



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

The relationship between inspection and research

Considerations from Ireland

Pádraig Mac Fhlannchadha

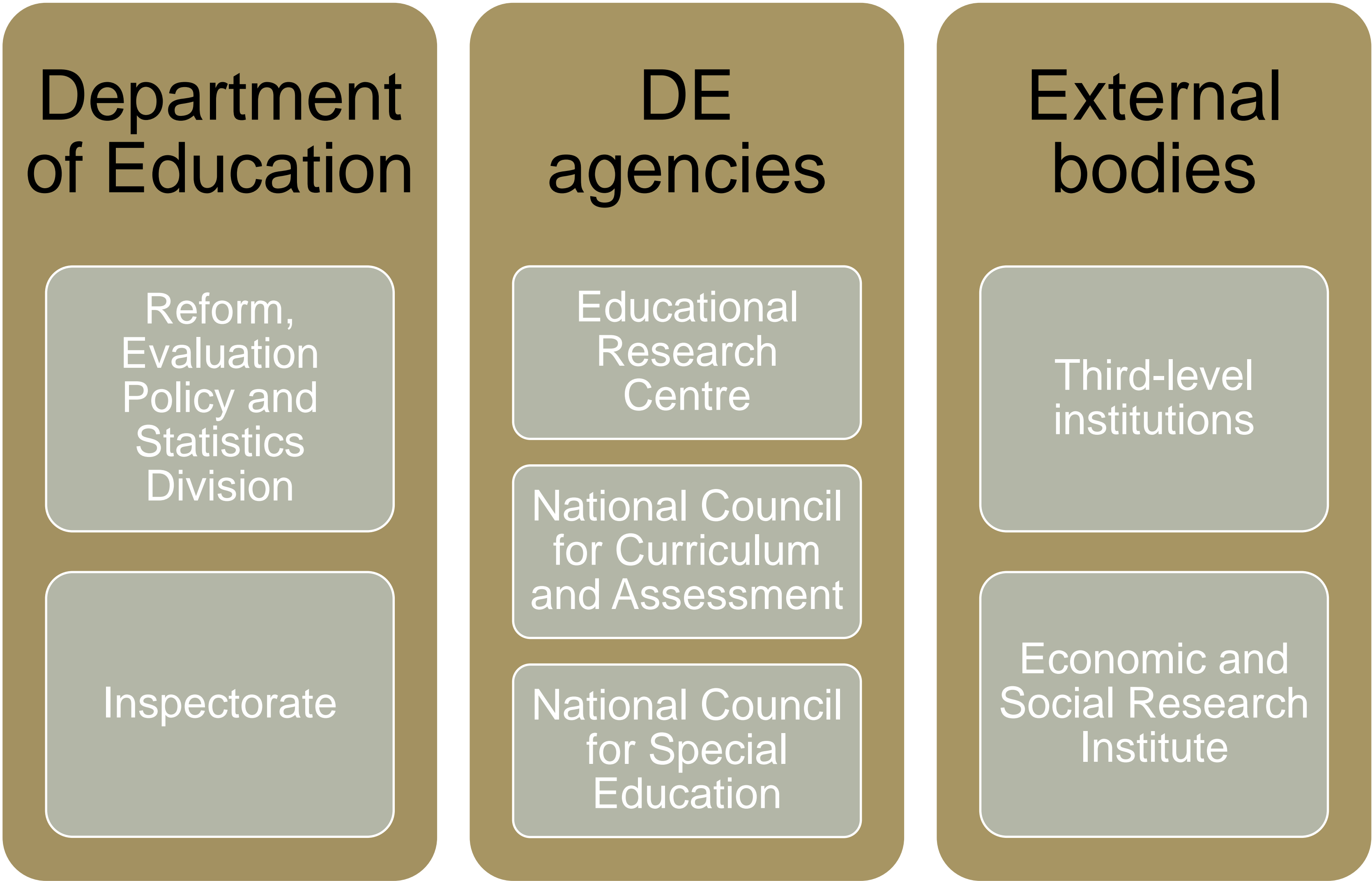
30 March 2023

Introduction-Objective of the session

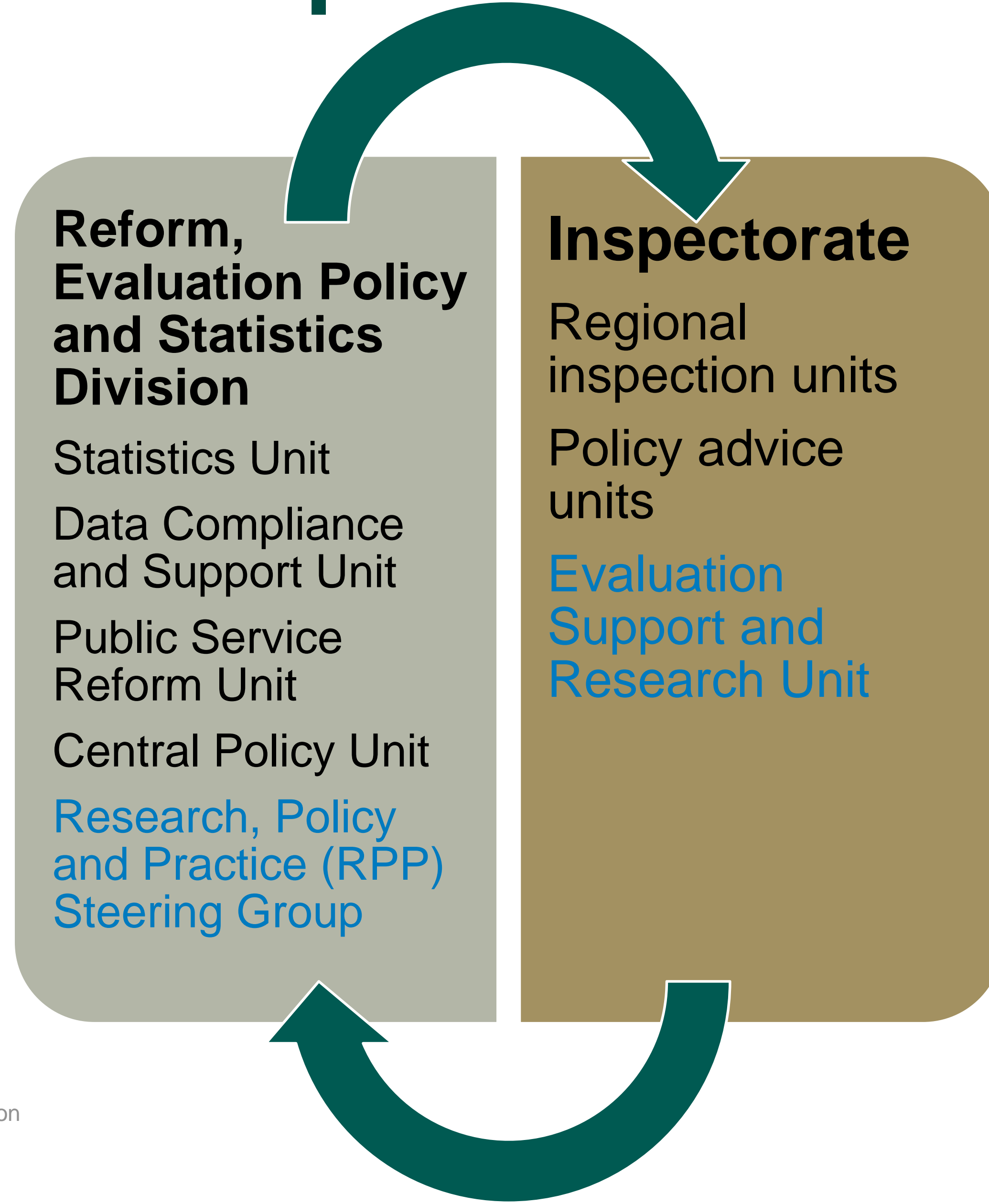


- Provide background information on research in the Department of Education, the Inspectorate and our approach to inspection
- Look at how inspection and research interacts in practice in the Irish inspectorate and at the potential for its further development in order to give additional value to our work
- Outline the driving forces and the challenges in the relationship between inspection and research in the Irish inspectorate and the value added for inspection and the educational system
