

# **‘Reporting without fear, or favour’: HMI 2000-2010, an oral history**

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## **Abstract**

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This thesis contends that the methodological approaches taken in exploring education inspections in the last twenty years are largely unhistorical and result in a particular view that contrasts current school inspections unfavourably with previous approaches, as a result of the particular methodological stances adopted, often analysing teachers’ experiences of inspections using Foucauldian and performativity theoretical frameworks. Even studies with a more-historical bent tend to present Her Majesty’s Inspectors (HMI) as belonging more to a less-destructive golden age of ‘professional relationships’. The evidence bases for the hypotheses tend to omit, to treat as incidental, or to dismiss as misguided the views of inspectors, particularly the experiences of HMIs. The literature suggests also that the office of HMI effectively ceased to exist by the year 2000.

This research set out to locate previously unavailable evidence about the work of HMIs after 2000 and to consider what that evidence revealed about the nature of the role at that time, using the method of oral history. The research looked at the experiences of a small group of former HMIs, who were active in the period 2000-2010, through semi-structured, recorded interviews, subsequently transcribed and analysed thematically, to see what the HMIs’ recollections reveal about the prevailing debates, and to contribute to the growing body of literature about the value of oral history as a distinctive branch of historical method.

The study argues that, throughout the period, HMIs operated as independently minded individuals, who sought to transcend their particular circumstances, in order to sustain a sense of the purpose and values which they considered underpinned the office. It demonstrates also that oral history evidence is as valid and useful as any other historical source, notwithstanding some distinctive contingencies and limitations associated with it.

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## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

### **Context for the thesis**

In 2010, a newspaper editorial criticised obsession with procedure, failure to comprehend the reality of schools and an addiction to data that, according to the leader writer (Kelly, 2010), rendered Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) robotic. The adjective was, perhaps, intentionally provocative, but the general message and the specific criticism appear to indicate important and, arguably, detrimental changes in the nature of HMIs' work around that time.

The idea of 'reporting without fear, or favour' remains a much-used maxim amongst HMIs. Whilst the specific moment of its first use may be unclear, the maxim persists in encapsulating the historical independence of the office and provides some sense of connection with a long-standing tradition. Founded in 1839, HMIs' origins were linked to the early use of central government funding for schools and the enforcement of such regulations as existed. Initially, HMIs' powers were tentative and intended more for assisting local efforts than exercising central control. Concerns that the function would, nevertheless, result in the subjugation of teachers to the caprices of central government were expressed from the outset. Though a considerable time later, during the two decades around the millennium, inspection has become increasingly central to governments' attempts to influence teachers' practice.

The Education (Schools) Act 1992 created Ofsted as the agency responsible for carrying out a national programme of inspections. At that point, HMIs were subsumed

within the new organisation. The number of HMIs was reduced dramatically and the balance of their work altered to include primarily, though not exclusively, the oversight of the new regime and its operation by independent inspectors working almost as sub-contractors to Ofsted and often themselves under contract to a range of new companies called inspection service providers.

Subsequently, Ofsted's role has been expanded and re-shaped in various legislation. Ofsted's remit and the precise format of inspections have changed to reflect changing policy priorities at different times and, though the media coverage might not suggest so, the experience of implementing the inspection programme in the light of feedback. Also, the number of HMIs has increased again, particularly after the Education Act 2005, reflecting additional demands and needs brought by the legislative changes and broader remit.

### **Why and how the research topic was chosen**

The inspection regime has, during that same period, been much criticised. Much of the literature about inspection since 1992 relies on meta-historical hypotheses, which colour markedly the conclusions drawn. At the heart of recent debates about the value of school inspections and the role of inspectors are two key concepts; professionalism and an associated notion of de-professionalisation and performativity, infused with Foucauldian notions of governmentality, panopticism, and disciplinary discourse.

I joined Her Majesty's Inspectors in 2005 as part of the first significant wave of recruitment to the office since the inception of Ofsted. I must acknowledge that much

of the literature about inspection, encapsulated in Kelly's editorial, did not reflect my personal experience, either of the work that I saw myself as carrying out, or the people with whom I worked. As an historian, it seemed to me that the literature, much of which, admittedly, was not written to be history, did not tell the whole story, an omission that seemed, in part at least, the result of methodological approaches that were themselves not historical. Rose (1998) challenges criticism of historicist works for showing scant regard for historical conventions of evidence as missing the point, because such critiques are not intended to be works of history, but aim rather to suggest ways of understanding that are not dependent on the nature of reality, or empirical validity. Nevertheless, such approaches often purport to reveal an otherwise-hidden 'truth' about the present and past.

### **Purpose of the research**

This research focuses on HMIs' experiences of the period around 2000-2010, in part because such history as has been written about their work presents 2000 as a cut-off point, after which HMI 'ceased to exist' in any 'meaningful' sense, and also because much of the literature about school inspections during that period largely ignores inspectors' perspectives. The research set out to find out about some individual responses to the changes that took place and how those changes affected HMIs' perceptions of the role, the culture of HMIs as a group, and how they made decisions about their practice. It collected the views of a small selection of former HMIs to see what those views reveal about the nature of the role in the decade after 2000 and whether, or not there is any sense in which HMIs transcended the circumstances in which they found themselves by '(defining) their own narratives and select(ing)

courses of action that are dependent on their deliberations and choices' (Aboulafia, 2010, p. 8).

The research does not aim to discover new generalisations to replace those presented in other literature, or to disprove the hypotheses that the literature contains. It does seek to 'unsettle' the existing account by attempting to gain an understanding of behaviour that is not disclosed by such generalisations, by using a methodological approach that has not been applied previously to the particular topic, namely oral history. The primary intention is to leave a contribution for the historical record on an under-researched component of educational history, itself a relatively less well-developed aspect of history. Equally important were more-simplistic aims of adding to the evidence base on the history of HMI and of leaving material for potential future historians.

The resulting thesis does not seek to compare the experiences of inspectors with those of the inspected because the latter have been covered elsewhere. It does not presume to advocate for HMIs, or seek to mount an argument in favour of inspection. It attempts to understand how changes were understood and interpreted by individuals who went through them. The approach concentrates on small-scale settings and how people saw themselves within those settings, but the concern is historical, rather than biographical.

## **The research questions**

The main data gathering comprised a series of discussions with nine former HMIs active within the time period suggested by the review of the existing literature (details of the sample are given in Chapter 4). The research questions were;

- a) How did individual HMIs view the role in the period?
- b) What do their views indicate about how the role changed, or developed during that time?
- c) What do HMIs' stories reveal about their personal responses to any changes?

The research questions focussed on individual HMIs' conceptions of the role during the period, their motivations for undertaking it, and whether they perceived any changes in its nature during their tenure, or not, and, if so, what they saw as the reasons for the changes; what their stories reveal about the extent to which they felt able individually to influence and to control their work. The intention was to obtain previously unavailable empirical evidence and to use that evidence to offer a more-historical interpretation of the conduct of school inspections within the period than is available currently.

## **Data analysis, results and structure of the thesis**

The approach to analysing the transcripts was adapted from Burnard (1991) idea of thematic content analysis and Geanellos' (2000) call for repeated engagement with the text of the transcripts. The end product is a written account of the researcher's summary of the evidence, to be found in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 and conclusions in



Chapter 8, illustrated with references to selections from the transcripts. The thesis is presented in eight chapters. Following this introduction, there is a literature review, including an historiography of HMI, and then a chapter about the methodological issues. Information about the interviewees is presented in Chapter 4, along with contextual and background information about the policy environment and detail changes in inspections. The findings are presented in three sections covering the interviewees' early experiences of the role, followed by their development within the role, and then their reflections on how the role developed within the timeframe. A final chapter suggests some conclusions about both the development of the role of HMIs and also concerning what the exercise indicated about the chosen method for the research, oral history.

The key result was that the interview material provides clear examples of individuals responding to and interpreting the events that they experienced for themselves, seemingly with little consciousness of the meta-historical narratives that permeate the literature outlined in the review chapter. It seems apparent that important changes in the nature and operation of HMIs did take place within the period of interest, but equally that the interviewees retained a sense of the historical nature of the role.

## **Chapter 2 HMI: literature review and historiography**

This chapter begins by considering some of the works setting out the thematic discourses that infuse much of the literature about school inspections during the period of interest and so, by association, the work of HMIs, in order to understand the context within which that literature has developed. It looks then at examples of the literature about inspections in the period after 1992, the point at which Ofsted became the body responsible for school inspections, in order to see how the debates about professionalism and performativity have influenced that literature. What matters less here is achieving precise definitions of these concepts, than considering how they have set the tenor of debates about the impact of inspections and, by extension, the role and contributions of inspectors.

The chapter finishes by reviewing the main historical works about HMI and a few examples of other works that contain references to HMI. This section presents a straightforwardly chronological summary of the main literature, with the intention of showing how approaches to the subject have altered over time. It will be evident both that there is not a coherent body of work on HMI and that the character of much of what has been written is very different from the other literature on school inspections. It will be seen that, after the formation of Ofsted, the already sparse catalogue of works about HMI becomes even thinner as the focus of research switches more to the impact of the new approach to school inspections. This change in focus seems to reinforce a theme running through the literature that the role of HMI changed such

that previous notions of what it entailed no longer apply and even that, effectively, the office ceased to exist.

Reading the extant literature reinforced a sense of a need for a new study, to provide a different perspective on the development of inspection in the opening decade of the current century, in terms of evidence that was not available previously, of points of view that had not been explored and even discounted, and using a methodological approach that might serve to balance the types of accounts that have predominated, given that such historical accounts as do look at the subject largely do not extend beyond the year 2000. It must be acknowledged that the motivation for the study was partly personal. As a serving HMI, I might, perhaps, be expected to view the office, Ofsted, and inspections positively. Whilst I admit to finding viewpoints such as Kelly's (see p. 4 above) provocative, my sense of need to try to redress what seems to me to be a clear imbalance did not stem from a blinkered vision of the work of HMI. Accordingly, this study does not aim to disprove research that suggests a negative impact from inspections, though certainly, the intention was to present an account of HMIs as the human beings that they are and it does attempt to show that the existing literature fails to consider all of the possible evidence and is restricted in the conclusions that it reaches by the dynamics of the research paradigms used and the ontological standpoints underpinning the approaches taken. The same caveats must apply to this study, but the contribution to knowledge made here lies in locating previously unavailable evidence and subjecting it to historical analysis, an approach that is largely not evident in the available literature, and in the particular perspective brought by this historian.

The Education (Schools) Act 1992 created Ofsted as the agency responsible for carrying out a national programme of inspections. HMIs were absorbed into the new body, drastically reduced in numbers and given a revised brief, including, though not exclusively, establishing and supervising a new and radically different national programme of institutional inspections. Ofsted's role has been expanded and re-shaped in subsequent legislation and the precise format of inspections has changed to reflect different policy priorities and the experience of implementing the inspection programme.

The inspection regime has, during that same period, been much criticised in literature that often draws upon prevailing sociological debates and meta-historical analyses, in particular, ideas about professionalism and an associated notion of de-professionalisation, hypotheses about performativity, linked with Foucauldian concepts of governmentality, panopticism, and disciplinary discourses of power. Inspections and, by extension, inspectors are presented as a key mechanism undermining previously established relationships and what is regarded as the professional autonomy of teachers.

Much of the research into inspection practice after 1992 concentrates either on teachers' experiences of being inspected, or on challenging the reliability of inspection judgements by comparing inspection methods and social science research methodologies. The research contrasts current inspections unfavourably with previous approaches by HMI, largely on the grounds of analyses of teachers' experiences of Ofsted-style inspections. It can be seen increasingly, as a result of the chronological approach, that very little of the more-recent literature deals directly with inspectors

themselves and HMIs particularly. That makes it difficult to understand what it is that inspectors think that they are doing and seems to leave an image of them as drones of a pervasive and pernicious discourse. Furthermore, whilst much of the research was not written to be history, nor looks explicitly at the work of HMIs, it becomes, nevertheless, part of the historical record and so influences current and future interpretations. It is not the intention of this thesis to explore those themes through the new evidence collected, but it is important to understand how the literature sets the tone and background for what that evidence suggests about the role of HMIs, when approached as historical material.

### **The ideal of professionalism**

Larson (1977) sets professionalism's origins within the specialised functions that developed with the advent of writing and the growth of institutionalised centres of learning. The term describes the culmination of socio-economic developments that led by the end of the nineteenth century to the political dominance of a series of career hierarchies, based upon trained experts selected on merit by similarly educated peers, who, as a group, persuaded society that the services that they provided were vitally important. Professional domination of society was secured through control of each occupational market, a monopoly, for which the professions needed state backing.

For Friedson (2001), that monopolistic control is the bedrock of professionalism. Friedson defined professionalism as a level of 'discretionary' specialisation that takes the performance of a function beyond routine tasks, requiring a body of knowledge beyond the everyday, which is acquired through dedicated training providing a high

level of expertise. Exclusive jurisdiction is conferred by the possession of qualifying credentials, controlled by each profession itself. A level of discretion is seen as a right concomitant on a level of moral commitment that commands trust. Trust is due because specialisation conveys functional and cognitive authority, the use of which is guided by transcendental ethical and moral values, rather than functional efficiency, or economic gain. Larson (1977) argues that it was, nevertheless, precisely by commodifying their expertise, positioning themselves in the market in order to compete for and to secure precedence, that the professions were able to gain the social and economic preferment which they desired.

Perkin (1996) suggests that professional society was able to thrive as long as there was a booming economy, but economic decline in the latter half of the twentieth century brought with it a challenge particularly to the supposed supremacy of the public-sector professions, regarded by their private-sector peers as unproductive and parasitic. Professional groups from both sectors found themselves in competition for state resources. The expansion of professional roles and groups produced the conditions, rooted within professional society itself, in which professional hegemony began to break down. More recently, there have been attempts to re-cast the ideal of professionalism (Dickson, 2004).

Mansell et al. (1988) considered that technological developments have made professional distinctions redundant and, potentially, barriers to prosperity. Rajan (1992) suggests that the emergence of a 'knowledge-based' economy almost required an extension of professionalism beyond the established occupational areas, if economies were to be competitive in a globalised world. Giddens (2000) suggests that

the development of a 'knowledge economy' has blurred the boundaries between occupations that were once distinctive. Older forms of specialism are breaking down; new technologies are changing concepts of professionalism. Historically, this is far from being a new process. Technological developments bring social change and the rise of information and communication technology has presented a particular challenge to professional society by seeming to make expert knowledge available to all, rather as did the advent of printing.

The concept of a profession is an attempt to specify and in so doing to set apart a function as distinctive. It points towards stereotypes of loyalty that condition beliefs, ways of seeing the world and feelings, centred on symbols and emblems, resulting in '...the acceptance or the rejection of specific opinions not so much by the force of logical consistency as by their emotional affinity and by the way in which they relieve anxieties' (Mills, 2000, p. 312 sic.). Bourdieu (2000) noted that a common technical language is often a distinctive characteristic of professional groups and assists in creating a sense of the profession's exclusivity, the profession creates its own meaning and importance on the back of its unique terminology.

Parry (1969) suggests that Weber noted that the technical expertise central to the professions' demand for status had the potential both to liberalise and to dominate society. Popper (1979), similarly, regarded professional specialisation in the scientific world as dehumanising. Perkin (1996) saw professionalism's simultaneous potential to enhance life and to be exploitative. The dichotomous theme is taken up by Stronach et al. (2002, p. 110), who saw in professionalism '...methodological reduction,

rhetorical inflation and universalist excess' resulting in '...a kind of over-investment in the professional as an agent for good in society...'

It is possible to see professionalism as a pervasive power discourse. Rose (1998) defined professionalism as a claim to truth based on knowledge and training, involving a notion of a consensus about professional standards. Pitkin (1972) argued that consensus is a mechanism for establishing an equilibrium, the maintenance of which requires socialisation and control. The apparatus is apparently one of mutuality, respect, open and constructive dialogue, but Cuff and Payne (1984) point out that it offers an illusion of equity and reason that allows us to think that we can have our say. Dawson (1994) suggested that professional codes were potentially unethical, in that they reduced responsibility for individual actions. Salomon and Perkins (1998) point out the danger of the supposed collegiality of professional groups. Mills (2000) pointed towards the danger inherent amongst self-selected coterie groups that confirm one another's ontology and become closed to others. Such internally regulated dialogues create conditions that, arguably, lead ultimately to the public mistrust of professionals.

### **Professional elites and the decline of deference**

Pocock (1976) argues that the catastrophic trauma of two World Wars contributed to significant social and political changes accompanied by increasingly vigorous questioning of established institutions and previously accepted social norms that might be described as the decline of deferential society. More recently, Perkin (1989) believed that a reaction against the power, privilege and pretensions of organised



professions has been exacerbated by a decline in democracy, though it is unclear quite what he means by this. Professionalism rested on a tacit, deferential conveyance of a licence to operate. Setting aside major considerations of to and by whom exactly, how and to what a licence was given, Rudkin (2010) has suggested that, for modern professionals, gaining a licence to operate requires more than a plaintiff appeal to the past in order to maintain an idealised and ill-defined professionalism.

Professionals have tried to defend their hegemony through recourse to moral and ethical arguments in terms of social justice that simultaneously preserved their self-interest. The professions positioned themselves as guardians of ill-defined standards, such as excellence, a notion that has, ironically, invested the concept of managerialism, regarded, arguably, as the antithesis of professionalism. As a result, ‘...to many, the professions have seemed anachronistic in a modern world that does not stand on ceremony or title, that does not accept status as it once did and that is more likely to challenge traditional authority’ (Dickson, 2004, no page reference).

Increasingly easy access to knowledge that was previously the purview of specialists, has facilitated challenges to professionals’ claims to superiority and ‘...the public has become more demanding, less deferential, more litigious and with periodic scandals government involvement has grown and its remit extended beyond the quantity of what was on offer to its content and quality - previously the exclusive domain of the professions’ (Stronach et al., 2002, pp. 131-132 sic.). For education professionals, there is a sense of double jeopardy in the threats carried by easy access to technology that facilitates autodidacticism and, simultaneously, increased demands from the public’s expectations of professionals.

Perkin (1989) argues that the public perception has often been that professionals have demanded self-regulation, but refused to implement their own codes of conduct against transgressors. Scandals and the impact of litigation have been important contributors to undermining public confidence in the professions. Fuelled, arguably, by materialistic values and a sensationalist media, they point, nevertheless, towards the failure of the professions to manage their own discipline and to public frustration at a perceived lack of professional openness and accountability, leading to increased demands for greater scrutiny of and control over professional functions, including through inspections. Professionals' responses have often been to berate the influence of inspection regimes for highlighting the '... "spectacle" of defective practitioners' (Stronach et al., 2002, p. 129). Conversely, Giddens (2000) believes that democracy can only survive within a globalised environment through greater professional transparency and accountability, which are logical outcomes of the widespread availability of information, the decline of deference and of older ways of working. The very expertise that has been the professionals' claim to status needs to be demopolized. For some proponents of professionalism, however, the idea that professionals should be regulated other than by their own peer group, or that they should respond to globalised economic imperatives, is fundamentally 'de-professionalising'.

### **Performativity – a product of professionalism?**

Friedson (2001, p. 130) thought that the level of specialisation inherent in professionalism necessitated self-governance, because the work '...cannot be

standardized, rationalized, or...”commodified””. This definition sets an ideal of professionalism in contradistinction with the idea of performativity, which gained currency in the 1960s as a concept for describing a suite of interrelated ‘technologies’, including market forces and managerialism, said to account for increasingly prevalent social phenomena that run counter to older-established ideals of professionalism.

Though he does not deal explicitly with the concept of performativity as used by Lyotard (1984), Marshall (1999) contends that what Foucault (1991) describes in *Discipline and Punish* is essentially a performative regime. Foucault’s basic thesis is that there has been an insidious growth of supervisory power masquerading as the application of scientific principles of measurement and observation to social functions of justice, education and health, resulting in a ‘disciplinary’ society. He suggested that the development of systems of classification and taxonomies of gradation were adapted to create structures for controlling individuals, including optimal specifications for activities and the use of mechanisms such as timetables in schools, which then imposed themselves on teachers’ pedagogy.

Foucault does not offer professionalism a defence against the ravages of performativity and the insidious incursions of a malign managerialism, but potentially condemns it as a creator of the very thing to which it positions itself in opposition. He looked for underlying processes and situated their origin historically by analogy, but traced no conscious acts, or established any link between developments other than structural and/or semiotic similarity. Generality was extrapolated from individual and striking examples. The trends, forces and dynamics that he described have been in play for some 300 years, although Foucault was somewhat ‘fast and loose’ with

timescales and chronology. They are deep-seated, all-pervasive and the product of human activity magnified to the macro level. They result from the combination of several inter-related meta-historical themes, including notions of an industrial revolution and an intellectual enlightenment, that led ineluctably to the social conditions that constitute professional society. Similarly, Mills (2000) equates the growth of professions with a trend towards large-scale, metropolitan living, a phenomenon associated with industrialisation, which he sees as essentially dehumanising, a form of alienation from society as a whole and a loss of individual identity and independence. By this analysis, the features of supposedly performative regimes may even be cornerstones of professional power.

### **Professionalism and performativity; the impact on education**

In the field of education, writers have traced the development of performativity back through history, citing, for example, the emergence of text-books as early initiatives purportedly limiting the professional autonomy of teachers, although the idea of teaching as a profession is something of an anachronism prior to the nineteenth century, and more recently assigning a central role to inspections, including, by extension, HMIs. Hamilton (1999) suggests that the proliferation of such literature eventually de-skilled teachers by formalising the educational process, giving it the character of instruction, rather than education.

Such arguments seek to situate developments that are supposed currently to be de-skilling teachers as originating in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, although much is inferred on the basis of later, apparently similar developments, often using

anachronistic terms and concepts, without clear evidence being cited to connect events. It is possible, however, to see in those developments the emergence of unique knowledge and practice on which teachers were subsequently able to stake their claim to professional status. Brickman and Cordasco (1970) suggested that the authors and publishers of the many volumes of teaching exercises and lectures saw themselves as promoting high-quality teaching and as contributing to rectifying widespread views of the poor quality of teachers.

Nevertheless, similar arguments persist. Stronach et al. (2002) identified mechanistic approaches to education amongst recent initiatives. Even the identification of ‘good’ practice, once regarded as a key function of HMI, is described as a controlling, prescriptive act, removing professional autonomy by reducing the act of educating to mere technique, the very functionality of the approach deemed to be demeaning, whilst its validity is dismissed on the grounds that any empirical identification of ‘good’ necessarily involves values and a pre-supposed methodological superiority. Kemmis (2010) suggests that academic research may have contributed to creating the conditions that have ensnared teachers within what Lave (1996) terms a ‘performative web’ by reducing professional action to rule-following and by commodifying educational outcomes.

Salomon and Perkins (1998) suggest that, ultimately, performative approaches fail to promote effective and efficient ways of learning, though effectiveness and efficiency might themselves be regarded as performative constructs. Ball (2003) argues that the technologies of performativity force the methods, culture and ethics of the private sector onto the public sector by employing judgements and comparisons as means of

incentive and control, rather as Perkin (1989) describes the tension between private- and public-sector professionals.

Ball (2003) castigates performative technologies for appearing to offer devolution from central control, which confines itself to establishing an overall framework, but the implementation of which is then inspected, requiring the production of information that induces terror in those responsible for the implementation. He derides the emphasis on measurement and data, borrowed from the private sector, for giving the appearance of control, but actually being part of an insidious conspiracy to undermine professionals because it encourages fabricated results. Conversely, Aspinwall et al. (1992) suggest that the tension between evaluative mechanisms for developmental purposes and for accountability is not irreconcilable and Fitzgibbon (1996) suggests that valid data on learner outcomes are actually the key to restoring teachers' professional autonomy.

