

Position statement to DE
in response to NISRA's feedback on GTCNI's *Survey of Teachers' Perceptions of Approaches to Inspection and School Improvement*

1 Introduction

1.1 Strategic context

This position statement is set in the context of 1) the current Inquiry into approaches to inspection and school improvement initiated by the Assembly Education Committee and 2) the recent OECD review of evaluation and assessment in Northern Ireland, part of a 28 country study which is summarised in the *'Synergies for Better Learning'* Report (OECD 2013).

Both the Education Committee Inquiry and the OECD report highlight that external school evaluation/inspection is an important process, among a range of other important processes which, together, combine to influence school and teacher practices in pursuit of better teaching and learning and better student outcomes. The other important and interdependent elements identified by the OECD include: 1) student assessment; 2) school self-evaluation; 3) teacher appraisal; and 4) leadership appraisal (see Figure 6.1 over, OECD 2013:385).

At a series of meetings with Primary Principals' Associations and Area Learning Communities in 2012-13 head teachers expressed a range of concerns to GTCNI about current approaches to both assessment and inspection and the extent to which they were appropriately designed, supported and implemented to enable *'fair and accurate reporting and informed analysis and comparison'* (Matthews and Sammons, in OECD 2013: 284) of the value added by teachers, leaders and schools.

1.2 Purpose of the surveys

It was in this strategic context that GTCNI carried out two surveys of perceptions of two key areas of policy which are currently under scrutiny (assessment and inspection) with a view to informing policy considerations and developments in these areas as suggested by the OECD and conceptualised in Figure 6.1 (over).

The purpose of the surveys was to ascertain the extent of support or otherwise for current policy approaches to these policy areas and to assess the extent of professional support for constructive recommendations for refinement as articulated in *Professional Update 1 on 'Assessment'* and *Professional Update 2 on 'Striking the Right Balance'*

The Council considers that listening to and representing teachers' views is a key responsibility of GTCNI as a professional body, and a critical first step in *'engaging educators seriously in helping to design services to achieve greater buy-in to and support'* (OECD NI Report; Dec 2013).

GTCNI's strategic contribution to the design of a coherent framework for school evaluation