- In light of our experience, present some key considerations on the SICl theme for discussion

Contributors to educational research in the Irish context



Research in the Department of Education



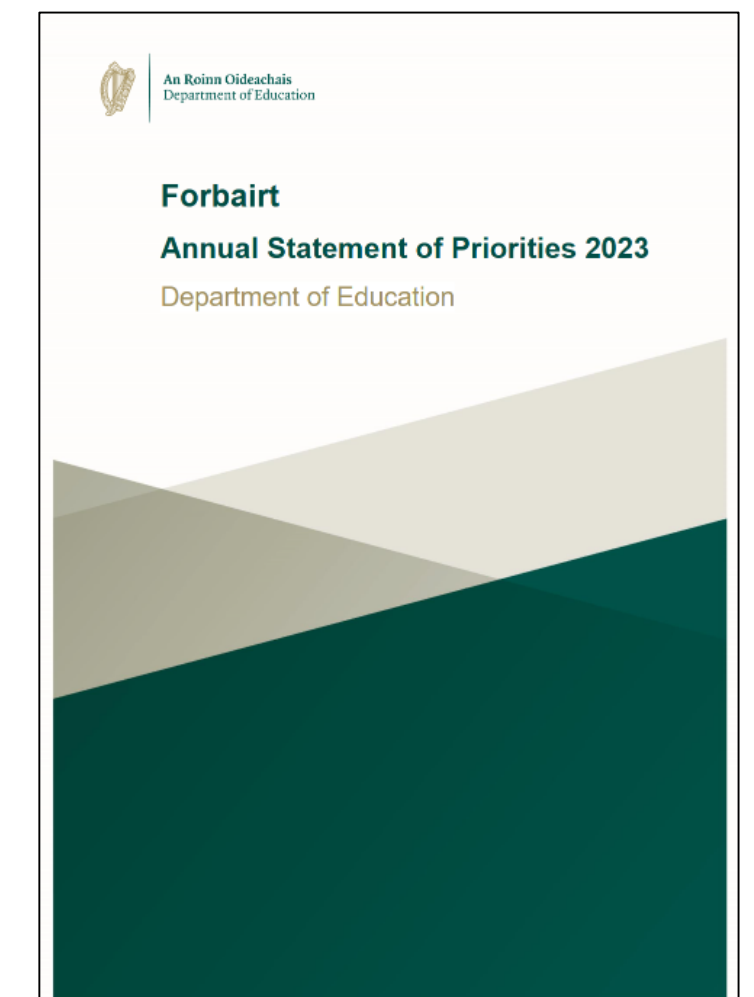
Research at Department level



Forbairt 2023 – *Annual Statement of Priorities*

Progress the establishment of a central research repository, including data and analytics, under the new **Research, Policy and Practice (RPP) Steering Group**, building on collaboration between the Inspectorate, other Departmental teams, national agencies and stakeholders

- Develop understanding of how Department sections use and conduct research
- Develop data storage and analytics systems that support culture of data-sharing



