jurisdictions, the challenges and opportunities, the impact and assessment of same
3. Share key learning from the workshop with colleagues
4. **Discussion on most effective ways to encourage and embed innovation in external evaluations** included:
   * The more consultation, the better but this takes time
   * Based on high quality research and data, although this may not always be available
   * Pilot where possible and don’t be afraid to change - this also causes problems
   * Approaches differ in different jurisdictions, very much reliant on what legislation is in place, union engagement, school and school management contexts and even historical practices where people are loathe to change
   * Difficulty where parents don’t support change, the system they experienced if positive, is the one they want for their children
   * All agreed transparency is important
   * Essential that those carrying out the inspections are well qualified and trained
   * Frequent reflection
   * Awareness that landscape is changing and as a consequence our inspection practices need to change not only reactively but pro-actively. Need to establish a means to collaborate with schools and students to enable this.
   * Linking with research is very important to ensure that new approaches are evidence based as in new Ofsted model
   * Need to clarify purpose of evaluation, whether supportive or just accountability
   * Not sufficient to give nod to innovation, must promote it actively at all levels and give ownership to stakeholders
   * Takes time to embed innovative evaluation practices, go easy and promote initially and reflect and learn from the challenges it poses.
   * Need to support and coach school leaders to develop targets that the review
   * System needs to provide tools/materials/data gathering tools to support SSE
   * Give inspectors and schools a degree of freedom within parameters
   * Don’t overlook the potential of SSE to promote innovation in schools. We should not be too prescriptive in what it should address.
   * We need to make inspection work more visible in the community- often inspection happens and parents/students/community not aware
   * Communicate to schools that innovation is valued and part of what we do.
5. **Participants discussed recently introduced practices, their impact, assessment, challenges and opportunities** and stated the following;

* Much greater awareness now of practices in other countries and how they might be adapted to own system
* Awareness of the need to constantly review the purpose and impact of what we are doing and ensuring that it is fit for purpose
* Need to have more formal methods of evaluating impact, and not relying too much on informal feedback. OECD reports are increasingly relevant and informative but we must not just rely on external evaluation of our work
* Agreed that focus is changing, sometimes too slowly, to ensuring that our work impacts directly not only on provision but on the quality of attainment, wellbeing and experiences of students but this can be difficult to measure
* The need for student voice to be heard is compelling but is a long way off for some.
* The need to affirm those schools who are not on the “risk” database
* Most participants agreed that their Inspectorates are getting better at introducing new practices, learning for workshops and sharing, but that the assessment of these takes time. All partners who engage in the new innovation should be part of its assessment.
* Practices in different jurisdictions differ, challenges faced include resistance by teachers/unions, capacity of management bodies/authorities, resources, overload on schools. Opportunities exist in the form of IT to communicate, professional bodies willing to engage and research
* Reports, who are they for and do they adequately outline strengths and challenges for schools, could we have longer report for the school especially when implementing a new inspection practice?
* Piloting is a good means of introducing innovative practice but many of our pilots are too short in the race to get them introduced.

1. Contributions regarding **the sharing of key learning from workshop** with colleagues included:

* Consultation is so important if you want to get an initiative over the line. Inspectors don’t always have all the answers and partners bring a unique perspective
* Transparency and co-creating – partners are more likely to buy in and to sell it to others if they were part of its creation
* We must evaluate for 21st century and move away from approaches that don’t work; sharing the responsibility for improvement with schools is a powerful means of ensuring improvement happens
* We need to recognise and learn from what is happening in innovative schools and allow them the platform to inspire others. Ideally, there would be a forum to enable this to happen
* External and internal inspections go hand in hand but capacity building can be a huge challenge as can the need for a leadership team in each school who share a commitment to improvement
* Innovative inspection practices can promote change, schools respond to what is inspected.
* We need time to engage with research and to collaborate among Inspectorates and learn from each other.
* Align innovation with other policy initiatives in the system
* Flexibility is key as is professional dialogues, don’t underestimate what we can learn from others.
* Continue to get stakeholders feedback, crucial to reviewing and creating models of inspection.
* How important student voice is and the need to reflect it more in how we do our work and the impact of what we do.