



SICI NEWSLETTER

JULY 2020

Introduction

The SICI Executive Committee would like to improve communication with members, especially concerning the implementation of our Strategic Plan. One approach to this is to issue a regular 'News Update', usually produced after each Executive Committee meeting. We would encourage members to respond to the information in this update, and to submit any information that they would like to highlight to other members. Please use the contact details at the end of the newsletter.

Update from the Executive Committee

The activities of SICI have been considerably disrupted as a result of the lockdown. The workshops in the Czech Republic and Finland had to be cancelled. Nevertheless, the Executive committee continued working and has met several times by using digital technologies such as Teams and Zoom. The following key decisions were made and communicated to all members by the letter from the President in June:

- Following the discussions in the regional groups we will organize one meeting on Covid related topics, building up to the General Assembly in November.
- The raise of the membership fee, decided by the GA in London, will be postponed until 2021 and will therefore not be requested in 2020. This seems a fair decision to take in the face of the financial difficulties the crisis is creating for all members. The loss will be compensated for SICI by the cancellation of the two workshops.
- SICI had a trainee studying 'Public governance and Management' from the middle of March until the middle of May. Her main tasks were to help the EC define new communication strategies and processes to improve SICI's organization and make it more visible in the professional community. Due to the corona crisis, the internship had to be organized remotely and has resulted into the report 'update of the strategic plan of the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates. The Executive Committee will now start working on drafting a proposal for a future strategic plan for the next four years.

- The General Assembly in Paris is confirmed. It will be held on November 19 and 20 as planned. It will be organized on a hybrid format, giving the choice to each member to be present on site or remotely, with a webinar type tool. Members will receive details in September and will be asked to indicate which format they choose.
- SICI is ready to support collaborative initiatives between members to share good practices and professional development in this field.

Please find our previous newsletters by clicking on the following link: <http://www.sici-inspectorates.eu/Contact-us/EC-Minutes>.

Members' responses to the COVID 19 crisis

Some words about ...

...The inspectorate update of Bulgaria

For the period from March to July (end of the school year) the schools have been closed and training, assessment and support for personal development of students are held in the electronic environment through the use of information and communication technologies.

Almost all of their inspection activities have been postponed and Bulgaria had the opportunity to take time for the development of an Inspection Guide and an Inspector's Handbook. These new textbooks make all participants familiar in the educational process with guidance of expert analysis and evaluation of the quality of education provided in kindergartens and schools, carried out by the National Inspectorate of Education. The conclusions from the national testing during the 2018/2019 school year and the review of the published research and good practices by SICI outlined the current requirements for quality assurance provided by the education systems and became the basis of the Inspection Guide.

In May the National Inspectorate of Education tested a model for inspection in the electronic environment, which aimed to establish the applicability of procedures and of inspection criteria and indicators in 10 schools.

The NIE inspectors also used the time to increase their competencies by participating in 6 different on-line professional development trainings.

...The inspectorate update of Czech Republic

Following the Extraordinary Measure of the Ministry of Health to Protect the Population and Prevent the Risk of the Origin and Spread of COVID-19, the physical presence of pupils in primary and secondary schools and school facilities was prohibited from 11 March to the end of May 2020. Schools were forced to switch completely to distance learning. A completely exceptional situation for which schools, pupils and their parents were not more systematically prepared in the past arose. In April 2020, the Czech School Inspectorate investigated and evaluated the impacts of these extraordinary measures via controlled telephone interviews with school principals.

The survey showed that a large proportion of schools, within their means, successfully coped with the rapid transition to distance education and tried to do the maximum possible to effectively ensure the educational process even in extraordinary conditions. It also turned out that the implementation of distance education deepened the differences between positives and negatives in regions and among schools. The fundamental differences in the level of school management, in the approaches to teaching and in the conditions for distance education that school pupils have in regions of the country became much more pronounced.

Kindergartens were not centrally restricted during the emergency; their closure depended on the decision of the principal in agreement with the founder. Information on their activities during the period from 11 March to 30 April 2020 was obtained from all kindergartens in the form of an inspection electronic survey via an online questionnaire, including plans and prospects for their reopening after the loosening of government preventive measures. It was found that 95% of kindergartens closed for some time. The survey showed that kindergartens in this difficult situation tried to fulfill their role, especially in the area of providing compulsory pre-school education. However, the survey also pointed to the need for material support for pre-school education in the field of digital technologies and the need for teacher training in this area.

From March to June 2020, the working conditions of most employees of the Czech School Inspectorate who worked in the home-office regime were adjusted. Excellent technical equipment significantly helped the fulfillment of the organization's tasks, as well as the self-education of school inspectors and also operationally prepared professional development in home-office regime through platforms for synchronous online communication in this extraordinary regime.

The effects of the extraordinary measures will certainly be reflected in the period of the next school year 2020/2021. The Czech School Inspectorate aims to map and evaluate the impacts of extraordinary measures on the preparation, organization and form of teaching, on the work of teachers and school principals, and on pupils' educational results in the next school year. Attention

will be paid to whether schools continue to apply new positive approaches, such as: greater effective use of digital technologies, reduction of educational content, changes in pupil assessment, qualitative changes in communication with legal representatives, etc. Inspection activities will also focus on surveys; how the schools compensate for the previous long-term non-participation of some pupils in education, how they ensure the balancing of different knowledge and skills of pupils, etc. The inspection activity will also include verification of the achieved results of education in selected topics through selective testing of pupils in the 5th and 9th grades of primary schools.

...The inspectorate update of England (OFSTED)

At the time of the meeting, schools in England were closed except to children of critical workers and vulnerable children. Ofsted has suspended all its non-regulatory inspections. About 700 staff members have been seconded to local authorities or other government departments and about 160 inspectors have become emergency foster carers.

Early years settings re-opened on 9 June and regulatory inspections of those settings resumed at the same time.

We have been communicating with our sectors through a rolling update: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ofsted-coronavirus-covid-19-rolling-update>

A large number of inspectors are working in the research and evaluation division, starting to optimize the data from our electronic gathering system. We have been hosting research webinars – with presenters from both within Ofsted’s research team and external academics. These are primarily for the inspection workforce.

