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The Politics of Educational Change: Governance and School Inspection in England and Scotland

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and Martin Lawn****

1 Introduction: disciplinary resources for the study of education governance

This paper discusses the inspection of education as a governing practice. In doing this, it draws on current comparative research¹ with colleagues on the governing of education through inspection in England, Sweden and Scotland, with a primary focus in this paper on England and Scotland. This research is interdisciplinary, and draws on ideas from political and policy sociology, as well as political science and social geography, to consider how the work of governing is done in and through education in the emergent European Education Policy Space (EEPS) (Ozga et al. 2011; Lawn and Grek 2012). In the first section of the paper we set out some of the disciplinary resources which frame and support our work, before looking at the relationship between changing UK politics and changing inspection practices in England and Scotland. In seeking to understand inspection as a governing practice, some of the questions that pre-occupy us are: what is the role of inspectors? Are inspectors asked to provide coherence in increasingly diverse, networked “systems” of education? Does the rise of performance data inhibit or extend the authority of inspectorates? Do inspectorates provide expertise and judgement that enables the translation of data-based information into policy choices?

We see these questions as developments of our earlier work on data and governance (Ozga et al. 2011). That research highlighted the importance of data systems in constructing the polycscape of education in Europe (Appadurai 2001). Our current research shifts the focus to examination of key actors who act as brokers, mediators or translators (Jacobsson 2006) of data-based knowledge and information between policy makers and schooling systems. We hypothesise that these actors do

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1 Governing by Inspection (ESRC RES 062 23 2241A).

governing work that develops and promotes a “governing narrative” in the context of increasingly fluid, diverse and unstable governing relations in Europe (Beyeler 2003; Krossa 2011). Respatialised governing relations are being produced, in education, through data-driven information systems (Ozga et al. 2011; Lawn and Grek 2012). These policy technologies (Lascoumes and Le Galès 2007, 6) construct policy problems and frame policy solutions beyond and across the national scale (Nóvoa and Yariv-Mashal 2003).

This perspective, in turn, understands governance as defined and (re) constructed in the *processes* of governing (Clarke 2009), and in the political work of governing, rather than as an orderly formation of pre-defined spaces and relationships, as found, for example, in multi-level governance approaches. The interdisciplinary resources offered by *sociologie politique* (Smith 2009; Favell and Guiraudon 2011) help to frame an approach to the governing of education as a “set of practices which participate in the organization and the orientation of social life” (Lagroye 1997, 25), and so we approach inspectors as actors who do the “political work”; ie work that “both discursively and interactively seeks to change or reproduce institutions by mobilising values” (Smith 2009, 13). This work mobilises or articulates political blocs; builds alliances, negotiates and reconciles interests, and assembles projects that define the direction and purpose of governing (Clarke 2009, 2). The mobilisation of discourse is a highly significant element of the governing work that such mediators and translators do, not least because it attempts to provide narrative coherence to the overarching “project” (Jacobsson 2006; Naglo and Waine 2011). As Clarke points out, intellectual coherence is probably the least significant criterion for assessing political projects, but the performative work that is done in order to inspire confidence, belief and support from increasingly demanding or disillusioned publics is of considerable importance in the field of education, and provides a key resource for our investigation of inspection as a form of governing.

Moreover, in conceptualising inspection as a governing practice, and investigating the governing work that inspectors do, we are also able to draw on resources from the sociology of work and the professions. Here we mobilise resources that draw attention to the growing conflict between control and autonomy in professional workplaces (Boyne et al. 2002; Boyne 2006; Baxter 2011), and to the conflicts and tensions around professional identities in increasingly regulated occupational groups (Hood et al. 1999; Evetts 2012). This enables us to pursue investigation of the tensions in “political work” in a number of sites – the transnational, national and institutional, as is illustrated in our research design (below). These, then, are the intellectual resources, that shape our approach to inspection as governing work and our concern to “sociologise” research on inspection, focussing on issues of power and its distribution, of problematisation and legitimation (Grek 2012).