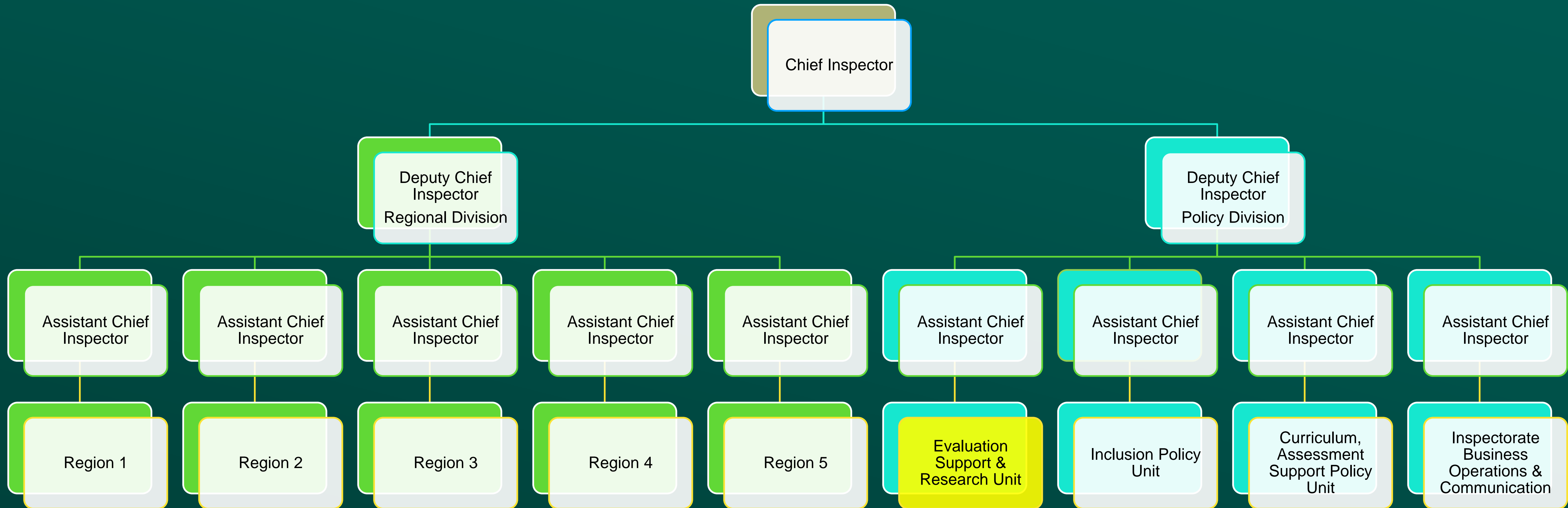
Overview of Inspectorate in Ireland



- A division of the Department of Education
- Chief Inspector a member of the Department's Management Board
- Our vision: *Excellence in learning for all*
- Established on a statutory basis under Section 13(9) Education Act, 1998
- Key functions: promoting accountability and improvement
 - **Evaluate and report** on the quality of educational provision
 - **Support and advise** schools and settings to improve the quality of educational provision
 - **Advise** the Minister on any matter relating to education policy and provision
 - **Conduct research** into education and to provide **support** in the formulation of policy by the Minister
- Date of establishment: 1831 (primary); 1914 (post-primary); 2016 (early years)
- All inspectors are qualified & experienced early-years educators or teachers

2022
139 inspectors
21 early years
58 primary
49 post-primary

Organisational Structure of the Inspectorate



Early Years, Primary and Post-primary inspectors are assigned across regional units and/or policy units

Overview of Irish school system in numbers



Overview of the school system in numbers

Primary	
Primary schools	3,240
DEIS schools	687
Primary pupils	554,788
Primary teachers	40,351
<small>Source: Education Indicators for Ireland 2022</small>	

Post-primary	
Post-primary schools	728
DEIS schools	197
Post-primary pupils	391,698
Post-primary teachers	32,145
<small>Source: Education Indicators for Ireland 2022</small>	

- Early learning and care (ELC)**
- 4022 ELC settings
 - 104,612 enrolled in ECCE scheme
 - 26,197 staff

Support for students with special educational needs			
Total number of special schools	128	Number of special classes	2,544
Children attending special schools	8,717	Number of special needs assistants	19,213
Number of teachers in special education	18,617	<small>Source: SEN Allocations 2022/23</small>	

Evaluation Support and Research Unit



- **Inspection development and support**

- Develop quality frameworks to inform external and self-evaluation in schools and settings
- Develop inspection approaches and tools
- Support evaluation, including **data management**, inspection planning and national reporting
- Develop data systems
- **Provide data for national composite reporting** by the Inspectorate and the Department

- **Research support and oversight**

- **Support/liaise** with the DE Policy and Research Division and the Educational Research Centre
- **Oversee research** conducted by the Inspectorate

