

THE WORK OF THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING INSPECTORATE

1. The Origin and work of the Inspectorate

The present Inspectorate is in direct and unbroken descent from the Inspectorate established in 1832 by the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland. A number of inspectors transferred to the Inspectorate of the Ministry of Education for Northern Ireland when it was established in 1922. In January 1989 the Inspectorate's work was extended to include the training service in Northern Ireland and it became known as the Education and Training Inspectorate (the Inspectorate). Notwithstanding the many changes that have occurred in the education service, including the Education Reform legislation of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the core responsibility of the Inspectorate remains fundamentally unchanged – to evaluate and report on quality and standards in pre-school centres, schools, the youth service, institutes of further and higher education and initial teacher education, and now, also, of work-related training, in Northern Ireland. The Inspectorate's mission statement is 'Promoting Improvement in the interests of all learners'.

The Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 redefined the authority and responsibility of the Inspectorate in evaluating education provision and focused its activities on the inspection of schools, institutes of further and higher education and the support services of the Education and Library Boards

(ELBs). The work of the Inspectorate in providing curriculum advice and support, which had been a significant feature of its operations prior to 1989, transferred to the newly created Curriculum Advisory and Support Services (CASS) of the ELBs.

As part of the Review of Public Administration, the legislation governing inspection and the Inspectorate will be reviewed, and the legislation basis strengthened. This will include the powers to inspect those aspects of the new Education and Skills Authority which have a direct bearing on learning and teaching and standards achieved.

In the education service, the Inspectorate is the Department of Education's principal source of advice on all professional educational issues as well as on standards of educational provision throughout schools and grant-aided institutions. The Inspectorate is based within the Department of Education (DE), and also provides inspection services and evidence-based advice on policy and its outworking for the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL).

In the further and higher education and training sectors, for example, the Inspectorate is the principal source of objective and professional advice for DEL, on all professional education and training issues, as well as on quality and standards of provision throughout institutes of further and higher education and training providers.

2. The Organisation of the Inspectorate

The Inspectorate is headed by the Chief Inspector who is the principal professional adviser on education matters to DE, and to DEL on further and higher education and training matters. In the next tier of management there are four Assistant Chief Inspectors, each of whom is responsible for a major sector of the Inspectorate's work. The Chief Inspector with the four Assistant Chief Inspectors, comprise the Inspectorate Management Group (IMG). There are, in addition, 9 Managing Inspectors and 52 inspectors drawn from a variety of professional backgrounds and with wide experience and expertise in particular areas of the education, training and youth services. Most inspectors work mainly in two phases of these services, for example, primary and post-primary, further education and training, or Youth and Alternative Education Provision (AEP), but some inspectors have duties in three or four phases. All inspectors are required to evaluate general aspects of the education and training provided as well as those in their specialist area. Much of the work of an inspector consists of furnishing written reports to a wide range of audiences, including: DE, DCAL, DEL, School authorities, Boards of Governors of schools, parents, Governing Bodies of Institutes of Further Education, Managing Committees of Youth Organisations and Managers of Training Providers : these reports are published.

3. Involving others in Inspection

Lay persons, whose experience is not in education, are appointed through public advertisement and interview, and serve on a sample of school inspections over a period of three years. The lay member of an inspection team

helps to make sure that the views of parents whose children attend the school are taken fully into account during the inspection. Associate Assessors (AAs) are also appointed to join inspection teams across the education, youth and training sectors. An AA is a serving practitioner in a pre-school, school, further or higher education college, a training provider, an AEP centre, a youth centre or a support service such as the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS). An AA will normally join two inspection teams each academic year in the phase/sector relevant to their professional experience. AAs are appointed through public advertisement, followed by an interview. A key aim of the AA initiative is to provide the AAs with the opportunity to inform and improve the inspection process. Furthermore, the experience gained during inspection will help develop the AAs skills in self-evaluation, skills which they can put into practice in their own organisation.