Existing research on school inspection is very focused on the impact of inspection on school performance or on teachers’ work (see, for example Woods and

Jeffrey 1998; Matthews and Sammons 2004; Sammons 2008; Sammons and Bakum 2012). Our research takes a different starting point, illustrated here through discussion of the relationship between political change and the governing work that inspectors do, so that in this paper we discuss evidence from our research at the level of national policy rather than on inspection activity within schools. In the next section we say something about our methodology, before offering a brief discussion of the changing political contexts in which these governing processes of inspection are being developed.

2 The research project: scope and methodology

We have mapped the interrelationships of inspection at different system levels and across Sweden, Scotland and England, with a focus on transnational policy learning, and we are currently investigating inspection processes within local authorities/municipalities and between local policy spaces and schools. In order to achieve our research aims, we focus our enquiry on the incidence and management of the “tension in governance” between performance management and self-evaluation, or between hard and soft governance that is encapsulated in inspection, with particular attention to the ways in which these tensions play out in the relation between “judgement” and “evidence” in the inspection process. We have carried out extensive analysis of policy texts, and interviews with key system actors at all levels. The research is underpinned by an understanding of policy as discourse, in that we understand education policy to be constructed and presented – in texts, speeches and other public forms – discursively.

We have organised our investigation in relation to the following overarching research questions, aimed at three “levels” of enquiry but enabling a focus on interactions between them:

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?

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?

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?

As indicated earlier, in this paper we are largely reporting on work carried out in relation to the “(intra)-national/local interface”, based on our analysis of policy texts, of the backgrounds and training of inspectorates in England and Scotland, and on interviews with key policy actors, both policy makers and inspectors, with responsibilities for brokering, mediating or translating policy influences on Inspection within their national systems, and/or responsibility for training and development of national inspectorates (N = 30).²

3 Changing UK politics

In attempting to study the role of inspection in governing education in England and Scotland we seek to connect the changing nature of the inspection process to the shifting politics and increasingly heterogeneous political projects (Clarke 2012) that are developing within that fragile polity (Hassan and Scott 2012), drawing on the disciplinary resources identified above. Change is the only constant: the political landscape of the UK is shifting as we attempt to study it. Constitutional change following political devolution in 1999 brought complexity across all policy areas throughout the UK (Jeffrey 2009), but here we focus only on the relationship between the UK government (which has responsibility for education policy in England) and the Scottish government, as it is in this relationship that political differences are perhaps most acutely exemplified. We cannot consider all the complexities of the devolution “settlement” and its consequences for policy and politics here,³ for our present purposes the key points are the following:

- I. devolution of powers to a Scottish parliament in 1999 “reserved” some areas of social and public policy to UK government control: these do not include education but do include pensions, benefits, employment law, immigration and defence;

² We agreed to protect the identity of our informants in order to achieve open and productive discussion with them about sensitive topics. We therefore use a coding system: for example SPA01 is Scottish Policy Actor 1, EPAE 1 is an English policy actor who also has policy brokering functions in Europe, and SPM 5 is a Scottish Policy Actor who is a Scottish Government Minister.

³ For further discussion of devolution and UK politics and policy see Keating (2009); Hassan and Scott (2012).

- II. the Scottish National party (SNP) has formed the Scottish Government since 2007, and its core political project is independence for Scotland. The constraints of the devolution “settlement”, as well as the SNP’s emphasis on building an independent, confident polity, have constructed the performance of governing in partnership with local authorities and the third sector;
- III. the SNP’s project is in tension with that of the UK government not only on the fundamental issue of independence but in their projection of an independent Scotland as a social democracy, close to European models such as Denmark, which in turn produces direct conflict with the UK government over such issues as the SNP’s support for unilateral nuclear disarmament, progressive personal taxation, investment of public funds to address poverty, free state education including support grants for school, further and higher education students, opposition to privatisation of education or health provision and increased pay and employment protection for public sector workers;
- IV. Political differences were sharpened with the formation of a UK Coalition government of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats in 2010, coinciding with deepening financial recession and by that Coalition’s commitment to accelerated deficit reduction borne by reduced spending rather than increased taxes;
- V. Along with reducing public spending, the UK Coalition government’s social policy agenda, including in education, reflects a resurgence of neo-liberal principles, enabling greater scope for private, commercial involvement in providing and running services, in charging for services, in increased deregulation, reduction in government or quasi-governmental agencies and in the abandonment of universalist principles of provision of services, in favour of residual provision at a level that is intended to reduce dependency on the state.