Ofsted hasn’t changed the definition of ‘quality’, nor will we. Since the meeting, it has been confirmed that inspections under the education inspection framework will resume in January 2021.

Ofsted is not inspecting or supervising distance learning. We have stepped back from contacting schools because of the burden they are under at the moment (see first paragraph).

When inspectors in Ofsted will go back to inspections in September, it will probably be an interim phase. Small teams will go into the schools physically to discuss what barriers the schools have faced, to look at how schools have managed to identify the more vulnerable children and what schools have done about children who are not very much engaged. The inspectors will be much more empathetic.

The inspections will feed into a report to the Department for Education about how the sector is recovering but we will not issue school reports.

Ofsted was already very digitally flexible in its approach. We are looking at what types of inspection might be done without in person visits. Some settings will need a physical visit but there is a lot which can be done digitally.

...The inspectorate update of Finland

FINEEC is evaluating how the exceptional teaching arrangements (distance teaching and learning) impact on the realization of equity in all sectors of education. The evaluation is based on the data already gathered by other actors in the field of education. The results are reported to different stakeholders during summer and autumn.

Consequently, FINEEC's role as a producer of up-to-date information to policy makers, education authorities, schools etc. on the current state of the Finnish education system is still reinforced.

For the evaluation project mentioned above, we use online survey and online questionnaires instead of face-to-face interviews. In addition, there is already lots of existing data on the effects of the COVID-19 which only need to be summarized by involving as many stakeholders as possible: school principals, student organizations, education providers etc.

In the upcoming evaluations of learning outcomes, we'll have additional questions on the effects of distance learning for school principals, teachers and students. In longitudinal evaluations, we have also the possibility to detect, at least to some extent, if the diminution of face-to-face teaching and learning has had an impact on the learning outcomes. Unfortunately, the effects of the exceptional teaching arrangements become visible only gradually.

It is still a big question mark as we do not yet know if all the schools are reopened at the beginning of autumn. What we already know is that there will be legislative changes in basic education that will allow for the schools to arrange distance teaching also in autumn if needed. This, of course, has an impact on our evaluations.

Due to COVID-19 some evaluation projects have been postponed and this will, in turn, require some changes to the already existing evaluation plan.

Since spring 2020, the FINEEC personnel has been working at distance and no decision has yet been made of when the situation gets back to normal.

One thing that we already have learnt is that we need to be more flexible to adjust our activities to suddenly and unexpectedly changing situations. To have flexibility to find new ways of doing the evaluations.

...The inspectorate update of Flanders

The Flemish inspectorate is responsible for evaluating and stimulating quality, but is now taking up a liaison role between policy and practice and a role as a mediator for schools struggling with the risk analysis before reopening. The inspectors have gathered a lot of information (mostly by phoning schools and by online questionnaires) from half of March until now and then made reports out of this information for the minister and the education sector at large. E.g. how do schools organize day care for parents working in the health sectors, reports about the pre teaching phase, reports about the risk analysis for the reopening of the schools, reports about reopening,... The minister strongly relied on these reports in terms of policy-making.

We connect every school to a 'bridge' inspector who bridges the gap between education policy in Brussels and education practice. Schools can address this inspector for all kind of questions and concerns. A few inspectors are seconded on a voluntary basis to another organization.

The inspectorate was strongly involved in drafting guidelines for schools in every phase of the crisis.

Schools are gradually reopening since 15 May 2020. The inspectors visited a representative sample of schools in the week of 15 June during half days. The focus was on three questions:

- How will schools deal with the evaluation of the pupils?
- How will schools deal with the impact of the corona crisis on pupil's progress in terms of learning and wellbeing?
- How do schools anticipate challenges for the start of the new school year in September?

The inspectors monitored distance learning by gathering information on how schools practice distance learning, what measure were taken and what methods they use if problems occur,...

The inspectors will restart with home tuition inspections, organized in government offices. The beginning of the new school year will be an intermediate phase. From September until December, there will not be regular inspections but rather short visits to a lot of schools with one research question for every school.

The lesson learnt in Flanders is that next to the digital acceleration, quality differences tend to get clearer between teachers and schools in terms of policy and practice. Equal opportunities between pupils get more under pressure than before the COVID 19 crisis.

...The inspectorate update of Estonia

During the COVID-19 crisis, schools closed for distance learning and the role of the inspectors was to support and advise them. They contacted all the school owners (79 municipalities) and schools (524 schools) by phone to identify concerns and good practices regarding the organization of distance learning. In addition, surveys were conducted in municipalities to map how students are equipped with computers and the Internet; whether and how many students are not participating in studies, and how the municipality deals with them. The summary of the results was sent directly to the management and to the minister. Since 15 May, when the emergency situation ended, they have continued to inspect.

In May they continued with the planned inspection. 3 schools were inspected in May and June, one of them is related to the educational license. (They have an obligation to inspect schools that have a temporary training permit.) Two inspections are related to risk-based assessment. The inspection process is relatively the same as before, but they do not visit the lessons because students are generally distance learning and the 2 + 2 requirement (2 people max and at least 2 meters apart) must still be met. They are in school for 2-3 days, compared to the previous four days. From September, they plan to continue with the usual inspection. They certainly need to carry out surveillance of educational licences. They have taken into account that if the situation becomes difficult again, they will carry out document-based monitoring and conduct the interviews online.

...The inspectorate update of Hessen (Germany)

For the Hessian Inspectorate the corona crisis means, that external evaluation is closed down until the end of the next school term. They hope to restart external evaluation in September 2021.

But they are still engaged in school counselling, helping schools to deal with the challenges of school closing and developing ways to prepare for digital learning and teaching.

In addition they develop feedback questionnaires for internal school evaluation – supporting schools in finding out, what their students need and how they cope with the new ways of learning.