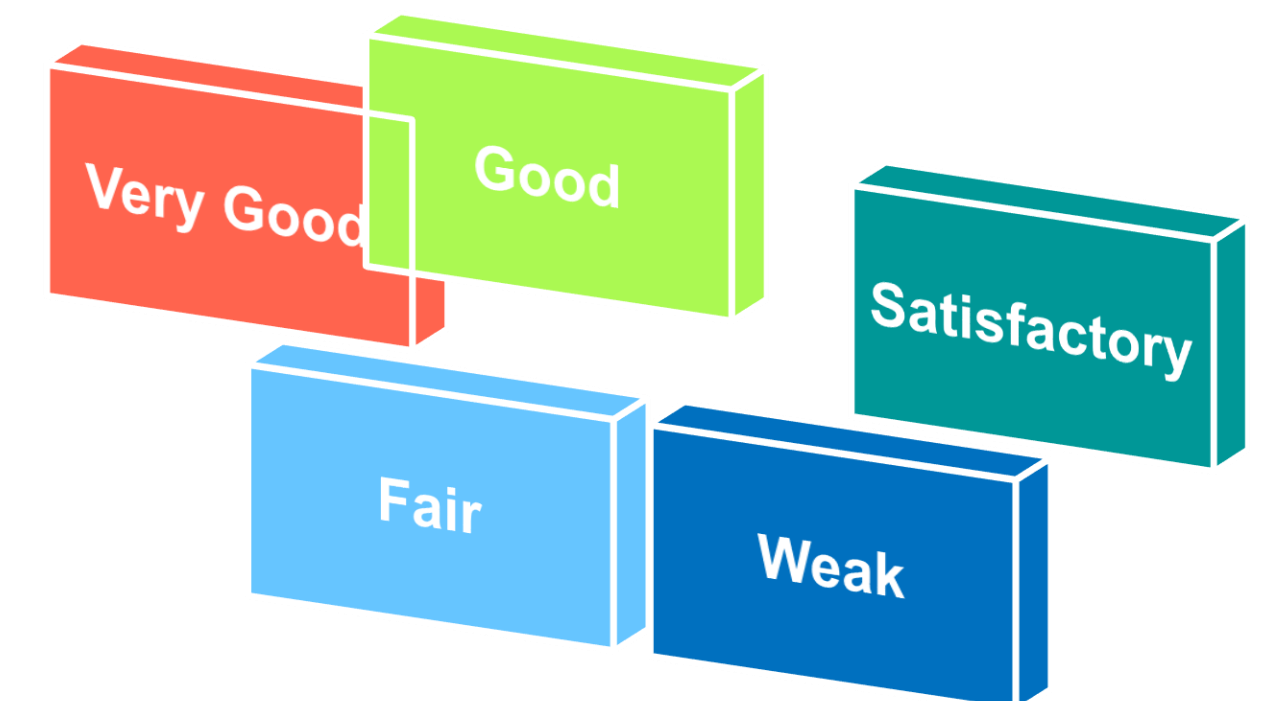
- **International collaboration**

- Co-ordinate links with SICI and inspectorates in UK
- Co-ordinate links with European agencies, including EU Commission & EU Directors of Education
- Support international section with **data collection and analysis** for OECD-NESLI Network and Eurydice

Our approach to inspection



- A range of **inspection models** that vary in duration and in focus to support a **risk-based approach** to inspection planning
- Published Code of Professional Practice and Guides to inspection
- Three **quality frameworks** to inform our judgements on provision in early learning and care settings, primary schools and post-primary schools
- We gather **evidence from a range of sources**, including interaction with students
- A **quality continuum** to articulate our judgements
- We record our judgements on our **inspection management information systems**
- We **analyse the aggregate data** arising from inspectors' judgements
- The analysis of the data informs inspection reports, thematic evaluation / composite reports and the Chief Inspector's Report