The governments of Scotland and the UK/England⁴ thus offer two political “projects” in considerable tension. How these will play out – whether they will lead to the break up of the UK – is not our concern here. The projects have been sketched in order to provide a frame within which we can explore the parallel development of the inspectorate in the two countries. In the case of Scotland, the political project of the SNP government uses discursive resources to include different elements – local government, public servants, the third sector – in collective governing work that builds commitment to their vision of an independent Scotland. Thus the “crafting of the narrative”, as one senior politician put it, is a centrally important component of the SNP policy agenda, as the “narrative”, expressed, for example, in the National Performance Framework (NPF) in its agenda for a “wealthier and fairer, healthier, safer and stronger, smarter and greener Scotland” can be easily understood and referenced across the different public and social policy fields (Arnott and Ozga 2010). Importantly, it discursively links wealth and fairness; economic growth is defined

4 The UK government has responsibility for education in England – so we use this construction – UK/England as a way of expressing this double governing form.

as a public good. This text does governing work not only because it conveys purpose and direction, but because it recognises and includes “delivery partners”, and marks a clear departure from the previous Labour-controlled target-driven regime of monitoring public service delivery. This is a shift in governing mode from close central surveillance to the setting of a direction through a shared “project”.

In the field of education, as indicated above, the direction of the project is apparent in the strong role for local government in education (enshrined in a “concordat” setting out responsibilities for both the centre and the localities), in curriculum and examination development that is linked to more inclusive provision, the continued homogeneity of provision of state schooling and the related absence of market-related policy initiatives such as regular testing, league tables, parental choice, or diversity in school provision, along with the exclusion of commercial/private sector interests. In education, as in other public sector services, responsibility has moved to individuals and institutions (teachers, learners and schools as well as local authorities) and created a narrative of a learning government, offering a model of reflective, responsive practice to “the people of Scotland” (Arnott and Ozga 2010).

The SNP thus connects schooling discursively to “community” and a wider, progressive social project and contract:

And this nation pioneered free education for all, which resulted in Scots inventing and explaining much of the modern world. We called this the Scottish Enlightenment. And out of educational access came social mobility as we reached all the talents of a nation to change the world for the better.

We can do so again (...) this is part of the Scottish Settlement, our social contract with the people. (Salmond 2011)

The SNP project reflects a response to the re-spatialisation of relations in the perpetual dynamic of local and global interaction that exploits the opportunity to:

strengthen[s] and renew[s] our sense of rootedness and belonging by requiring us to define who we are, who we strive to be, within an ever increasing spectrum of contexts. (Schoene 2009, 13, quoted in Crawshaw 2011)

In the UK/England, the governing “project” is harder to capture. It is apparent, from the summary points above, that the resurgence or revisiting of neo-liberal principles, in a context of severe economic difficulty, combines to enable a narrative that promotes the free market and the rolling up of the state. Yet the narrative is neither clear nor strong, overlaid as it is with the echoes of previous attempts to free the market and dismantle the state, while, at the same time, deregulatory initiatives are combined with strong re-regulation, justified in order to create the conditions of total freedom that are always just out of reach. Peck captures some of this sense

of repetition and contradiction in his description of neo-liberalism as “variously failing and flailing forward”. He goes on:

Neoliberalism’s curse, then, is that it cannot help itself but to be a kind of interventionist project, which confers on the project a certain directionality, if not a destination (...). To the extent that neoliberalism has been, since the 1970s, “victorious” in the war of ideas, its victories have always been Pyrrhic and partial ones. Yet the project ploughs forward, never arriving at its stated destination, and never knowing where to stop. (Peck 2010, 7)

This analysis helps to make sense of the apparent paradox of the increased use of state power since 2010 by the current UK/English Minister, Michael Gove, to drive through the market revolution in education. This revolution is pursued through the creation of greater diversity of provision and providers, along with “freedom” from local authority control – so that almost half of all state secondary schools in England are now academy schools. These are:

publically funded independent local (...) all ability schools established by sponsors from business, faith or voluntary groups (...) focusing especially on one or more subject areas (specialisms) sponsored by commercial companies. (DfE 2012)

Another Gove initiative, “Free” Schools are also growing in number, these are all-ability state-funded schools set up “in response to parental demand” by a wide range of proposers, including charities, universities, businesses and groups of parents. They operate under the same legal requirements as academies. As these types of provision increase, examinations and curricula are also changing in order to reflect policy prioritisation of a sharper focus on “on essential knowledge and concepts” and “the essentials of, for example, English language and literature, core mathematical processes and science” (DfE 2011a, 4.12).