Figure 6.1 Conceptual framework for school evaluation

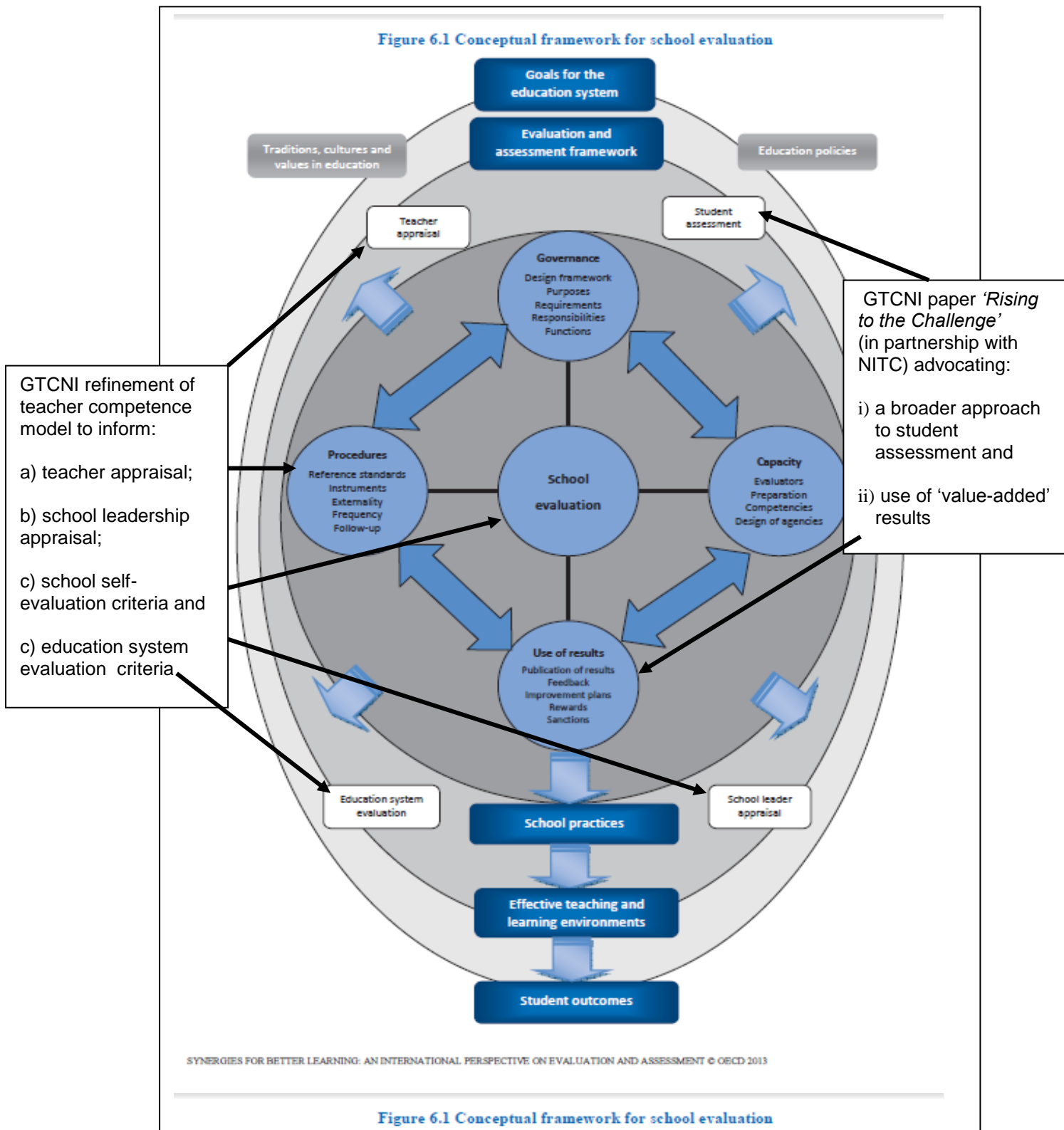


Figure 6.1 Conceptual framework for school evaluation



2 Response to NISRA Feedback

2.1 Aim of the survey

The letter from Dr. Kennedy of 31st January has wrongly quoted that “*the aim of the research is to provide “a proper independent research analysis” of the ETI’s current approach in respect of school inspection/improvement (para 1.1).*”

The purpose of the survey, as outlined on Survey Monkey was ‘to gather teachers’ professional views about approaches to school inspection and school improvement to feed into the current NI Assembly Education Committee ‘Inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate and the School Improvement Process’.

Para 1.1 of the survey report states that: “*the report summarises the responses of 1677 teachers to an opinion survey which aimed to gather [teachers’] professional views and experience about approaches to school inspection and school improvement to feed into the current NI Assembly Education Committee*”.

2.2 Methodology

The Council acknowledges that a random selection of the sample from a target population is a commonly used method in social science research but notes that in particular research scenarios other sampling methods, such as quotas, are justifiable in terms of both practicality and time / resource constraints. Advice on achieving a representative sample highlights that the sample source is more important than sample size to ensure that:

- The sample source included the whole target population;
- The data collection method (online) can reach individuals, with characteristics typical of those of the population;
- The screening criteria truly reflect the target population;
- non-response bias with appropriate contact methods to guarantee that designated members of the sample are reached.

The methodological approach adopted mirrors that taken by DE in the majority of its opinion gathering processes i.e. to notify schools of the opportunity to respond and to invite quantitative and qualitative responses. The volume of responses is well in excess of the norm for many DE opinion-gathering exercises (see Appendix 2), although it is recognised that DE undertakes other more comprehensive and and complex ‘Omnibus’ surveys from time to time

2.3 Representativeness

NISRA considers that ‘*the GTCNI survey ..has resulted in findings which are not representative of all teachers and it is unknown if they are representative of schools*’.

One way to explore potential representativeness is to profile a sub-sample by certain characteristics and see how that compares with total sample. As there is only 1 principal in each school it is therefore considered reasonable to profile the number of returns from school principals as representative of the number of schools which made a response.