...The inspectorate update of Ireland

In Ireland, normal inspection work has been suspended since March and the Inspectorate has leveraged its advisory and research roles in support of Continuity of Schooling since schools closed in March and the Resumption of Schooling when schools re-open in September. The main focus has been on advising and supporting schools and gathering information for the system in relation to distance learning. Activities have included: phased phone calls to principals; surveys; development of guidance

notes for schools; gathering and disseminating effective practice; and liaising with support services. The Inspectorate has also been involved in advising on revised arrangements for the assessment of students who were due to sit the State examinations in June 2020. The outcomes of inspectors' contact with school principals has informed the suite of guidance documents on Continuity of Schooling published by the Department of Education.

Other changes: For the first term of the upcoming school year, the Inspectorate will focus on advising and supporting schools as they re-open. Schools will be offered an opportunity to participate in Inspectorate-led advisory sessions (online and face-to-face) focusing on well-being, teaching and learning, and assessment and the promotion of school self-evaluation. There will also be a strong emphasis on the needs of vulnerable learners. The Inspectorate will engage in research work to identify and disseminate effective practice and will conduct regular surveys of stakeholders, the outcomes of which will inform the provision of supports to schools.

Evaluation work will be confined to a small number of priority inspections including the completion of inspections commenced prior to school closure and risk-based inspections such as child protection and safeguarding inspections and urgent follow through inspections. Furthermore, inspectors may be involved in advising schools, where relevant, in relation to implementing public health advice.

Schools will have the flexibility to use the school self-evaluation (SSE) process to help them to address the challenges that will arise from the re-opening of schools in line with public health advice and/or complete work on the aspects of teaching and learning that they had selected as the focus for self-evaluation in the period 2016-2020. The arrangements for school inspection and school self-evaluation for the new school year are set out in circulars issued on 17 June that are available at the following links: [circular for primary and special schools](#) [circular for post-primary schools](#).

...The inspectorate update of Kosovo*

As a result of the current crisis, the Education Inspectorate in the Republic of Kosovo has worked with reduced staff, namely with essential staff. Due to the current crisis, the Education Inspectorate has stopped all types of inspections related to quality assurance, such as teacher performance assessment and school performance evaluation. During this time, the Education Inspectorate has closely monitored the delivery of distance learning. The inspectors have analysed this form of teaching and have exchanged ideas and given various proposals and recommendations which have to do with the preparations of the Education Inspectorate for the realization of activities after passing the current risk, as well as the preparations that must be made for cases.

From this crisis in the field of education they have learned that the current curriculum and legislation in force are not suitable for these situations, and do not foresee the activities that should be undertaken in the implementation of distance learning. Since this crisis could last or even happen again, then it is necessary for policy makers, curriculum developers and experts in the field of education to set priorities and start preparing an alternative curriculum which will be a guide for the preparation of school curricula such as and for the organization and delivery of distance learning.

The current activities of the Education Inspectorate are the inspection, monitoring and support of educational institutions of preschool education, with special emphasis on the protection and prevention of the spread of pandemics with COVID-19.

After the end of the pandemic, the new roles of the Education Inspectorate for different situations will be determined.

...The inspectorate update of Luxembourg

The Luxembourgish government decided to shut down schools from 15th March 2020. From the start of confinement, the College of Directors of Basic Education was involved in the organization, management, coordination and supervision of the actions decided by the ministry. Concretely, the Directorate took care of the good progress and the implementation of the measures envisaged by the government within the framework of "Schoul doheem" (school at home). The Directorate therefore collaborated in the implementation of pedagogical materials to be used in "distance learning". On the other hand, a "helpline" was organized for parents and teachers (didactical but also psychological concerns).

The evaluation is currently limited to reports to the Minister relating to the impact of the measures planned by the Ministry. On the other hand, the Directorate provides for supervision only in the case of complaints from parents of pupils.

At present, the evaluation is mainly done through discussions with the heads of school committees (headteacher).

The schools were asked to provide the Directorate with an exact and detailed description of the activities planned for this period of confinement and until the end of the school year. In addition, the Directorate has access to all preparations from the respective schools via onedrive. In complaints from parents of pupils, the Directorate has made supervisions.

One of the lessons to be learned from this confinement is certainly the major role of the Public School as a pillar of society. Indeed, from the start of confinement and the establishment of home education

we were able to observe the social disparities and inequalities experienced by the students. Inequalities that the Public School tries to make less important.

I would like SICI to support projects which aim to see how the evaluation / inspection / supervision of distance education can be carried out in a professional and efficient manner.

...The inspectorate update of Malta

Before Covid19, the inspectors in Malta could not perform external reviews in schools because the unions had stopped any kind of lesson observations. External reviews in Childcare Centres proceeded normally. During the Covid crisis, inspectors have been focusing on the development of an inspection framework and a thorough evaluation of internal mechanisms.

Due to Covid 19, schools were closed since 13 March 2020 and will remain closed until the end of the scholastic year with regards to compulsory schools. On Friday 12th June, Malta reopened childcare centres, which are operating with restrictive measures. The Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) has been contributing and liaising with the Minister for Health to issue guidelines for the reopening of childcare centres. Childcare Centres have come up with a mitigating plan which is being monitored by the DQSE. Childcare Centres are also being guided by the DQSE during this transitioning period especially with regard to the adherence to the guidelines issued by the Health Authority. Definition of quality has not changed as educational institutions (at the moment Childcare Centres) are expected to follow the National Standards. On 1st July 2020, Summer schools will open as well.

Distance Learning has not been inspected and this is an area for development. A working group including inspectors from the Quality Assurance Department (QAD) and the Digital Literacy Department has been recently set up in order to develop Standards for Digital Learning. However, this is still in its initial stages.

With regards to the compulsory schooling in September, it is still too early to make a decision and different scenarios are being planned as the context is still fluid. Schools will need standards for safe online learning. Regarding primary and secondary institutions, what has been discussed so far, is the possibility of not having external reviews during the first term of school. This is to allow schools identify and address new challenges. The focus in Malta is currently on the process of getting back the children in the routine and helping them to feel safe to go back to their respective educational institution.