These developments – many of which are promoted under the heading of greater freedoms for schools and teachers – do not dislodge established practices of performance testing – on the contrary, the regime established in the 1990s by the New Labour administrations remains in place and “proper testing you can trust” (Gove 2011) is one of the key elements of the coalition’s strategy for raising standards. Indeed the so-called “floor standards” – the minimum expected standard for secondary school examination performance was raised in 2010 to 35 per cent achieving five A*-C grades in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) – that is, the examinations taken at the end of compulsory education at age 16. These increased demands include English and maths, combined with the majority of pupils making above average progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4, that is, between the ages of 7 and 16. This increased to 40 per cent in 2012 and

will increase to 50 per cent by 2015. Data, then, remain central to the governing work of education for the UK/England coalition, indeed there is to be much more data, freely available to parents and others – much more transparency and unmediated information is promised (Gove 2011). The centrality of data to the coalition government may reflect a continuation of data-driven logic in which data constituted the governing “project” for education in England under New Labour (Lawn and Ozga 2009). Data use grew in England from the 1980s onwards because of the policy pre-occupation with measuring attainment levels (of pupils, schools and the system). The proliferation of government guidelines and regulations for every aspect of schooling – including management, examination performance, local authority provision of services, inspection, teachers’ performance management, target-setting, addressing underperformance, pupil tracking – all drew on data and all required the use of data in their implementation at the school or local authority level. Government presented policy as informed, justified and legitimated by data and constructed and circulated an overarching narrative of knowledge-policy relations, and, in addition to home-grown data systems, global comparative data from OECD’s PISA provided a key reference point.

The coalition’s justification of its proposed restructuring of provision references PISA in signalling the need to catch up with competitors:

[W]hat really matters is how we’re doing compared with our international competitors. That is what will define our economic growth and our country’s future. The truth is, at the moment we are standing still while others race past. In the most recent OECD PISA survey in 2006 we fell from 4th in the world in the 2000 survey to 14th in science, 7th to 17th in literacy, and 8th to 24th in mathematics. (DfE 2010, 1)

This document, and the other policy texts that we have analysed, are preoccupied with achieving world-class status, and with the pursuit of freedom from bureaucratic controls, cultures and practices. It is a project that draws meaning from the practices and cultures that it opposes – those of state control, target-setting, regulation and system management. There is then, a considerable contrast with the governing project being articulated in Scotland, both in the nature of the narrative and in the content of policy. What are the implications of these political developments for the work of the inspectorates? We look first at England.

4 Inspection in England

A national system for the inspection of education has been a major feature of the English system of schooling for nearly 140 years. Throughout this time, National inspectors (Her Majesty’s Inspectors – HMI) visited schools, wrote reports on

schools and on the condition of education. They were perceived by teachers, schools and local authorities as significant policy actors, occupying a central – if shifting – place in the landscape of schooling (Clarke and Lawn 2011). But that 140 year history is one of considerable change, most notably in 1992 with the invention of Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education). Ofsted was part of the Thatcher governments' reforms of education that promoted greater "autonomy" for schools, promised greater "choice" for parents, nationalised the curriculum and challenged approaches to teaching that were variously labelled as "liberal", "permissive" or "child-centred". The new arrangements for governing schooling, like many other public services, were articulated around the principles of "governing at a distance", rather than through the systems of integral government department bureaucracies. In this new architecture, forms of scrutiny, evaluation, audit and inspection took on increasingly important roles as means of managing dispersed or fragmented systems of provision.