The Inspectorate recently recruited two Nutritional Associates to join and support the work in school inspection teams. The Nutritional Associates add professional expertise to the knowledge base of the Inspectorate and since September 2006 they have monitored, evaluated and reported on the implementation of the recommendations of 'Catering for Healthier Lifestyles', and, in particular, with regard to the nutritional value of schools meals.

The Education and Training Inspectorate has the lead role in monitoring and evaluating the outworking of the Children and Young People's Funding Package (CYPFP). And, as part of this development, is working with other Inspectorates and agencies to prepare an integrated model of inspection in order to evaluate the quality of integrated service provision via the CYPFP.

4. The Structure of the Inspectorate: a unitary Inspectorate located within DE but operationally independent from it

Following concerns raised by the Public Accounts Committee, both in Westminster and Stormont, about the Inspectorate's perceived lack of independence from DE, a review was initiated of the Inspectorate's relationship with DE, DCAL and DEL.

As a consequence of the review, a Memorandum of Understanding between the Inspectorate and the three Departments has been prepared and published, and the Inspectorate's business with the three Departments is now guided by three separate Service Level Agreements.

Work linked to the review includes an ongoing exploration of the Inspectorate's funding arrangements and, as mentioned earlier in Section 1, a proposed change to the legislation governing inspection and the Inspectorate.

5. The Practice of Inspection

The Inspectorate's advice and recommendations are based on its knowledge and understanding of what schools, youth organisations, colleges and training providers are seeking to achieve, and of the standards that are appropriate in different circumstances. Inspectors are expected to be familiar with a wide range of approaches to and practices in teaching/training and learning. Above all, the basis for the Inspectorate's judgements rests on what is observed and evaluated at first hand in classrooms, laboratories, workshops and on

employers' premises etc - ie in all places where teaching, training and learning occur.

6. Advice for schools, colleges, youth and training providers, employing authorities and the Departments (DE, DCAL and DEL)

In discharging its responsibility for promoting the highest standards, the Inspectorate's mode of working goes beyond evaluation and reporting – it extends to giving advice and recommendations where these are appropriate. Often, in discussing what has been observed, an inspector will give help and advice and, from his or her experience of good practice throughout Northern Ireland, will discuss how issues have been tackled in other places and by other teachers or instructors and, if appropriate, recommend how practice might be improved. Inspectors identify and report on strengths as well as areas for improvement; they do not set out to look for faults and deficiencies, but will make constructive, critical comment where standards are lower than they ought to be.

The Inspectorate's effectiveness depends essentially on the expertise, competence and experience which Inspectors bring to bear in their work and on their professional relationships with, and influence on, those with whom they come into contact.

7. The Importance of quality in the inspection process

The fact that the Inspectorate alone has the task of inspection places a particular responsibility on inspectors and, indirectly, and to a lesser extent, on lay

members, Associate Assessors, and other, professional associates. DE, DEL, and DCAL rely on the advice and recommendations given by the Inspectorate. In the education service, under the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, DE may direct an ELB, CCMS or a school or college to take such action as it thinks necessary to remedy any matter referred to by a report of the Inspectorate. It is fundamental, therefore, that the Inspectorate's reports are supported by objective, clear and unbiased judgement, and are based on experience and up-to-date knowledge of the work of schools, youth organisations, colleges and training providers. It is equally important that, in performing all the tasks assigned to it, the Inspectorate and lay, Associate Assessor and professional associate members of inspection teams, maintain the highest professional standards of practice, and that the Inspectorate reports precisely as it finds.

8. Openness in the inspection process

It is important that schools, youth organisations, colleges, supplier organisations, teachers, lecturers and instructors should have a clear understanding of the approaches adopted by the Inspectorate, that they know the issues being explored during inspections and surveys and the questions the Inspectorate is seeking to answer as it goes about its work. When undertaking an inspection, it is the responsibility of the Reporting Inspector to meet the principal or manager and staff of the school, college, youth setting or training provider beforehand to explain how the inspection will be conducted. The Reporting Inspector will also take the lead in the spoken report of findings to the principal or manager and his/her deputy and to the Board of Governors, Governing Body, or Management Board.