Since on-site inspections have stopped, the QAD has also worked on an analysis of the outcomes of their school visits as they had just launched a new one day review model. They have made a report which will be shared with the policy makers. Colleagues within the Education Department have conducted a survey on how online tools were used by teachers. It seemed that all the schools in Malta have worked really hard to use different platforms. The ministry has also been very supportive. There are now two websites issued by the ministry where educators are encouraged to deposit lessons, ideas,... which could be shared with and seen by everyone. The main lesson learnt is that distance learning needs to be better addressed, especially with regard to vulnerable learners to better reduce gaps. Also, teachers need further training in the pedagogy of distance learning.

...The inspectorate update of Northern Ireland

Inspectors have a new role as 'Link Officer' with a group of schools. The Link Officer is the school's first contact for any queries or information. Such information is entered onto a spreadsheet for all schools in Northern Ireland.

Ahead of school closures, to support the vital efforts of schools and providers during these challenging times and to alleviate pressure on school staff, all inspections were paused on 18 March 2020 until further notice.

On 23 April 2020, ETI published a web statement advising that when schools and providers re-open to all children and young people, inspections will continue to be paused for a period of time (subject to review). During this period, ETI will continue to work with schools, providers and the wider education system to provide advice and support.

ETI is not inspecting during the present covid-19 crisis.

ETI as Link Officers monitor distance learning through asking schools about their practice and arrangements, entering the information on the spreadsheet where it is collated, analyzed and reported upon as required, by the ETI to the Department of Education.

ETI will move back into their role as District Inspectors. Each inspector has a group of schools for which they are District Inspectors, keeping in contact with each school.

In line with the recovery programmes of the Northern Ireland Executive and the Department of Education, the ETI is beginning to scope transition and recovery when schools re-open. ETI are intending to engage with the teaching unions and other stakeholders to discuss the same and take on board views. At this point, definitive timeframes cannot be set as advised by the guidelines from the

Executive as of 12 May 2020. There are a number of scenarios that will inform how long this period of time will be, dependent on when and how children and young people return to school.

Clearly there is a balance to be struck between supporting schools in the response and recovery phase and through inspection to provide assurances to parents, the wider public, the Department and other stakeholders that our children and young people are receiving as good a quality of education in the current and future circumstances.

The lessons learnt in NI is that schools have progressed significantly in their on-line learning provision. The effective practice needs to be shared with all schools, and training provided where required. The pedagogy of remote learning can be expanded and developed further and the use of on-line meeting facilities should be continued where feasible, to save time and travel.

...The inspectorate update of Portugal

The Portuguese Inspectorate of Education and Science (IGEC) is worried about the impact of the coronavirus outbreak on children and youth, mainly concerning losses in learning and increased dropout rates. The crisis is being experienced disproportionately since many children do not have a laptop at home, or internet connectivity, or supportive parents. Relying exclusively on online strategies may imply reaching only children from well-off families.

The use of online tools to assure that lesson plans, videos, tutorials, and other resources provide guidelines, instructions and structure to the learning process became crucial. Remote learning is not only about online learning, but about mixed media learning, with the objective of reaching as many students as possible.

The Portuguese Ministry of Education along with a State television (RTP1) has launched “study at home”. Every week from 9 am to 6 pm students may complement their learning with classes that become available also online. IGEC is following those classes.

In order to oversee the development of pedagogical evaluation in schools in its operation in virtual learning and now back to classrooms, and before the ending of the school year, IGEC has visited one hundred both public and private schools. A process of triangulation of information coming from school documentation, interviews of school principals and teachers as well questionnaires answered by students was developed. Three hundred secondary school classes were involved and around three thousand students. The report gathering the conclusions of this action will be available on our website.

...The inspectorate update of the Republic of France

Schools were closed from March 16 until May 11 when they reopened partially and progressively.

Inspection reports, whether concerning a teacher, a school or educational policy continued to be released, provided lockdown conditions allowed them to be completed and issued.

All inspections, of individual teachers and of educational units, have been suspended. Whenever possible, they will be postponed until September. Contact with school leaders is established by phone, email or video.

In our two-tier system, with regional inspectorates and a general inspectorate, the tasks carried out during lockdown were the following:

- regional inspectors have been tasked with maintaining contact with school leaders and giving advice whenever necessary;
- the inspectors in charge of a school subject (maths, languages, etc.) keep in touch with the teachers concerned, providing guidelines and advice on how to teach and maintain contact with their pupils or students during lockdown. Thus, a great number of circular letters and guidance papers have been produced on home schooling or the use of distance learning tools – a wealth of pedagogical ideas and guidelines;
- regional inspectors involved in training courses for teachers have devised ways of ensuring distance training;
- at national level, general inspectors maintain contact with the regional inspectors in their areas of responsibility (primary education, maths, languages, exams, etc.), and produce regular accounts on the state of distance learning or on the difficulties encountered by school leaders, teachers or students, bringing both notable difficulties and best solutions to the attention of the Education minister. These accounts then serve as a basis for decision-making. Special work-groups have also been set up to collect information and provide advice on specific questions such as the organization of exams or the re-opening of schools.
- Both regional and general inspectors are involved in the supervision of distance learning. Supervision takes on a number of shapes, such as:
 - looking closely at tools and strategies in order to evaluate them and write up recommendations for teachers;
 - collecting examples of good practices and innovative strategies;
 - encouraging collaborative work and sharing examples of successful implementations of teacher or student collaboration;
 - supervising the creation of special educational broadcasts for television and radio.

All in all, the quantity and quality of the resources produced since distance learning started is leading inspectorates to think about the best ways of using them so that the innovations due to the current circumstances should benefit the school system in the future.

...The inspectorate update of the Republic of Moldova

A new role assumed during this period by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC) can be considered the one of a consultant both for the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research and for the representatives of general education institutions on certain dimensions, for example regarding some state policies and actions taken during the pandemic outbreak of COVID-19. During the quarantine period, ANACEC became a real distance training center for the managerial staff in general education.

At present, the entire evaluation process in general education is suspended due to the stopping of the activity of all educational institutions during the quarantine period. With the resumption of the activity of general education institutions, ANACEC expects to continue the external evaluation process, including the application of remote (online) external evaluation methods, for which it recently developed a draft Regulation on the remote organization and operation of the External Evaluation Commission in general education.

