

A.E.D.I.P.S.

Association of Educational Development
& Improvement Professionals in Scotland



Aspect achieving
change
together



**FROM DEVELOPMENT
TO IMPROVEMENT:
A STEP TOO FAR?**

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Introduction

Since the re-organisation of local government in 1996 and the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 the role of advisers in local authorities has changed significantly. *Improving Our Schools* (Scottish Executive Education Department, 1999) placed an expectation on local authorities to support and challenge schools. Performance monitoring became a key function of local authorities.

The Association of Educational Development and Improvement Professionals, Scotland (AEDIPS) has become aware of a range of issues relating to this changing role, raised by its membership. These include issues such as: the increased burden on local authority staff; their role in continuing professional development for teachers; and their changing relationship with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland (HMIE) as part of the quality improvement process.

Between April and August 2005, AEDIPS devised two questionnaires which were sent to local authority improvement personnel. This pamphlet highlights some of the key areas of concern which emerged from those surveys.

What are the concerns?

Although the total number of responses to the surveys was relatively small (65), the responses were drawn from 24 of the 32 local authorities. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that they are an accurate gauge of the feelings of improvement professionals in Scotland.

The key issues which emerged were:

- The shift in focus within the remits of former advisers, and the subsequent diminution of specialist support to subject teachers
- The increased workload associated with the expectation of a generic, rather than sectoral or subject-specific role
- The lack of time to provide pastoral support to schools, in a period of great change within Scottish education
- The ill-defined and sometimes uneasy relationship of quality improvement officers (QIOs) to HMIE and inspection processes, and the amount of time spent on them
- The relationship between school self-evaluation and the activities of quality improvement organisations and HMIE.

The respondents came from a wide range of authorities, with 19 coming from small population areas, 14 from large population areas, and eight from rural or island.



Summary of responses

Survey 1: changing roles of advisers

The first questionnaire, which was quantitative, was designed to elicit information on the changing role of local authority advisory services. There were 41 respondents in total, 21 of whom had less than four years experience in their present post, 18 of whom had between five and nine years, and two of whom had more than ten years experience.

The breakdown of previous jobs showed the diversity of experience among advisory staff and replicated the findings of Aspect's policy and development officer, David Waxman, that advisory staff with a secondary school background were less likely than their primary school colleagues to have had senior management experience, an issue which only became significant as the advisers' role began to shift from curriculum and CPD towards quality improvement and performance monitoring.

Shift in adviser remits

The shift in role within the remits of former advisers is illustrated by new job titles which have emerged from within 32 new local authorities. The term adviser has remained in some but not in others. In most cases, the term 'quality' appears, acknowledging the most significant shift in role.

Indeed, when one adds together all the titles which include the word 'quality' the total comes to 23, some 56%. However, when asked whether their current role

had a 'quality improvement /assurance element, 28 of the respondents (93%) said 'yes'.

Specialist or generic?

The longest list of all – some 56 items – was generated by the question, 'Which area(s) are you responsible for?' with 36 respondents (88%) indicating that they also had a 'functional or general responsibility'. The list included such diverse issues as anti-bullying, baseline assessment, probationer teachers, university liaison and budget-monitoring as well as individual national initiatives such as Assessment is for Learning.

The obvious conclusion to be drawn from this data is that the roles and remits of local authority advisory staff have changed. However, it would appear that while the new emphasis appears to be on the quality improvement process within schools, many of the traditional duties they have carried out remain the same.

In-service training

One role which appears to have disappeared in many authorities is the delivery of what was once called in-service training, now referred to as CPD. It would appear that the people within local authorities most likely to perform this role are seconded staff, recently in the classroom, who have specific remits.

The more established advisory staff tend to facilitate CPD, by responding to schools' needs analyses, constructing programmes

of CPD, supporting probationer teacher induction programmes, Scottish Qualification for Headship (sometimes), and the Chartered Teacher programme.

Support for schools

The extent of the change in role is highlighted most graphically when performance monitoring and support for school self-evaluation tasks are considered together. Most of the authorities represented in this survey used the 2003 HMIE publication, *How Good is Our School 2?* as the foundation for their quality improvement process. Indeed, the amount of time spent by local authority staff as part of the HMIE inspection process has become a major issue within the advisory service nationally.

Range of activities

When asked to list any other quality improvement tasks carried out, the respondents generated a further 16, from the evaluation cluster plans to carrying out 'themed evaluations' – from writing 'consolidated performance reports' for the directorate to the development of evaluation frameworks and self-evaluation training for school staff to the evaluation of specific initiatives such as ICT in learning and teaching.