At the core of the debate about the benefits versus the losses resulting from performative discourses is an issue of how individuals respond. Pick (2004) argues that attempts to define quality in education, which are deemed to inhibit academic freedom, are resisted because they impose an artificial form of consensus based upon schema external to the professional group. Stronach et al. (2002) suggest that resistance often involves appealing to notions of individual autonomy and trust and assertions that the removal of these conditions inhibits the rather vaguely defined benefits of professionalism. What appears to be objectionable is that the process involved changes what it means to be a professional and a person; it is, in Ball's (2003) example, a '...struggle over the teacher's soul'.

## **Performativity; the role of inspection and its impact on teachers' professionalism**

The focus of educational policy making shifted with the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA), initiating major changes, not least in the approach to inspections, and a process that has, arguably, produced the performative regime to which schools have since been subjected. This is, historically, the point at which the role assigned to HMIs began to change and that much of the literature began to ascribe more-negative characteristics to inspections than were, purportedly, evident previously. For example, Jeffrey and Woods (1998) see in inspections post-ERA the potential to pervert the work of schools. Somewhat unusually, they included in their research the views of some inspectors and contrasted those views with the teachers' responses to the experience. Differences between the two are dismissed as a problem of the inspectors' perspectives, but the researchers conclude that it is less the concept of inspection that is objectionable than the practice; it is the experience of inspection that is de-professionalising.

Case et al. (2000) described the effects of inspection on primary school teachers as a 'managerialist discourse'. The authors acknowledge the small scale of their study and the limitations that places on how generalisable the findings are and offer their final thoughts as speculation; they are content to state, however, that unidentified anecdotal evidence gives a 'strong suspicion' that the findings are 'not atypical'. Focusing solely on the experience of inspection as reported by teachers, they use their conclusions about the experiences of teachers to infer implications for children and to establish a justification for the hypotheses that they use to frame their study of the empirical evidence. Whilst acknowledging the contested nature of such hypotheses,

they state clearly that their aim was from the outset to provide evidence for the debilitating effect of inspections.

Jeffrey (2002) describes education inspections as a cornerstone of a subtle and insidious form of control that inveigles teachers to implement self-disciplinary measures to satisfy demands for transparency and public accountability as part of a market-style discourse about education. The inspection process is deemed to distance teachers from learners and to create a dependency culture, replacing previously mutual and intimate relations, marginalising individuality and rejecting collegiality. Its culture is subjugatory, rather than consensual, and results in a reduction in the autonomy of teachers through a devolution of responsibility that emphasises instruments of blame.

Perryman (2006) continues the theme. Despite use of the plural in the title of the first of her articles, Perryman (2006) based her study around a single school, augmented by reference to other studies that examined similar themes and, reportedly, contained first-hand accounts of inspections. Perryman uses the example to illustrate an all-encompassing supervisory and disciplinary discourse permeating the educational world. Much is asserted about the purpose and operation of inspections, for example, assuming that all inspectors believe in a single recipe for a successful school, removing from them any sense of individuality. Perryman's (2009) follow-up paper rehearses the theoretical background underpinning the study and produces a conclusion that inspections are performances that obscure 'the real school'. Quotations are presented to support the hypothesis being expounded. The adoption of particular theoretical frameworks from the outset, in order to classify and to



characterise the research evidence, appears to have the sort of determinative effect noted by de Wolf and Janssens (2007), such that Perryman feels able to state, even before introducing any of the research evidence, that the school's experience demonstrates clearly the features of panopticism and performativity.

Dunford (1998) did not regard HMI inspections, as distinct from Ofsted's, as straightforwardly performative in their effect. He believes that views of HMI as an organisation closely identified with central government over-simplify a complex relationship. Nevertheless, he provides several examples, even from the early years of the inspectorate, of approaches that might be taken to exhibit performative features.

As early as 1842, inspectors commented on poor-quality teaching and the inefficiency of schools. An early framework for inspection linked central government funding to a school's average attendance, pupils' performance in examinations of the '3Rs', and six detailed standards of achievement. At least one HMI criticised the framework for tending to formalise elementary school teaching and rendering it '...“lifeless, inelastic and mechanical”...’ (Dunford, 2008, p. 9), because it caused teachers to restrict their work to the six standards. Matthew Arnold, perhaps the most famous of HMIs, described the examinations associated with the framework as '...“a game of mechanical contrivance in which teachers will and must learn how to beat us”’ (Dunford, 2008, p. 9). In 1898, the inspectorate attempted to tackle the problem by replacing its regular annual visit with unannounced inspections. In 1906, the Board of Education issued a list of secondary schools judged to be 'efficient'.

Over time, the scale, frequency and focus of inspection has varied alongside the development of accountability structures within education more generally. The 1980s saw increased demands for public accountability from schools, resulting in the automatic publication of institutional inspection reports, something which had previously required ministerial approval. Publication required HMIs to develop new writing skills that made less use of jargon and ‘coded’ messages, in order to open up the ‘secret garden’ of professional educators to the general public. The very attempts to make inspections and their outcomes more transparent have been seen, however, as contributing to the de-professionalisation of teachers, by giving a message that all was not well with the nation’s schools.

Dunford (1998) appears to suggest that the purportedly negative impact of inspection on the education system is as much a result of the failure of HMI to influence sufficiently views of how schools should be judged, as its success in applying such arguably performative techniques, in that the inspectorate failed to solve the persistent problem of a lack of any professional consensus about pedagogical, or curricular practice. Throughout the 1970s, several initiatives attempted to effect a greater degree of professional consensus about educational practice that have since come to be regarded by some as contributing to the tightening of a performative regime, including methods for monitoring the system in a more-statistical way, in light of growing concerns about the supposed impact of the then-prevailing professional dialogue about pedagogy in primary schools and about outcomes in comprehensive schools. At the same time, HMI reported that secondary schools allowed examinations to exert an undue influence on teaching, rendering lessons lifeless and mechanical, and found the curriculum in many schools to lack coherence and to offer

no form of entitlement to learners. This was not, however, a conclusion substantiated by later academic research, for example, Fitz-Gibbon (1996) suggested the contrary. Alexander (1997) states that, from 1978 onwards, HMI developed a view of teaching practice that focused on content and management and was concerned only marginally with pedagogy. Alexander decided that this view translated some eighteen years later into Ofsted's central role as an arbiter of good practice within what had become a hegemonic, centralised education system.

### **Professionalism, inspection and the myth of an educational golden age**

Jeffrey (2002) contrasted his concerns about the current regime with a view of education prior to 'the introduction of the performativity discourse', vaguely sometime before 1962, when learning was an holistic process. He cites the 1926 Hadow Report as establishing a basis for such an approach to education. He seems to assume that the approaches recommended in it were introduced into schools with immediate effect and establishes the character of a golden age in education through neatly selected snippets of information, sweeping through time to the Plowden Report some 40 years later (the close connection appears assumed).

The idea of a 'golden age' takes for granted a sense of consensus and mutually agreed approaches to practice. The characteristics of educational practice in that golden age were based supposedly on commonly understood values of holism, person-centredness and warm, caring relationships, which appear to imply a claim to something of higher value than more-functionalist approaches involving measurements, statistics, outcomes, and results.

In fact, education has long been associated with marks, classification, ranks, norm-referenced examinations, higher-education entry points, and demands for schools to be inspected have a long history. In 1622, Ratke advised that education of the young was the duty of the political authorities and they should appoint inspectors to examine pupils quarterly, in order to judge the pupils' progress (Turnbull, 1993). Teachers have, from time to time, been summoned before consistory and civil courts, charged with contravening legislation concerning educational provision. Funding agencies have historically closed down educational establishments as a result of performance deemed to be inadequate.<sup>1</sup>

The basis for believing that education experienced a golden age before the advent of performative technologies is extremely tenuous. It is a vision of the past in contrast, for example, to that painted by Holt (1969), who wrote famously in the 1960s about how most children failed to develop more than a tiny part of their capacity for learning whilst at school, albeit in a study based on American schools. Alexander (1997, p. 272) wrote that '...during the 1970s and 1980s consensus was perhaps too readily assumed on the central ethical and practical questions with which...teachers...were confronted'. Stronach et al. (2002, p. 114) discerned a '...pronounced tendency of accounts of the "professional" to seek holistic succour in a mythicized past, or a utopian resolution in some future state of imagined grace'. Mumford (1973) argued that such idealised social models are inherently destructive of

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Pdraig O'Brien. (1989). *Warrington Academy 1757-86 Its predecessors and successors*. Wigan, Owl Books.

human society. It is against this backdrop that we must consider the historiography of HMI.

### **The historiography of HMI**

In the course of its 170-year history, HMI has been the subject of several parliamentary reviews, but the historiography is surprisingly brief. Leaving aside very early works, there have been only four substantial histories in the last thirty years and a sprinkling of other works that look into aspects of HMI's work, but which are not necessarily historiographical in purpose. In the small amount of the literature that extends beyond 1991-2, the inception of Ofsted is presented as a turning point, after which HMIs have a much-diminished role. Little of the debates about professionalism and performativity is overt in the literature concerned specifically with HMI, though elements may be discerned in some of the authors' assumptions.

Lawton and Gordon (1987) aimed to provide a brief, evaluative study of what they regarded as a unique and important 'professional' group, whose role could be understood only through appreciating the historical context. They stake no claim to it being a definitive history, or a survey of how HMIs spent their time, but provide a broadly chronological review of the inspectorate's development. They relied largely on published material and talked to an unspecified number of HMIs. They were much exercised over matters of HMIs' autonomy and status and how these were affected as HMIs' work became increasingly visible and, consequently, controversial. Lawton and Gordon describe the function of HMI as maintaining and improving existing standards and establishing new ones, but also as ameliorating the politicisation of

education. The study identifies a number of persistent themes within critiques of inspection: the omnipresence of the inquisitorial role, the question being periodically one of how much emphasis it was given; inspectorial methods of observation and questioning to assess educational effectiveness; the impact of the period of notice given prior to inspections; the style and purpose of reporting; the reliability of inspection judgements; the suitability of inspectors.

Lawton's and Gordon's chronological framework is defined by statutes, official minutes, parliamentary reviews, and reports. It is, essentially, a collection of excerpts from such sources, which establish mileposts in the narrative of the inspectorate. The overriding impression is one of 'shifting sands' in terms of the relationship between government and the inspectorate, but also of ill-defined continuity within the corps of HMIs themselves.

The work contains a chapter devoted to exploring HMIs as a professional group, in which the authors seek to correct an image of HMIs' professionalism as being wrapped in mystique. Nevertheless, it points to HMIs' traditional appointment by Order in Council as a symbol of the inspectors' independence from the executive, a symbol abandoned in 2006. The authors stress the lack of typicality amongst HMIs' assignments and indicate a degree of overlap with particular responsibilities within local education authorities. They explore the nature and level of HMIs' workload and the extent to which it had, even by that time, increasingly, been prescribed. They conclude with Kay-Shuttleworth's original instructions to HMI in 1839 as defining still the core of the role; that inspection is more for the purpose of offering assistance than exercising control. Responding to that injunction required, throughout the period

covered by the book, individual judgement, rather than prescribed classifications and constant refinements in inspection methods. The reader is left with a view that, as late as 1987, a 'classical' model of HMI persisted.

Though perhaps not intentionally historiographical, Bolton (1998) recalls his personal experience of HMI during the years of the Thatcher government and offers, in contrast to Lawton and Gordon, a sense that the classical model had dissipated. A former chief inspector, Bolton traces the shift in the nature of the relationship between policy making and the inspectorate in the transition from HMI to Ofsted. Purely a personal viewpoint and a matter of considered recollection, Bolton ends not with conclusions, but recommendations for how inspections might be improved to recapture some of the benefits purportedly lost since Ofsted's creation. Bolton's view is that the fundamental nature of inspection changed as a direct result of shifts in government policy and that structural problems in the conception of Ofsted were exacerbated by personalities, both political and within Ofsted.

Dunford (1998) echoes Bolton's theme in a thoroughgoing historical narrative, reconstructed from documentary evidence and an unspecified number of interviews with former inspectors, and reviews some of the criticisms made of the inspectors' methods. Taking a line slightly different from Lawton and Gordon, Dunford suggests that the efforts of HMI to improve its methods led to a 'lifting of the veil' covering inspectoral criteria, removing the mystique from HMIs' work and allowing scrutiny of their methods.

The reform of the inspection regime after 1991 embodied in the creation of Ofsted centred on a national inspection code, with procedures and reporting conventions drawn up by HMIs to enable the independent, objective and consistent application of hard-edged criteria for judging the quality of educational provision. Thereafter, the role of HMIs was restricted mainly to accrediting and monitoring the work of privatised inspection organisations that deployed teams of inspectors drawn largely from outside of HMI.

Maclure (2000) focuses on the development of the education system in England and the way that national policy unfolded after the Second World War, up to the inception of Ofsted, which appears to form a deliberate cut-off point for his work. The period is characterised as one of rapid and vigorous growth of centralised control, with Ofsted seemingly representing the culmination of that trend. Maclure's perspective is consciously narrow, concerned with policy makers and the contribution of HMI to policy making. The main structure of the account is the broad historical context and Maclure is at his most lucid when summarising that context. He traces the role of HMIs via a series of policy initiatives, rather than examining their practice, and a central point of the book concerns the extent to which HMIs were involved in non-inspection activities.

Maclure draws on personal accounts of varying lengths provided by some 200 HMIs operating at different times to illustrate developments and a range of documentary evidence. National events are given primacy, however, and remain the focus throughout. The reader learns about the impact of assessment regimes, of selection and social and educational inclusion, curricular excesses, the social, political and



economic purposes of a state-funded system, how best to judge the effectiveness of schools against a background perception of low attainment and inadequate provision, and the ways in which each of these represents contested areas of educational philosophy and professional ideals. The workings of inspectors and the inspectorate are related to the events, but one is left with the impression that these are more the chorus than the *dramatis personae*. 1992 emerges as a watershed in the history of HMI. The role of HMIs is, subsequently, no longer that of professional advisers to the government. The necessity to make public the inner workings of inspectorial practice and judgement in order to facilitate a new species of frequent, regular and ‘out-sourced’ inspections removed the last vestiges of the ‘traditional’ HMI.

Ultimately, Maclure does not escape from the ‘milestones’ in education approach. He offers a review of major educational developments, augmented with cameos from HMIs. The HMIs supplying accounts responded to a general invitation and so Maclure does not claim that the sample is in any way representative. They were asked to cover certain broad themes; background information on the work done; interactions with teachers and government departments. The process and structure for obtaining the accounts is not explained in any detail, though Maclure does suggest that the edited personal views collected provide an authentic snapshot and indicate the diversity of the work carried out by HMIs.

Maclure uses anecdotes from the HMIs, which offer a glimpse into the individuals’ perceptions of their work, how they went about it, how they formed their judgements. He sees in his analysis of the changes in the working lives of HMIs the same encroachments of managerialism purportedly evident elsewhere. He suggests that his

evidence points towards a sense amongst HMIs that their independence, the essential basis of their professionalism, was being eroded. The actual relationship between this conclusion and the evidence is not made explicit and, sometimes, he appears to ignore chronology, so that, for example, evidence of HMIs' dissatisfaction with the situation vis-à-vis the Department of Education in the 1970s is based upon a report published by the senior chief inspector in 1970. Lengthier extracts from the HMIs' accounts are appended to several chapters, presumably edited, but with no commentary or indication how, and entitled 'Miscellany', with the reader being left to decide what relevance they have. The impression is one of a largely untapped resource.

Elsdon et al. (2001) tell a story of the symbiotic development of government policy towards further education provision beyond that of general colleges and of the Other Further Education (OFE) section of HMI. The work is unusual in the historiography in that it is constructed almost entirely by former HMIs, placing their accounts centrally within the evidence base, whilst drawing also on official documents, where available. There are few references that can be followed up, however, and primary sources are not listed.

Whilst the focus of the work is not schools, Elsdon et al. see the emergence of Ofsted as a 'sea-change' in the nature of inspections. Themes similar to other works are evident; shifting patterns of work, the tension between broad-ranging surveys and institutional inspections, variations in the size of the inspectorate, tensions in the relationship between HMIs' views of the role and the requirements of central government. The government wanted an inspectorate focused on monitoring and

control to meet the requirements of an education policy that sought to promote consumer choice, rather than the evaluative and advisory functions of HMI.

Though a distinctive and identifiable section of HMI for much of the period covered by the book, the OFE's *raison d'être* was to obtain well-grounded evidence and to provide unbiased advice, reporting, challenging and influencing in the traditional manner of HMI. Its strength was drawn from its unrivalled and extensive knowledge and experience of developments within educational institutions. Suggestions of differences in approach between it and other sections of the inspectorate are left unexplored, but Ofsted's approach is contrasted sharply with the confidentiality, informality, collegiality and privacy of OFE inspections. The nurturing role that the OFE regarded itself as having was abandoned, shackled by being tied too rigidly to a centrally directed, managerialist policy discourse. The language used to describe the transition to Ofsted is that of finality, of the traditional inspectorate as being wound up, even though the OFE section itself had ceased to exist as a discrete group in 1967. Having used personal recollections as a major source throughout the work, although largely referenced inadequately, the book ends with an 'epilogue' that comprises extracts from individual and personal accounts, obtained, recorded and selected how is not made clear, conveying the views and experiences of contributors who participated in the events.

### **HMI: agents of a performative regime?**

The establishment of HMI predates the formation of the National Union of Teachers, itself often taken as a key moment in the emergence of teaching as a profession, by a

quarter of a century. Previously, teaching was not highly regarded and was throughout the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries almost casualised labour, undertaken often by clerics seeking to supplement low earnings, or as a temporary occupation pending preferment to a living, or by unmarried women. Even by the start of the nineteenth century, teaching ‘...still lacked the institutional framework necessary from which to control membership. This framework emerged in the nineteenth century when, teaching appears to have been the first occupation to use the word “professionalise”’ (O’Day, 1982, p. 178). In this context, the recognition by government that education was sufficiently important to warrant some form of official, state-sanctioned scrutiny makes the establishment of HMI itself a turning point in the emergence of teaching as a recognised profession. Nevertheless, in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, school inspections have been criticised as a major component of a putative de-professionalisation of teaching.

Whilst the actual histories of HMI say little in relation to the broader debates about inspection as part of over-arching discourses impacting upon education, other literature picks up on those themes. In a brief paper, Young (1981) sets out what becomes a recurrent theme within the available commentaries on the work of HMI. She explores a perceived change in emphasis in the two decades prior to the paper’s publication, suggesting that an increased focus at the time on educational outcomes was the result of a lack in HMIs’ qualitative and subjective assessments of the clear criteria deemed necessary for effective quality control in education. Behind that view lay a debate about the central function of inspection and the extent to which centralised control was its purpose. Young concluded that a change towards quantitative measures and specific criteria for inspection judgements represented a

move towards HMIs becoming agents of quality control, rather than the source of professional advice for improving the educational system, which had been well received within the profession previously.

Gray and Hannon (1986) focus on the question of how HMIs reached their judgements. They were interested in the extent to which HMIs' judgements provided a model for how the teaching profession might judge itself and whether all schools, irrespective of context, might be judged equally, by exploring the broader evaluative frameworks used by HMIs and the assumptions underlying them. They analysed the summary sections of the first 35 published HMI reports from school inspections, identifying which of four approaches to interpreting examinations results were used, comparing the text with examinations data, and pointing to inconsistencies in how HMIs had used contextual information. Gray and Hannon acknowledge that their own judgements required them to make inferences from textual analyses of the reports about what HMIs actually did and that they encountered difficulties. Despite acknowledging that none of the evidence they used was fully convincing, Gray and Hannon felt able to express their conclusions in stark language, describing the apparent differences in HMIs' practice as a matter for concern.

The problematic nature of inspection judgements continued into the Ofsted era. Fitz-Gibbon (1996) has challenged current inspection methodology on the grounds that anyone has yet to establish the reliability and validity of inspection findings and suggests a series of ways in which these might be tested. Her concern is that different inspectors might reach different conclusions about the same evidence, or that inspectors' judgements might not accord with other forms of evidence, particularly

data on learner performance. The idea that there should be no variation in what inspectors think is a recurrent complaint and seems, perhaps ironically, to demand a more-mechanistic approach to inspection. Fitz-Gibbon and Stephenson (1996) suggested that school inspections should be replaced altogether with statistical indicators of value-added; one of the main charges levied against current school inspections and a feature of claims to their performative nature is, however, just such an over-reliance on numbers.

### **HMI in the Ofsted era**

Dunford (1998) states that, by 1991, central government was concerned that HMI was part of a closed and overly independent professional world. That concern was dealt with within the major reforms to the inspection system which resulted in the establishment of Ofsted in 1992. Once subsumed within Ofsted, Dunford believes that the role of HMIs changed radically, their work was programmed, in order to ensure that precedence was given to annually identified, national priorities, reducing the facility for HMIs to exercise control over the things that they do. This notion of a radical change in what it meant to be an HMI and an associated change in the nature of inspections after 1992 recurs within the non-historiographical literature about inspections after 1992.

Fitz-Gibbon and Stephenson (1996) regarded the inspection regime as established under Ofsted as new and different from the previous HMI model and examined the reliability of Ofsted inspectors' judgements by comparing inspection methods with social science research models. The research comprised a questionnaire survey of 322

headteachers of schools, identified using seven criteria to form two random samples, 51% of whom responded, augmented by responses from five of seventeen schools which had 'failed' their inspections invited to complete a questionnaire. Fitz-Gibbon and Stephenson acknowledge that the outcomes of their survey are indicative rather than conclusive, but they considered them sufficient to raise concerns about inspection methodology and particularly the lack of statistical procedures for validating inspectors' judgements. HMIs are criticised on the grounds that, although highly respected, theirs was the received wisdom that provided the foundation for the methods used in the inspections that formed part of the survey.

Dunford (1998) states that an unidentified study of inspectors' reports on schools raised questions about the criteria used by HMIs to make their judgements. He quotes a senior chief inspector as saying as late as 1979 that inspection was carried out largely by conventions, instructions and guidelines, though the basic principle was close observation with an open mind by persons of suitable experience and a framework of relevant principles, recording what they see, trying to understand why it is so and deciding if it is good enough. Dunford was concerned that this offered no guarantee of consistency in either the practice of, or the judgements reached by HMIs and rested on assumptions about inspectors' professional expertise. Efforts by HMIs themselves to respond to the accusations removed some of the mystique surrounding HMIs and opened their practice up to academic research (Dunford, 1998).

By 1991, proposals for reform of the inspection regime centred on a national inspection code, with procedures and reporting conventions drawn up by HMIs and intended to enable the independent, objective and consistent application of hard-edged

criteria for judging the quality of educational provision. That approach has been criticised for contributing to the de-professionalisation of teachers, but at the same time, Ehren and Visscher (2008, p. 211) noted continued calls for a ““more rigorous and consistent application of an agreed framework””, though Wolf (2002) questions the possibility of ever reaching real consensus on notions of standards and her work suggests that any attempt to assess performance of any kind is intrinsically judgemental and variable. Dunford (1998) believes that such conflicting demands combined to result in a progressively greater degree of centralised control of HMIs, such that after 1992, the role was no longer recognisable as the independently minded and professional occupation that, supposedly, it once was.

Scanlon’s (1999) report on the work of Ofsted summarises the results of a questionnaire survey and a complementary selection of eighteen interviews with headteachers intended to provide illustrative insights into the survey. The work concentrates on schools that had ‘failed’ their first inspection after the creation of Ofsted. The research questions looked at the effects of both the experience of inspection and of the inspection judgement on a range of things, including teachers’ workload, health and stress levels, relationships between the staff, staff morale, turnover and recruitment. The report acknowledges that some of the numbers generated by the survey are small, making generalisations difficult, but the survey revealed significant perceived increases in teachers’ stress levels amongst the schools placed in special measures than in others.

Scanlon raises questions about the professionalism of inspectors, but concluded that the interview data suggested that HMI-led monitoring inspections to check on schools



in special measures were regarded as more constructive than other inspections. HMIs were seen as experienced, insightful and supportive, 'professional', and their approach was preferred for being more advisory. The survey found that, overall, professional relationships in special measures schools were likely to have improved, rather than to have deteriorated, and that action taken at the school after the inspection was more likely than not to have resulted in an improvement in educational provision, or in some aspect of school life. Any deterioration, determined by the perceptions of the surveyed groups, was likely to be in terms of staff morale, the school's reputation locally, and staffing turnover. The author's final conclusion is that it was less inspection to which teachers objected, than the particular 'Ofsted' model.