The potential representation of schools by sector on the basis of returns from Principals only is as follows:

- 450 returns were received from Principals out of a 'total sample' (n 1199) representing 40% of all possible returns.
- The returns were stratified across all sectors and all types of schools as follows: nursery 37%, primary 38%, post-primary 36%, and special 48%.
- Returns from Principals whose schools had been inspected in the last 5 years averaged 48% (with 50% of Principals whose schools has been inspected in the last year returning a response).

The data collected about respondents isn line with some DE surveys have gathered similar 'contextual only ' information that does not require specific identification of the respondent of their school. Information requested includes:

- In which education and library board area do you work?
- In which type of school do you work?
- In which management type of school do you work?
- In total, how many years have you worked as a teacher?
- Which of these best describes the terms of your employment?
- Which of these best describes your job?
- Which of these best describes any additional responsibilities of your post?
- Please state your gender?
- Please indicate to which age band you belong?
- Are you a teacher union representative?

- The response from Principals overall and from those whose schools have been inspected in the last 5 years suggests that the survey might be considered to be representative of school principals across all school types and sectors.

2.4 Questionnaire design

NISRA commented on the *'the impact of multiple concepts being included within one question'*.

The wording of questions 16 and 18 were subsequently judged to contain multiple concepts and therefore responses to these questions were omitted from the analysis.

NISRA commented on *'questions being biased against the inspection process, lack of objectivity and leading questions potentially resulting in response bias.*

Appendix1 shows related questions side by side to illustrate the balance of positive and alternative statements (which were mainly drawn from the approach to inspection taken in Scotland to ascertain the extent or otherwise of support for this type of approach).

2.5 Qualitative Responses

NISRA acknowledges that '*information collected in qualitative research is very valuable in adding depth to the quantitative findings*' and that the GTCNI survey '*is in keeping with standard practice of asking for verbatim comments*' following on from the quantitative questions.

NISRA suggests, however, that the alleged lack of objectivity of questions opposed may '*have an impact on how a person responds to the following open questions, again potentially leading to response bias*'.

The majority of qualitative responses were recorded in response to question 14, which followed on from a series of almost entirely positive questions. As indicated at 2.4 above and in Appendix 1 a balance of questions was offered.

2.6 Revised random sample survey

The Council agrees that that a revised survey could be issued to a random sample of teachers. Presumably in order to accurately reflect current perceptions of inspection the sample needs to be drawn from a stratified sample of schools which have undergone inspection within a specified period of time (as opposed to all schools) which is why GTCNI had a specific sections for those who had experienced inspection within the past 5 years.

The Council continues to await DE approval of its business case to re-structure core staff and to appoint a dedicated researcher. Until this approval is obtained the Council is not in a position to conduct *a proper independent research analysis of the ETI's current approach to school inspection/improvement* which it highlighted in its 'Striking the Right Balance' submission as necessary.

2.7 Summary of the Council position

The clear view emerging from the survey is that the profession is generally supportive of the concept of external inspection. However, as the OECD NI report (2013) observes, while many of the elements of a coherent evaluation framework are present in official policy some of elements have not achieve the degree of professional buy-in and support needed to maximise school improvement. In relation to ETI approaches to Inspection the OECD NI report recommends:

- *building school self-evaluation capacity and adapting external evaluation to reflect the maturity of the school self-evaluation culture*
- *Only moving to a more proportionate and risk based approach to school inspection once the evaluation culture is consolidated, evaluation capacity in schools is satisfactory, and data gathering and analysis within the school evaluation framework is established*
- *Developing new indicators in key areas of pupil performance and self-evaluation capacity*

- *Ensuring a consistent approach to reporting on equity in school and system evaluation; and*
- *Involving the profession more fully in the design of key elements of education policy in a way that maximises 'buy-in' from the profession.*

The Council also draws attention to EU research (*Ehren et al. 2013*) which recommends that the maintenance of staff morale and self-esteem needs to be designed into any evaluation process as an important requirement and pre-condition to help persuade teachers to embrace the changes necessary for improvement.

The Council reiterates its total commitment to working collaboratively with DE, ETI, the teaching profession and all relevant stakeholders to design a coherent evaluation and assessment framework that address the profession's clear concerns in relation to *'fair and accurate reporting and informed analysis and comparison'*. GTCNI has already put forward constructive proposals in collaboration with NITC in both *'Striking the Right Balance'* and *'Rising to the Challenge'* towards the design of a coherent evaluation and assessment framework for Northern Ireland which draw on: a broader range of value-added measures which are reflective of system goals; a refined professional competences model; and a supportive approach to accountability.