Inspection activities



Surveys
learners,
teachers &
parents

Meetings
with school
leadership &
Governance



Focus
groups with
learners &
parents

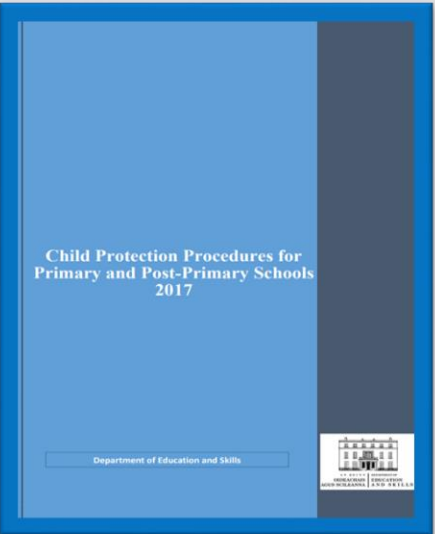
Feedback to
teachers &
school
leaders



Range of
inspection
activities

Observation in
learning
settings-
interaction with
students

Review of
documentation



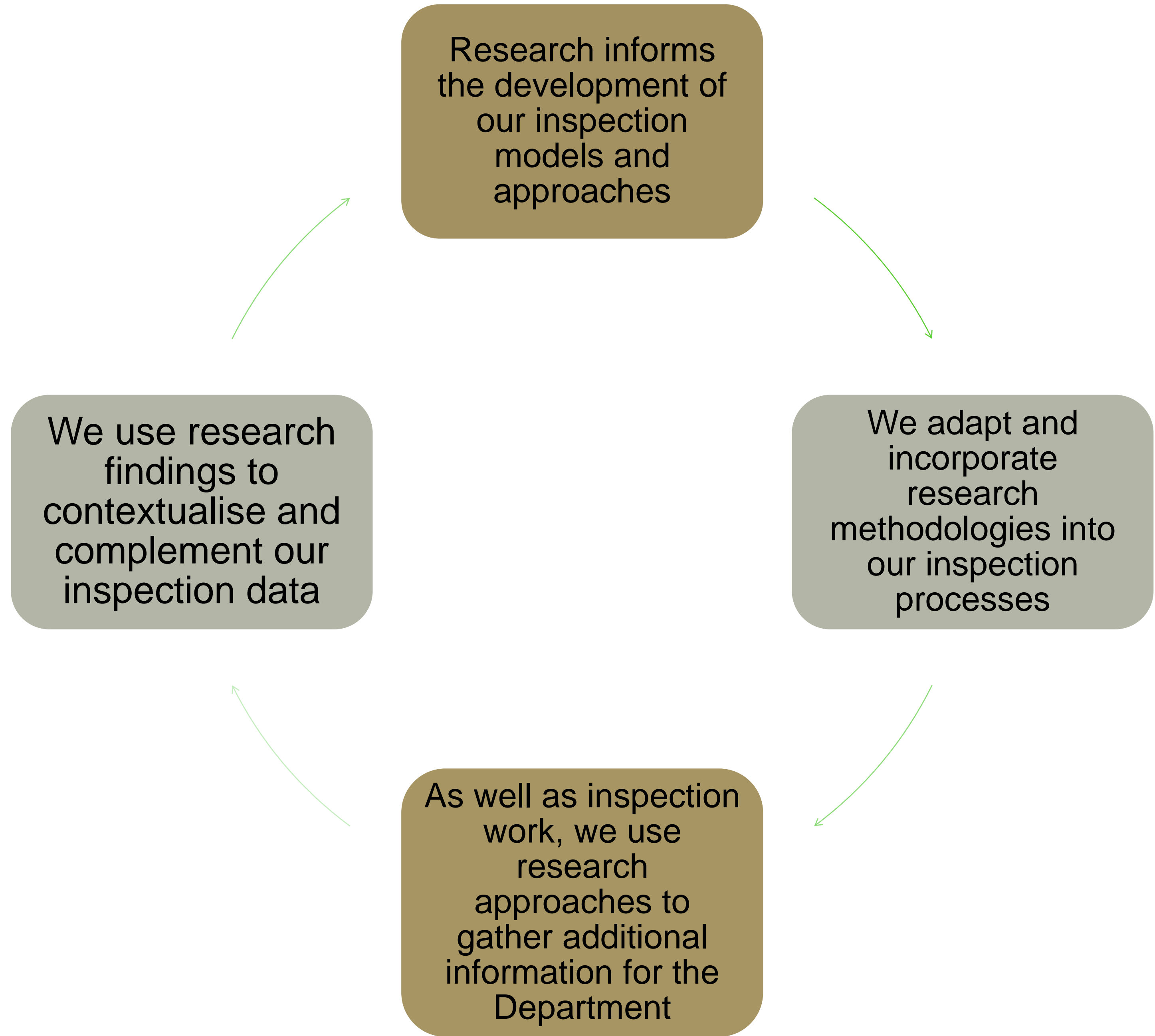
Working definitions of research



- Research is defined as **the creation of new knowledge and/or the use of existing knowledge in a new and creative way so as to generate new concepts, methodologies and understandings**. This could include synthesis and analysis of previous research to the extent that it leads to new and creative outcomes. (Australian Research Council)
- Educational research refers to a **systematic attempt to gain a better understanding of the educational process**, generally with a view to improving its efficiency. It is an **application of scientific method to the study of educational problems**. (Chakma, 2022)
- Research (Education) **addresses policy issues** critical to **achieving greater equality of educational outcomes** and **improving the experience** of students, teachers, principals and other stakeholders across the education system. The **student voice is placed at the centre of the research**, providing important insights into student experiences across the school system, their reflections on choices made and their post-school pathways. (Economic and Social Research Institute, Ireland)



The interaction between inspection and research in the Irish Inspectorate



Research informing the development of inspection models and approaches



- We use a research-based approach combined with a co-construction/consultative approach
- Background work
 - Review of practice in other jurisdictions
 - Review of existing practice based on feedback
- Research and expertise of inspectors
- Process of model development
 - Scoping out and design
 - Fieldwork based on representative sampling
 - Piloting of the model
 - Further refinement following feedback

Co-construction with settings and schools



Consultation with stakeholders

An example of research informing inspection



How we promote the participation of children and young people (CYP) in inspection

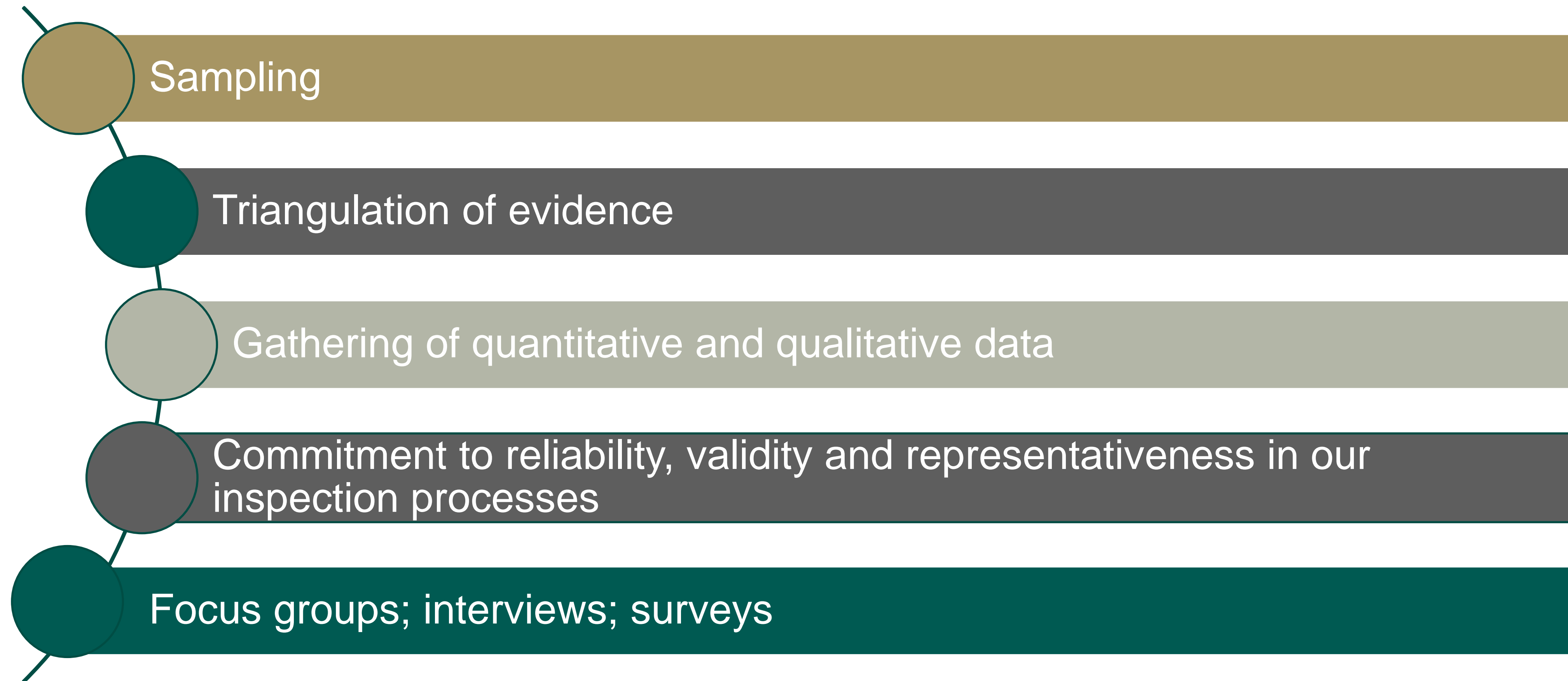
Lundy model of participation (2007); a rights-respecting approach