Cullingford (1999) presents a dismal picture of Ofsted. Ofsted's public and official exposure of failure is contrasted with the preceding HMI-led regime. HMIs feature in Cullingford's papers rarely and almost always to provide that sense of contrast with Ofsted. Grubb (1999) conducted interviews with an unspecified number of former HMIs as part of his research, which centred around shadowing two Ofsted inspections, but the paper tells almost nothing of what was asked, or how. How the empirical evidence has been marshalled and analysed is not clear. Whilst acknowledging that much literature on inspections has ignored the perspective of inspectors, Cullingford, nevertheless, makes unsubstantiated assertions regarding what is in the minds of inspectors. One contributor to the volume, Winkley (1999) uses excerpts from inspectors occasionally, in order to confirm the problematic nature of inspections and to suggest that Ofsted has no claim to the validity of inspections.

Despite assertions that the evidence presented will obviate matters of personality, such matters surface clearly in certain of the papers in Cullingford's collection. Alexander (1999) is drawn towards an extended critique of the style of a particular chief inspector, whose approach appears to be taken to stand metonymically for all inspection practice. Alexander's contribution was an edited version of evidence provided to a House of Commons education sub-committee inquiry into Ofsted. The empirical basis of the evidence is alluded to, rather than cited, except for what appear to be personal recollections of an experience of an Ofsted inspection of initial teacher training.

The final chapter, by Cullingford himself, concludes that Ofsted constitutes a system that orders results and makes people obedient to those orders. The central problem stems from the primary function of Ofsted to be an agent of government policy by deploying a rigid system that treats each school in the same way. The relationship between the 'conclusions' and the empirical evidence from the papers is not outlined and difficult to discern, not least because Cullingford chose to present the conclusion as a dystopian parody of the development of the inspection regime. The satire is claimed to reveal Ofsted's intentions and the motivations and of those who join it.

Case et al. (2000) provide a brief summary of historical trends and events prior to the establishment of Ofsted before reporting that more-recent experience of inspections is different, although they provide no comparison of the research evidence with similar evidence of pre-Ofsted inspections. Again, references to HMI are very few and incidental. Large periods of time are covered in brief sections, so that HMI's history takes three paragraphs and acts merely as a prelude to Ofsted. The change from an

admired HMI to a 'managerialist' Ofsted is presented as clear-cut and resulting unequivocally in a fundamental change to the nature of inspection.

Smith (2000) examined the relationship between inspection and research, as evidenced by the activities firstly of HMI and subsequently of Ofsted. The paper provides a commentary on and comparison of particular inspection and research exercises. Smith appears to have had access to unpublished papers circulated amongst HMIs. He points out that he drew upon additional material and comments from senior HMIs and other Ofsted personnel, during an 'attachment' to the Department for Education and Science, HMI and Ofsted between 1981-1996. Smith does not make clear whether it is his direct experience of HMIs, or documentary evidence, to which he refers, that leads to his characterisation of HMIs' working practices. Some of his comments about changes to inspectors' intentions with the advent of Ofsted appear speculative, not evidence-based. Smith believes that inspection altered significantly after the advent of Ofsted, as a result of the particular style and agenda of an individual chief inspector, which was purportedly at variance with previous, HMI-led approaches.

Perryman (2006) adopts an unashamedly historicist perspective on the development of education policy in the late twentieth century. The approach leads to an idealised view of historical development and a romanticised view of events preceding an ill-defined period. Though dealing with HMI only incidentally, Perryman's case study conflates each of the distinct inspection events experienced by a school, so that references to monitoring visits by HMIs are treated as exactly the same as full inspections, in contrast to Scanlon's (1998) earlier conclusion. Ehren and Visscher

(2008) highlighted not only variations in the application of inspection criteria, but also in the approaches taken by inspectors to their work and suggested that the impact of inspections might relate more to the manner in which the inspectors carry them out than the technical nature of the inspection itself.

De Waal (2008) edited a selection of papers compiled as a summary of a 'seminar' hosted by the then chairman of a parliamentary select committee to discuss what was working in Ofsted's inspections and what was not. The selection of papers included two from experienced inspectors, one an additional inspector who worked for one of the private inspection companies with which Ofsted then contracted, and one who is introduced as a former Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools. De Waal concluded that the change from HMI inspections to Ofsted's approach altered significantly the relationship between schools and inspectors, describing Ofsted's approach as more forceful than its predecessor's. She ascribes the change not just to issues of approach, or manner, but to the particular nature of inspections, especially after 2005, when the purview of school inspections became narrower and, allegedly, driven by performance data. De Waal implies that some sort of contrast persisted even after the changes, however, asserting that schools continued to prefer those inspections that were led by HMIs. Some of the differences between HMI-led and other inspections after the foundation of Ofsted are alluded to also in a paper contributed by Drake (2008), an additional inspector active almost throughout that period,.

The paper focussing on HMI specifically was by the former chief inspector. Active as an HMI in the 1970s and as a chief inspector until 1986, Perry (2008) begins by referring to the seemingly nostalgic views about inspection in the 'good old days' of

HMI. She points out that, though much reduced in numbers, HMIs did not disappear after 1992, although there were major changes to the way that they were organised. Perry's purpose was not to write an historical account of HMI, but she provides interesting insights as someone present during the so-called 'golden age' and in a position to observe subsequent developments, albeit from a particular perspective. Her account does not seek to embellish the importance and impact of HMIs' work unduly, though it is difficult not to perceive a sense of personal pride in her account. She indicates that there were weaknesses in the approach, not least in what she regards as the misplaced enthusiasm amongst some, with no attempt to indicate the actual extent to which the views prevailed, for then-popular educational philosophies that, in Perry's estimation, produced, at best, an unexceptional experience for children and one that was, at worst, actually damaging.

Situating the point of change in the reforms initiated by Keith Joseph in the 1980s, Perry seems to mark 1991 as a particular turning point, when John Major determined to embark on a programme of change to tackle what were regarded as low standards in public services and in education particularly. A much more-frequent and regular cycle of institutional inspections meant that the then-current establishment of HMI would be insufficient. After that, the system of inspection changed fundamentally and, along with it, the role, purpose and influence of HMIs. Perry makes no statement that the new role was somehow less than previously, but there is perhaps a suggestion in her closing remarks that, whatever the failings of those earlier times, HMIs commanded the respect of government and the teaching profession, the inference being, perhaps, that their successors do not.

The main theme that appears to emerge from the literature is one of contrasting emphases between those works focused on HMI and others concerned with the impact of inspections since 1992. The brevity of the historiography of HMI, ending as it does around 2000, seems to reinforce the idea that a major change occurred around that time that constitutes, at least in effect, an end to the office as existing in any meaningful sense. Arguably, though not overtly, these works are concerned with the professional status of HMI, but there is little consideration of the idea of professionalism itself and almost nothing that looks at the impact of the work of HMI in terms of broader debates about performativity. Similarly, the literature on inspections since the inception of Ofsted, though much more extensive, has little to say about HMI and focuses on suggestions that Ofsted brought significant changes in the nature of inspections, framing such conclusions in terms of a prevailing discourse within debates about current educational policy and practice, often linked with notions of supervisory, or panoptic, disciplinary and performative regimes and their putative impact upon a paradigm of professionalism and an associated, perceived threat of de-professionalisation.

The debates about the effects of the revised inspection regime appear to depend upon acceptance of dichotomous relationships between the phenomena and the annexation of socially acceptable terms to describe preferred paradigms. Such arguments seem to be predicated on the presumed superiority of one set of values, established and reinforced through potentially emotive and polemical language that positions the arguments so as to seem irrefutable, and unproblematised and sometimes ill-defined references to the past. Concepts such as professionalism and performativity offer interesting possibilities for developing our understanding of historical events, but

uncritical use of them does so at the expense of accounting adequately for other possible factors and particularly the roles of individual people in those events. Where use is made of research evidence drawn directly from HMIs, the intention has been to illustrate the relationship between inspections pre-Ofsted and thereafter, rather than to understand HMIs' views of the inspection process.

HMIs might draw some succour from such analyses on the grounds that the literature presents them often as belonging more to a less-destructive 'golden age' of professional relationships, but, after the severe reductions in numbers in the wake of 1992, the complement of HMIs is now similar to the levels of that purportedly golden age and, since 2005, much of their time is given over to leading inspections. That suggests a question as to whether it is different to be an HMI now. None of the literature considers how HMIs conceive of their work in the current millennium. This research attempts to update the history of HMI a little by taking the views and experiences of inspectors active after the year 2000. It explores how the inspectors' sense of their role developed, how that affected their practice. It attempts to identify any perceived differences with the work of their predecessors, such as any loss of the independence asserted through the maxim 'reporting without fear, or favour'.

### **Chapter 3 Methodology and method**

This chapter begins by considering the main methodological debates surrounding history, including oral history, the research paradigm underpinning this thesis. It goes on to look at the problems associated with the particular research method adopted, finishing with a summary of the way in which the method was applied. It considers problems of epistemology connected with history, including ideas of ‘distanciation’, or temporal, or intellectual separation from the subject matter, and associated issues concerning objectivity.

A section follows setting out the methodological position adopted for this study. The study is intentionally a work of oral history, attempting to locate and to explore individual experiences and everyday lives, rather than meta-historical emplotments. It is argued that, for all of the acknowledged problems that surround the method of oral history and the discipline of history itself, and in researching a topic in which one is simultaneously a participant, both as researcher and as someone engaged in the occupation under study, the approach has allowed for a meaningful interpretation of events. My role as historian has both facilitated and constrained, through my inevitable ontological predispositions, a position that is justifiable ultimately by offering the evidence used and the conclusions drawn to other historians to critique.

The latter part of the chapter looks more closely at the method of oral history, the particular approach adopted for this study. It considers the problematics associated with memory and the construction of narrative accounts based upon recollections of past events, particularly the role of and difficulties associated with interview



transcripts. It describes some of the debates connected with the validity of oral accounts as historical sources. The section concludes by stating the approach taken for this study. Finally, the chapter sets out the specific steps taken for the research.

## **Methodology**

The intention of this study was to examine evidence about the development of Her Majesty's Inspectorate during the period 2000-2010 historically because much of the extant literature appeared unhistorical in its constitution. Oral history offered a seemingly obvious method for getting at previously unavailable evidence and an opportunity arose accordingly to examine particular problems associated with the method, in light of debates about the extent to which oral history is genuinely historical in nature. Equally important were more-simplistic aims of adding to the evidence base on the history of HMI and of leaving material for potential future historians.

Historical research starts with a simple idea, to locate and to interrogate evidence with a view to ascertaining what the evidence reveals in relation to an area of interest.

Gardner (2010) describes history as a recovery of an accurate record of an absent past and then reporting it accurately. The simplicity belies a complex web of philosophical, methodological and practical problems. Those problems are linked to ontological standpoints about the purpose of history and the nature of the relationship between past and present, and methodological problems, including: the nature, validity, reliability and interpretation of evidence; the validity of claims to know about the past; ideological and political agendas; the moral integrity of historians.

Add to these problems associated with linguistic, or visual representation and the historian's task seems impossibly tainted, incapable of establishing 'objective truths'. As Lee and Shemilt (2003) note, however, that incapacity rests on a view of the past as a given, a singular 'truth', which leads in turn to a simplistic view of historical sources either as biased, or corrupted and, accordingly, of history as a dubious proposition.

The nature of 'truth' is contested. The problem is compounded by the metaphorical characteristics of language used to describe a supposedly objective reality. Bourdieu (1990) noted that the very language used to classify and to categorise practice that is the subject of research serves to objectify the practice and imposes upon it a structure and meaning that is separate from the practical purpose of the activity. The language helps to constitute the reality, rather than simply describing it, and structures devised for understanding reality are not themselves the reality. Researchers invest things with meaning, purpose and agency that they may not possess otherwise. Historians create history, giving meaning to events through the terms that they use to describe, to characterise and to summarise, creating the idea of patterns within events. Danto (2008) notes that evidence selection is itself dependent on ontology. The data to which historians ascribe significance become the facts and the frameworks for interpretation impose an order on those facts.

The tension between the ideal of an objective reality that was 'the past' and the idea of history as a necessarily interpretive practice is, undeniably, an epistemological problem. The problem is exacerbated by the fragmentary and ambiguous nature of historical evidence, which means that historians can never recover in full the past that

they seek to represent, so that the accounts that they create are necessarily constructed and artificial. Neale (1981) pointed out that, whilst some facts about the past might be regarded as independent entities, others come to light only as a result of the way that the historian has approached the evidence and that, even if approached ‘scientifically’, such ‘facts’ are still, essentially, manufactured by the historian. The different accounts that historians construct contain different ideological bases, leading in turn to differing interpretations of the same pieces of information. Gardner (2010) argues, however, that, though a matter of interpretation, the historian’s report achieves value through the application of a practical wisdom akin to the ‘...interpretive practices of everyday life’ (Gardner 2010, p. 5). This position is adopted in this thesis.

Southgate (2003) points out that long-established notions of truth, fact, objectivity, actually indicate ontological and ideological commitments that can themselves be situated historically. Responding to the challenge posed by postmodernism, history, he suggests, becomes, rather than an act of recovery and identification of a singular, ‘true’ past, a means of destabilising received narratives, of questioning endlessly to provoke re-assessments and so to reveal alternative accounts. Walker (2007) warns that, in any case, narratives do not speak for themselves. Bolton (2006) points out that the receivers of the narrative, also, make their own interpretative choices. She regards as a necessity the interpretation of any story, using interpretative frameworks that are bound up with individual social, political and psychological understandings.

Rigby (1987) suggests that employing some form of framework facilitates the posing of questions and construction of hypotheses, rather than pre-figuring answers, opening up for analysis areas that might otherwise be missed. Danto (2008) regards

the central features of ‘descriptive historiography’ as the posing of scholarly questions, an act itself requiring imagination, and as an empiricist commitment, defined as the use of ‘reliable’ and relevant historical sources to produce a close description of events. This is the position adopted in this thesis. Danto sees potential for knowledge creation through the application of conceptual frameworks that may be drawn quite legitimately from different intellectual spheres, which can provide meaningful insights into study of the past, enabling the identification of connections and allowing potentially for more-accurate readings of the evidence.

Gardner (2010) rejects debate about the role of truth in history as arcane. Historians must simply accept that they cannot offer a past that is certain, but if the standard of truth cannot be absolute, that does not mean it must be non-existent. A partial understanding is still knowledge, imperfect, but sufficient basis for continued discussion. Whilst the ‘truth’ offered by a historian may be putative, the process of its construction through ‘honest analysis of the material traces of the past’ (Gardner, 2010, p. 34) is legitimate. The results are always open to scrutiny through reference to other historical evidence. This is the position taken in this thesis. There is in this stance some correspondence with Southgate’s (2003) position; postmodernist history is essentially hypothetical and accepts that no final truth is attainable, but rather than indulging in historiographical debates intended to defend the discipline from the perceived threat posed by postmodernism, the multiplicity of histories that becomes possible should be regarded as desirable, facilitating new forms of narratives from a variety of perspectives.

Whatever standpoint is adopted, the knowledge created results from an interaction between the historian and the source material. The historian interprets the evidence, examining the inter-relationships between sources and postulating new problems. Historians' interpretations vary with current attitudes, giving rise to new questions and interpretations. Rendering the past intelligible requires the exercise of imagination to reveal meaning within the source material by trying to identify the thoughts and feelings that it embodies. That means, as Southgate (2003) counsels, that we can have no fixed view of the past. Whilst a simple and strongly positivistic idea of history persists amongst some writers (Halldén, 1997), Ricoeur was perhaps correct, when he noted 'All that is finally meaningful is the current possession of the activity of the past' (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 11).

Although undeniably problematic, interpretation necessitates some form of human judgement in relation to the evidence collected. Historical narrative cannot but be constructed by the historian and reflects personal ontology, which is itself influenced by and shaped in the context of the historian's temporal moment. This is an acceptable position, borrowing Gardner's (2010, p. 5) idea of history as drawing from the '...interpretive practices of everyday life'. It is important, nevertheless, to avoid approaching the past as an amplifier for one's own concerns.

A core problematic of history as a discipline has been a belief that events can only be understood properly through reflection on the evidence after the passage of sufficient time to allow for proper 'perspective'. Inextricable from long-established views about truth, such history requires objectivity in the form of detachment from events as a result of distance in time. The implication is that temporal detachment brings clarity,

such that events are understood more accurately, because the consequences of events can be seen. It assumes that temporal proximity to events compromises objectivity.

Southgate (2003) identifies such detachment as an essentially modernist ideal. The result has been that certain forms of historical thought and method have been legitimised, whilst others, such as oral history, have been ‘...relegated to an inferior station’ (Phillips, 2011, p. 14). Den Hollander (2011) argues, however, that the idea of a cut off point, neatly separating the past from people in the present, such that there can be an appropriate degree of temporal distance, is misconceived. This is the position adopted in this study.

The demand for ‘distanciation’, the idea that the historian needs to stand in a particular relationship temporally distant from the subject material, presupposes a clear distinction between the past and the present, giving primacy to the written word, rendering the idea of oral testimony unreliable and making close proximity to events a disadvantage for the historian. Nevertheless, den Hollander does not abandon all notions of objectivity and distanciation, because he sees historians as needing to be able to separate themselves from certain frames of mind. Distanciation, in that sense, is more a form of estrangement from the material, in order to allow for, to create, or to facilitate a critical attitude towards the material. This study sets out to initiate a more-historically critical approach to the topic of inspection and the role of Her Majesty’s Inspectors in the decade after the millenium using previously unavailable source material.

Phillips (2011) argues that, contrary to establishing the disciplinary objectivity that they appear to prioritise, such views actually serve particular values. Kobayashi and Marion (2011) argue that the idea of distanciation is bound up with particular notions of time as operating in a linear fashion, such that the present is constantly moving away from the past in a quasi-spatial way, the physical flow of time providing a mechanism for causal explanation in history.

Bevir (2011) states that historians can only ever approach the past from the perspective of current contexts and never at a distance, a standpoint adopted here. Any reconstruction of the past is, consequently, only ever a projection from the present. History is then not about writing objective narratives drawn from impartial, systematic, rigorous collection and sorting of 'facts'. Indeed, Bevir challenges the very possibility of secure facts, statements of 'how things are'. Historical knowledge cannot be absolute, depending as it does on the application of hypotheses and ideas that are fallible.

Bevir believes that, by adopting a 'post-foundationalist' approach, concerns about historical distance disappear. It is no longer necessary to achieve the sort of emotional distance from the subject matter that historicist approaches built up during the nineteenth century seem to require. Instead, objectivity is defined in terms of the ability to make reasonable comparisons between available accounts of the past and the function of a historian is to examine those accounts critically, highlighting similarities and differences, their correspondence, or otherwise, with the currently accepted versions of the past, and the extent to which the accounts are compatible with accepted, or agreed standards of evidence.

Gardner (2010) seems to take a similar stance, regarding temporal proximity not as a barrier to meaningful history, but as something to be explored as part of an interpretive process that is actually mediative, rather than reconstructive, such that historical truth is constantly debated. Den Hollander (2011) seems to go further still by rejecting the problem of distanciation altogether, on the grounds that, far from allowing the historian to see the past more clearly, it is simply not possible to see the past at all and any attempt at distanciation entails an internal split between a present subject (the historian) and a past object (the events under study). Drawing on ideas from Ricoeur and Gadamer, Phillips (2011) proposes as an alternative a continuum of practice that moves from an alienating distanciation at one extreme, to participatory belonging at the other, allowing a heuristic exploration of possibilities, rather than doctrinal compliance with a set of rules. The purpose of this study is to extend the range of evidence available to historians to facilitate such an exploration of the topic and to offer a point of embarkation.

Southgate (2002) points out that postmodernist thinking has challenged the idea that there is a privileged, or central position from which to view the past, due not least to the unstable nature of 'the present'. Even concepts of historical time as linear and the chronological periodisation that accompanies that idea, which is central to modernist history, are destabilised, because they do not correspond to human experience and its essentially individual nature.

The idea of distanciation in history is bound up with related notions of partiality, bias, and objectivity. Temporal distance is regarded as a means of ameliorating such



‘undesirable’ factors, if not of removing them. For Hamilton (2008), however, subjectivity is unavoidably part of any field of human study. Jóhannesson (2010) points out that a researcher’s identity is related to his/her reasons for undertaking the research, embodying interests that have developed over time, along with associated experience, insights, and the knowledge needed for the study. Southgate (2001) believes that human psychology renders impartiality and detachment impossible in relation to the past. These problems are acknowledged as relevant to this thesis.

Geanellos (2000) suggests that preconceptions are simultaneously preconditions for understanding and obstacles to it; the historian cannot avoid them, might even embrace them, but should remain aware of their potentially undesirable nature.

Gardner (2010) argues that, not only are preconceptions inevitable, they are necessary for historical interpretations to be made, a view adopted for this study. Consequently, preconceptions are not things to be overcome in the search for a ‘true’ account of the past, but fundamental to and a pre-condition for any meaningful understanding of the past. Danto (2008) regards the partiality of historical method as an advantage, removing illusions of logical progression and objectivity created by attempts to write accounts in an authoritative and detached style. Whilst such views, arguably, give licence to historians to utilise any conceptual frameworks when interpreting historical evidence, it is important to remain aware of potential pitfalls.

Through their choice of language, people writing about the past invest things with meaning, purpose and agency that they may not possess otherwise, a tendency that is not obviated by scholastic attempts to create analytical tools that are supposedly neutral. For example, Weber has been credited with introducing the concept of the

ideal type as a construct for understanding social phenomena through his seminal work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. The work drew criticism instantly from historians, however, for the way in which it imputed causal relationships between the emergence of a mode of religious thought and economics, its loose use of notions such as ‘protestant ethic’ and ‘capitalist spirit’, as well as the veracity of its analysis of the religious details of Protestantism (Gannon, 2002-3). Eidin (2005) believes that the concept involves a form of reification that encourages a confusion between the description of the ideal-type and objective reality. Such constructs may provide tools for analysing evidence, but they may also prompt researchers to ignore ostensibly contradictory or aberrant data, contravening Bourdieu’s (1990) injunction that any pretension to establishing ‘truth’ must account for all of the facts in a completely coherent way.

Stronach et al. (2002) show how the choice of language creates the theoretical constructs used by analysts, for example to explain concepts such as professionalism and performativity, which simultaneously become the phenomenon. This is a point of view accepted by this researcher and which influenced the decision to undertake this study. The role-construct implicit in the idea of professionalism is bound up so closely with personal identity as to evoke the deeply felt emotional response to the historical process of change that the notion of professionalism is seemingly undergoing. The term ‘de-professionalisation’ carries emotive connotations, despite assertions that its use is neutral.

Berger and Luckman (1967) describe social institutions such as professions as ‘objectivated human activity’. Professionalism is a mental construct, a subjective

process objectified through phenomenological analysis or descriptive method. Berger and Luckman argue that such typologies are a necessary feature of institutionalised conduct. Accordingly, the actor is a representative of the role and it is through such action that the institution takes on a reality in terms of actual experience for people. Popper (1979) believed that the linguistic formulation of ideas necessarily objectified them and thus rendered them open to criticism, a crucial condition, he believed and which is accepted by this historian, for the growth of knowledge. 'Reality' is then created through a dialectical process of externalisation, followed by objectification, resulting in internalisation. Bourdieu (1990) argued, however, that the very language used to classify and to categorise practice that is the subject of research serves by objectifying the practice to impose upon it a structure and meaning that is separate from the practical purpose of the activity researched.