Survey 2: views from the field

The second survey allowed for more qualitative observations on the issues. The sample was selected on the basis of length of service so that it would be possible to

collect reflections of the changes which had taken place in the role of advisory staff, as well as the implications for other roles and the relationship between HMIE and local authority quality improvement processes.

Twenty-four staff from 23 local authorities responded to the questionnaire, and their experience in advisory work ranged from five to 26 years, with the average being 12 years. Only three of these respondents had not been in post before local government reorganisation.

The quotations used in the following sections are indicative of the general response to the questions.

The increased time spent on HMIE-related processes

This questionnaire had one quantitative section. Respondents were asked to quantify the amount of time spent on activities in relation to HMIE processes prior to, during, and after the HMIE visit. Not all of the respondents were able to do so. Out of the 24 people who completed the questionnaire, 13 were able to quantify the time spent, in terms of days. Some were able to quantify hours spent.

The time spent on HMIE-related processes was vast, stretching from one to eleven days pre-inspection, and one hour to 18 days for post-inspection. Interestingly, the smallest amount of time and the narrowest range was during the inspection. From these results, it

appears that once HMIE are present in the school there is no role for QIOs.

The lack of time available for curriculum development

Several respondents expressed unease at the lack of time they were able to engage in meaningful curricular development:

The need to improve collaboration with HMIE

In spite of the amount of time spent on HMIE process, most respondents felt that the potential for true partnership working was not realised.

Previous experience of advisory staff

| Previous post | No | % |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|----|------|
| Principal teacher (secondary) | 10 | 24 |
| Headteacher/depute headteacher (primary) | 12 | 29 |
| Local authority post (development officer; co-ordinator, etc) | 12 | 29 |
| Adviser | 6 | 14.6 |
| Librarian | 1 | 2.5 |

“By 2003 the job was already undoable. To survive we have ‘dumped’ curriculum and learning and teaching...where curriculum needs are still being met, they are in the hands of unsupervised and poorly-directed seconded staff.”

Changing job titles

| Job title | No | % |
|-----------------------------------|----|----|
| Adviser | 10 | 24 |
| Quality improvement officer | 17 | 41 |
| Education officer (I, quality) | 5 | 8 |
| Quality development officer | 5 | 8 |
| Early years officer | 5 | 2 |
| Others (service improvement, etc) | 3 | 7 |

“My job title has changed five times in the last six years.”

“My colleagues in other authorities who seem to do much the same job as I do rarely have the same job title. It’s very confusing.”

HMIE inspections: average time spent supporting schools

| Aspect of process | Time |
|-------------------|----------|
| Before inspection | 3 days |
| During inspection | Half-day |
| After inspection | 5 days |

“I find it difficult to put a time commitment on this as it varies accordingly to size, needs etc of the school.”

“My team of eight QIOs has between 15 August 2004 and 21 April 2005, made 602 visits to schools.”

“I think we do have some capacity for supporting schools; we have the skills, we have the experience, but we lack the time.”

HMIE inspection: one local authority's support for schools – time spent

| Task | Time spent |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Before | |
| Quality visit – half-day 4 times per year | 2 days |
| Writing up a quality visit | 2 hours |
| Health check – half-day x 4 visits | 2 days |
| Writing up pre-inspection report | 6 hours |
| During | |
| Feedback meeting – I always ask to attend feedback to staff | 2–3 hours |
| Writing up feedback notes | 2 hours |
| After | |
| Action planning – primary, half-day each 6 weeks for 2 years | 6 days |
| Action planning – secondary, half-day per term | 4 days |
| Writing up action planning notes (each visit) | 2 hours |
| Writing follow-through report | 6 hours |

“HMIE inspections take up a disproportionate amount of my time. Continuing improvement needs opportunities to reflect and develop – I feel this is being lost both in establishments and in local authorities... across Scotland.”

“I would like to work more closely with HMIE in inspections. We seem to be doing very nearly the same job so it makes sense that we work together.”