- Engage CYP as advisors in developing the approaches to be used and the information to be shared
- Provide information to all CYP before inspection in their setting/school
- Undertake focus groups with CYP during inspection,
 - place a strong emphasis on capacity building
 - provide information to CYP in advance of the meeting
 - use varied approaches to promote participation
- Review and develop surveys of CYP in schools
- Make reports accessible to CYP (in development)



[National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making](#)

Adapting and incorporating research methodologies in our inspection work



Using research approaches to gather additional information



- Inspectors gather data and work as field researchers outside of normal inspection activity to inform decision-making at system level
 - *Surveys – online and phone*
 - *Focus groups*
 - *Discussion with school stakeholders*
 - *Desk-based literature reviews*
 - *Case studies*

Contexts

Impact of COVID-19

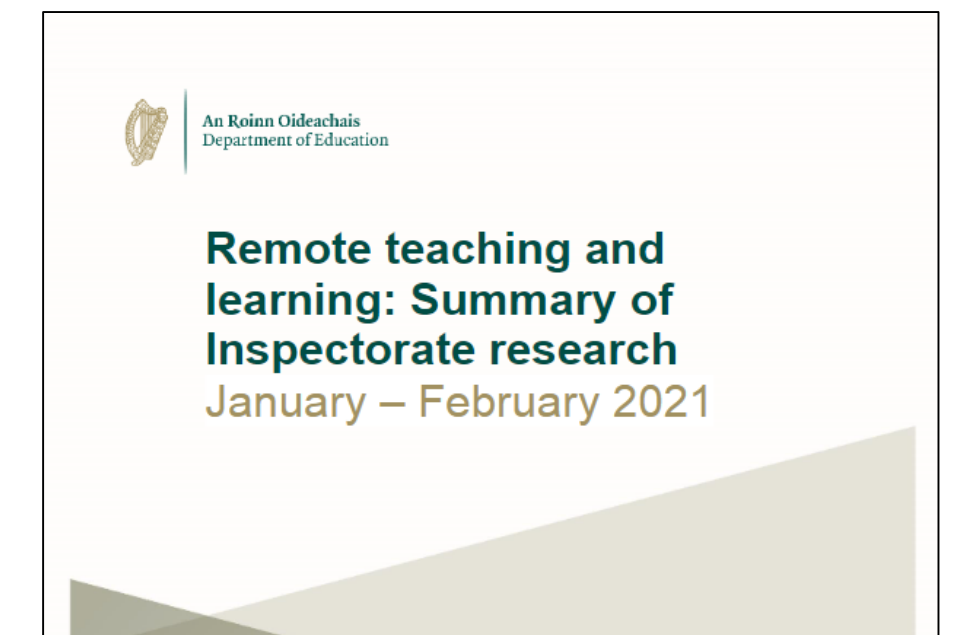
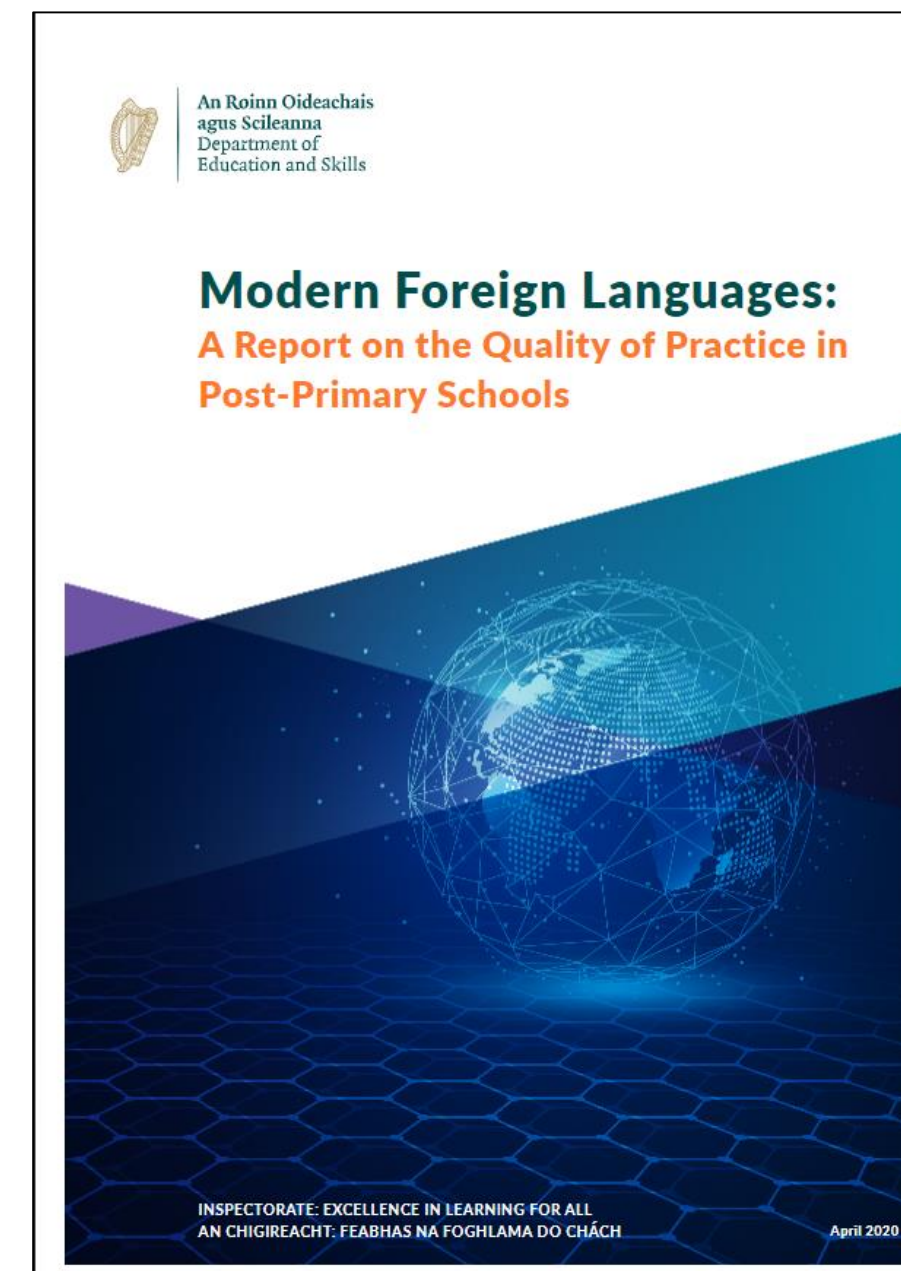
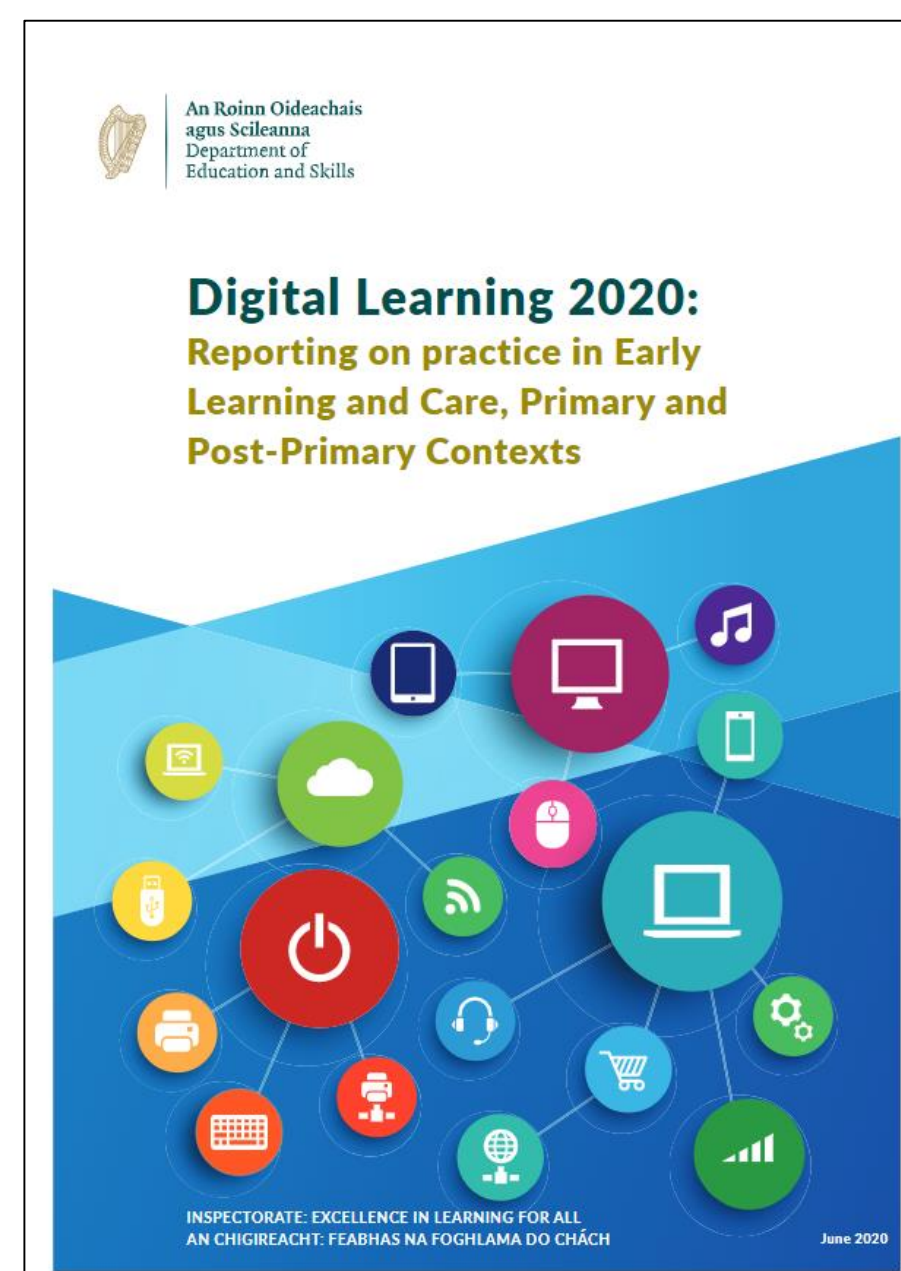
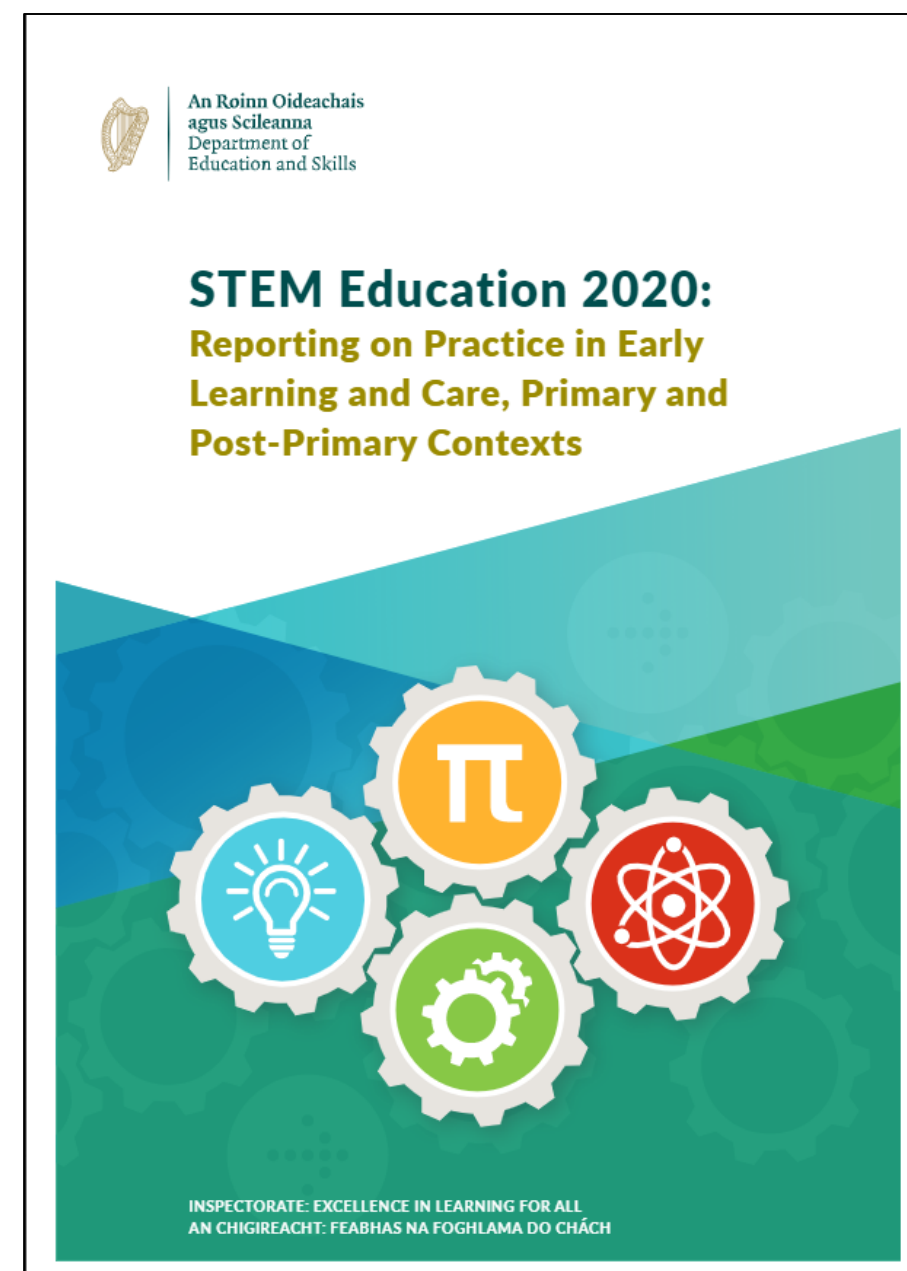
Review of schools' engagement with school self-evaluation