Similarly, some of these difficulties are apparent in the work of Foucault. Foucault has been criticised for showing a disregard for history, lacking both factual accuracy and rigorous argument (Rowlinson and Carter, 2002). Foucault takes as a given that the course of modern history is characterized by increasing discipline in daily life, although Iggers (1997) regards his view of earlier societies as romanticised, with administrative organisation likely to have been no less pervasive. Explanations rooted, as is Foucault's, in discovering antecedents propose causal accounts from a reverse chronological relationship. They assume and, therefore, look for regularity and similarity. Foucault purports to locate largely unconscious systems, similarities and regularities over time. Whilst he did not describe history as the teleological fulfilment of a completed present state, his intention was to explain the current situation by tracing its lineage. Genealogy as a process may allow for an examination

of the past by moving backwards through time, but, despite Foucault's intention, does not get away entirely from an idea of the past as something objective, awaiting discovery, a notion enhanced by associating it also with the idea of archaeology, a discipline and method with strongly positivist associations.

A potential problem of such reasoning is the suggestion that the consequences of a phenomenon can be held to explain the phenomenon, implying causation in human events through a process of infinite regression, the explanation of antecedents by reference to later events or outcomes. Although writing about a different method, Bourdieu (2000, p. 57) summarises a problem with the approach; 'Imputing to its object what belongs in fact to the way of looking at it, it projects into practice...an unexamined social relation which is none other than the scholastic relation to the world.' The effect is achieved through, '...vague sets of imprecise metaphors and approximate metaphors – liberalism, liberation, liberalization, flexibility, free enterprise, deregulation, etc.' The researcher creates '...syncretic ideologies, obtained by mixing themes and schemes borrowed from various thinkers'(sic.)

None of this is to deny the value of Foucauldian, or Weberian scholarship, but to state that such approaches impose particular limits on historical knowledge. Popper (1961) believed that the task of social theory was to construct and to analyse sociological models carefully in terms of individuals, of their attitudes, expectations, relationships. Structuralist and panoramic views of the past ignore meaningful examination of evidence that might explain the motivations and reasons for practices, but if social institutions, such as professions, are 'objectivated human activity', part of the self

objectified as the performer, then understanding the nature of social institutions means understanding the meanings and intentions of the actors involved.

This thesis attempts to get closer to the meanings and intentions of a small group of HMIs. Large-scale histories, or meta-narratives, focus on institutions, grand schemes and sub-structural discourses. Social science history, as exemplified by Perkin (1989) and Foucault (1991), though it may be inappropriate to describe Foucault's work as history (Dean, 1994), displays little interest in everyday lives as experienced by individuals. Iggers (1997) believes that historians can explore the connections between broad social themes and personal experiences, through a process of 'thick description' that situates individuals within a broader context and allows theoretical constructs to be tested against small-scale experience. Ankersmitt (1995) sees that as the subject matter of oral history, which is, accepting these premises, the method chosen for this research.

### **The methodological stance taken for this study**

Many epistemological, methodological and practical problems remain, along with debates about their meanings, distinctions and ramifications, but Goldstein's (1967) view that history is a way of knowing, which legitimates conclusions about past events in ways that other practice does not has been a core belief underpinning the approach for this study. Standish (2002) finds that it is often difficult to discern in the debates about methodology a clear distinction between issues that relate to academic rigour, whatever that may be, and ethical considerations and ontological stances. Assigning labels can become a shortcut for accepting or rejecting research outcomes,

theories or opinions. Southgate (2003) suggests that researchers' defence of the purity of their preferred methodological and disciplinary paradigms is essentially utopian and, arguably, no longer tenable. Even the idea of achieving coherence in terms of methods and research outcomes is questionable; this does not sit easily with notions of a 'body of knowledge' to which research and historical narratives are supposed to contribute, but postmodernism refuses to be '...seduced by the appearance of coherence, and the "single vision" that entails (sic.)' (Southgate, 2003, p. 135). Cresswell (2008) suggests that the usefulness of research may be a function of procedure, but Jóhannesson (2010) argues that, as long as the reasons for conducting a study are clear, it is acceptable for the actual ways for working and for thinking about the research material to develop during the process. That is the position adopted in this research.

Historians must accept that, at any point in time at which they are working, a range of potentially relevant sources may not yet be available. Consequently, some temporal distance may be important in being able to see longer-term trends and for there to be sufficient weight of evidence. There is, accordingly, in any attempt to write a contemporary history, the potential for the historian to be too close to the events, unable to separate his, or her own recalled experience of the events from the need to write a supposedly dispassionate account. It has to be questionable, however, as to whether it would ever be possible, let alone desirable, to write dispassionately about something, for example, like the Holocaust. For this writer, historical distancing is achieved through the critical process, the debate about what sources reveal and an open and honest identification of personal standpoints, rather than an individual's sense of moral, ethical, or emotional detachment from the topic under study.

There seems to be no manifestly stronger claim to superiority, epistemologically, practically, ethically, or morally, in either the modernist, or postmodernist stance regarding history. Problems stem from the failure by proponents of each to acknowledge the deficits that accrue from the single-minded pursuit of one approach over another. Pragmatically, it does seem sensible that the outcomes of events can be identified only subsequently, making a degree of teleology inevitable, and perhaps understanding does require reflection. It may be that the consequences of actions become apparent only in the long term, though quite what constitutes 'long term' is by no means clear and may perhaps vary from context to context, but it is difficult to understand the basis for human action, if what happens in the immediate, or short-term is either unimportant, or in some sense less meaningful, 'true', or 'real'. An effect may be ephemeral, but that should not necessarily imply less significant. This is the position taken for this study.

It is acknowledged that there is considerable tension in contemporary and oral history for the historian to be too close to events. It is accepted that the idea of a neat and clearly defined cut-off point between the present and the past, sufficient to provide an 'appropriate' degree of temporal distance and so allow greater objectivity than would be the case otherwise, is misconceived. The position taken in this thesis is that of Phillips' (2011), in that the study through oral history of a topic directly relevant to the historian is conducted as one of 'participatory belonging' and is acceptable because it allows for the heuristic exploration of possible explanations for historical events and that, when adopting such an approach, historical 'objectivity' is achieved

by making reasonable comparisons between available accounts, as suggested by Bevir (2011).

Adopting Eley's (2005) stance, a historian cannot be separated from his/her account of the past, because at the heart of the methodology is the evaluation by the historian of the historical evidence, in accordance with procedures appropriate to the discipline, and subsequent assignation of relevance to the sources through the construction of the historical account, in the context of a given temporal moment and influenced by a personal ontology constrained by the circumstances of that moment. Gardner's (2010) argument is accepted here; preconceptions are both inevitable and necessary for interpretations to be made.

Amongst the many problems to be faced, then, is a question of whether it is actually possible to know anything about the past. Whether what history reveals is 'truth', or 'reality' may not be clear, but, whilst there may be a real past, in a positivistic sense, something that actually happened, it seems clear that the human understanding of it is created through the application of personal perspectives. Southgate (2003) does not abandon altogether the idea of truth, or reality regarding the past, but considers that, for all that the idea is undermined by the tenets of postmodernist thinking, it remains valid as a goal and a means for prompting perpetual dissatisfaction with and so questioning of current narratives. Historical knowledge is not so much about a search for certainty, but a continuous exploration of '...the unstable interface between the past and present' (Southgate, 2003, p. 153). That is an attractive position and one that is adopted here.



Holstein and Gubrium (2005) suggest that objectifying subjective experiences using analytical tools such as typologies and classifications can ameliorate the impact of ontological influences in qualitative approaches to research by eliminating any judgement of the people and behaviours they observe. Setting aside considerations of whether that is correct, it is not the point in this study. This researcher believes that, as is stated elsewhere, every act of selecting evidence for consideration is dependent on ontology, even before we consider how it is interpreted. Historians note evidence that serves the purpose of their studies. The data to which historians ascribe significance become the facts and the frameworks used for interpretation impose an order on these facts. Organising evidence in order to make a point is an act of manipulation and, consequently, construction by the historian, who creates relationships between data and information in order to form an explanation.

The requirements of academic writing take the final outcome further away from any actuality of what happened. The choice of language and the theoretical constructs used by historians to explain historical phenomena simultaneously constitute the phenomena, because the concepts used create the idea of patterns within events. Accordingly, historians create history, giving meaning to events through the terms that they use. Historians' interpretations vary with current attitudes, making constant reinterpretation necessary, which means, in turn, that we can have no fixed view of the past.

Catterall's (1997, p. 445) stance seems appropriate for this study; 'The historical process is to research, process and present the changing characteristics of human society' making sense of memory and experience, '...not a fictionalized interpretation

imposed upon a reified past, but a supreme regard for the evidence, the problems it poses and the uses to which it can be put.’ Despite Catterall’s contention, the approach reifies social action to some extent, but accepts that social reality is subject to constant modification. It may not guarantee to reveal truth, but it does offer the hope of an account open to checking and this may be the best assurance available in a world in which even the ‘hard’ sciences are contemplating the possibility of multiple realities (Hawking, 1998).

Bernstein’s (1993) view that the dichotomy of subjective versus objective reality has been deployed specifically to undermine the cognitive legitimacy of non-natural-science disciplines seems reasonable. Tashakkori’s and Teddlie’s (2003) view, that validity rests on the usefulness of the methods used in answering the research questions and in providing ethically justifiable results, is attractive also, although not necessarily results that constitute ‘truth’ or ‘reality’. Ultimately, one either accepts the methodology as valid, or one does not. Difficulties acknowledged, Danto’s (2008) definition of a successful output of historical study as one that provides a well-told multi-faceted story that establishes a context for individuals’ lives without in any way diminishing their contributions, is appealing and is what has been attempted here.

## **Method**

Oral history, the method chosen for this study, offers a form of history that moves away from generalisation to a more-realistic, in the sense of everyday, understanding of the past. It is an approach rendered possible, Southgate (2003) suggests, only by some acceptance of the postmodernist challenge to traditional historical virtues. The

interest in oral history is in the retrieval of the details of the daily lives, getting beyond conventional accounts to a more-direct sense of the way things were for the individuals concerned. Its distinctiveness lies in undertaking historical reconstruction using material that is unavailable in the standard sources to provide insights into individual human action, rather than meta-historical theories. It identifies new evidence about events, how they are remembered, reconstructed and reinterpreted by people in the present, whilst the historian retains responsibility for selecting and sampling from the data collected and placing it within a chosen historical framework.

Oral history is an attempt to understand the things that were understood by the individuals who experienced the events under study, in this instance through the medium of semi-structured discussions, such that the discussions themselves help to construct the historical interpretation (Dilley, 2004). As such, it is not a process that can guarantee replicable results.

The approach is grounded in an empirical evidence base, but is essentially interpretative and pragmatic. Weiler (1992) believes that oral history does not offer a straightforwardly empiricist view of the past, in that it does not suppose a view of the past as something unchangeable and awaiting discovery. Accordingly, oral history is not, an act of uncovering facts through interviews. Weiler does not think, however, that that position means that the past did not exist and cannot be known, simply that memory is constructed through the act of remembering. Oral history is about socially constructed representations of individual experiences and those experiences are of a material world, a premise underpinning this study.

Bruner (1991) tried to distinguish between life as experienced and life as told. This allows for gaps between reality, experience and expression, but seems to ignore the individual and inter-subjective act of creation in the interpretation of the thoughts, feelings and recollections of individuals. Sandelowski (1991) suggests, however, that consideration of such issues has been conditioned by standards of truth derived from logical-positivist perspectives and insists that the 'narrative patterning' in the telling of personal experiences is important for itself. She rejects attempts to validate individual accounts by tests and reliability measures as misguided, being based upon a confusion of fictional and false. No such tests have been applied in this study. Denzin (Moen, 2006) sought to get around the problem by arguing that narratives are fictional statements, but about real lives. As Bolton (2006) suggests, the subjective perceptions and experiences of individuals become then the focus of research and the narratives describing them are the closest that we can come to the individuals' experiences and this is the position taken here. Mills (2000) reminds us, however, that personal experience has to be subjected to 'the fleck of interpretation' and that that interpretation is also socially created, in that personal experience requires explanation through reference to loyalties and beliefs. Both the findings presented in this thesis and the conclusions drawn have resulted from the application of this researcher's 'fleck of interpretation', conditioned, as admitted previously, by my ontological predispositions, but allowable within the context of the discipline because the evidence and conclusions are left open for others to challenge.

Oral history has developed as a cross-disciplinary approach, sometimes with radical intentions connected with revealing aspects of human history ignored by traditional historiography. Drawing upon theory and practice developed in other fields,

including narrative research, its distinctiveness lies in its concern with historical reconstruction using material about how events are remembered and reinterpreted by people in the present to provide insights into human actions. Thompson (1998) makes grand claims for the purpose of oral history, but most interesting perhaps is its potential to act as a counterweight to meta-historical discourses, a reason for taking the approach here.

There are many similarities between oral history and narrative research. Narrative research is the study of how people experience the world and is situated, like history, within the hermeneutic tradition and qualitative, interpretative research methodology. Sikes (date unknown) suggests the popularity of narrative research has increased along with postmodernist ideas about multiple realities and a concomitant decrease of faith in grand schemes, echoing the growth of oral history. It will be apparent from what has been written so far that this thesis echoes Sikes' view. Bolton (2006) emphasises the idea of narrative as a natural way of recounting experience and creating reasonable order out of that experience. Sandelowski (1991) identifies as key features the temporal sequencing of events to create meaning and the plausible expression of personal, changing and historically situated experiences. That is reflected here in the collection and transcription of the HMIs' accounts of their careers and my attempt to construct some conclusion about the events that they described.

Walker (2007) believes that the narrative form renders the possibility of new insights greater by focussing on the detail of complex human experiences through a process of changing perspectives and reworking understandings, a means to locate individual

experiences within a broader context, enabling the researcher to identify how individuals assigned meaning to their experiences, as the individuals tell their stories in relation to their social, policy and organisational contexts. As will be seen, this study has not been successful entirely in making strong links between the individual accounts and the wider policy and historical context, although some detail is provided in Chapter 4 to offer some basis for links. Sandelowski (1991, p. 164) believes that ‘...the goal of narrative explanation is to provide an intelligible, comprehensive and verisimilar narrative rendering of why something happened that is well grounded and constitutes a supportable emplotment of events.’ In this study, the process of selection and editing the excerpts from interview transcripts was done to make an account of the events as understandable as possible, whilst remaining grounded within what the interviewees actually said.

The supposed exigencies of memory and uncritical reliance on it have long been at the core of criticisms of oral history as a method (Thomson, 2006). The idea of memory seems to be conflated with imagination and, by extension, the imaginary and the fictitious. Gardner (2010) follows Ricouer in pointing out that memory is at least directed towards events that actually occurred. The methodological consequence of this observation is taken by Gardner to be that the focus of interview analyses should be towards picking out patterns in the recollections of large cohorts, rather than individual life stories. Quite why that should be so is not entirely clear and it appears to rule out any value in small-scale studies such as this one.

Memory is far from being an unproblematic recollection of experiences. Recall is an active process of reconstruction, placing traces of past events in conjunction with each

other and drawing on various social and cultural influences to create an understandable account. Individuals can have markedly different recollections even of seemingly straightforward events; people may exaggerate, or omit things, deliberately or unintentionally, even if only to make an account interesting, in what Abrams (2010, p. 69) calls the 'cultural circuit and composure of accounts'. Common sense might suggest that some particular thing happened, but, as Catterall (1997) suggests, different perceptions lead to different memories and the construction of different cognitive realities. Young (2011) argues that such competing versions of events are a problem for oral history, as though that were not the case with other forms of evidence. Certainly, if two interviewees provide similar accounts of the same events, that does not guarantee that the version offered is correct, but one countervailing viewpoint, assuming that it is honestly held and recounted, is surely sufficient to cast doubt, because the initial account of events no longer fits all of the available evidence. The purpose of this study was to try to understand the individual viewpoints, rather than to establish the 'rightness', or 'wrongness' of any particular account.

Whilst interviews involving long-past events run the risk that the views expressed are subject to failures of memory and the probability that memories have been mediated by subsequent events and experience, recency of recollection is no guarantee of veracity. Descriptions may be unrepresentative, fallible, partial and bear no relation to actual time elapsed. Seldon (1998) believes that, accordingly, some lapse of time is required to develop an appropriate perspective, though he does not indicate how long, or how it is that temporal distance improves veracity. Just because memory may be false, however, does not mean that it is always so and to dismiss such evidence, even when it is demonstrably fallacious, is to misunderstand its epistemological value as a

mediation of events capable of critical enquiry (Gardner, 2010). Oral history treats such recollections not as misrepresentations, but as a resource, which may not tell us about the subject's actual experience, but can tell us much about how he, or she has made sense of experiences.

Thomson (2006) points to a number of ways in which oral historians have responded to the difficulties by borrowing concepts and approaches from other branches of study, but has suggested that, rather than seeing it as a problem of method, memory should be the point of oral history. It is, accordingly, the aim of this study. The focus becomes the ways in which people make sense of their lives, connect their individual experiences with a wider social context, and use that context to interpret what they have witnessed. Given such a purpose, the problems associated with spoken language, the issues of subjectivity, the ambiguous relationship between interviewers and interviewees become resources for the construction of new accounts. Interviews, as a dynamic, dialogic process, allow some concerns about the accuracy of memory to be tackled by seeking clarifications of meaning and establishing more clearly the interviewees' intentions (Gardner, 2010).

Inevitably, an interviewee's account is rendered as an action in the present; the testimony provided is about, but is not itself of the past. It is part of a process of generating knowledge. Tozzi (2012) suggests that essential presuppositions for that process to have epistemological validity and, seemingly, for historical method to be able to claim legitimacy for understanding the recent past, include a degree of acceptance that an interviewee's experience of the events was homogenous and that the way in which an interviewee expresses that experience is similarly homogenous.



She regards testimony as an act of constituting the past, in much the same way, presumably, as the historian hearing the testimony does and so concludes that the testified accounts are as open to criticism as any other account. By this argument, such testimonies appear to be less evidence about the past, historical sources, than historical interpretations in themselves, something that resonates with respect to the accounts produced for this study.

Lummis (2003) believes that there is an unresolvable problem in the extent to which an individual's experience can be representative of others'. If what we seek to understand, however, is the very individuality, people's experiences, their personal memories may not need authenticating objectively. This is the position adopted here. The subject's subjectivity becomes the historian's business; the 'facts' are about what people believed, as much as what actually occurred. It seems reasonable in principle at least, with regards to the HMIs in this study, that 'A closely observed event...written about, reflected upon, discussed critically and re-explored through further writings, stands metonymically for the whole of that professional's practice' (Bolton, 2006, p. 205).

The methodological frailties of oral history are fundamentally the same as for any other branch of the discipline and the problem of reliance on memory is only a problem for rigidly positivistic notions of truth. Oral history makes transient factors the subject of historical interest because they illustrate the everyday dynamics of the social, political and cultural processes in play. Memories are, accordingly, the point of an oral history and that history's epistemological value rests upon it being a mediated account, capable of critical enquiry.

Interviews are interactive endeavours, affected by the often-unstated conventions of social discourse governing conversations and the types and forms of questions and questioning deemed acceptable (Anderson & Jack, 1998). Stephens (2010) notes that the use of informal conversational idioms, interjections, qualifications to things that have been said, and even disputes over things such as dates, as remembered by individuals, create epistemological problems for oral history. Interview questioning forces sequences upon recollection and enunciation.

The interview process demands a search for inter-subjective understanding, but agreement should not be taken for granted; Borland (2003) warns of ‘interactive conflict’, the variations in meaning between interviewer and interviewee that occur particularly when there is assumed to be a high degree of mutual understanding, based upon an assumed commonality of experience. This means that it could not be taken as a given that each HMI had the best or most accurate appreciation of events, or that I, as an experienced HMI, would necessarily understand their experience. Familiarity might result in meaning being assumed and much taken for granted. Inescapably also, any interpretation of the participants contributions would be mediated through the personal experience of the researcher; as suggested by Gardner (2010), this is potentially as beneficial for the purposes of writing history, as it is problematic.

The interview event pushes the participants towards seeking a common ground from which to proceed that may involve sublimating important differences. Connolly (1974) outlines significant problems that underlie the common use of terms with normative, positive associations. Hamilton (1999) showed that even ‘technical’

concepts change meaning with context and so commonly used terms may be understood quite differently. In any event, the historians' response to the values and mores of past times, even relatively recent times, is not inter-subjective with the people of those times, but if they are wholly incommensurable, then, as Puttnam (1981) suggests, it would be impossible to understand the past.

Hamilton (2008) disagrees with the view that the inter-subjectivity of interviews constitutes a methodological weakness and thinks that such a view indicates an ontological predisposition. She suggests that historical understanding may depend, to some extent, on an interviewer's willingness to get close to the interviewee. In the context of interviews that are concerned with testimony, the interview cannot work, unless the interviewer has a degree of empathy for the subject, although this is not taken to mean sympathy, or agreement necessarily. Such a position is anathema to Seldon (1998), who argues that getting to know an interviewee, potentially, compromises the goal of dispassionate history, but it is a premise fundamental to this research. Similarly, Perks (2010) finds subjectivity an advantage, in that the accounts created through interviews offer unique historical data about changing perceptions. Stephens (2010) seeks to celebrate the subjectivity of interviews as an analytical tool, rather than regarding it as a methodological shortcoming. Hamilton (2008) warns, however, that it is important that interviewees' testimony is not used either to confirm, or to justify the personal standpoints of the interviewer.

The relationship of interviewer to interviewee is a key problem of oral history, but that relationship is neither straightforward, nor fixed (Hamilton, 2008). The researcher is potentially the dominant element, directing, interrupting and even

preventing the narration. The nature of the event can push interviewees into ways of speaking that typically they might not use, to be concise, to summarise and to structure their answers, to fulfil what they may understand to be the interviewer's requirements (Slim et al., 1998). The interview focus can create a pressure on interviewees to come up with ready answers, or to simplify complex experiences, in the interests of being succinct. Interviewees may, wittingly, or otherwise, deceive by emphasising positives, or negatives (Hamilton, 2008). They may try to 'second guess' the motives behind a question (Berridge, 2010).

A historian's sources of evidence are actual and provide, in that sense, an objective side to the discipline, offering tangible contact with the past. There is, for oral historians, however, a question regarding what, exactly, the sources are. Seldon (1998) regards interviews as inferior sources to contemporary documents, though he grants that they may provide a sense of which documents are important and illuminate issues by providing material that would not be available otherwise. This view appears to take for granted that the element of fixity established by being written renders source material 'objective', whereas interviews are suspect, because the views expressed by interviewees may differ from 'firmly established written facts' and the 'hard certainty of documents.' The certainty rests on an assumed immutability of documents on each and every reading, in marked contrast to interviews, raising a question about whether the interviewer has obtained the 'real' testimony. For all that it was a problematic process, interviews seemed the method most likely to produce the evidence needed to allow an exploration of individual responses to the developments within the period of study, given that the available documentary records of the work of HMIs would likely be largely unrevealing of personal

experiences and viewpoints; these people have not generally written professional biographies, or submitted diaries and personal papers to the archives.

Gardner (2010) acknowledges, and it is acknowledged here also, that non-documentary sources pose evidential problems, which is not to say that documents do not, but that the process remains one of looking for and making sense of the traces of the past and then constructing from them a coherent and convincing account. That has been the approach in this study. As Berridge (2010) points out, oral history is often the sole source of evidence for groups and individuals for whom there are no written records.

Thane (1999) challenges the idea that oral sources are inherently less reliable than written, suggesting that the primacy of documentary evidence is something of a relatively modern, Western phenomenon. Thomson (2006) argues that the primacy accorded to documentary evidence stems from the development of history as an academic discipline, which led to the marginalisation of oral accounts of the past. The availability of modern recording techniques has assisted a revival of interest in oral history, although, ironically, it seems as though the primary purpose of the recordings is to facilitate written transcription.

Gardner (2010) suggests that, as soon as the interviewee's words are written down, they are, in a sense, estranged from their originator and their meaning, defined as that which the interviewee intended, and become open and prone to others' interpretations. Fidelity to the evidence here means supporting the historian's interpretations through references to the interviews to indicate how the interpretations have been reached

(Geanellos, 2010). This has been attempted in the final chapter of this thesis.