The traditional notion of Quality, starting this year, will undoubtedly include the re-awareness of the Pedagogical Continuity formula, which expresses a principle with the role of backbone for all teaching processes, carried out anywhere, anytime, in isolation or between classroom walls.

Starting from the created situation, the avoidance of learning disruptions, didactic and communication discontinuities must certainly be a priority of all educational systems. In this sense, the phrase Quality in the field of education, especially will include the well-thought-out organization of teaching efforts designed to maintain a consistent link between teachers and students / children; to keep fresh the learning disposition of all and to concentrate the efforts for the maintenance of an effective communication and of the educational community.

The diversity of teaching resources and forms of work developed and proposed as an alternative in this unnatural period was oriented towards the development of students' abilities (including their assessment) according to the Curriculum and, at the same time, towards the development and improvement of digital skills. In the future, a reassessment of the existing Curriculum is requested, with an emphasis on transdisciplinarity, the development of skills and integration situations related to the school environment and life skills.

During the quarantine period, as tools of communication, information, consultation, etc. in order to keep in touch with the representatives of the school community, ANACEC specialists apply several web applications and platforms: Webex Cisco, Zoom.us, Google Classroom, Google Meet, etc.

In order to evaluate, monitor and appreciate the quality of distance learning, ANACEC specialists:

- participate in various online webinars on topics related to distance evaluation, where in public discussions they get acquainted with the existing issues stated by various participants, but also with examples of good practice related to distance learning;
- develop online training courses for various beneficiaries (managerial staff, teachers) and external evaluators, which contain a mandatory component - evaluation of training modules: tests, or simulation of a practical activity based on those studied remotely.

The activity of the evaluators also after the summer period will be directed towards the support and promotion of the quality assurance measures and the actions, the role of the evaluator being still the one of „critical friend“.

The pandemic has taught us many lessons:

Awareness that very soon, after leaving quarantine, the School will need another „normality“ - that is, what McKinsey analysts call „the next normal“. The need to rethink the importance of education for sustainable development. The challenges of the pandemic will lead to a rethinking of education and the reconfiguration of the school.

One lesson would be to understand that we must already expect the unexpected, with uncertainty about the future becoming the only certainty; and that we are not prepared (logistically, materially, intellectually and emotionally), as a society and as individuals, for this unexpected. A lesson learned was to demonstrate the need for flexibility and rapid mobilization and to initiate active communication between the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research via all means, including through social networks to discuss possible solutions for the quarantine period and offer various platform models and web tool applications including online learning tutorials to maintain the continuity of teaching and the connection and Teacher-Student, School-Family, School-Community partnerships in crisis situation.

A new lesson offered is the awareness of the need to re-evaluate the quality of teachers' professional development and continuous self-improvement. In this regard, many questions have arisen regarding the future of professional training: What kind of qualifications do we need to train? What skills are more important for the future?

Online learning will become an integral part of the school activity, although experience has shown that distance learning will not be able to completely replace face-to-face teaching. At the same time, online teaching has demonstrated new possibilities for integrating children with special educational needs. This requires much more flexibility in planning and conducting learning activities and, of course, improving the skills of teachers and students to collaborate online. The teacher, regardless of the level of education, will have to adapt their learning materials at the same time for students with and without access to online learning - at least for a transition period.

At the same time, there is a need for massive endowment programs, at national and local level, to ensure the necessary equipment and Internet connection (for schools, teachers and students), as well as equally comprehensive programs for the general improvement of digital skills (key competences) for teachers and students.

The pandemic has shown that despite advanced technologies, teachers often prove to be irreplaceable and essential for learning - much of society has realized that schools are not just buildings, classrooms and lessons, how hard it is to be a teacher and that teachers are materially unappreciated anyway.

Another lesson: Changing assessment criteria and extending assessment beyond academic performance. The pandemic has influenced the rethinking of the assessment of learning outcomes, in several directions:

The organization of assessment tests for online application has been re-evaluated / rethought - including for national exams.

In this sense, the school management will also be rethought. Administrative measures will be needed, on a permanent basis, right from the moment schools are reopened. Limiting or rethinking activities that bring together many students, children or adults (e.g. sports competitions, concerts, meetings, teacher councils, training programs, ceremonies - opening of the school year or graduation - etc.) by using tele-presence. Taking draconian cleaning and sanitation measures and often washing your hands - of course, with the provision of the necessary resources.

It will require the organization of summer schools and evening education to make up for the laggards - especially for students without access to online learning.

A proven lesson was taught by the School-Family Partnership, which could be activated and functioned in the conditions of ensuring an open and permanent communication. At the same time, the school-family relationship will be rethought in the future. In many cases, parents proved to be valuable educational resources, even becoming „emergency teachers“ during the pandemic.

Despite new opportunities, with the challenge of switching to online teaching, at the same time, the pandemic exposed a number of more hidden problems of the school, the level of quality of teaching not only online, including the existence of a certain failure on the basic educational relationship – „teacher” and „student”.

Distance learning has been and is complicated to apply for some categories of children e.g. from preschool education, for many children from disadvantaged families, socially vulnerable, etc. Complications have also arisen in the provision of services by psychologists who apply ART therapy in practice, or in the distance teaching of school subjects (e.g. physical education). Many myths about contemporary education have been dispelled.

Another lesson: Giving more importance to the mental health of children, their families and teachers, as well as social and emotional learning, including through the consistent development of counseling services (for students, parents and teachers), etc.

...The inspectorate update of the Republic of Slovenia

Due to the corona virus crisis, most of the staff of the Inspectorate of the Republic of Slovenia were working at home from March, 13 until the end of May. This means that only 2 or 3 people were at the Inspectorate per day, mostly the chief inspector and one of the inspectors and a secretary. They answered the phone calls, were doing urgent meetings at the Ministry of education, were answering to urgent emails and mail in general. All the rest of inspectors would take their computers, files, certificates to their homes and worked more or less like usual. They were in touch with schools (principals) via phone or emails, and they were working on their cases, studying files etc. The only difference was that the inspectors didn't go to schools in person. So if the inspectors had cases that needed something to be checked in person, they postponed it until after the crisis. Mostly all of those cases were already done in June. They could say that they are almost back to normal now. During corona crisis all the inspectors would regularly meet via Zoom meetings, they discussed via emails ...