To further promote openness and transparency in its work, the Inspectorate has published the quality indicators, against which organisations are evaluated, through a variety of documents such as, 'Together Towards Improvement', 'Improving Quality: Raising Standards' and 'The Reflective Teacher'. These documents have been received well by the organisations inspected and are used widely to support the process of self-evaluation leading to sustained self-improvement.

9. The Programme of Work of the Inspectorate

i. The frequency of inspection in schools

The Citizen's Charter required each school to be subject to at least one major inspection activity every five years and the completion of the five year cycle was largely effected by June 1998. Thereafter, it has been agreed that the inspection programme will be drawn up within a seven year framework with more frequent inspection of a school being undertaken where necessary, need being identified by information from school performance indicators and contacts with schools by inspectors at local level. The inspection programme for each year may be adjusted to meet particular needs of the Departments and to have recent and relevant advice on the implementation and development of the Government's policies for education and training.

ii. The frequency of inspection in institutions of further and higher education, training, and teacher education

Following the incorporation of colleges and the introduction of the New Deal programme, the Inspectorate implemented an extended inspection within each college and training provider on an four year cycle; a focused inspection on an aspect of provision was carried out at least once every four years. However, following the recent review of Further Education in Northern Ireland, resulting in the establishment of six FE units of management across the Province, the inspection process in FE is currently under review.

One aspect of the teacher education provision – initial, induction, continuing professional development, is inspected every year.

iii. The focus of inspection

A school, college or training provider may be selected for inclusion in a particular programme of inspections for a number of reasons. It may have specific features or characteristics; it may be chosen as part of a representative cross-section or it may be included in a random sample. A particular aspect of the work of any school, college or training provider may also be inspected as part of the Inspectorate's general monitoring activities.

iv. The timing of inspection

Inspections, surveys and a continuous programme of visits by inspectors to schools, colleges, youth settings and training providers ensure that no institution is overlooked in the monitoring and evaluation of education, youth and training provision. Inspection activity of all kinds, and the scrutiny by the Inspectorate of key indicators of performance, inform decisions about the focus and timing of inspections which, if necessary, will overrule the normal cycle of inspection.

The Inspectorate is committed to the continuous improvement of its work to ensure that the forms of inspections are fit for purpose in respect of the education, youth and training sectors, and the priority needs of the Departments.

Over recent years the process of inspection across the education, youth and training sectors in Northern Ireland has been subject to independent evaluation by a firm of consultants. The findings of the independent evaluations have been published and, to date, have been extremely positive.

The outcomes of the aforementioned independent evaluation of inspection, coupled with a secure knowledge of the system and insights from contact with other Inspectorates, and feedback from focus groups, all serve to inform the development of inspection. In October 2002, the Inspectorate published its first Charter for Inspection, setting out the organisation's mission, vision and service standards; an updated Charter for Inspection was published in September 2009.

In November 2003, the Inspectorate published 'A Common Framework for Inspection' to help ensure further openness and transparency in its work; an updated version will be published in 2007. The Service Standards for the Inspectorate and its support service, Inspection Services Branch, were published in 2004/2005 and the implementation of the standards is monitored on an annual basis. In December 2005, the Inspectorate and its support staff achieved the Charter Mark award for excellence in public service; the award was reaffirmed in December 2006 and again in 2009. In 2011 the organisation was awarded the Customer Service Excellence standard – the successor the Charter Mark.

All the documents, quality indicators and reports published by the Inspectorate are available on the organisation's website, www.etini.gov.uk

11. In Conclusion

Inspectors do not follow individually determined lines of action or adopt personal stances. The Inspectorate's effectiveness depends crucially on the collective expertise, competence and experience of those who make up its strength. The lay member in inspection teams helps to bring an additional and distinctive perspective to bear in the inspection process. The Inspectorate's influence is exercised through establishing and maintaining the highest professional standards of operation, with the aim of promoting the highest possible quality of education and training for children, young people and adults. In carrying out its task, the Inspectorate seeks to ensure that standards are raised, and that the knowledge, skills and competences taught and acquired are relevant to the emerging needs of Northern Ireland as part of a rapidly changing world.