Accordingly, a reader may understand how the interpretations were formed, even if they are not accepted.

Drawing from the work of Ricouer, Geanellos (2000) believes that the objectification of spoken text through the act of transcription allows researchers to encompass the possibility of multiple interpretations and facilitates a degree of ‘distanciation’ by fixing the spoken word. In oral history, the recordings and the transcripts stand as objectifications of the interviewees’ lived experiences. As a record of a spoken event, a transcript is necessarily a form of artifice, which allows the event to ‘survive the moment of its production’ (Gardner, 2010).

Gardner (2010) considers transcripts, even verbatim, to be speech masquerading as text, though it seems equally reasonable to suggest that the converse may be the case. Ostensibly, fidelity to the sources would seem to demand a strictly verbatim transcription, but the idea of careful transcription does not rule out alterations. Gardner (2010, p. 72) suggests that an ‘authentic’ oral history transcript ‘seeks to offer a written version of spoken discourse, unedited and unelided, and, accordingly, contains all of the interviewer’s and the interviewee’s hesitations, stumblings, pauses, gestures, and so forth, in order that it should not be ‘artfully and wittingly composed’. Such mannerisms appear essential to some forms of sociological textual and discourse analysis, but how necessary are they for history?

Decisions have to be made about what to include within a transcript. Hastings (2010) believes that it is inappropriate for a historian to do nothing to a text. Bayliss (2007)

suggests that transcription may involve ‘cosmetic’ changes to language, in the interests of clarity, and some degree of editing and selection. Such practices still correspond with the notion of full transcription, but they seem more appropriate to the construction of interpretative, historical narrative and, as such, accepted as guiding principles for this study.

Researchers may attempt to overcome some of the limitations of transcribing accounts by using strict notations of pauses, repetitions, although Sandelowski’s (1991) work suggests that such things may be unhelpful. Interpreting rhetorical devices, silences, body language, is far from straightforward. Detailed field notes may be added in an effort to capture more of the moment, but such notes add potential problems as much as they add information by making the transcript more difficult to read and so to understand and to interpret. Emphasis awards significance that may not be intended.

### **Stance on method**

Despite the attempt to fix the moment and its meanings, a transcript is but one possible interpretation of what happened during an interview. The nature of the link between the interviewer’s memory of the interview and the subsequent transcribed text is problematic. The process of transcription is not neutral and necessarily involves decisions about what to commit to paper and how. Something as seemingly innocuous as punctuation involves interpreting words, pauses, silences, idioms of everyday speech and the idiosyncracies of individuals. The spoken word has no obvious punctuation and the transcriber must make choices about where and how to punctuate, in order to turn the recording into a readable account, thereby instantly

giving a rendition of what happened at the interview, not an account unimpeachably faithful entirely to the live discussion. Often, people use and repeat redundant words and expressions, make slips of the tongue, commit errors of grammar, and may not converse in complete sentences. Correcting such things can render accounts more interesting and easier to read by removing unhelpful passages, which has been done in this study for that reason, but it is acknowledged that this takes the written version even further from the actuality of the interview event.

It is conceivable that an interviewee may be offended either by the verbatim record, or some cosmetic enhancement, leaving the transcriber with an ethical problem. Bayliss (2007) does not believe it is reasonable, or practical to seek to record every utterance. He argues that such problems merely reinforce the notion of an interview as social interaction, not just data collection, and suggests that perhaps the best way to deal with the problems is to undertake transcription as an act of sensitive interpretation. In this study, producing the transcripts formed the initial stage of interpretation, done sensitively, in the sense that the aim was to bring out meaning that the researcher thought honestly was the interviewees' intentions and mindful to avoid as far as possible foisting the researcher's ontology onto the interpretation. Even so, as Portelli (2003) concludes, the transcript can only be an approximation of what the researcher was told.

If the point of transcribing is to facilitate analysis, there is no consensus amongst oral historians about how best to undertake it. Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest that the categories used for analysing transcripts must be suggested by, not forced upon, the data. It is a fundamental problem of history, however, that interpreters of the records



cannot avoid projecting their historically situated selves onto their reading of a text, a problem that seems likely to be compounded in oral history, when the interpreter is also the creator of the text to be interpreted. Geanellos (2000) suggests that the problem may be overcome by repeated engagement with the text, an approach adopted for this study, although he does not specify the extent, or form that may be required.

Using computer software to facilitate transcript and textual analysis offers simultaneously advantages and potential disadvantages. Twycross (2008) suggests that, as with the physical sciences, such technology is enabling historians to see things differently. In oral history, computers and quantification may support the historian in identifying commonalities, patterns across transcriptions that would otherwise be less apparent. Such analyses reify the patterning, however, and render the narrators irrelevant, removing any sense of people from personal actions. This researcher sought to derive the structure for the findings from repeated engagement with the transcripts, iteratively, without any predetermined classifications, or using information technology because the point of the exercise was as much about the researcher's personal interaction with and interpretation of the material.

By exercising authorial choices, the process of transcription creates a new form, its own, as a source of historical evidence. Even if 'signed off' by an interviewee, it remains something worked up, structured, amended from the original source and form, abridged, edited, such that, whilst still undoubtedly a record of an event, that record is a representation involving considerable interpretation and not the event itself. Very small changes in wording to make a transcript more readable produce

some loss of the subtleties of meaning as constructed in the original dialogue, but as it is the individuals' understanding and interpretation of their actions in relation to events that is of interest in this study, the focus was more on the content, shape and form of the stories, than on unguarded syntax.

Transcribing the interviews was a very time-consuming process, going back and forth over the recordings. It seemed impossible to capture every single word, much as Bayliss (2007) suggested, let alone to use any meaningful notation for inflexion, or emotion, because the attempt to classify such things seems every bit as problematic as the meaning it purports to reveal. The material in this thesis was recorded accurately and reported fully, though not entirely unaltered; the transcription was an act of sensitive interpretation and, as such, each is only one possible interpretation of what happened during the interviews.

There is, finally, the historian's account of the events, written, or presented otherwise. The historian must create some sort of coherent version of the past, notwithstanding Southgate's warnings, from the evidence collected, but in oral history, people do not reminisce in a structured and linear fashion, even when an interviewer has an agenda and structure for an interview. An interviewer helps to construct the account during the interview, interprets it subsequently and synthesises it with other accounts and evidence to create the final narrative. The requirements of academic writing take the final outcome further away from the interviewees' testimonies than even the transcripts and so the final account is not the 'truth' of the past, but the historians' understandings about that past. Readers thereafter cannot but infer all sorts of things

for themselves, including motives and a sense of the interviewees modulating, or performing, their contributions.

Gardner (2003) believes that the epistemological challenges faced by oral history are best answered by clarifying the types of historical question such source material may be useful for answering. That meant, in this study, probing the reactions of people who experienced it to a period of change in the work of HMIs. The intention has been that the conclusions are grounded in the narratives provided by the interviewees, but the methodology is fundamentally interpretative. There is no attempt to enable relevant interpretations, or explanations through any strategy for handling data using categories and concepts for describing and explaining data. The structuring of data is, however, part of the interpretative process that is history. The structure adopted for this study was relatively crude. Whilst acknowledging that notions of time have shifted from regarding it as homogenous and chronologically linear in its operation (Jordheim, 2012), the transcript data were ordered chronologically, in an attempt to see if the HMIs' experiences changed through the course of the period under study, and in relation to different phases of their careers.

Accepting that the evidence from the past is always incomplete and often limited to a particular format, written documentation, this research seeks to locate and to analyse some different traces of the past that would not exist otherwise, though as will be seen, it does not escape entirely from being written. The personal and subjective perceptions of the individuals that are the focus of the research are the closest that we can come to those individuals' experiences. Following Sandelowski (1991), there is no attempt to validate the accounts through any test of reliability, but that is not the

same as saying that the accounts are taken purely at face value as a representation of an ‘objective past’.

### **Application of the method**

#### **Ethical statement**

The research proposal was submitted to and fulfilled the requirements of the research ethics committee at Sheffield Hallam University. The research was carried out using guidelines published by the Oral History Society.<sup>2</sup> In line with that guidance, the interviewees were informed using a written project information sheet about the research objectives and intentions and including a statement regarding the intended use of the research data and its subsequent storage in the short and long terms (see Appendix 3 Participant Information Sheet). Each interviewee was required to sign a consent form before taking part, acknowledging the content of the project information sheet (see Appendix 2 Participant consent form). The interviewees were invited to select the venue for the interview. Each was provided with an opportunity at the start of the interview to get clarification of any issues, or concerns. The researcher has considerable professional experience as an interviewer in a variety of contexts and has received appropriate training as part of that experience.

The interviewees were guaranteed anonymity and allowed through the interview process to decide what information they wished to share. As part of the researcher’s

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<sup>2</sup> PERKS, Rob and BORNAT, Joanna et al. (2012). Is Your Oral History Legal and Ethical? Oral History Society, last accessed online at [www.ohs.org.uk](http://www.ohs.org.uk)

commitment to acting ethically, they were provided with an opportunity to see the transcript and to request that the interview be withdrawn from the sample, in the event that their confidentiality, or anonymity was thought to be compromised; this process acknowledges the interviewees' respective copyright to their recorded words, though the reality of the interview and transcription process is that the outcome is co-produced between interviewer and interviewee. Accordingly, the interviewees signed their consent to the recordings being archived and the researcher's function in writing a thesis that is his own interpretation of the interviewees' testimonies was made clear.

### **The interview process**

Each interview was semi-structured around questions related to the focus of the research, lasted one to one-and-a-half hours, was recorded and transcribed subsequently. An interview schedule was developed to form the basis for a semi-structured interview, in order to allow a degree of focus, whilst not restricting unduly what the interviewee might offer (Kvale, 1996).

Participants were asked;

- a) Outline your career as an HMI.
- b) What were your reasons for undertaking the role?
- c) What were the main influences on how you carried out the role?
- d) Were you aware of any changes to the role during your period of office? If so, what were they and how did you respond to them?
- e) How do you see your experience as an HMI compared to others'?

The approach was chosen on the grounds that an interview offers the prospect of getting closest to the personal experience of each HMI. The questions were framed to

balance as much as possible the need to provide a guide for each interview linked with the purpose of the research, whilst allowing each interviewee to frame their answers as they wished to do.

The participants were given an option as to where the interview should take place, in order to allow the interviewee to feel as much at ease with the process as possible and also to enable access to any relevant material, such as diaries, should the interviewee wish to consult it. In the event, all were interviewed in their homes. Initially, a preliminary questionnaire was trialled, with the intention of orientating the interview. It was abandoned because, in practice, it offered little, either in terms of assisting the discussion, or subsequently useful data. The choice of audio recording was intended to allow as naturalistic a method of capturing what the interviewees said as possible and the recordings constitute a permanent record for the archive. Whilst there remain issues connected with non-verbal communications in the interviews and the fact that audio recording did not capture them, the intention was to focus as far as possible on what the interviewees said, rather than the manner in which it was performed. It may be argued that such an approach removes a rich and potentially essential part of the evidence, but the disadvantage is perhaps offset by avoidance of arguably more-intrusive methods of recording (Ritchie, 1995).

The interviews were not designed to elicit the whole story of the interviewees' careers. They focused on a specific aspect of the interviewees' working lives, so-called single-issue testimony (Slim et al., 1998) about a particular aspect of each interviewee's life within a particular period of time. The point of the interviews as historical sources was to identify how and moments when inspectors' practice

changed, if it did, rather than to reconstruct an idealised version of how the profession operated.

### **The selection of participants**

The criteria for selecting interviewees were entirely opportunistic; locality, time spent in office, period in office, mix of male and female, range of backgrounds, range of experience of inspection remits. Further information can be found in Chapter 4. The participants were identified from The Register of the Association of Retired and Former HMI, Widows and Widowers. Whilst pragmatic manageability was the overriding factor in determining the number of participants, it was thought that more than one, or two were needed, in order to avoid any tendency for the study to become biographical and to broaden, albeit to a limited extent, the historical evidence base (an important goal for oral history). Also, from the possible sample, no individual's experience corresponded exactly with the decade of interest, or encompassed all of the potentially interesting perspectives. It seemed reasonable that experiences might vary according to when, how, and why an individual became an HMI. Beyond those factors, the decisions taken were entirely pragmatic, relating to the time available and other resources for conducting the fieldwork. Nevertheless, it seemed important to have some sense of whether individual experiences, or perceptions about the role of HMI were echoed by others', not as a means of 'proving' anything, but to see if similarities emerged, or whether each individual's experience was entirely unique.

Inevitably, some of the interviewees were reasonably well known to the researcher, some not so. The ethical dilemmas posed by such relationships were considered,

including the potential for the interviewees' accounts to be accepted uncritically and not probed sufficiently. As has been noted earlier, the nature of the relationship between interviewee and interviewer is never straightforward and not fixed. I have taken the view that prior relationships and personal experience of the topic of study were beneficial in terms of facilitating the interviews and in interpreting the outcomes. This is not to deny the inherent problems.

Each participant was contacted by letter. Arrangements for the interviews were conducted via email. It was explained to participants that the original recordings of the interviews will be lodged with the Jack Kitching Archive: Records of the Board of Education Inspectors' Association at the University of London Institute of Education and made available for future research, along with the transcripts, subject to the approval of the archivist; no copies were retained personally after the final assessment of the thesis.

The participants have been anonymised. They were allowed to review the transcripts and to comment, but were informed from the outset that the thesis is the researcher's. In the event that a participant did not wish the transcript to be used within the research, it was to be expunged and the recording destroyed. Such action offers some sense of having acted ethically and, fortunately, none refused.

### **Analysing the evidence**

In analysing the evidence, some early and initial thoughts were noted after each interview. Further notes were made during the process of transcription, in order to



capture potential points of interest for further investigation. Each transcript was then read repeatedly, as recommended by Geaneallos (2000), with a view to identifying a possible structure for a narrative and in order not to leave out anything that seemed important, or interesting. The process began with the act of transcription, resulting in an initial list of broad possible categories of interest. The list was refined through a first detailed analysis of the completed transcripts, highlighting material of interest relevant to the research questions, clarifying the broad headings and identifying possible sub-sections. A second detailed analysis of the transcripts led to further refinements, particularly with regard to the sub-sections, resulting in the structure and detail presented in chapters 5, 6, and 7 of this thesis. The process continued, iteratively, as each 'topic' emerged, to identify what appeared to be significant events within the different transcripts, things that seemed important to the interviewees and that reflected a sense of the values that they brought to the role.

The process was systematic. It employed Geaneallos' (2000) idea of repeated engagement with the transcripts as a means for identifying features of interest pertinent to the research questions and a possible structure for a narrative. It borrowed from Burnard's notion of thematic content analysis, although the information extracted was more in the way of strands, apparent features of the interviewees' experience, rather than formal themes. It was consistent with the researcher's aims of compiling the HMIs' memories of events and developments within the specified timeframe, as described by Milewski (2012), and of getting as close as possible to how the interviewees saw their roles and the conditions in which they acted, a principle of oral history as suggested by Samier (2006). The approach provided reasonable assurance that nothing apparently important was omitted, with each

reading of the transcripts allowing for refinements to the headings and sub-headings that became, ultimately, the structure of the written account that is this thesis.

Undeniably, the process channels the evidence and the need to offset personal bias when doing so was ever-present. In order to compensate for personal bias, to which I am not immune any more than any other historian, I sought to remain aware of the potential, requested the interviewees' comments on the transcripts, and submitted to external challenge from my research supervisors and, of course, the examiners.

Furthermore, it is open to future historians to examine the evidence and the thesis and to correct for any untoward effects of personal bias that they may discern. I stand by the ideas of Mills (2000), in that an historian's interpretation of the evidence is both required and necessary, of Gardner (2010), that my preconceptions borne of proximity to the events and to the interviewees are an advantage, allowing me to draw on knowledge, experience and personal insight in the manner suggested by Jóhannesson (2010), which assists with the critical examination of the evidence and existing accounts called for by Bevir (2011), by providing opportunities for the exploration of possible explanations for events, as suggested by Philips (2011). I am fully aware that this historian is inherent within the account that has been written, but have taken the view that this is unavoidable, necessary for the process of writing history, and beneficial in terms of my intention, *qua* Thompson (1988) to exploit the potential for oral history to offer a counterweight to balance the prevailing meta-narratives.

The historical values of faithfulness to the sources, careful and accurate recording and transcription of the material and of reporting fully, in the sense that material has not been elided because it did not fit with some preferred version of events, have been

observed. The intention was, however, to explore the range of the individuals' experiences as they recalled them and not especially to challenge those views, on the grounds that too much contradiction, or challenge would be counter-productive in getting the interviewees to talk about potentially emotive matters.

Interviews, necessarily, involve a search for some degree of mutual understanding, requiring a degree of empathy for the subject. In this study, the personal experience of the researcher as an HMI was beneficial, as it facilitated supplementary questions during the course of interviews to clarify the interviewees' intended meanings. That had to be done cautiously, in order that the inevitable co-construction that the process entails did not superimpose the researcher's experience entirely onto the participants'; the intention was, throughout, to understand their views. There remains an unresolvable problem in the extent to which an individual's experience can be representative of others'. If what we seek to understand, however, is the very individuality of HMIs' experiences, their personal memories do not need authenticating objectively. Pring's (2000) standpoint seems reasonable, that, as long as claims for the general significance of the findings are limited, as they are in this instance, it is perhaps legitimate to seek sufficient commonality to allow some conclusions.

Perks (2010) is concerned that personal testimonies have tended to be used inadequately and unreflectively. In this study, the participants' views have not been used unreflectively, not taken to be incontrovertible statements of historical fact, even when the participants themselves seemed quite adamant about events and their meaning. What is offered here is not a reconstruction of past events, but an account

of a set of views, a mediated narrative, in the manner suggested by Gardner (2010). No claim is made in this study to the superiority of the source material compared with any other, but it is claimed that the conclusions reached are commensurate with a suitable and appropriate evidence base.

The material from the interview transcripts has been sequenced chronologically, both in terms of the period during which the HMIs were in office and according to three loosely defined phases in their careers. The sequencing allowed a sense to emerge from the evidence of changes over time in the HMIs' perceptions of the work that they did and in their responses to it. It will be evident that, consistent with the method of oral history, the memories and accounts provided by the interviewees have been sampled, in order to create a sense of a narrative chronologically through the period of interest. Large amounts have been redacted from the transcripts to create the selections presented in the findings. The editing process has allowed the creation (and it is acknowledged to be such) of more-readable accounts, making for clearer points and assisting a narrative of events to unfold. In each case, the quotations indicate where the original transcript contains more words and the transcripts and recordings have been offered to an archive, so that other researchers may check on the veracity of what is presented here. The restricted nature of the evidence base means that, inevitably, the narrative is fragmentary and incomplete. It is, nonetheless, an account that, I contend, satisfies Gardner's idea of an interpretation constructed through the application of practical wisdom, reasonable inferences drawn from the evidence collected and providing a basis for further discussion and research and other interpretations. As such, it offers a useful contribution to our knowledge of the subject matter.

Inevitably, the selections and the decisions about editing reflect the author's personal interpretations of the interviewees' intended meanings, rooted in his own ontological standpoint and coloured by a commitment to the office of HMI and particular relationships with the interviewees. The subjectivity which that position entails was central to the reasons for undertaking the research. The difficulties involved in interviews in which each party is known to the other, with the potential for much to be assumed and for some things to be ignored, are acknowledged fully, but it is argued, as suggested by Hamilton (2008), that they are offset, at least in part, by the equal potential for the ensuing empathy to assist the interviewees to construct their accounts and so to provide the unique historical evidence that has resulted. No attempt has been made at distancing from the material, other than by seeking to stick to the general historical principle of a supreme regard for the evidence and not imposing personal concerns onto it and by offering the transcripts for comment by the interviewees and the thesis for critique by research supervisors and examiners, notwithstanding the inevitable impact of the structuring necessary for creating a narrative, and a willingness to render the account in such a way as to invite further research and criticism.

### **Writing the thesis**

Narrative, as it is written in many historical accounts, is bound up with notions of continuity, or of some form of flow in a quasi-physical, though actually metaphorical tide of events. In contrast, this study, though it is structured in order to see if there is any discernible sense of change over time, seeks to provide evidence from the past

‘...not about a specific trajectory reified by a chronicle’ (Bonneuil, 2010. P. 45), but about how a small group of individuals operated at a particular point in time and under the conditions then prevalent, as they understood them. The approach adopted here was intended specifically to be an oral history focusing on ‘episodic memory’ related to temporally specific events (Milewski, 2012). The method of oral history is used to emphasise the role of individuals and the conditions under which they acted (Samier, 2006). The result is not an uncritical presentation of the narratives, involving, as it does, some interpretation of the interview material. Nevertheless, an aim of this research was simultaneously to record and to archive professional memories.

The intention has been to ground the conclusions in the accounts provided by the interviewees, but ensuring that conclusions inhere within sources when the methodology is fundamentally interpretative is not straightforward. Seldon (1998) is surely correct to point out the difficulty of ever knowing what is the hearts and minds of interviewees. The problems are compounded in decisions about how to record and subsequently to transcribe such data. That necessitates also consideration of the potential impact of recording technology both to inhibit and to encourage performance. Ultimately, Seldon’s (1998) response to the problems of interviews as historical sources is that the material which they generate should be subjected to the same critical approach that historians ought to apply to written sources. The interviews forming this study leave a useable source of evidence for future historians, that they might not otherwise be able to access, this being still a primary purpose of oral history.

What follows is a collection of memories as recounted in particular circumstances and contexts. The memories and accounts have not been accepted uncritically, though it is not the purpose here to challenge the versions of events that were proffered, or to construct a version that lays any claim to establishing an indivisible, or unassailable ‘truth’, but to gain some understanding of how the interviewees experienced events. The accounts have been taken, however, as honest and, in that sense, ‘truthful’ personal testimonies, albeit mediated in the various ways to which such accounts are subject. The meanings ascribed in the analysis and conclusion presented in this thesis are mine; the thesis is my attempt to interpret the evidence and to construct a history, justifiable ethically, I would argue, because the evidence and thesis are open to others for future use and criticism. Where attempts have been made to note apparent similarities in the accounts, that has not been done to establish some claim to greater veracity, but an inference that there was some commonality amongst this fairly random group. Resources have not allowed proper comparison of the accounts presented here with other evidence and so Gardner’s requirements for a meaningful heuristic exploration of the topic have yet to be met, but the thesis provides a contribution for such an exploration and the continued construction of history.

## Chapter 4 The Interviewees and Contextual Information

This chapter introduces the interviewees. It indicates the time periods within which they were active as inspectors. It summarises key aspects of the policy background which set the parameters within which they worked and also the main, particular developments of the inspection framework that had a direct bearing on their daily work.

### The interviewees' Backgrounds

The nine HMIs who participated in this study straddle a period between 1987 and 2012. Their periods in office varied between eight and 21 years, the group dividing into those joining prior to 2000, who had the longest periods in office, between 14 and 21 years, and those joining after the millenium, who stayed in office between eight and 10 years.

**Table 1 showing the beginning and end points for each interviewee's term of office.**

Interviewee 1	1989	2008
Interviewee 2	1997	2011
Interviewee 3	2001	2009
Interviewee 4	2001	2011
Interviewee 5	2002	2011
Interviewee 6	2001	2011
Interviewee 7	1987	2008
Interviewee 8	2004	2012
Interviewee 9	1990	2009

Eight of the participants had experience as teachers prior to joining HMI, seven within the schools sector and one in further education. The ninth came from a background in local authority children's services. Three had experience as headteachers and four with other senior responsibilities in schools, particularly for



curriculum subjects. Between them, they amassed also a range of other professional experiences; five had roles as education advisers working for local authorities and two had periods of time working for national educational organisations, such as the National Curriculum Council and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. One worked at one point for the Department for Education (as it is known now). Four, all from the post-2000 group, had prior experience of inspecting, either in schools, or in other areas. Seven of the participants were male and two female.