Since 2019 there has been work done in changing the Inspection law, but that hasn't been changed yet due to coronavirus crisis and because also the government changed in March 2020. One big change besides waiting for the general Inspection law to change is getting more opened to schools, what they do with regular lectures for teachers and headmasters at schools, where inspectors explain them all the basic information about their work, their rights, duties and try to make Inspectorate more "human" and less stressfull for employees at schools.

...The inspectorate update of Scotland

New roles were taken up as the National Improvement Agency has worked very hard to liaise with the other directorates within the agency so considerable partnership working is taking place but also with other stakeholders. Inspectors all work at home at this moment, but they use Teams and Skype and this is working well.

The national decision was made to stop inspections temporarily in order to enable head teachers and their staff to focus on the tremendous challenges that were taking place, E.g. on how they measure the distances when children go back to the class room,....

The inspectors in Scotland have taken up different kind of roles. These include advisory groups, governance groups to provide policy documentation on health and well-being, groups to provide additional support for schools such as blended learning, groups to work on the national curriculum, groups to participate in writing teams who publish two newsletters weekly (one for parents and one for practitioners),...

At this moment the senior leaders are setting out clear principles, aims and outcomes for inspectors in order to support schools and teachers after the summer holidays.

The lesson learnt in Scotland is that they need better flexibility of approach, ongoing openness, better online teaching, sharing more practices between the countries across Europe, strong online quality support and protection for vulnerable learners.

...The inspectorate update of the Slovak Republic

During the period of the corona crisis, teaching in Slovak schools was interrupted in the same way as in other European countries.

The working regime of the Slovak School Inspectorate was also adapted to this situation. In cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic the Slovak School Inspectorate took a new role related to setting up distance learning, methods and principles for formative and summative assessment of students, as well as gave schools counseling at these areas.

At the same time the Inspectorate was involved in the process of systemic adjustments of primary school curricula for the future period in order to make them more flexible and provide a space for compensating some deficits caused by the closure of schools and interrupting education services.

For the next school year, the Slovak School Inspectorate have prepared a series of tools focused on identifying the potential of individual groups of primary schools which were able to move smoothly into the distance learning; and based on these findings Inspectorate will propose targeted measures contributing to solve the shortcomings that accompanied distance education in that period.

...The inspectorate update of Sweden

In March, the government recommended the upper secondary schools in Sweden to close and teach through distance education. The government also issued a regulation which made it possible for municipalities and school owners for example to adjust which subjects to teach this spring and a possibility to extend the semester if many teachers or students were absent because of the corona virus.

The Inspectorate received a lot of questions from parents and students concerning upper secondary school as well as primary schools. We decided to stop our school visits and change our content in the inspections due to the circumstances.

For example:

Content of inspections

- Focus on dialogue with feed-forward reports
- Surveys to follow-up the current situation at schools and municipalities and school-owners
- Concluding reports after dialogue and surveys
- Inspections focusing on legal shortcomings only if necessary

Methods:

- Interviews on Skype and no school visits
- No follow-up after recommendations

...The inspectorate update of the Netherlands

The Dutch Inspectorate has changed the supervision during the Covid-19 crisis. Since the moment the schools have been closed (beginning of March), they have postponed most of their inspection activities. A limited number of inspections has been done or completed by digital tools.

Furthermore, the Netherlands have focused on the effect of the Covid-19-crisis on schools. First of all they monitored how schools provide education on distance by developing questionnaires and by having telephone calls with the school board and heads of the schools. Examples from questions are 'Do all pupils participate?', 'Why do they not participate?', 'How is the contact with parents?', 'What

measures do schools take concerning vulnerable pupils?,...". highly appreciated by the schools that the inspectors show empathy and sympathy.

Since 11th of June Primary schools are open again, and secondary schools are opened partially. In June they did a new research in which they looked at several aspects of the re-opening: how schools monitor the development of the children, the choices schools make in the curriculum, the challenges they face, the 'lessons learned' during the period in which they only provided education on distance. This information will also be reported and used to inform the government and the educational field. They will also deduce subjects from this monitoring which they can bring up during regular supervision.

Next school year they will investigate the effect the school closing has had on the development of the children. This will probably be the last part of their special Covid-19-monitoring.

After summer holiday they will also gradually restart our regular supervision: partly still supervision on distance and partly also on site. The originally planned thematic inspections have been changed because of limited possibilities to visit schools.

Other changes: Since August 2017 The Netherlands have been working with the inspection framework for the inspection of governing bodies and their schools. Since this inspection approach (schoolboard inspection) was rather new and rather different compared with the previous model, the new approach has been evaluated (internally and externally) last year. The current framework is been adjusted based on the outcomes of the evaluations. Next school year several professionalization activities for inspectors and other staff will be organized. The plan is to implement the renewed framework on August 2021.

The most important changes will be that they will more and more include the quality of the educational system as a whole (systemic supervision) as starting point for the inspection of schoolboard and schools. System issues will therefore be part of the inspection at the level of school boards and schools. They also want to make our supervision more proportional, which means our inspections will be less standardized. They continue school board inspection in which they focus on assuring basis quality for all schools and school boards, and on stimulating schools and schoolboards to constantly improve their quality (above basic quality).

...The inspectorate update of Ukraine

In the conditions of quarantine caused by the spread of coronavirus COVID-19 in the State Service for Quality of Education of Ukraine there were changes in the organization of the internal work schedule of the Service.

In order to prevent the spread of coronavirus infection, to preserve the life, health and safety of employees of the Service, all employees switched to work using an electronic document management system, using the remote form of work and flexible working hours as much as possible (including to reduce crowding during "hours" peak"), a mode of operation has been introduced on the conditions of reduced and part-time working, taking into account the requirements defined by law.

In order to protect employees from COVID-19 infection and to organize the effective functioning of the Service, all meetings and seminars take place through online platforms.