In designing the architecture for governing education, England focused strongly on developing very large-scale data systems (referred to by one of our European informants as "monstrous") linked to external measures of performance of the total school population at regular intervals. Data dominate the inspection process:

I think in England we have too much data and a lot of the inspectors don't really understand it. (...) I mean data – you can make it say anything you want it to and it's difficult to refute in an inspection, or to say something different from what the data appear to be saying. (...) you are in the bottom left hand quadrant. It's very difficult to say in a report (...) well yes you are there but in actual fact the school is much better than that there are reasons why, but Ofsted will say, but the data says this. (EPA14)

Ofsted has always been regarded as "very, very distinctive" (EPAE1) in the inspection field, and the scale of its activity sets it apart – it inspects on an almost industrial scale (Field et al. 1998). At first every primary or secondary school in England was inspected every four years: from 2009 effort was concentrated on those schools deemed to be most in need of support and/or intervention. The methodology changed over time from a relatively informal distillation of the professional experience of HMI to a much more structured, routinised and template-driven process that seeks to ensure standardised judgement across a workforce that is recruited not only from HMI but from part-time inspectors trained and employed by a number of commercial agencies.

The involvement of commercial agencies – sometimes in competition with one another for contracts – could create problems in terms of pressures to cut costs:

I was working for xxx [agency tendering for inspection contracts] they didn't have a clue. It was all on price not quality, they dropped the quality for the price. [Other agencies] both had much better quality but they

were ousted on price: price has always been a big one more than quality. Going back to xxx, when they were brought in they really didn't have a clue, they were dreadful, awful (...) they didn't know what they were doing, they are better, but its taken time, around 2 years before they could even get a handle on what they had to do. (EPA16)

At the same time, the involvement of different agencies in the provision of inspection services increased pressure to standardise and limited the scope for professional judgement of individual inspectors:

[W]e have these three documents and that's the document well, the framework for inspection which underpins the legal element of it, which is very important for inspectors because it also harbours the philosophical approach the transparent philosophical approach which focuses on parents – you know this is all about telling parents what type of schools their children go to. Then the evaluation schedule which holds the grade descriptors and that is where the bar is set, then there's a document called conducting the inspection and that's how to do it so there are like a triumvirate of mini bibles if you like and you amalgamate those together and there you are, and you should in theory be able to read those and inspect (...) that's the theory. (EPA16)

Ofsted developed a succession of frameworks in order to evaluate schools, judging them as outstanding, good, satisfactory or inadequate. From around 2005 it made greater use of “self evaluation” in the inspection and reporting process, and up to the forming of the UK coalition government in 2010, it was expanding its remit to include different aspects of children's welfare as well as schooling. Although Ofsted links inspection to school improvement, improvement is understood and demonstrated in the raising of standards of educational performance that are measurable and comparable. The emphasis is on judgement, not development:

[I]nspectors don't advise, they make judgements, they make evaluations (...) [with] total objectivity (...). (EPA11)

Constant change in the frameworks made the assessment of the impact of inspection on improvement difficult, but at the same time constant change was built into the inspection system because of the underlying anxiety about costs and “gaming” the system, as a senior inspector explained:

(...) but I was increasingly of the view and indeed Ofsted's own evidence suggested it – that it looked as though we were increasingly getting less of a return on our investment. And I think there is something quite interesting there for inspection systems – that if you keep them rigidly the way they are then after a while you get fewer bangs for your buck – people

start to game the system, inspectors may fall back on complacent behaviours and attitudes – your system can get locked when education generally is moving on. (EPA 5)

The arrival of the Coalition Government in 2010 produced further changes in school inspection, that require a focus on the “core business” (teaching, learning and pupil behaviour), rather than the 27 different areas in which they were asked to operate under the previous government – the aim is to:

reform Ofsted inspection, so that inspectors spend more time in the classroom and focus on key issues of educational effectiveness, rather than the long list of issues they are currently required to consider. (DfE 2010, 13)

Inspection will be “proportionate” and “outstanding schools” will not be inspected if they are able to demonstrate excellence in teaching and learning. Schools at the other end of the scale will be monitored and if failing to improve may be inspected annually. As part of the narrowing of focus, the self-evaluation form was abolished and inspectors are now required to assess behaviour and safety, looking at:

evidence of how well pupils behave, by observing lessons and pupils’ conduct around the school. They will also expect schools to demonstrate that the standards of behaviour seen during the inspection are maintained at all times. Inspection will consider whether pupils are and feel safe in school. (DfE 2011b, pp.)