The Council is aware that revisions to the teacher competence framework is a central component of this work and attaches for information development work to date on this area which highlights the complexity of this work. Currently the Registrar alone is undertaking virtually all education development work, assisted only by one part-time development officer employed within the limited flexibility offered by delegated limits to work on the review of the competences.

To advance this work to the breadth and depth necessary requires the restructuring of core staffing (as envisaged in the business case currently with DE since 22 May 2013, revised and re-submitted on 19 November 2013) and the provision of additional educational staff and accommodation, as proposed in business cases submitted last month.

Appendix 1: Responses to DENI consultations and surveys since Jan 2011

<http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/about-the-department/public-consultations/closed-consultations.htm>

Name of Consultation	Number of Responses	Date
1. Draft Budget 2011-2015	162 responses	16 Feb 2011
2. Qualifications	460 responses	30 Dec 2011
3. Consultation on the Provision of Performance and Other Information	responses not detailed to date	22 Sep 2012
4. Education Maintenance Allowances - Public Consultation	responses not detailed to date	02 Nov 2012
5. Public Consultation - Priorities for Youth	518 responses	10 Dec 2012
6. Proposals to widen the powers of the GTCNI	41 responses	18 Jan 2013
7. Learning to Learn	332 responses	31 Jan 2013
The Way forward in Teacher Education http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Documents/Official-Reports/Education/20112012/Teacher%20Education%20Review%20The%20Way%20Forward.pdf	48 responses	21 March 2012
8. Consultation on Potential Short Term Changes to GCE A Levels	responses not detailed to date	08 Mar 2013
9. Consultation on proposed changes to the Common Funding Scheme	responses currently being considered	25 Oct 2013
10. Workplace pension reform	2 responses	28 Oct 2013
11. Consultation on the fundamental review of GCSEs and A Levels	responses not detailed to date	20 Dec 2013
12. Consultations - NI Teachers' Pension Scheme 2013-14	responses not detailed to date	20 Jan 2014
13. Disability Action Plan and Five Year Review of the Disability Action Plan	responses not detailed to date	7 February 2014

Appendix 2: Balance of questions

The table aligns positive statements with statements /proposals drawn from *Striking the Right Balance* to illustrate the balance of statements in the survey

5. ... the inspection process took appropriate account of our school context and intake	16. The inspection process has an 'in-built' social bias
20. The inspection process takes appropriate account of intake and value added	17. The inspection process is overly data driven
6. The inspection process took appropriate account of our own school self-evaluation	31. The inspection process should be replaced by school self evaluation supported by a critical friend / mentor process
7. The inspection process took appropriate account of the range of practice in our school	18. The emphasis on data produces undesirable practices such as 'teaching to the numbers'
8. The inspectors provided appropriate insight into the criteria against which our school was being inspected	24. The inspection process and report should take explicit account of all important wider learning goals than those which can be measured
9. The inspectors provided appropriately detailed feedback in relation to the inspection criteria	21. The inspection process holds schools to account for factors outside their control
10. The inspection process allowed us appropriate opportunity to challenge judgement with supporting evidence	26. The inspection process should include an opportunity to challenge the inspection judgement with evidence
11. The feedback provided advice in relation to next steps and how to access appropriate support	29. The inspection process should be aligned to the support services
12. The inspection has been central to later improvement	25. Inspection outcome categories should use more supportive language e.g. very confident; confident or not confident
13. The Inspection process has been a valuable process	15. The inspection process encourages compliance rather than innovation
19. The inspection process drives improvement through observation and measurement	30. The inspection process should highlight areas for improvement and only report on progress against these 6 -24 months later
27. The published school report should remain short and concise	28. A longer unpublished report to schools should be provided which includes more detail
	23. The Inspection process should be undertaken primarily by practising principals and teachers with recent classroom and management experience.
14. Please add any comments you wish about your experience of the inspection process and its impact	22. Please add any comments you wish about your experience/views of the inspection process and its impact