Supporting schools through the HMIE inspection process

| Task | No | % |
|-----------------------------------------------|----|----|
| Writing pre-inspection reports | 29 | 70 |
| Preparation of HMIE action plans | 31 | 75 |
| Analysis of performance information | 36 | 88 |
| Using performance information | 36 | 88 |
| Verification of improvement plans | 30 | 73 |
| Verification of standards and quality reports | 29 | 70 |
| Writing follow-through reports | 25 | 61 |
| Making quality visits to schools | 37 | 90 |



Discussion

The quality improvement process has not only come to dominate national and local government education agendas, but it appears to have significantly altered the focus of what were once advisory services as they have become quality improvement services. The questions which sparked this research were concerned with the apparent move from 'development' to 'improvement', the impact of the quality process on local authority CPD, and the changing relationship between the QIOs and HMIE.

The word adviser continues to exist in the system but, significantly, in 2005, the former Association of Educational Advisers, Scotland (AEAS) changed its name to the Association of Educational Development and Improvement Professionals in Scotland (AEDIPS) to reflect the changing focus. The evidence from AEDIPS' more extensive survey is that quality improvement of schools now drives much of the agenda within local authorities.

The extent of this aspect of the work the staff surveyed emerges in the second survey. Not only do QIOs have to become generalists, cross-sectoral as well as cross-curricular, but they are now working at every level in schools, from pupils and parents, from teachers to headteachers, a role which in the past only the primary advisers carried out.

However, the most significant change is that while the focus is on quality improvement generally, most of the activities seem to be concentrated around the HMIE inspection.

The amount of time spent around this event in some authorities is significant.

Indeed, one council has produced a 'school inspections checklist' which runs to two-and-half pages of A4, closely typed, beginning with the 'Formal Notification of Inspection from HMIE' to 'Authority/School Discussion of Action Plan', all timed around the inspection, from 'Inspection Minus 3 Weeks' to 'Publication Plus 1 Week'. However, in this checklist, as in the data from experienced advisers, the involvement of local authority staff during the inspection itself is minimal.

Therefore, if the inspection itself is clearly an HMIE function, and if so much time is spent before and after by local authority staff, what is the nature of the relationship between the two sets of activities and the two sets of professionals. From the schools' perspective, where does CPD fit into the process? It seems self-evident from the data that there are two sets of activity – each of which are very time-consuming and play a part in the quality improvement process.

There is a sense that, given comments about the nature of the training and the relationship between HMIE as 'trainers' and QIOs as 'the trained', and given that local authority staff play no part during the inspection nor has there been, to date much in the way of formal acknowledgement by HMIE of the role of QIOs in the final published report, there needs to be some debate nationally

about how the work of QIOs and HMIE can be truly complementary.

It may be that there is some conceptual confusion between 'improvement' and 'inspection'. Are they synonymous? Or is inspection a subset of improvement and vice versa? Is the kind of national inspection currently undertaken by HMIE necessary when so much support and challenge is offered by local authority staff? If the answer is yes, then would the system benefit from a greater separation of roles, locally and nationally with 'development' being the task of the advisers and 'inspection' the role of HMIE? A third possible option is increasing the level of joint training opportunities, with QIOs taking on an enhanced improvement role and HMIE 'quality assuring' the local authority staff.

The debate is an important one. David Waxman, in his report, *The Scottish Pathway to Quality Improvement: the Evolving Role of Quality Improvement Officers in Scottish Local Authorities* (NAEIAC, 2003), concluded that: "there are many positive features of advisory work and the quality assurance framework in Scotland" (p17) but warned that "given size and resource limitations, there are few local authorities that [can] sustain a large advisory team and offer a comprehensive range of quality assurance, curriculum and staff development to schools." (p14)

The real issue here may be the extent to which quality assurance – whether through external inspection or not – is conceived

as a developmental activity. Leading educational academics Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves have written extensively on the need for collaborative models of school improvement, both internally within schools and among all the players in the school improvement game. It would appear that what we have lacks this essential ingredient of 'true' (as opposed to 'forced') collaboration.

At present QIOs do not feel that they are equal partners with HMIE; and schools still find the new role of the former advisory service problematic, and most of the time and energy spent on improvement seems to be narrowly focused on the inspection element of the process.

Can the new manifestation of the traditional advisory service perform both a developmental and an improvement function? The evidence from the surveys suggests that they will continue to try to do so, but at a cost. Perhaps, the way forward is for a period of reflection, nationally, on how the improvement agenda itself can move forward and learn from the experiences of those who are committed to it.

Comments/feedback

If you have any comments please direct your correspondence to Professor Brian Boyd at brian.boyd@strath.ac.uk or to Fiona Norris, Quality Improvement Officer at Inverclyde Council, fiona.norris@inverclydeschools.org.uk. If you would like to receive a copy of the full paper on which this booklet is based, please contact Professor Boyd.