**Table 1 showing the interviewees’ periods in office and how those periods correspond with a selection of significant historical events, legislative and policy developments in education, and changes to the inspection framework and evaluation schedule.**

Research Participants (Interviewees)	Selected Events	Legislative & Policy Framework	Inspection Framework
<p><b>1987</b> Interviewee 7 joins HMI</p>		<p><b>Education Policy Themes</b> Raising standards School autonomy School competitiveness ('marketisation') Curriculum &amp; pedagogical reform (qualifications framework &amp; National Strategies) Tackling inequalities ('gaps')</p> <p><b>1988</b> Education Reform Act (City Technology Colleges; grant-maintained (GM) schools; National Curriculum introduced; local management of schools</p>	<p><b>1983</b> Eric Bolton Senior Chief Inspector</p>

<p><b>1989</b> Interviewee 1 joins HMI</p> <p><b>1990</b> Interviewee 9 joins HMI</p> <p><b>1997</b> Interviewee 2 joins HMI</p>	<p><b>2000</b> Waterhouse Report (child abuse); Victoria Climbié case; Anti-capitalist riot, London;</p>	<p><b>1992</b> Education (Schools) Act (Ofsted created)</p> <p><b>1998</b> School Standards &amp; Framework Act (LEA powers; Sec. of State power to intervene in 'failing' schools; abolition of GM schools) Teaching and Higher Education Act (GTC. Ofsted inspects ITE) National Literacy Strategy</p> <p><b>1999</b> Fresh Start scheme (schools) Excellence in Cities Beacon Schools</p> <p><b>2000</b> Specialist Schools &amp; Academies programmes</p>	<p><b>1991</b> Terry Melia appointed Senior Chief Inspector</p> <p><b>1992</b> Stewart Sutherland appointed Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI)</p> <p><b>1994</b> Chris Woodhead appointed HMCI</p> <p><b>1999</b> The Handbook for school inspection (Short &amp; Full inspections; up to 16 inspectors; lay inspector; 6-8 weeks' notification; pre- inspection visits &amp; forms; parents' meeting; PISCI; 7-point judgement scale; delayed feedback; 6 weeks to write report; 5 days for school to comment)</p> <p><b>2000</b> Mike Tomlinson appointed HMCI</p>
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<p><b>2001</b> Interviewees 3, 4 &amp; 6 join HMI</p>	<p>Sarah Payne murder case; Jamie Bulger case sentences review; Damilola Taylor murder case</p> <p><b>2001</b> 2nd Labour election victory; Leanne Tiernan murder case; Race riots, Bromley, Bradford, Brixton; New York terror attacks</p>		
<p><b>2002</b> Interviewee 5 joins HMI</p>	<p><b>2002</b> Amanda Dowler murder case; Holly Wells &amp; Jessica Chapman murder case; Danielle Jones murder trial</p> <p><b>2003</b> Anti-Iraq war demonstrations, London; Bomb attacks on British targets</p>	<p><b>2002</b> Education Act (LEA/school funding; Curriculum freedoms for 'successful' schools; Narrowing achievement gaps; 14-19/vocational courses)</p>	<p><b>2002</b> David Bell appointed HMCI</p> <p><b>2003</b> <i>Inspecting Schools Framework for inspecting Schools</i> (school self-evaluation; leadership at all levels'; diversity of curricula; views of pupils &amp; staff; individuals' needs; community services; inclusion &amp; race equality; shorter reports; 9 judgements; shorter 'tailored' inspections; PANDA) New Handbook for inspecting schools (expanded grade descriptors)</p>
<p><b>2004</b> Interviewee 8 joins HMI</p>	<p><b>2004</b> Bichard Enquiry Children Act</p> <p><b>2005</b> Prevention of Terrorism Act; 3rd Labour</p>	<p><b>2004</b> Children Act (implements 2003 ECM White Paper; JAR inspection programme) Tomlinson Review (14-19)</p> <p><b>2005</b> Education Act (Inspection intervals; Procedures for schools causing concern;</p>	<p><b>2005</b> <i>Every Child Matters The framework for inspecting schools</i> (1/2-day inspections; 2-5 days'</p>

	<p>election victory; Live8 concerts; G8 summit, Gleneagles; Terrorist bomb attacks, London</p>	<p>Publication of inspection reports) Steer Report (behaviour)</p>	<p>notice; smaller teams; 3-year cycle; SEF; more feedback; new-style report within 3 weeks; 4-point judgement scale; ECM 'outcomes'; reconfigured judgements) Using the evaluation schedule Guidance for inspectors (radically slimmed down)</p>
	<p><b>2006</b> Airport security measures (plot fears)</p>	<p><b>2006</b> Education &amp; Inspections Act ((Expansion of Ofsted's remit; Change to HMI title &amp; functions; Schools causing concern) Rose Review (Primary curriculum)</p>	<p><b>2006</b> Christine Gilbert appointed HMCI Using the evaluation schedule Guidance for inspectors (Dec.) (greater emphasis to achievement &amp; inclusion 'raising the bar'; more things to evaluate)</p>
	<p><b>2007</b> 2 car bombs destroyed in London; Disappearance of Madeleine McCann; Peter Connelly ('Baby P') case; Casey Leigh Mullen murder case; Rhys Jones murder case</p>	<p><b>2007</b> Children's Plan</p>	<p><b>2007</b> Every Child Matters The framework for inspecting schools (revised) (2-days' notice; ROL; shorter observations; community cohesion; safeguarding) Using the evaluation schedule Guidance for inspectors (Sept.) ('limiting judgements'; behaviour)</p>
<p><b>2008</b> Interviewees 1 &amp; 7 leave HMI</p>	<p><b>2008</b> Shannon Matthews case; Global financial crisis</p>	<p><b>2008</b> Education &amp; Skills Act (KS3 tests no longer compulsory)</p>	<p><b>2008</b> Using the evaluation schedule Guidance for inspectors (Apr.) ('Narrowing gap's; new grade descriptors for community cohesion)</p>
<p><b>2009</b> Interviewees 3 &amp; 9 leave HMI</p>	<p><b>2009</b> G20 summit, London; Strikes over use of foreign workers; BNP wins council seats</p>	<p><b>2009</b> Apprenticeships, Skills, Children, &amp; Learning Act (Changes to inspection arrangements; Complaints against schools; extension of Sec. of State's powers)</p>	<p><b>2009</b> Using the evaluation schedule Guidance for inspectors (Feb.) (attendance; new descriptors for community cohesion) The framework for inspecting schools (Jul.) (Removal of community cohesion) Evaluation schedule (Jul.) (Number of judgements increased to 27)</p>
<p><b>2011</b> Interviewees 4, 5 &amp; 6 leave HMI</p>			

2012 Interviewee 8 leaves HMI			
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### **The Policy Context**

Lowe (2008) situates the development of British education firmly within a context of the nation's development as the first industrial nation, but increasingly reflecting international developments through the twentieth century and particularly the ever-increasing proportion of the national budget committed to it, in order, in intention at least, to remain competitive economically, with major implications for policy, consequent upon what Lowe characterises as the sense of threat posed by a globalised economy, specifically greater standardisation and bureaucratisation concomitant upon increased governmental scrutiny. The growth of consumerism has been a seemingly inevitable consequence of increasing levels of affluence in the industrialised world. Consumerism has not meant simply a greater demand for goods, however, but an expectation of choice and not only with regard to material things. A highly educated and affluent population has extended the range of things over which it demands a degree of control. The heightened political sensitivity towards education has brought closer, public scrutiny of schools in the media, but also through the development of the inspection system.

Taking a view over an extended time frame and looking at the development of mass education from the first half of the nineteenth century onwards, the growth in the level of central government funding for schooling has been reflected in a gradual transfer of control towards central government agencies. For much of the period until the latter quarter of the twentieth century, the aphorism 'a national system locally administered'

broadly describes English education. The balance altered significantly, however, in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

By the 1980s, national policies for education came to be predicated upon four perceived problems within the education system: poor and purportedly falling standards in schools; a low proportion of young people staying in education beyond compulsory schooling; a 'long tail' of low achievement amongst pupils; and generally poor basic skills amongst the population. As a result. Machin and McNally (2011) identify four types of policy response to these issues: resource-based; market incentives; structural changes in the governance of schools (school autonomy); and pedagogical approaches, including qualifications reforms.

The Education Reform Act (ERA) 1988 brought significant changes, notably local management of schools (LMS) via the delegation of budgets, which gave schools considerable autonomy. By allowing for the setting up of city technology colleges, the Act also initiated a move towards creating maintained schools independent of local authorities that continues to the present day. The Education (Schools) Act 1992 removed the power of local education authorities (LEAs) to inspect and provided for the establishment of state schools fully independent of local authority control through grant-maintained (GM) status. It also established the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) as the body responsible for carrying out a radically new national programme of school inspections.

Arguably, the level of governmental interest reached its apogee in 1997, when the then-leader of the Labour Party centred its electoral campaign around his stated

priority of ‘education, education, education’. The White Paper *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE 1997) described a role for LEAs in challenging schools to raise standards continuously, acting as a voice for parents, offering support services subject to schools’ choice, acting as a conduit for national priorities such as literacy and numeracy, and focusing support on underperforming schools, with an expectation that they would apply pressure if the schools did not improve (Woods & Cribb 2001, p. 2). Concomitant with this clarified role was an expectation that LEAs would be accountable through inspection for the effectiveness of their work with schools in raising standards.

The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 provided a new specification of duties for LEAs. The LEA Framework for Inspection established Ofsted’s remit to inspect LEA’s including the extent to which they operated in accordance with a Code of Practice. The Act also abolished grant maintained status, resulting in these schools having to decide between taking voluntary aided status and becoming foundation, or community schools, although the later academies programme revived the idea of state-funded independent schools.

The 2003 Green Paper, *Every Child Matters* (ECM) and the subsequent Children Act 2004 heralded a shift in government policy and legislation towards holistic approaches to raising educational achievement. The Act effectively abolished LEAs as established in 1902 and placed a duty on local authorities to secure five ECM ‘outcomes’ for young people through broad ranging partnerships, integrating the planning and commissioning of extended services, including such things as capital programmes for schools and the specialist schools initiative, through Children’s

Trusts, which reaffirmed the local authority role as one of leadership and quality assurance (Wilkin, Kinder & Schad 2004). Operating within the Local Strategic Partnership, Children's Trusts were to play a central role in setting local targets relating to children and young people. The Children's Plan set out a vision of a 21<sup>st</sup> century school with a brief both to achieve high standards and support the wider development of children and young people within the area. In order to do so, it was envisaged that schools would need to be part of Children's Trusts, so that they could exert real influence on the planning of local priorities and receive the support that their pupils needed. Whilst retaining their essential autonomy, the government believed that schools needed to operate as part of a local system of service providers (DCSF 2008, p. 15).

The Children Act 2004 led also to the setting up of integrated Children's Services within local authorities under a single Director of Children's Services (DCS), encompassing the functions and services carried out previously as the LEA. The DCS was expected to take a major leadership role locally, driving through cultural change and improving practice leading to measurable impact on outcomes for children and young people, particularly narrowing gaps in outcomes for different groups.

In 2005 the government published the White Paper *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All* (DfES 2005) which set out the intention to allow even greater autonomy for schools, creating independent state schools. The Education Act 2002 had already established the academies as state schools independent of local authority control. The Education and Inspection Act 2006 provided the facility for all schools to become, like academies, fully independent of local authority control as 'Trust' schools.



Hoskins (2012) traces the continuities and changes in national education policy over the last thirty years. She maintains that, irrespective of which party was in government, the imperative to 'raise standards' has remained constant and a centrepiece of the political response to the threat, taking Lowe's (2008) view, or challenge, taking the politician's stance, of global competitiveness. Each successive government has, accordingly, reinforced the presence of targets for pupils' performance in examinations and tests and the 'league tables' associated with them and the publication of results.

Such devices have not been simply an expression of public accountability, however, but a strategem for facilitating parental choice by providing information about the best-performing schools. The intended resulting competition between schools is supposed to drive up standards in all of them, or to lead to the removal of those performing badly, thereby either reducing inequalities, or at least offering the prospect of an acceptable level of affluence for all, depending on one's definition of social inclusion. In either case, it would seem that parents are regarded as autonomous customers of education services. Specific and particular policies in pursuit of these goals have included attempts to reconfigure the qualifications and curricular frameworks operating in secondary schools and tertiary education, attempting to emphasise vocational studies, and providing direct financial incentives to increase participation in formal education and training.

## **The Development of the Inspection Framework**

### **2000-2003**

Arguably, the single most-important instrument governing the work of inspectors is the inspection framework. The framework began as a distillation of the collective wisdom of HMI, compiled into a single document and published initially in 1992 as the *Handbook for school inspection*. It was intended to be the means by which HMIs transferred their skills, knowledge and understanding of how to inspect schools to the then newly recruited, 'privatised' inspector workforce that was to carry out the vast bulk of inspections under the Ofsted regime. The *Handbook* was, quite literally, a weighty tome, filling a lever-arch file and measuring several inches in thickness.

Since then, the inspection framework has gone through several iterations. At the start of the period that is the subject of this study, it was still governed principally by section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 (school inspection being known colloquially as section 10 inspections) and to all intents and purposes, the same *Handbook* as at its first publication. It was, nevertheless, re-published in 1999 (Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England, 1999), bearing the advice 'applies from January 2000' on the front cover and stating in the Introduction that it had been fully revised to provide for what was to be a 'differentiated' approach to inspections, in which the schools deemed to be most effective would be inspected less intensively than others (HMCI, 1999). Organised into four parts, the first two concern use of the evaluation schedule, the criteria for reaching judgements during the inspection, and instructions to inspectors on the conduct of the inspection and writing the report. Part three is dedicated to how it may be used by schools for self-evaluation (a fact

potentially of significance for readers interested in the concepts of performativity and panopticism) and part four contains several annexes providing additional guidance for inspectors about specific topics, including the use of ‘best value’ principles in schools’ financial management (DoE, 1997), the categories of concern into which schools might be placed by an inspection (special measures, serious weaknesses, underachieving), instructions on completing the record of inspection evidence, and notes about key national initiatives then current.

The *Handbook* aimed to ensure high-quality, fair and rigorous inspections, defining a good inspection as one in which the judgements reached were grounded in sufficient, varied, and reliable evidence. Clearly, each of those adjectives would bear considerable discussion to define in this context, but the *Handbook* does not venture definitions, except by inference from the rest of its specifications, guidance and requirements. Much importance was accorded to achieving effective (again undefined) and ‘professional’ working relationships; inspectors were required to be sensitive to the school’s concerns and circumstances, to communicate well with the school and provide feedback that was clear and comprehensible, such that the school’s staff were left feeling it had gained from the contact, which contributed in turn to the school’s improvement. It may be argued that such ideas resonate strongly through the tradition of HMIs’ work. The main findings of the inspection had to be identified and reported directly to the school, but the *Handbook* states unequivocally that the target audience for the inspection report was parents.

In the revised framework, inspections were to be of two types, Short and Full. Each type shared common features, reporting on the quality of the education provided, the

efficiency with which resources were used by the school, and the spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development of the pupils. The procedures pre- and post-inspection were common and both types could result in a school being placed in any of the three categories of concern. Full inspections were required to report on each subject of the curriculum. Short inspections, however, might omit parts of the evaluation schedule. The inspection teams visiting schools were to be led by inspectors registered as fit to lead teams (registered inspectors, or 'RgIs') and each team had to include at least one 'lay' inspector, defined as someone without paid experience of teaching in, or running a school. In keeping with the more-restricted requirements, Short inspections, intended as a sort of 'health check', were to last two to three days, rather than up to five, and involved teams of two to five inspectors, rather than fifteen to sixteen. There was less requirement for inspectors to provide oral feedback during a Short inspection and it was only during a Full inspection that inspectors were required to provide each teacher with a profile of the judgements on those of their lessons which had been observed.

Part 2 of the *Handbook* sets out in detail the standards expected for inspections. It stresses the need for inspectors to demonstrate 'professional qualities', defined as showing interest, courtesy, respect, sensitivity, objectivity, rigour, fairness, and teamwork, summed up in a Quality Guarantee. The *Handbook* contained a thorough briefing on how to provide feedback most effectively. There was a separate Code of Conduct for inspectors. The role of the registered inspector was defined with managerial as well as inspectoral functions. S/he was responsible for ensuring team meetings were structured, checking the work of team members and monitoring their conduct. S/he was required to deploy team members, giving each a specific brief,

although there was equally a strong expectation that all members of the team would contribute to every judgement to be reached, so that the judgements were fully corporate ones.

As the governmental agency responsible for school inspections, Ofsted issued specifications for each inspection to separate contracting organisations. Schools were to be notified of the inspection by the organisation contracted to administer it six to eight weeks before the registered inspector would make contact. The school was then expected to return the relevant pre-inspection forms within three weeks of the notification. Two to three weeks prior to the inspection, the registered inspector identified by the contractor as responsible for leading the inspection would visit the school, in order to plan the inspection in detail, in discussion with the headteacher. The *Handbook* included an agenda for the visit, varied according to which type of inspection was required. The agenda included a list of documents the inspector would need from the school, which would be taken away by the inspector. The registered inspector would also meet with parents, for which there was also an agenda and guidance in the *Handbook*.

The registered inspector was then required to prepare the inspection using specific documentation, in particular the Pre-inspection Context and School Indicator Report (PICSI) and other school data. S/he was required to check the school's self-evaluation, using forms completed by the school prior to the inspection, so that the inspection could test the school's perceptions of itself. The registered inspector would then form early 'hypotheses' to be the focus of a preliminary visit to the school. Following that visit, the registered inspector completed a Pre-Inspection Commentary

for the other members of the team, to include evidence about parents' views, depending upon the timing of a meeting s/he was required to hold with parents, and any issues identified by the previous inspection of the school.

The *Handbook* contains a clear expectation that the inspection team would meet to be briefed before the on-site stage. The preliminary work was the beginning of a staged process, which the *Handbook* described as an empirical enquiry, leading to what might be described as a hermeneutic conclusion. Stage One was concerned with what the school appeared to be like, to decide on what the inspection should focus. Stage Two, the actual on-site inspection, was concerned with what the school was actually like and why it was the way it was. Stage Three involved reaching a judgement about the school, how good it was and what were its strengths and weaknesses. The *Handbook* specifies each stage in detail.

Evidence collected by the inspectors was to be recorded on evidence forms and summarised progressively through the time on site in Inspection Notebooks. The team was required to spend at least 60% of its time observing lessons, or sampling pupils' work, a range for analysis being specified, with a 'sufficient', but unspecified amount of time allocated to each Key Stage of the National Curriculum. Inspectors could vary the amount of time spent in individual lessons, staying only as long as was necessary to reach 'valid and reliable judgements on standards, teaching and learning' (Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England, 1999, Part 2, para. 77), but had to ensure that some observations were of whole lessons. A limit was set on the frequency of lesson observations of individual teachers and no observation of less than thirty minutes was to result in a judgement, but every teacher had to be seen at

least once during Full inspections. Inspectors were required to be as unobtrusive as possible when in the classroom. It was intended that the emphasis would be on such ‘first-hand’ evidence of the work of the school, rather than on scrutinising documents; ‘Where a school is very effective, there is little need to trawl through all its procedural documents’ (Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Schools in England, 1999, Part 2, para. 95).

The process for completing the inspection was the final team meeting, at which discussion was to result in completion of the Record of Corporate Judgements. The *Handbook* specified that, in the event of inspection activity ending at the close of a school day, the team meeting must not be held that same day. The team meeting was to be followed by feedback to the school, so that the headteacher and senior staff were provided with an opportunity to clarify the findings and the evidence on which judgements were based, in order to provide the school with an early basis from which to start planning. The registered inspector was required to leave sufficient time after the meeting and before the feedback to reflect on the evidence and the corporate judgements, in order to ensure the quality of the feedback. S/he was expressly prohibited from holding the feedback on the last day of the inspection, or even the day after.

The final phase of the inspection was taken up with the preparation and publication of the report. The layout of the report was prescribed, but inspectors were allowed considerable latitude in terms of writing style, with only eight short bullet points to guide the style of writing. The *Handbook* contains some general requirements in respect of the report, for example indicating to inspectors the need to explain

convincingly any ostensible disparities between judgements, such as poor achievement by the pupils, but good teaching; however, such differences were not ruled out. Six weeks were allowed for the production of the report and the school was allowed five days to comment on the draft.

## **2003-2005**

The arrangements described above pertained for the first three years of the decade of interest. A new Framework (Ofsted, 2003) came into effect in September 2003, following on from the Education Act 2002, and was revised to take into account ‘significant developments’ in education and inspection policy. It placed greater emphasis than previously on promoting school self-evaluation and intended to draw upon school’s views of themselves more heavily during the inspection process. There was to be a stronger focus on evaluating the effectiveness of leadership and management, but ‘at all levels’ and not just the senior leadership.

The new framework attempted to recognise increasing diversification within school curricula, particularly the growth of ‘vocational’ subjects and courses in secondary schools. Equally, inspectors were required to look more carefully at how well schools met the needs of individual pupils, as opposed simply to the outcomes overall. They were required also to take account of the views of pupils and members of staff, as well as parents, and enjoined to have regard to the fact that schools were increasingly offering services to their communities beyond the school day. Explicitly, the findings were to provide a measure of accountability, as well as to assist improvement; this sense of dual purpose is not universal amongst national school inspection regimes (Dedering & Müller, 2011). It was intended that inspection would be complemented



by continuous internal evaluation by the school and the authors of the Framework noted ‘Many schools use the (inspection) *Evaluation Schedule* as the basis for their internal evaluation processes’ (Ofsted, 2003, p. 10), a statement that may suggest some ambivalence in the relationship between inspection for accountability and as a mechanism to promote self-evaluating and, subsequently, self-improving schools.

A revised set of principles governing inspections was included, reflecting the changes in emphasis. Acting in the interests of children and young people, though still with reports aimed at parents, inspection was to promote high-quality provision to meet the diverse range of needs and to promote equalities. The process was to be evaluative and diagnostic, testing both quality and compliance with regulations and providing a clear basis for school improvement. Inspection had to be carried out by ‘...those who have sufficient and relevant professional experience and training’ (Ofsted 2003, p. 3), but teams were still required to contain at least one lay inspector, although the level of involvement was now specified in terms of time (Ofsted 2003, p. 11). The lay inspector was to be a full and equal member of the team, but not allowed responsibility for subjects, courses, or curriculum areas; they could, however, be the lead inspector. For other members of the team, phase-specific qualifications were required and teams should also have at least one member responsible for each of special educational needs, the Foundation Stage, and English as an additional language, where relevant. Lead inspectors were now specifically responsible for the inspection of inclusion and race equality.

Clear and helpful verbal feedback and written reporting remained key skills.

Judgements were still to be corporate and based on systematic evaluation

requirements and criteria, but the Framework and *Evaluation schedule* were now separated into different documents. The reporting requirements were now specified under four headings; the educational standards achieved by the pupils, the quality of the education provided, the quality of leadership and management (including the efficient management of financial resources), the spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development of the pupils. The four areas were expanded into a nine aspects in the *Evaluation schedule* and the seven-point scale of summary judgements remained.

There were further developments in taking a ‘proportional’ approach to inspections. Not only was the size of the exercise to be reduced further, but also the ‘most-effective schools’ were to be inspected less frequently, the requirement being for inspection within six years of the end of the academic year in which the school had been inspected last. In addition, inspections were to be ‘tailored’ to individual schools. ‘Tailoring’, or differentiation, in inspections was to be achieved through consultation with the school to be inspected, taking account of its self-evaluation and reflecting its particular character, such as any specialist status gained through a national programme that had contributed to increased diversification of secondary school curricula.<sup>3</sup> In a response to criticism about the burden imposed by inspections, the revisions attempted to reduce further the demands for form filling and paperwork.