The State Education Quality Service of Ukraine conducted during the pandemic

1. An online survey of participants in the educational process on the organization of distance learning in general secondary education in quarantine. According to the results of the survey prepared:
 - recommendations to participants in the educational process to ensure the quality of education during distance learning of students in quarantine;
 - analytical certificate on the organization of distance learning in general secondary education in quarantine (sent to the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine).
2. Organized and conducted online training of employees of territorial bodies on the methodology of institutional audit in general secondary education institutions.
3. Methodical recommendations have been prepared by the territorial bodies of the Service on conducting questionnaires during the institutional audit.
4. Draft orders of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine "On approval of Guidelines for the formation of the internal system of quality assurance in education in general secondary education"; "On Amendments to the Procedure for Conducting Institutional Audit of General Secondary Education Institutions".

...The inspectorate update of Wales (ESTYN)

The inspectorate took the decision to suspend all direct inspection related activity on 16 March 2020. This was a day before the Education Minister took the decision to close all education providers in Wales from 23 March 2020.

In Wales, there is already a planned pause to school inspections in place for one academic year 2020-21 to create capacity for all inspectors to provide support for schools as they prepare for education reform and the introduction of a new curriculum. No inspection activity for maintained schools had been scheduled for this year, except for schools in a statutory level of follow-up. Instead, a series of

one-day engagement visits had been planned for all maintained schools focusing on schools' preparedness for the new curriculum.

Despite the academic year 2020-21 being a planned pause year for school inspections it was intended to continue to inspect in other sectors such as post-16 education. Plans are being developed on the conditions required to re-start inspections in these sectors.

Since the suspension of inspection much of Estyn's work has been adapted to increase engagement and communication with stakeholders to support the education sectors' response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

Continuity of learning in Wales – the policy statement can be found [here](#)

Initially Estyn reconfigured much of their resources to support Welsh Government to deliver a Continuity of Learning programme. In partnership with local authorities, regional improvement services, headteachers and Welsh Government, Estyn has worked collaboratively to develop guidance:

- on supporting wellbeing of headteachers, governors, staff and learners
- on the development and management of learning online, [distance learning](#) and blended learning – including addressing digital exclusion and supporting professional learning for staff using and developing resources online
- on how to continue with [school business](#) during the Covid-19 pandemic with key [principles](#)
- on supporting children to use the [Welsh language at home](#)
- for [parents and carers](#) to support families to stay safe, healthy and learning

Engagement phone calls/visits

The focus of the planned model of one-day engagement visits to schools by inspectors as critical friends has been adapted so that inspectors now speak with headteachers about learner and staff wellbeing, their responses to the current crisis, and their approach to remote learning. Over time, when schools increase their operation, the focus of these visits will include a professional dialogue around preparation for Curriculum for Wales. The information from the direct engagement with schools allows the inspectorate to provide regular system-level updates and advice to Welsh Government. During the Autumn term the findings will be published to share practice across the education sector.

Schools causing concern (schools in special measures or in need of significant improvement)

Currently all monitoring visits to schools in a statutory improvement category have been paused due to the outbreak of COVID-19. Each school has been allocated a link inspector who contacts the school regularly to:

- gain an understanding of the school's situation to plan for future approaches to follow-up visits
- provide support, including liaising with local authorities and regional improvement organisations regarding any support required
- keep follow up lead officers within Estyn regularly informed of the school's situation and the key issues discussed with them.

The ethos of these links is to be able to respond to the school's needs in a sensitive, flexible and supportive way.

Further responses to the pandemic

- Four HMI have been loaned to Welsh Government to support their response to Covid-19.
- Existing link inspectors are engaging more regularly with local authorities, independent schools and their boards, regional education improvement consortia, initial teacher education and post-16 providers.
- Work on thematic reports that do not involve school visits will continue. We are piloting the hosting of webinars to share the main findings from our thematic work. The first of these will be in October 2020 focussing on Welsh A Level.
- There will be a thematic section in this year's Annual Report focusing on education and COVID-19. The report will be published in December 2020. There will also be forewords to our Community schools, LGBT, and Mental Health thematic reports due to be published this term.
- Estyn is working even more closely with our colleagues in other inspectorates in the home nations of the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland. A programme of weekly video conferences has allowed senior managers to explore the response to the crisis and discuss re-imagining inspection arrangements.

Home-working and support for Estyn staff

Most HMI were homeworkers before the outbreak of COVID-19, and travelled for inspection activity and policy meetings. Most of the office-base staff also had worked at home at some point before the lockdown. As a consequence, Estyn had IT infrastructure and systems already in place that could be rolled out readily across the organisation to support homeworking.

Estyn has developed advice for the organisation of online meetings and line managers have increased the frequency of communications with all staff. Daily updates were published at the beginning of the crisis and these are now published twice weekly. Each member of staff has regular one-to-one "catch-

ups” with their line managers focusing on their wellbeing, such as work-life balance. This provides reassurance to staff and enables particular concerns to be resolved quickly.

Professional learning modules have been developed by Estyn’s professional learning team for HMI. These include distance training materials and small group discussions focusing on specific aspects of education and inspection practice, for example approaches to blended learning, inspecting reading, and evaluating schools’ provision for different groups of learners, particularly those that are vulnerable to disadvantage.

Recent innovations - post crisis inspection from September 2021

In 2019-2020 Estyn consulted widely with stakeholders as part of a mid-cycle review of its inspection arrangements introduced in 2017. These changes are planned for implementation in 2021. Many of the respondents to Estyn’s consultation felt that the current arrangements were working well. Nonetheless, the inspectorate consulted on removing summative gradings and respondents were very much in favour of detailed evaluative reporting without headline summative gradings. Feedback from Estyn’s headteacher reference group, established last year to support the development of the new inspection arrangements suggests that no major changes are required to the inspection framework in light of COVID-19 but that inspectors should continue to approach inspection flexibly and adapt to reflect the context of the school.

In addition to this change, the revised framework aims to:

- strengthen the link between internal and external evaluation,
- provide a valuable learning experience for schools and inspectors,
- sharpen the focus of our activities on the quality of schools’ curricula at a time when Wales’ education sector introduces a new curriculum.