The grade “satisfactory” is to be replaced with the rather less positive term “requires improvement” (Ofsted 2012) reflecting a new much tougher inspection framework that will operate in an increasingly competitive environment in which penalty for failure is even more severe (Baxter 2012). In summary then, Ofsted is located in a governing project for education that embraces diversity of provision and deregulation to a degree that makes it difficult to “see” a system of education in England. One of our informants makes this point:

Historically we’ve all looked at that – that whole system – as being the responsibility largely if not exclusively of one agency – the local authority – I think what we’re going to see is a system of systems within systems – a number of different players. I even ask the question whether it will be possible to talk about an education system in the future. (EPAE1)

He goes on to consider the implications for the role of inspection, and suggests that schools are chosen by people on the basis of good performance – then perhaps there is a question mark over the position of Ofsted:

I do ask myself whether what you might describe as old fashioned inspection is going to quite have the same power (...) because we’re putting more

information out all the time about the performance of schools – and that’s another thing this government has done – to make all this data available – and – if that becomes more regularly used and you get a kind of “trip adviser” view of how schools are doing – you might think, well – pretty imperfect that. The problem is however imperfect it is it could leave inspection standing [still] (...). (EPAE1)

5 Inspection in Scotland

While England continues to be pre-occupied with its global positioning in education, the Scottish government and its inspectorate of education use Europe to promote Scotland’s approach to inspection as “in line with evolving European-wide models” (CP6S). They construct the European education policy space as an area of exchange of experience and good practice, and the Scottish inspectorate uses the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates (SICI) as a platform for promoting the role of professional knowledge and skills that contribute to European-wide initiatives while also stressing Scotland’s distinctiveness (Donaldson 2008; Grek 2012). The governing “narrative” of the SNP government, discussed earlier, is built around the idea of collective learning that provides a resource for strengthened national identity, growing national capacity and hence political independence. The inspectorate thus has a very important role to play as “translators” of this narrative into practice through their use of judgement, evidence, and the building of trust through self evaluation, which they propagate as a key resource for better public sector management and accountability, while they model and “teach” self-evaluation within the national policy space.

Her Majesty’s Inspectors of Education in Scotland have long been a powerful presence with influence in policy formation within and outside the central education department (McPherson and Raab 1988, 135). The inspectorate increased its power throughout the 1980s and 1990s, becoming more policy-active, but suffered a setback in a crisis over examinations in 2000–01, when it was demoted to agency status (Raffe 2005). Since the election of the minority SNP government in 2007, the Inspectorate has been steadily recovering its position, and, indeed, advancing beyond its traditional role to promote an identity as “teachers” of good practice within Scotland and indeed, within Europe. These developments take place against a background of political support for the performance of the education system, which is acknowledged to be “good but not great” (SPA1).

The policy technology that Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) promote in Europe and within Scotland is school self-evaluation (SSE) as set out in the key text “How Good is our School” (HGIOS). HGIOS positions the inspectorate as guides and enablers of quality assurance processes that are built and maintained

by the school, using HMIE guidance. Self-evaluation, then, builds towards system “greatness” through inspection:

[I]nspection is part of that self-evaluation (...). [W]hat the inspection is providing is the mirror of a national perspective against which a school can reflect its own performance. (SPA02)

In 2011 a new body – Education Scotland – was created, combining HMIE with Learning and Teaching Scotland (the former curriculum development agency) and thus heavily underlining the alignment of inspection with improvement. The new model of inspection and the whole philosophy of Education Scotland, we were told, is to provide, within one body:

both that facility to provide a reflection on the national perspective, but at the same time corral the resource that is required to provide support to the school. (SPA02)

The role of the inspectorate is to “gather intelligence, advise and intervene” to support a “learning system through which the professionals at the front line create the forward planning and the forward movement”. In a system described by a senior policy actor as:

much more based on schools being the primary agent of self-evaluation, with what we tend to describe as a kind of peer coaching that we bring in with inspection for schools, rather than an external evaluation of schools (...). (SPA1)