At this point, the lead inspector remained responsible for the composition of the inspection team. The inspection was to be planned and prepared around issues and themes identified beforehand (‘tailored’). The themes were then supposed to be

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For information about the specialist schools programme visit <http://www.education.gov.uk/vocabularies/educationtermsandtags/110>.

reflected in the composition of the team. For the most part, lead inspectors continued to be those registered for that purpose, contracted for the work by independent organisations. The revised Framework made a point of stating, however, that HMIs ‘...also inspect some schools’ and could be sent to do so by the chief inspector. Schools were to be notified of the inspection six to ten weeks in advance.

A school was to be contacted as soon as possible after the notification of the inspection ‘...to begin the process of agreeing dates for the inspection. (Ofsted 2003, p. 16). It was the lead inspector’s role still to ensure that the school, its staff and the governing body were fully briefed on the themes and issues for the inspection and the plan for the inspection ‘agreed’, including through a preliminary visit to the school of not less than one day’s duration and involving discussion with the headteacher, staff, governors, and some pupils, but further contact was also envisaged. The governing body was still expected to arrange for the lead inspector to meet with parents. In addition, questionnaires were offered to the school for circulation to parents and to pupils. Parents were also able to request to speak with the lead inspector during the inspection, such requests to be accommodated ‘...as far as it is practicable’ (Ofsted 2003), p. 18).

As before, preparation was to be carried out using the forms completed by the school, including a self-evaluation, and data in the form of what was now called the Performance and Assessment report (PANDA) and other reports. The lead inspector prepared a pre-inspection commentary, containing ‘hypotheses’ that led to the inspection themes. The commentary was to be sent to and discussed with the headteacher and, ‘if practical’, the chair of governors. All of the briefings, plans, and

instructions prepared by the lead inspector contributed to the evidence base for the inspection; this was a view of inspection clearly not restricted to the on-site activity. Team members were expected to be well prepared.

Once on site, the focus remained on gathering sufficient, reliable 'first-hand evidence'. Some of the detailed specification concerning approaches to lesson observations disappeared. Under the new arrangements 'Inspectors will not always observe complete lessons...However, inspectors should spend sufficient time in any single lesson to make a secure judgement of the teaching seen.' (Ofsted 2003, p. 21) Now, however, there was a requirement to offer feedback after every observation. The inspection process was intended to be dynamic, potentially refocusing each day through regular team meetings as themes were tested and emerging findings identified. As before, inspectors recorded evidence on evidence forms and compiled an inspection record, with the lead inspector responsible for the record of corporate judgements.

The headteacher was to be provided with brief, interim feedback by the lead inspector before leaving the school, especially if the school was to be placed in a category of concern, though there was an option for the team not to have decided finally, suggesting that further team discussions might take place, but not requiring this explicitly as before. A full debriefing was to follow, 'within a reasonable time, but allowing for proper preparation by the lead inspector'. The debriefing had to be 'a full and professional discussion of the findings', involving the headteacher and such others from the staff as the headteacher wished, in which the school was able to clarify matters and to understand what had to be done to improve. A separate

feedback was to be offered to the governing body, at which the governors were able to agree with the lead inspector the characteristics of the school that would be identified in the report.

Finally came the report, to a prescribed format, but not prescribed wording. It had, however, to be readable for the governing body, parents, and the pupils (no mean feat), suggesting a shift away from parents as the sole, identified target audience. The school had five days still to respond to the draft report, checking its factual accuracy, but also commenting on it. The lead inspector was charged with making any changes in light of the school's response, but, in keeping with the corporate nature of the inspection judgments, changes had to be agreed with the rest of the team. The report would be completed in six weeks and the governing body was required to send a copy to parents within ten days of receiving it.

### **2005-2009 'Every Child Matters'**

The first five years of the decade of interest to this study were relatively stable, changes to the inspection framework being largely matters of detail rather than substance; indeed, the Framework at the beginning of 2005 would have been recognisable in very large part to inspectors familiar with Ofsted's regime since its inception more than a decade before. The first significant change of substance came in 2005, as a result of the Education Act passed that year. 'Section 10' inspections were no more, the inspection of schools being governed henceforth by section 5 of the 2005 Act.

Borrowing from a theme rehearsed in the United States, the title of the new Framework (Ofsted, 2005) was lifted directly from the eponymous programme outlined in the Children Act 2004, which became something of a mantra for education policy for the next half decade, Every Child Matters (ECM), and indicated an expansion and enhancement of some of the themes that emerged in the 2002 Framework around equalities, social diversity, and interest in the progress of different groups of young people, but introduced aspects of work, new foci of attention, and requirements on school inspectors that constituted a significant change.

The new inspection Framework introduced the intention to have a common inspection schedule for schools, colleges and other post-16 providers. It specified provision for dealing with 'inadequate' providers and an intention to align school inspections with inspections of local authority children's services, under powers contained in the Children Act 2004, for a much-more broad-based evaluation of the education system.

Paradoxically, the extended scope of the new inspection regime was accompanied by a major reduction in the size of school inspections themselves. The timescale of the on-site inspection was reduced to just two days. The notice period was reduced to between two and five days. Inspection teams were much smaller and many more were to be led by HMIs, in response to growing disquiet about the quality of inspections; the dual pressure of the expanded scope of the inspection regime and the need to deploy HMIs more towards leading inspections and not simply 'quality assuring' the work of independent teams initiated a recruitment drive and subsequent increase in the size of HMI for the first time since Ofsted was formed. HMIs were now also to be involved in 'signing off' every school inspection report. Three years was to be the

usual period between inspections of schools. The emphasis on the role of and connection with school self-evaluation was strengthened and a new official form, the Self-evaluation Form (SEF), replaced the previous multiple documents to assist with this, although, contrary to common perception, there was never any statutory requirement for schools to complete the form.

The PANDA report remained a key element of the inspectors' toolkit. A mandatory questionnaire for parents became a central piece of inspection evidence, but the previously required parents' meeting was abandoned, although individuals could still request to speak with an inspector. The requirement to focus on 'first-hand' evidence remained, with a view as before to identifying, though perhaps more explicitly, what schools needed to do to improve. Accordingly, there was a heightened expectation for oral feedback to any teacher whose work was observed. New-style inspection reports were written to a prescribed format, although it continued to be the case that the wording was, for the most part, not prescribed and published within a massively reduced three-week timescale.

A new, four-point grading scale replaced the old seven grades, with the 'Inadequate' grade 4 resulting automatically in a school being placed in either 'special measures', or given a new category, a 'notice to improve', if applied to the school's Overall Effectiveness. The list of things that inspectors were now obliged to judge contained both familiar and new elements and some reconfiguration of, or enhanced emphasis to previous elements, including: achievement and standards (performance in examinations and tests; the acquisition of workplace skills; the development of skills in contributing to social and economic wellbeing; the pupils' emotional development;

attendance; the adoption by pupils of safe practices and healthy lifestyles; spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development (SMSC); and the pupils' contribution to the community.

Evaluation of the quality of provision at a school was to include: an investigation of whether teaching promoted learning; the use of assessment; the ways schools identified and made provision for additional learning needs; the involvement of parents and carers (the introduction of the latter term is not incidental); the extent to which the curriculum and lessons were matched to the pupils' needs and aspirations, and were responsive to local circumstances; how well employers' needs were met; the contribution of any enrichment activities; the pupils' welfare and safeguarding arrangements; the quality of information, advice and guidance (IAG) for pupils. Lastly, in evaluating the effectiveness of leadership and management, inspectors were required to obtain evidence of: the accuracy of self-assessment and school's quality assurance processes; the extent to which leaders and managers directed improvement at the school; how well equal opportunities were promoted and discrimination tackled; staffing arrangements; resources; efficiency and value for money; partnerships and other links; the impact of governance. It is a lot to get through in two days. What the Framework does not specify are the other arrangements for preparation and report writing that accompanied the changes and which included equally dramatic reductions in time, from weeks to days.

The Framework was re-issued in September 2007, with several changes following on from the Education and Inspections Act 2006. Most of the changes were matters of detail. A slight change of wording acknowledged the fact that HMCI was now 'she'.



Similar changes reflected the changed nomenclature of government departments. In another slight change of wording, the notification period for inspections was now ‘...normally...at least two clear working days before’, (Ofsted, 2007 p. 12) so that the lead inspector could discuss the inspection plan and team deployment with the school. In a move that can be described as seeking to increase the transparency of the inspection process, lead inspectors had now to make clear to schools the arrangements for the quality assurance of inspections and inspection reports.

The PANDA was replaced by a new electronic data compilation known as RAISEOnline (Reporting and Analysis for Improvement through school Self-Evaluation). The compilation was now to be the principal source for lead inspectors’ pre-inspection preparation and briefing papers. The revised Framework continued to try to emphasise Ofsted’s efforts to reduce the demand on schools for documentation. A previous requirement for schools to contact ‘significant partners’ regarding the inspection and to ask those partners to make themselves available to the inspectors was removed. Feedback on lesson observations continued to be regarded as important, but a statement that there was no requirement on inspectors to observe full lessons indicates perhaps a subtle change in emphasis with important connotations for inspectors’ practice.

More significantly, in the wake of political responses to the July 2005 terrorist attacks in London, the revised Framework presaged a new duty to report upon schools’ contributions to promoting ‘community cohesion’; the duty upon schools was to take effect from September 2008, but the inspection of school’s preparedness was to begin the year before. There was now also a duty to inspect and to report upon schools’

work in promoting equalities. Following on also from the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, revisions to the inspection Framework enhanced inspectors' duties to inspect schools' practice in safeguarding children and young people. The Children Act 1989 had set out a comprehensive set of duties, which were updated in the 2004 Act of the same name. The 2004 Act represented a response to the outcomes of the 2003 Victoria Climbié Inquiry, a tragic case that brought about a heightened level of national concern for the safety and welfare of children. From 2007, inspectors were required to carry out specific checks on schools' policies for safeguarding and the extent to which they satisfied the new level of demands.

Some flexibility in what the inspectors covered was removed. In reporting on the Quality of Provision at the school, all parts of the Framework were now to be covered; previous references to 'where appropriate' were removed. Also removed were references to meeting the needs of employers. The revised Framework introduced an explicit reference to schools' use of 'challenging targets' in the section on Leadership and Management.

In a break with past practice, Ofsted re-issued the Framework part-way through an academic year, in April 2008. There were few and relatively minor changes (a reference to the appointment of newly qualified teachers (NQTs) in special measures schools was removed, reference to the confidentiality of statements made to inspectors was removed, and a line was inserted into the Code of Conduct for inspectors stating that providers should be courteous and helpful to inspectors), but this action inaugurated a considerable increase in Ofsted's revision and re-issuing of the Framework. A further edition was published in September 2008, with an addition

to the Leadership and management section acknowledging that schools' duties to contribute to community cohesion were now statutory. In the February 2009 edition, a slight change in wording in the Leadership and Management section changed the judgement inspectors were required to make from how well the school promoted equality of opportunity and tackled discrimination, to how well discrimination was tackled.

### **2009-10**

After a few years of relatively small changes to each iteration of the Framework, the July 2009 version was a substantially different document. Gone was the reference in the title to Every Child Matters. The title was now simply *The framework for inspecting schools* (Ofsted, 2009). There was no longer a requirement to inspect schools' contributions to community cohesion.

The various inspection frameworks, undoubtedly, offer great potential by themselves for many interesting studies. It is not the frameworks per se that are of interest here, however, but their impact on the work of HMI.

### **The Evaluation Schedule**

#### **2000-2003**

If the inspection Framework may be said to set the ground rules for inspectors' work, it is arguably the *Evaluation schedule* that conditions it. At the beginning of the period of interest for this study, the *Evaluation schedule*, the set of criteria used by inspectors to form their judgements, was incorporated into the inspection *Handbook*

(HMCI, 1999). In that 1999 publication, the *Evaluation schedule* was set out in eight sections or aspects under five headings:

- Context and overview – what sort of school is it (aspect 1)?
- Outcomes – how high are standards in terms of the school’s results and the pupils’ achievements, attitudes, values and personal development (aspect 2)?
- Quality of Provision – how well are the pupils taught (aspect 3)? How good are the curriculum and other opportunities offered (aspect 4)? How well does the school care for the pupils (aspect 5)? How well does the school work with parents (aspect 6)?
- Efficiency and effectiveness of management – how well is the school led and managed (aspect 7)?
- Issues for the school – what should it do to improve (aspect 8)?

The *Handbook* then expands each section and specifies what the inspectors must report on. The inspectors are provided with guidance on using the judgement criteria, how the criteria should be interpreted and how evidence should be tested against them. The criteria were regarded specifically as a specification of ‘good practice’. Judgements were to be described in terms of a seven-point scale,<sup>4</sup> but descriptors were provided for ‘very good or excellent’ and ‘satisfactory or better’ only. The question of whether the school required special measures, had serious weaknesses, or was underachieving had to be considered by the inspection team discretely from the grading judgements.

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<sup>4</sup> The grades were; 1 = excellent, 2 = very good, 3 = good, 4 = satisfactory, 5 = unsatisfactory, 6 = poor, 7 = very poor.

The sections on each aspect are of unequal length, though there is no indication that that indicated any sort of priority; unsurprisingly, the section on how well the pupils were taught is particularly long. Inspectors were referred also to separate guidance documents for judging the standards and quality of teaching in different subjects and courses. Although the grade descriptors lacked detail, the authors of the *Handbook* tried to guide inspectors in the exercise of judgement. For example, a school's context was regarded as relevant to deciding what judgement should be reached.

### **2003-2005**

In 2003, the *Evaluation schedule* was published in a separate document from the inspection Framework, called the *Handbook for inspecting secondary schools* (Ofsted, 2003, there were other publications aimed at primary and special schools, in which the guidance on using the *schedule* was adapted) and some two hundred pages in length and providing substantial guidance on what inspectors should look for, along with paragraph-length descriptors for five of the seven grades to be awarded in respect of each of the judgements that inspectors were required to make. Only for grades 1 and 7 were there the bare sentences reserved previously for the few descriptors provided; a general definition for grade 1, 'excellent', was given as 'worth disseminating beyond school, whilst grade 7, 'very poor', meant 'immediate radical change needed' (Ofsted 2003, p. 21).

It seems clear from reading the document that it represents a refinement of HMIs' collective wisdom in the light of the first decade of Ofsted's governance of the inspection process. Detail is given about the intended practice of inspection that was previously mixed in with the description of the Framework. Interestingly, perhaps, it

begins with a quotation from Sheila Browne, a former Senior Chief Inspector prior to Ofsted, defining the essence of inspection (Ofsted 2003, p. 2). Seven bullet points define a 'good' inspection, augmented by six more setting out broad principles for inspectors' behaviour, constituting a code of conduct. There is perhaps little here that is new, the quotation from Sheila Browne doubtless intended to provide a sense of continuity with the past, but the level of detail now in the grade descriptors marks a shift in emphasis from the professional judgement of the inspectors as the product largely of their individual experience, moderated through private discussions leading to collective decisions, to a more-overt set of pre-established and published criteria to which they must now have regard and in reference to which their decisions must be justified, even if the discussions remained private. It was potentially a process of clarification in the interests of transparency, a de-mystification, so that those whose work was being judged and the general public for whom the work was intended might understand more readily what lay behind the judgements of the inspectors; it had the potential simultaneously to constrain the work of the inspectors by delineating parameters for their decisions and to require of them new ways of working and of thinking. The document gives no suggestion, however, that such changes were envisaged, nor of any intention for the process of inspection to be substantially different from previously.

The *Handbook* provides little guidance on how to approach using the *Evaluation schedule*. It hints that the descriptors are illustrative (Ofsted 2003, p. 21), prompts to help inspectors to find answers to the same questions that they had been asking since the Framework was first set out and to help them to determine where to 'pitch' their judgements. At the same time, in a clear indication that the 'illustrations' were not

conceived as absolutes, however generic or standardised they appear, because inspection teams ‘...must take into account the characteristics of the school, the context in which the school works and any particular status or features it has. Inspectors should be aware of the school’s performance relative to similar schools, and what the best schools in such a group can achieve. These findings must be based on a careful weighing of all the evidence gathered about the school’ (Ofsted 2003, p. 23). A list on page 29 acknowledges the increased diversity in the types of secondary school, along with an array of national initiatives aimed at raising achievement and the associated ‘considerable freedoms and flexibilities’ that schools enjoyed in relation to the curriculum and it demanded of inspectors accordingly that ‘There is no place for imposing preconceived ideas of what the curriculum should be like’ (Ofsted 2003, p. 31). The *Handbook* seems thus to hark back to long-established traditions in the work of HMI, to be situated very much in its time, responding to the experience of relatively new institutional arrangements and the exigencies of then-current government policy, and, given the full benefits awarded by a further decade of research scrutiny and not a little hindsight, arguably to represent an example of several totalising hypotheses concerning the development of professionalism, performativity, and panopticism.

### **2005-2009**

The change from ‘section 10’ to ‘section 5’ inspections required a further re-thinking of the guidance to be given to inspectors and of the *Evaluation schedule*. The July 2005 publication *Using the evaluation schedule Guidance for inspectors of schools* (Ofsted 2005) was a radically slimmed down document in comparison with its predecessors, as, perhaps, befitted the new, slimmed-down inspection process. It was

produced to accompany the changes made to the inspection Framework introduced for September 2005 and stressed that inspectors would continue to use their professional judgement in evaluating the things that they observed and that the grade descriptors in the *Evaluation schedule* were intended to help them do so.

As the document itself was so much slimmer, so also was the range of judgements that the inspectors were required to make. The number of grades was reduced from seven to four. The disappearance of grades five, six, and seven meant that inspectors now had only one grade for inadequate provision. The remaining three equated broadly to previous grades, although there was no longer a grade identified as ‘Very good’, leaving inspectors to choose between ‘Good’ and ‘Outstanding’.

The descriptors were themselves briefer. For ‘Outstanding’ and ‘Satisfactory’, they were typically a single sentence. The other two were short paragraphs, highlighting a few key features of the relevant aspect to be judged. The new schedule introduced a separate set of descriptors for judgements on provision for the Foundation Stage and for school sixth forms.

Another version of the new *Evaluation schedule* was published little more than one academic year later, in December 2006. The evaluation of the standards reached by the pupils was now combined with the pupils’ achievement and a single judgement, Achievement and Standards. The definition of a school’s overall effectiveness was expanded to incorporate an assessment of how ‘inclusive’ it was. Boarding provision was now identified as requiring a distinct judgement, for which a separate set of grade descriptors was provided. A new and separate judgement on a school’s Capacity to



Improve was also introduced, again with its own set of descriptors. There was now a specific injunction to inspectors not to arrive at the Overall Effectiveness judgement through an arithmetical calculation using the other grades awarded (suggesting that experience indicated that some had done so). Under the section on the pupils Personal Development and Wellbeing, there was also a new injunction to remind inspectors that this section was concerned with pupil outcomes, rather than provision made by the school, judging here how well the pupils performed, just as with the standards that they achieved academically (suggesting that experience indicated that inspectors were concentrating on what schools did, rather than how it affected the pupils).

Whilst there was a slight difference in the presentation of the grade descriptors, their content remained largely as before, though with some small changes. For the judgement on Achievement and Standards, the descriptors now referred to a particular piece of data, the contextual value added (CVA) score. There was a significant expansion of the range of things to be evaluated with regard to the pupils Personal Development and Wellbeing, in an effort to make clear what counted as suitable outcomes. The grade descriptors changed little, however, although the descriptor for inadequate Personal Development now made specific reference to exclusions and any isolation or lack of integration by any particular group of pupils.

When evaluating the Quality of Provision at a school, the range of factors considered now referred specifically to how Black and minority ethnic groups were affected and also to pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (the choice of terminology is interesting and shifts in a number of instances over the time period of this study; the reference to learning difficulties and/or disabilities was intended to indicate a broader

conception of the pupils concerned than the expression special educational needs.) Inspectors were now required to evaluate all aspects listed under the heading of the Curriculum and Other Activities and the list was expanded to identify the contribution to the pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development.

The section outlining the things to be evaluated in relation to the Care, Guidance and Support for pupils was re-written. The legal requirements on schools in respect of safeguarding pupils were now referred to explicitly. A new requirement was placed on inspectors to evaluate how well a school met the needs of all learners, specifically Black and minority ethnic pupils, young carers, children in public care ('looked-after children') and, particularly, to identify where any groups were over-represented in exclusions figures. The greater specificity was accompanied by a subtle change in the wording of the grade descriptors; to be judged Outstanding, the school had now to be at least good in all respects and not just nearly all (a small example of what Ofsted began to refer to regularly as 'raising the bar'). There was a major expansion of the descriptor for the 'Good' grade, emphasising the safeguarding requirements, referring to different groups of pupils and the identification by schools of any pupils deemed to be 'at risk' (the meaning of which appears to be taken as readily understood). The grade for 'Inadequate' was also expanded to state that ineffective promotion of the pupils' Personal Development was likely to indicate inadequate care, guidance and support.

The pattern of change continued into the section on Leadership and Management. There was now a reference to the school's use of 'challenging targets'. A new bullet point made it clear that the judgement was now concerned with leadership and

management ‘at all levels’. Although the subject of a separate judgement with its own grade descriptors, it was made clear in this section that a school’s capacity to improve was ‘shown in its track record of improvement since the last inspection’. (Ofsted 2006, p. 15) There was an expansion of the requirement to promote equal opportunities and tackle discrimination, so that a school’s compliance with statutory requirements for dealing with racist incidents was to be checked. Governance had now to be evaluated, not ‘as appropriate’, which was the case previously. In a further attempt to ‘raise the bar’, the descriptor for Outstanding now required leadership and management also to be good in all respects, not nearly all. In reaching a view on a school’s value for money, inspectors were told now that, if the Overall Effectiveness judgement was judged inadequate, then it was likely that the school was providing unsatisfactory value for money. A couple of things are of particular interest here; the assertion is a small illustration of how inspectors were expected to link together judgements at different points in the inspection Framework (which stands, in some ways, in contradistinction from the injunction earlier in the *Evaluation schedule* not to calculate the Overall Effectiveness judgement arithmetically) and use of the word ‘likely’, which appears to render the suggested connection less secure.

The next iteration of the *Evaluation schedule* appeared less than a year later, in September 2007. The idea of ‘limiting judgements’, by which the achievement of certain grades, for example for the Overall Effectiveness judgement, depended upon the grade awarded for particular other judgements, was now firmly embedded. For example, for a school to be judged ‘Good’ overall, the progress made by the pupils had to be judged similarly to be good (though, whilst the progress of the pupils might be better than good, that did not mean automatically that the school was better than

good). At the same time, the grade descriptors for Achievement and Standards were changed; reference to the CVA score was replaced to press inspectors to consider a wider range of data and to connect them with lesson observations and other evidence of the pupils' current progress.

Further changes attempted to make the requirements for the pupils' Personal Development even more specific. Added in was a requirement to evaluate the extent to which pupils embraced the (albeit unspecified) shared values of the (equally unspecified) community and contributed to the community's cohesiveness. There was a considerable expansion of the section identifying the things to be taken into account when evaluating the pupils' behaviour, including direct reference to a school's records of racist incidents, the pupils' treatment of school facilities, and parents' views of pupils' behaviour, gathered now using a questionnaire issued specifically for the inspection. The expanded range of factors was accompanied by a new set of dedicated grade descriptors for behaviour. There was additional guidance to inspectors to consider the extent to which lessons were disrupted by 'weaknesses in behaviour so that learning is less than it should be', in which case behaviour was to be judged inadequate. (Ofsted 2007, p. 15) A judgement that behaviour was Inadequate would in turn make the judgement on the pupils' Personal Development and Wellbeing 'Inadequate'. At the same time, the descriptor for 'Satisfactory' Quality of Teaching was altered to include a requirement that teaching promotes positive behaviour.

There was a further expansion also in the range of outcomes to be considered when judging Care, Guidance and Support. Inspectors were now to consider the impact of

actions taken by schools to reduce absence. A judgement that attendance was ‘Low’, leading to a grade 4 (the lowest grade), ‘may well affect’ the overall grades for both Personal Development and Wellbeing and Care, Guidance and Support. The section acquired a new bullet point about marking and assessment. There were other minor changes to the wording of the grade descriptors.