Links to useful documents:

- [Developing approaches to support distance learning](#)
- [Stay Safe. Stay Learning: continuity of learning policy statement](#)
- [Advice for school and PRU leaders and governors on how to continue with school and PRU business during the Covid-19 pandemic](#)
- [Key principles to support the continuation of school and PRU business](#)
- [Supporting your children to use the Welsh language at home](#)
- [COVID-19 Guidance to parents and carers to support families to stay safe, healthy and learning](#)

Other information by members

... Cooperation between the inspectorate of Bulgaria and EPAN

The National Inspectorate of Education participates through its director as representative of Bulgaria to the Education Policy Advisors Network (EPAN) in the discussion of integration and implementation of the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC [three volumes of the RFCDC](#)) in the education systems of the States Parties to the European Cultural Convention. The National Inspectorate of Education prepare information for the stakeholders providing:

- pre-service teacher education
- in-service teacher education

and which of these stakeholders have included RFCDC in their training activities.

NIE give feedback on applicability of RFCDC TEACHER REFLECTION TOOL: The self-reflected democratic practitioner – A journey to democratic teacher ethos and a democratic culture in school (Pilot Version). The purpose of this tool is to accompany teachers and multipliers in this process and in their work with the Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture. It can be used as a starter to get acquainted with the RFCDC but can also be seen as a very general companion to self-reflection on teaching and democratic competences.

... Cooperation between the inspectorates of Estonia, Sweden, Denmark and Finland

The Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, with the help of Nordic Council of Ministers, launched a cooperation project with colleagues from Sweden, Denmark and Finland. 8 experts from the External Evaluation Department travel to Sweden in October, Finland in December and Denmark in January.

Main objectives of the Project:

1. Knowledge exchange between ministries and local authorities on supporting the improvement of the quality of schools.
2. Create a network between participants to focus on supporting weaker schools (inspection of schools at risk).
3. To share experiences on best practices in dealing with schools at risk (identifying schools at risk; data analyses of the schools at risk; publishing schools-date; states' and local authorities' active intervention policies).
4. Increase the capacity of the state and local authorities to support schools, especially low-performing schools.

... Activities of the inspectorate of the Czech Republic

The Czech School Inspectorate participated in the OECD survey in May 2020 and provided data for the Czech Republic for the Second survey to support education systems in the next phase - Covid-19.

... Activities of the inspectorate of Ireland

The Inspectorate participates in the European Commission Directors General for Schools Group and in the Atlantic Rim Collaboratory (ARC) project.

***** We would like to take the opportunity to address other inspectorates, that have undergone significant changes or want to communicate other relevant information, to write a text and send this to the SICI secretariat for the next newsletter. Please keep in mind that this text has to be short (10 lines) and to the point*****

*****We would also like to ask to keep the SICI secretariat up to date about ongoing activities between members. This will make it possible to create an overview of existing projects and report about them at the General Assembly.*****

Updates about projects...

Some words about ...

...The Erasmus+ project “BIBESOIN”



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



Current state of affairs:

- The training events in Cyprus and Malta were cancelled and postponed until the spring of 2021.
- No decision has been made about the multiplier event, which was originally planned in November 2020 (in combination with the General Assembly).
- The project group has worked online on the TESSIE toolbox and a new timeline was set up (the time line can be found at <https://www.sici-inspectorates.eu/Activities/Projects/TESSIE>)

- A proposal has been submitted to extend the project with 5 extra months (Until August 31th, 2021). According to the rules of the Erasmus+ programme in corona times, five months is the maximum to prolong the project. The proposal has been approved.

Other information

Coming SICI events

<u>Date</u>	<u>Country</u>	<u>Theme</u>
21—22 May 2020	Prague	Improving the quality of inspection using feedback from schools on impact.
24—25 September 2020	Finland	Devising communication strategies
October 2020	Online regional group meeting	Members responses to Covid crisis in Fall/ Development of SICI strategic plan
November 2020	France	“General Assembly”
11-12 March 2021	Finland	Devising communication strategies
May 2021	Basque Country / Czech Republic?	
September 2021	?	
November 2021	Sweden	“General Assembly”

SICI-General Assembly 2020 in Paris:

- The General Assembly in Paris will be held on November 19 and 20 as planned. It will be organized on a hybrid format, giving the choice to each member to be present on site or remotely, with a webinar type tool. Members will receive details in September and will be asked to indicate which format they choose.
- Parts of the contents of the GA will be revisited:
 - o The business meeting will of course be held and distant voting will be organized. It is indeed a most important aspect of the life of our association and it is essential that we manage to safeguard it.
 - o The strategy of SICI during the next four years was also discussed in the regional groups on the basis of a proposition made by the EC.

- The main change will therefore concern the priority themes of 2020 and 2021. The theme of Internal Quality assurance will be continued in Paris and in the year 2021 so as to reach its wrapping up stage a year later than planned.
- Part of the GA will be devoted to analyzing and taking stock of the changes brought by the crisis in the field of education, the questions raised on how to support and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning, the steps taken by inspectorates to anticipate the changes to come.

You can always find an overview of the SICI activities by clicking on the following link: <http://www.sici-inspectorates.eu/News/Calendar>

Call for projects

...funded by SICI

One of the key actions of the SICI strategic plan is to promote and support partnership and cooperation between inspectorates. A subtheme of this key action is to help fund projects working collaboratively in line with SICI's aims and priorities. Therefore, we would like to inform you about the new criteria for funding SICI projects:

SICI can fund projects up to 3000 euros per year for two years in a row.

The EC will make a decision within one month about the application on the basis of the following elements:

1. The project is designed as a multilateral project of minimum 3 members.
2. All participating members co-finance and invest human resources into the project.
3. The project aims at developing or at further exploring an aspect of the SICI strategic plan. The aims are part of a short project description.
4. There is a project budget.
5. A plan for evaluating the project is presented with the application.
6. The dissemination into SICI is planned (Minimum: report in a workshop or GA)

A member of the EC will be appointed as a contact person for the project.

SICI contact details

Please let us know if you have any remarks or questions. Always feel free to submit any additional information, which can be used in the following newsletter.

Email SICI secretariat: sici@vlaanderen.be