Responding to requests from Minister and the Department on system needs' basis

Research informing/complementing inspection findings



- When reporting back to the system and informing policy, we use external research and other data to contextualise our inspection findings
- Some examples (Links included)



Research informing/complementing inspection findings



- Our thematic reports complement reports commissioned by the Department and /or carried out by external research agencies

Example:

- DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) Initiative
 - [Educational Research Centre](#)
 - [Inspectorate reports on DEIS](#)
- We combine analysis of early years inspection findings with relevant research to inform improvement in practice across the contexts in which young children are learning i.e. home, preschool and infant classes

Example:

- [Insight series- Quality in Early Years Education Webinars](#)



Drivers in the relationship between inspection and research in the Irish Inspectorate



Public accountability and value-for-money obligation

Our unique access to schools and settings

Our quality assurance role

Need to be relevant and responsive

Ensuring that inspection indicators are consistent with international best practice

Professionalisation of inspection

Striving for reliability and validity

Enhancing our credibility

Increasing the impact of inspection

The need for system-level information to inform decision-making

National education priorities

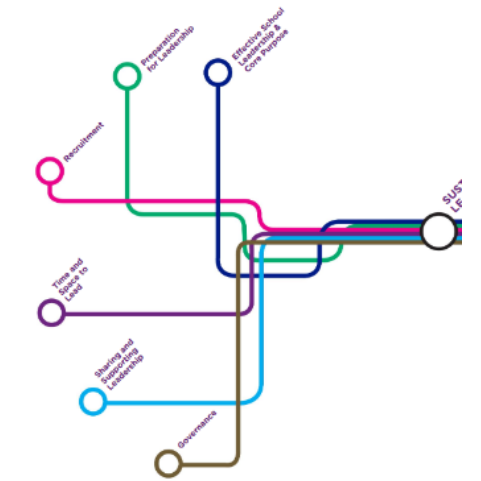
Emergent needs

What is the added value in the relationship between inspection and research?



Distinct but complementary processes

- They inform each other
- They can inform system decision-making and policy development from different perspectives



Research has helped professionalise inspection, enhances our credibility and supports reliability and validity in our findings

Having inspectors involved in research-type activity gives further scope and flexibility in responding to urgent system-level data needs

Challenges in developing the relationship between inspection and research



Time

Personnel – capacity, expertise, availability

Leveraging the potential of research while retaining the focus on the core work of inspection

Small number of schools presents a challenge

Stability versus dynamics of change

Taking context into account when considering application of research findings from elsewhere

Looking forward



Strengthen the links with research agencies to enhance our inspection tools

Complement/extend research on national priorities carried out by external researchers or commissioned by the Department

Develop a data dashboard to inform inspection in individual schools

Leverage existing research expertise within the Inspectorate

Look at the potential for recruitment of personnel with specific skills in research and data analysis

Our contributions to the debate



- How can inspectorates leverage research to conduct their work, use data, report on inspection outcomes, and increase their impact without undermining their unique role?

- How can inspection provide unique insights into educational provision over and above that provided by academic research?



Míle buíochas
Thank you

Questions?
Comments?