At the same time, inspection has continued to emphasise building good relations with local schools and local authorities in the drive for improvement, developing the PRAISE best practice framework for inspections and reviews (Purpose, Relationships, Awareness, Information gathering, Sharing information, Enabling; HMIE 2011). Inspectors are recruited from serving teachers and head teachers and see themselves as “close” to the schools being inspected. The development of a partnership view of inspection places a premium on support and developmental practices, reinforced by psychological training that seeks to develop appropriate skills

We’re training our people quite actively in the social skills of inspection (...) we’ve got some occupational psychologists working with us to develop this framework – working on relationships with people – we must be able to win the support and constructive interest that will enable initiative. (SPA1)

In fact:

how you inspect is almost more important than being right, in terms of making the judgments. I remember one time, 20 years ago, the absolute

– getting the judgment right was what mattered, nothing else – whereas now it's the social skills of being able to manage inspection to the point where you leave the school actually able to improve because they accept and are with you on the agenda – that's the real skill of inspection. (SPA2)

A recent development is a model of mid-inspection assessment, where the inspectors test the school's view of itself using processes including classroom observation and then move into a development, rather than an inspectorial mode if they are confident in the quality of the school's judgement. As one senior inspector puts it:

A school's never actually asked us to leave at this point, they always take advantage of another day or day and a half of consultancy or something they want to explore further. (SPA3)

The inspection event, then, becomes a process of collective learning that binds pupils, parents, teachers and inspectors together in a shared process, with a shared purpose that builds a collective identity:

The evaluative activities involved [in HGIOS] are similar to those we encourage pupils to engage in as part of their own learning process. Taking part in them creates a community of learners. (HMIE 2007, 7)

The construction of a community of learners (Lave and Wenger 1991) sits well with the wider policy narrative. The inspectorate, with its new “social skills” both models and disseminates best practice:

[Our purpose] is really being an engine for spreading best practice across the system – we are in a unique position in seeing so much front line practice across the whole country. (SPA01)

This development is congruent with the Scottish government's self-promotion as a “learning government”, working in concert with its partners and thus creating more confident individuals that have the capacity for political independence. As a senior policy maker puts it, reflecting on the tradition of strong central direction with which the SNP government claims to have broken:

(...) so for decades you have had this top down approach in education which has been civil servants telling ministers, ministers then tell local government, local government then tell directors of education and directors of education tell head teachers and then head teachers tell teachers. There is this suffocation by direction (...) so we are changing the education system, we hope, from one of dependence to one of independence. (SPM5)

6 Discussion

We started this paper with a number of questions that guide our enquiry into inspection as a governing practice, questions about the extent to which inspectors do political work that includes the promotion and translation of a governing “narrative” across the increasingly diverse, networked “systems” of education in which they work, and about the relationship between performance data and the authority of inspectorates. We also outlined some of the ways in which our research uses particular disciplinary resources to approach governing through a focus on practices and processes of governing (Clarke and Ozga 2011), and on the political *work* of governing, work that defines the direction and purpose of governing (Clarke and Ozga 2011, 2), and that attempts to give that project some coherence through the performative work that is done in order to inspire confidence, belief and support for governing projects, not least – in this case – from those who perform the work of educating or inspecting education.

Our research identifies a clear and coherent governing “project” that connects quite directly, we suggest, to the reshaping of inspection in Scotland. The SNP government’s need to build trust and confidence in order to achieve its longer term aim of political independence requires the promotion of governing practices and relations that are consensual, inclusive and appear to shift power and authority downwards. In education, this logic is developed in a range of policies and in the new inspection regime. We can understand this shift, using a political sociology analysis, as reflecting the mobilisation of interests and values to legitimise these changes and to help to problematise – however indirectly – the continuation of Scotland’s position within the UK. This supports the overarching governing project of the SNP, while also producing a performance of inspection, through self-evaluation and collaborative development that disciplines pupils, teachers and inspectors in the continuous work of self-scrutiny and self-improvement. Both organisations and individuals have, it seems, been increasingly invited to imagine themselves as auditable or inspectable performative selves (see Power 1997; Power 2005), and this reflection of themselves, in the national “mirror” of self-evaluation, integrates their performance with that of the nation in a unifying project. Here, in the education context, the evaluative state has articulated self-evaluation as a demand that connects pupils (and parents, of course), teachers, schools, and systems.

