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# Governing by Inspection: School Inspection and Education Governance in Sweden, Scotland and England [ESRC RES 062 23 2241A]

**Background on the Research Project**

This is a three-year research project, running from 2010-2013[[1]](#footnote-1), and funded by the ESRC and the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet). It compares the use of school inspection as a form of governing of education in the three systems of Sweden, Scotland and England, in the context of current changes in inspection practices in Europe. We are investigating whether there are tensions between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ governance that are revealed by analysis of inspection policies and processes. By this we mean tensions between controlling and regulating through technical means like performance data and the rules/frameworks followed by inspectors in their school assessments, in contrast with using expert knowledge, judgement and persuasion as part of self-regulation. We are also mapping the interrelationships of inspection at different system levels and across Sweden, Scotland and England, with a focus on transnational policy learning. We also seek to map inspection processes within local authorities/municipalities and between local policy spaces and schools.

The project is co-ordinated by Jenny Ozga (Oxford) and the research team includes Sotiria Grek and Martin Lawn at the University of Edinburgh, along with Professor John Clarke and Dr Jacqueline Baxter at the Open University, with Professor Christina Segerholm and colleagues at mid-Sweden and Umea universities. Please contact Jenny Ozga ([jennifer.ozga@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:jennifer.ozga@education.ox.ac.uk)) if you have any questions or want further information about the project.

**Main Research Questions**

**Our overarching research aim is to understand inspection as a governing process, incomparative context.** We are not concerned to establish if inspection imporves school performance: our interest lies in the different models of inspection developing throughout Europe, and in what they tell us about how education is governed in these three, rather different, national contexts.

In carrying out the investigation we seek answers to the following **research questions:**

(i) *At the (inter)national/national interface*: is there an emergent European Inspection policy and how is it constructed? How do global/European ideas of inspection practice and processes for compulsory schooling enter the three national policy-making spaces? To what extent and through what conduits do European ideas of ‘best practice’ seek to shape or influence national inspection practices? What use is made of inspection at the transnational level in the systems in our study? How is the future of Inspection envisaged in European and national policy?

(ii) *At the (intra) national/local interface*: What are the key characteristics of the three national systems of Inspection, and to what extent are they divergent or convergent? What forms of knowledge do they prioritise, and what is the relationship between judgement and evidence in these processes? How do they relate to local’ policymaking spaces, including the inspection of local government services?

(iii) *At the (inter)national/local/school interface*: How do local inspection processes enter school policy? How are they negotiated? What are the characteristics of inspection processes and what constitutes evidence and judgement in the operation of inspection? What uses are made of these processes in relation to system learning across authorities and schools? At the school level: How do teachers/headteachers experience Inspection processes? What involvement do they have in the construction of the inspection ‘event’? To what extent do these processes shape their work? To what extent are they used to review progress?

**Our Work to Date**

We have completed (a) a review of relevant policy literature analysing inspection in Europe and between Europe and the national contexts of our study along with a study of trans-national influences on inspection in the national policy contexts (b)  a review of the policy context of inspection in Sweden from the deregulation phase of the 1990s, for England and Scotland a review of the post-devolution policy context of inspection, exploring key differences and similarities in inspection regimes and (c) a study of the background, training, and experience of each national Inspectorate. Some of the publications from these stages in the project work can be found at the project website: [www.governingbyinspection.ox.ac.uk](http://www.governingbyinspection.ox.ac.uk)

We are now working on **phase 3 of the project:** case studies of the implementation/reception of policy and practice at the local level based on a sample of 50 recent inspection reports in selected case study areas. The areas will not be identified in any publications from the research, but they have been selected to provide a range of inspection outcomes, in different types of school, and in different parts of the country, both urban and rural. We are looking for people working in inspection teams in these areas at the local and school level, or who have recently experienced inspection, who are willing to talk to us, in complete confidence, about their experiences.

1. Subsequently granted an unfunded extention till March 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)