In the context of England, the governing project is one of establishing freedom from regulation, while simultaneously using regulation to achieve the state of perfect competition that neo-liberalism strives for. The problem of governing is addressed through a mixture of established practices of inspection, evaluation, and audit. The paradox remains, of increased centralisation following from the pursuit of freedom and the resultant direct line of control between the academies and free

schools and the Minister. As one of our informants points out – as the number of academies has grown:

[Y]ou can't have every failing academy crossing the secretary of States' desk – you just end up with madness. (EPA01)

In this context, Ofsted is not an agency of improvement through collaboration in development, but preserves its authority through its policing of the system (s), and identifying institutional failings (House of Commons Education Committee 2011, 14). Ofsted is located in a very different governing architecture from that of the Scottish inspectorate, in a “system of systems within systems” – perhaps, even a “systemless system”. This limits Ofsted’s capacity to construct an inclusive narrative that builds identification with a governing project. Instead Ofsted is the deliverer of (critical) judgement, especially as the new framework focuses its work on specific areas, and on underperforming or “coasting” schools. There are quite sharp contradictions in the positioning of Ofsted in this disciplinary role, as this offers little scope for the political work of enrolment of support and mobilisation of values that may be necessary to successful governing. There are signs of deepening resistance to the speed, scale and scope of change in education in England, especially from the teacher unions. Given the stronger penalties on schools for failure, and the wider context of growing teacher resistance to the direction of policy, as well as the confrontational style of the new Senior Chief Inspector, it seems that inspection in England is being constructed as an enforcement agency rather than a “partner” in the governing of education through expertise and example.

To conclude with a return to our overarching concern with the relationship between governing and politics, then, we offer this analysis and discussion as an argument for the need to see political work as part of the process of governing that seeks to build alliances and mobilise resources in support of projects of change in education. That political work is often preoccupied with problematisation (for example, the need for freedom from the dead hand of local government in order to achieve success) or legitimisation (for example, collaboration and partnership in governing). The political *work* of governing mobilises particular groups – like inspectors – and enables the assemblage of projects that define the direction and purpose of governing. Inspectorates, through their work on the “front line” – a term now frequently in use in England – are asked to promote and embody the governing project, and drive change in education. The material presented here highlights significant differences in the governing “projects” in England and Scotland, as evidenced in the different kinds of governing work that inspectors are being asked to do.

7 References

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8 Background note

Under the provisions of the Scotland Act (1998) Scotland has a parliament with primary legislative and tax varying powers, but territorial and constitutional interdependencies produce highly complex interrelationships between matters “reserved” for the UK government and those devolved to Scotland, especially in relation to economic policy and social security. In these areas there are limits upon what the Edinburgh parliament can do, and these limits become problematic when the government of the UK and that of Scotland have different agendas and priorities.

Furthermore, partly because of the constraints on the Scottish Government and parliament, governing in Scotland is “done” to a large extent through local government and the third sector in partnership arrangements. Finally, with the arrival of the Scottish National Party (SNP) as the governing party in Scotland in 2007, there is a strongly pro-European bias in government, and small, strong, social democratic European states are the key reference point for the Scottish Government in its promotion of a national imaginary. For the UK government, on the other hand, devolution is a set of working relations that preserve the “union” of the United Kingdom and enables small nations (Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland) to survive within a stronger UK framework.

The continuous process of devolution since 1999 has gradually raised questions about English identity and politics, given added urgency by the election of a minority Scottish National Party (SNP) government in 2007, which brought to

an end the cross-border pressures for convergence from a Labour-controlled UK government on the Labour-led coalition that had been in government in Edinburgh from 2000 onwards. The SNP government brought with it a commitment to independence for Scotland – though when, and on what terms, remains unclear. Political differences deepened with the arrival of the UK Coalition government in 2010, a government that had little electoral support in Scotland, and differences were deepened when the SNP won a clear victory in the elections to the Scottish parliament in 2011, a victory which they interpreted as a mandate for independence. The SNP government presents independence to the electorate not only as enabling freedom from the constraints imposed on it by the devolution “settlement” but as allowing it to depart from the UK coalition government’s agenda on social policy, including education.