Once again, there were amendments to the requirements relating to Leadership and Management. There was a new concern for ensuring the quality of off-site provision made by a school. There were now reference to the statutory targets schools were obliged to set, the systems that they used for setting them, and a new, separate set of grade descriptors concerned with such targets. At the same time, references to the smooth day-to-day running of the school were removed, perhaps because this was no longer considered important, or perhaps it was considered something of a ‘red herring’.

Another publication of the *Evaluation schedule* in April 2008 contained very few, if any changes, but September 2008 brought a new iteration. The Foundation Stage of Education had now become the Early Years Foundation Stage and the grade descriptors for it were relocated to a separate document.

A new bullet point in the section on Achievement and Standards required inspectors now to explain the relationship between the judgements for standards and progress and to link this also with the judgement under Leadership and Management about the use of targets. The *schedule* referred now to ‘the attainment gap’ and a change in the

wording of the grade descriptors made clear that, to achieve ‘Good’, there must be no ‘marked’ differences between the achievement of different groups of pupils.

In the section on Leadership and Management, inspectors now had to judge how well schools evaluated the impact of their policies for promoting equalities and ensured equal opportunities for all pupils to participate in and benefit from all provision at the school. There was now also a separate requirement to evaluate how well schools contributed to community cohesion and a distinct set of grade descriptors for the purpose. A change in the wording of the descriptor for ‘Good’ attempted to tighten the judgement on a school’s use of targets by stating that there must be clear evidence from statutory assessments and examinations that there was an established pattern of standards rising. The descriptor for ‘Inadequate’ changed also to include reference to CVA scores for English and mathematics that were statistically significantly negative and specific elements of the RAISEOnline data set, which provided the main source of data for inspectors, such as the statistical significance indicators for pupil progress measures in respect of English and mathematics, potentially linking in inspectors’ minds the idea of significant with statistical significance. In addition, even if Standards were judged to be average (and inspectors were accustomed to thinking somewhat vaguely in terms of ‘broadly’ average as few data were exactly so), or better, a lack of improvement or a pattern of decline in pupil progress measures meant that Leadership and Management were ‘likely’ to be inadequate.

Changes in the next iteration of the *Evaluation schedule* in February 2009 were less extensive, but no less significant. The descriptor for the Inadequate grade for a school’s Overall Effectiveness stated now that if the Quality of Provision was judged

to be inadequate, then the school was 'likely' to be so. There was an expansion of the things inspectors had to consider when judging pupils' attendance to refer to more data, specifically levels of persistent absence (defined as a particular percentage) and performance in relation attendance targets set by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), or by the school's local authority. All of the grade descriptors for the judgment on the school's promotion of community cohesion were re-written to make more explicit the particular requirements set out in the DCSF policy; a school's practice was deemed inadequate if it had not completed any of three particular actions. The parallel judgement on the school's promotion of equal opportunities became a limiting grade for the judgement on community cohesion. The February iteration of the *Evaluation schedule* was re-issued unchanged in April 2009.

### **2009-2010**

July 2009 brought a radically altered *Evaluation schedule*. Whilst the four-point grading scale remained, much was re-written and the number of judgements for which a grade was now required increased from ten to twenty-seven, three of which were summative, headline judgements; the overall effectiveness of the school, the outcomes for pupils, and the school's capacity to sustain improvement (the interjection of the word 'sustained' was new). There was no longer a single, overarching judgement on the effectiveness of leadership and management, but a list of individual judgements under that heading and a new set of descriptors specifically for the judgement about schools' arrangements for safeguarding children.

For a school's overall effectiveness to be Outstanding (grade 1), at least one of the other summative judgements had to be Outstanding and the others at least Good. In

addition and drawing from individual judgements demanded elsewhere within the *schedule*, a school's promotion of equal opportunities had to be judged at least Good also. To achieve a judgement of Outstanding for the pupil outcomes, the *schedule* specified that the pupils' achievement had to be at least Good (grade 2), with at least four of the other 'prime' judgements that led to the overall judgement on pupil outcomes judged to be Outstanding (grade 1). If the pupils' achievement was judged to be Outstanding, however, then only one other Outstanding judgement was required to make the overall grade Outstanding, as long as none of the others was less than Good. In a similar attempt to reduce the possibility of variations in the ways that inspectors reached their judgements, for pupil outcomes to be judged Good, achievement had to be good also, along with behaviour, safety, and at least one other 'prime' judgement. If any one of the 'prime' judgements was Inadequate' (grade 4), then pupil outcomes had to be Inadequate overall. A school's overall effectiveness was 'likely' to be judged Inadequate if any of the judgements on pupil outcomes overall, the capacity to sustain improvement, the promotion of equal opportunities, safeguarding, or any aspect of provision (such as the quality of teaching, or care, guidance, and support) was judged to be Inadequate.

There was still an expectation that the descriptors would be interpreted in the context of the particular school, though quite what that was supposed to mean in practice was not made clear. In an attempt to standardise judgements further and to deal with demands for greater consistency in the application of the descriptors, the *Evaluation schedule* now included a guide to proportions, so that inspectors and everyone else could be clear what it meant when reports stated 'few', 'some', or 'most'.



One of the new judgements to be introduced was on outcomes for pupils overall, consequent upon seven 'prime' sub-judgements, which '...taken together, determine the summative judgement.' (Ofsted 2009, p. 8) The list of outcomes to be judged was derived from the five proposed in the government's Every Child Matters strategy, along with behaviour and the spiritual, social, moral, and cultural development of the pupils. The extent to which such things constituted 'outcomes' is not a matter for this study.

The judgement on the pupils' achievement was now to be reached after separate consideration and grading of the pupils' attainment and 'learning and progress'. The pupils' attainment was to be judged on the test and examinations results for the oldest compulsory aged year group at the school compared with the national average and taking account of variations between different groups of pupils and trends 'over time', defined as the preceding three years-worth of data. Some modification was allowed for special schools and pupils whose cognitive abilities rendered the national average an unlikely outcome. The *schedule* specified the data inspectors had to consider.

A new injunction to inspectors demanded that the lowest grade be awarded if attainment was statistically significantly negative for any key subject (English, mathematics, science), or for any 'sizeable' group over the three-year period. The judgement on learning and progress took into account a range of evidence, such as scrutiny of the pupils' work and observations in lessons, but the document placed the published value-added data, including both the contextual value-added and non-contextualised value-added scores, at the top of the list. Separate judgements were required for the learning and progress of all pupils and of those with special

educational needs, though using the same grade descriptors for both. The 'prime' overall judgement on achievement had to take account of the three sub-judgements, but no algorithm was specified in the schedule.

This was the final iteration of the *Evaluation schedule* within the period of time that delineates the focus of this study. The general election of 2010 brought a change of government and there have been further changes both to the inspection Framework and the *Evaluation schedule*; subjects for future studies, perhaps.

## **Chapter 5 The Findings - Becoming an HMI**

In this and the two chapters that follow, the contributions of the interviewees are reported chronologically, from the earliest joiner to the latest. Simplistic though that approach is, the intention was to see if changes in the nature of the work of the HMIs emerged over time. The content of these chapters represents the outcome of the analysis of the interview transcripts, collected under three broad headings, linked with the main research questions. The sub-sections in each chapter are the result of further analysis of the transcripts, which identified the themes. This chapter looks at the HMIs' earliest experiences of the role, their reasons for joining, their induction into it, and the operating conditions at that time.

### **Joining – HMI as specialist expert**

All of the HMI were able to explain their reasons for choosing to take the role. For those with a schools background, at least up until the middle of the decade, a subject specialism was very important, though not universally so, along with a sense that the role was closely associated with expertise and offered opportunities to pursue personal interest at, in some sense, a higher level and, accordingly, with greater influence. The significance of subject expertise appears to reduce around the middle of the decade, when other factors, such as actual experience of inspection, appear to have become required more; that is unsurprising, for as shall be seen, it reflected an

important change in the nature of inspections and the pattern of what HMIs were actually required to do.

For the HMIs interviewed for this research, their specialisms, which prompted initial interest in the office, proved only to be a starting point. Ending up with a role rather broader than and often distinct from their specialist backgrounds was a relatively common experience. Interviewee 7, who joined HMI in 1987, applied to be a subject inspector, but ended up working in a range of contexts and institutions outside his/her background experience; however, the new experience was evidently stimulating (Transcript 7, 135-141). Interviewee 1, an HMI from 1989, stated ‘...in those days, you joined as a subject specialist, HMI was predominantly a subject-specialist organisation’ (Transcript 1, 70-5). For that HMI, the subject specialism was the primary reason for joining, but the actual experience involved operating in a wide range of contexts (Transcript 1, 93).

For some, that experience was a cause for concern, perhaps because it stood in contradistinction from their sense of the professional nature of the office. For example, Interviewee 1 described, during the induction year, ‘...one day, I’d be working with a colleague in the secure estate, the next day I’d be working with (name) on a secondary inspection looking at...the in-service training nationally for headteachers ...your mentor’s job was to put you with all the people they knew in all of the areas that HMI inspected in and it didn’t matter that, Wednesday, you’d be in Carlisle..., Thursday, you’d be in Bristol’ (Transcript 1, 465-72).

Subject expertise, or particular background experience in an educational phase were not always key factors in the HMIs' decisions to apply for the role. Joining in 1990, Interviewee 9 did so at a moment when a career decision had to be taken and the HMI described the choice to be made in terms of the relative merits of two alternatives, as they appeared at that time (Transcript 9, 9-54).

By the mid 1990s, inductees were experiencing some disorientation when the actual nature of the role became apparent to them. Interviewee 2, who joined in 1997, recalled '...it shows how naïve one can be, I suppose, because I responded to an advert that said HMI (for a subject), expecting that when I went to be HMI, I would be doing (the subject)...and, at the induction sessions, I was informed that I was going to be part of the post-compulsory division...It did youth work...It did the inspection of the juvenile estate, but not what I was expecting...' (Transcript 2, 127-136). Nevertheless, it did not detract ultimately from the HMI's positive experience of the office (Transcript 2, 136).

Matters had not changed significantly by 2001. 'I applied to be a (subject) specialist...When I arrived, I found that I was doing an immensely wide variety of things' (Transcript 3, 104-128). Several of those things were beyond the HMI's prior experience. The same interviewee saw that disjuncture as somehow inherent in the role of HMI; '...it was as if, once you had been...anointed by whoever it was...the Queen's stamp on you<sup>5</sup>, you were suddenly capable of doing anything and everything'

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<sup>5</sup> A reference to the longstanding convention that HMIs were appointed by the Privy Council.

(Transcript 3, 128-134). The HMI indicated that it was several months after joining before s/he repeated an experience (Transcript 3, lines 141-7).

Interviewee 5 joined in 2002 and, like others, came with a subject-based background that was significant in his/her appointment (Transcript 5, 73). It was the subject specialism that led in this instance to direct contact from a serving HMI, who was aware of Interviewee 5's reputation as a subject specialist and also of work s/he had undertaken already alongside HMIs (Transcript 5, 149-164). Interviewee 5 may also be representative of a shift that was beginning to take place in the recruitment of HMIs, in which prior experience of inspecting schools became a more-significant factor (Transcript 5, 141), something which longer-standing HMIs perceived as increasingly a required criterion for appointment in the decade to 2010 .

By the middle of the decade, prior experience of inspecting was certainly more common and, for one HMI who joined in 2004, a primary stimulus for applying (Transcript 8, 90). Of the schools HMIs interviewed, this was the first and only one for whom a curriculum subject was neither a stimulus for joining HMI, nor a relevant recruitment criterion. Interviewee 8 had a background in headship, but with experience also as a local authority education adviser, It was during that part of his/her career that s/he was caught up in the changed inspection regime that accompanied the foundation of Ofsted and, like many local authority advisers, trained to become one of a new type of non-HMI school inspector (Transcript 8, 8-13). It was participation in that process that led directly to interest in and, ultimately, successful application to join HMI (Transcript 8, 64-77).

As with those appointed earlier, Interviewee 8 expected, on the basis of his/her background, to be working in areas associated with that experience, in this case with schools in categories of concern within the state sector, but was allocated immediately to a division concerned with inspections of primary independent schools and service children's education, although at least the primary phase experience was relevant (Transcript 8, 134-149). Previously an experienced primary school headteacher, the HMI had from the outset a sense of being taken deliberately out of his/her personal areas of expertise, in much the same way that HMIs were in previous times (Transcript 8, 110-111, 191-193, 221-229). The geographical diversity in which the role was operated and a sense that the remit was national were also still apparent when Interviewee 8 joined in 2004 (Transcript 8, 134-40).

Whatever the primary motivation, it is apparent that, from the outset, all of the HMI were able to rationalise and to explain the choices that they made in applying for the job. For some, that involved decisions even before commencing about how to balance anticipated demands with other important factors in their lives. In every case, however, there is a common theme in terms of seeing the role as an opportunity to be more effective in influencing the lives of young people. There is little indication from their responses that the decision to apply was merely a matter of employment, though all had reached points within their careers at which they felt a need to 'move on' to something different, though not all for the same reasons. Each saw opportunities and dealt with various constraints on their options and choices, but made those choices consciously and actively. Applying to be an HMI was a positive choice.

## **HMI as a distinctive group**

Even by this time, a sense of being part of a body with a particular set of values and distinctive purpose is apparent in several of the interviews. It shows itself noticeably in the extent to which the HMIs interviewed were influenced by and conscious of their colleagues, particularly those of longer standing than themselves.

The impact of early contact with individual HMIs stands out in the recollections of most of the HMIs. Joining in 1987, Interviewee 7 had discovered an interest in the office of HMI through attendance on HMI-run courses in the 1980s (Transcript 7, 9-37). Interviewee 7 recalled,

‘I’d had quite a lot of contact with a chap who I liked very much...who was the HMI connected to (a geographical area)...at that time...if anyone applied for HMI, people within HMI who were thought to know them were sent a blue letter...and you had to write in, if you were the HMI who was asked...and give this person a reference...and, if any HMI wrote in and said “no, this person’s no good”, or whatever, that was that...So, if you wanted to be an HMI, you needed to be in with an HMI’ (Transcript 7, 48-62).

The early experiences were important also for inculcating a sense of guiding principles and the maxims that expressed them, such as ‘reporting without fear, or favour’ and ‘doing good as you go’.

‘They were things that were emphasised to me and I think they were always at the back of your mind...even if you put a school into special measures, you never wanted to upset people unnecessarily. I mean, it was bad enough as it



was, without you being awkward, so I was at pains to be pleasant...and professional and, hopefully, leave them...if not in a better place, in at least a place where they could improve from...' (Transcript 7, 1056-1083).

Like Interviewee 7, Interviewee 1 recalled contact with HMIs on training courses; 'Wonderful, huge influence on me' (Transcript 1, 440-445). Interviewee 1 remarked, however, that the positive acquaintance during a training course had not seemed typical. 'My entire experience of HMI hadn't been like that when I was teaching. They were these reserved individuals, who still were part of the hat and gloves brigade and all the rest of it,...but (name) was very warm, human, very intelligent...real motivator and I thought, actually, HMI are different people' (Transcript 1, 445-455). There is still apparent in this observation some sense of an office with a degree of mystique and a certain elitism. There is a sense also of both the individuals and the office as independent and powerful. Interviewee 1 described the role of HMI as '...the biggest influence nationally, the biggest place to have an influence on education and to inform practice and develop your subject area was always HMI...' (Transcript 1, 109-112).

Interviewee 9, who recalled reaching a significant crossroads in his/her career at which joining HMI was one of two probable options, was swayed ultimately by talking to a personal friend, who was a serving HMI (Transcript 9, 49-54). A notion of HMI as influential was important for Interviewee 2 also, '...because they were powerful thinkers...and clearly seen to be influential' (Transcript 2, 109). S/he shared a similar experience to Interviewees 1 and 7, in that attendance on a training course sparked a sense of the office of HMI as something distinctive and worthwhile. 'HMI

used to do some really high-quality...professional training courses and there was a lot of competition to get onto them...so that whetted my appetite to all things HMI’ (Transcript 2, 41-60)

Interviewee 2’s early experiences contained a mixture of admiration and discomfit; ‘...an HMI visited the school (where the interviewee was teaching) and the exchanges that went on between us were challenging, but tremendously stimulating...it prompted a lot of good, professional thinking...’ (Transcript 2, 70-86). The interviewee went on to note ‘I thought (it) would be a very stimulating environment (in which) to be a professional’ (Transcript 2, 110-112).

Interviewee 5, who joined in 2002, commented upon the reputation of individual HMIs and the influence that they exerted. S/he talked about an ‘old-fashioned’ style of HMI, who visited schools and carried out subject inspections (Transcript 5, 180-1). Those HMI subject specialists were known widely within their fields (Transcript 5, 190-4). They were ‘...such tours de force...just incredible role models in terms of knowledge, education, the way they comported themselves...I looked up to them in the sense that I...felt very privileged to be working with them’ (Transcript 5, 199-211).

Even an HMI joining as late as 2004 carried seminal recollections of HMIs from very early in his/her career through courses and conferences.

‘The first HMI I ever saw speak was...an inspirational speaker and, you know, sometimes you think I’d love to do that job’ (Transcript 8, 859-868).

Interviewee 8 recalled a visit from an HMI in about 1989.

‘I was a headteacher...and I got a ’phone call. “I’m coming to your school tomorrow morning. I want to have a look at everything and I’ll give you a report at the end of the day.” I was petrified, absolutely, ’cos...this was an HMI. He came in. He spent half a day...he walked round the school and he had a little notebook that he made notes on. He came back to me at two and he read from his notes and said, “This is what I’ve found out about your school and...maybe you want to think about doing this.”...which I agreed with. I got a lovely letter from him, about a week later, and that’s all...it was a lovely indictment (sic.) of what I was doing and where I was going with it, but that’s what I thought HMI was about...this really astute guy, who spotted stuff that you’d think...why didn’t I see that?’ (Transcript 8, 916-929).

More evidence of the influence of a personal touch came later, when, meeting a serving HMI during a course of refresher training for non-HMI inspectors, this time combined with experience of training provided by HMIs, though of markedly different content from that referred to by others, resulted in an application by Interviewee 8 to join; ‘...he says “you ought to be an HMI” and, d’you know, it never entered my head to be an HMI. This particular time...we were having a coffee together and (name) says “they’re recruiting again. I’ll look out for you...put an application in”...April 1<sup>st</sup> 2004, I got a ’phone call saying you’ve been recruited to HMI’ (Transcript 8, 64-77). Clearly, for Interviewee 8, as for others, meeting serving HMIs through training courses was an important influence, but it seems that the type of training recalled reflects a change in the nature of HMI’s work. Interviewee 8’s training was connected directly with developing knowledge and skills as inspectors. There is not in these cases the same sense of HMIs as sources of inspiration,

expertise, as there appears to have been in the decades before 2000, but that did not mean that the HMIs were regarded as less impressive.

By 2004, consciousness of a long-standing tradition was, perhaps, tempered by a sense that things were different. Speaking about more-established colleagues, Interviewee 8 said, ‘...when I joined, they were old-fashioned HMI. They were the ones who had what I would call the old-fashioned values...They weren’t used to inspecting, because they were used to doing surveys...they’re not the mundane, going in (to schools) to be an inspector. They would talk in terms of the old days, when there was the HMI car...it was a Humber, or something, there was a pool of them...and the white gloves and the old...HMI bags...when I talk about the old fashioned...maybe a bit starchy, maybe a bit stand-offish, but actually, they’re doing good as you go, being insightful and...wanting to know what best practice is around the country...that’s what was lost’ (Transcript 8, 859-868). By then, the ‘badges of office’ were perhaps even less evident, though the cachet and sense of history and of the office’s guiding maxims had not disappeared altogether.

An influential prior experience of HMIs was not confined to those who joined to inspect schools. Interviewee 4 joined in 2001 with a background in further education and, similarly to his/her colleagues from school backgrounds, cited positive early experiences through contact with HMIs as a motivational factor in seeking to join. ‘In those days, this was prior to Ofsted, HMI used to come down...and do...inspections from time to time...the college I worked in was inspected by HMI and I quite liked the sort of role they adopted... So, it’s basically from meeting HMI’ (Transcript 4, 14-

30) and ‘...they were great people. I’ve never really forgotten the way that they worked’ (Transcript 4, 418-432).

The interviewees’ accounts provide indications of the early stages of the HMIs beginning to engage with the cultural practices of the broader group, orientating themselves towards and seeking to become a part of the group. Indeed, it is some notion of what it meant to be an HMI that was a key motivator in seeking to appointment to the office.

### **Early experiences**

Personal contacts continued to be highly significant for the HMIs once they began work. For those joining as part of the schools inspectorate, a personal mentor was usually the most significant individual at that point in their careers, inducting new HMIs into the role. Often spoken of with some affection, the experience of the mentor was not, however, universally positive.

Interviewee 7 described a difficult relationship his/her mentor.

‘We had to meet (name), who was the divisional inspector... a very powerful and paternalistic chap, who everyone felt slightly cowered (sic.) by and... the relationship was something akin to a promising sixth-former with the headteacher... I had monthly mentoring with him that lasted a day... and they were absolutely dreadful, because we were grilled from morning ’til dusk, or talked at by this chap and we used to hate it... it was an awful lot about

protocol...and how you would address people. How you'd write a minute...relations with schools...that sort of thing' (Transcript 7, 92-108).

The role of the mentor was intended partly to ensure that inductees gained a broad experience of the work, one that took them beyond the confines of and boundaries set by the specialisms that they brought to it. Interviewee 1 had a sense that his/her experience on joining was distinctive, unlike others'. 'I joined a fairly unique experience, in the sense that my induction and my training and my own experience meant that I was inspecting nursery...you would go with subject colleagues to look at provision at all ages, but I ended up inspecting foundation degree courses in my specialist area and that was fairly unique' (Transcript 1, 80-3).

Interviewee 2 described the mentor as a powerful and primary influence and not just in terms of practical experiences (Transcript 2, 250-1). 'Tales from people longer in the tooth than me described how, as a starter HMI, you would be strapped to your mentor...and not be allowed to do anything...I think there was something of that spirit that persisted when I joined, in that the mentor role was very important; you learned the etiquette, the behavioural standards required, the procedures, the way to work with people being inspected' (Transcript 2, lines 251-265). Clearly, the early experiences of HMIs could be simultaneously challenging and stimulating.

There was not, apparently, a uniform standard for what was expected of mentors. For Interviewee 3, the experience proved to be very taxing, especially in the absence of any apparent approach to managing the probationer's workload. Interviewee 3 recalled, 'I think my first year was probably too hard. I had too much to do and I

didn't have somebody who was saying, "But we've just put something else in this (person's) programme..." (Transcript 3, 343-350). There could also be long-term and unhelpful consequences personally for the individuals concerned (Transcript 3, 343-350). Interviewee 3 described how a lack of oversight of his/her workload led to difficulties. 'He never, he didn't help and I would be sending him notes saying, "I'm struggling here. I'm supposed to be doing this work...I've no idea what it means...and...he'd just never reply' (Transcript 3, 294-8).

The role of mentor continued to be carried out in a similar vein into the first decade of the new millennium. Interviewee 5 joined HMI in 2002, when '...your mentor set up all sorts of opportunities for you to experience different work', which for that HMI included shadowing an inspection of a local education authority and monitoring schools in special measures (transcript 5, 304-316). The idea of sampling the broad range of inspection remits persisted into the middle of the decade and, for Interviewee 8, was a highlight of the induction period (Transcript 8, 134-149).

The mentor could be highly influential in determining the particular roles to which a newly appointed HMI could be allocated. Interviewee 8 found himself/herself working well outside his/her background experience as a direct consequence of the particular interest and responsibility of his/her mentor. That was apparently not a problem. S/he described the mentor as '...an inspirational person, somebody I learned a heck of a lot from. Second meeting I had with him...he said, "there's an inspection in the Falkland Islands coming up in February and you're coming with me"!' (Transcript 8, 156-161).

Despite the vagaries of some of these experiences, the induction process tended to have a markedly positive effect overall. Interviewee 1 described it as ‘...an absolutely terrific time...I learned a good deal...by the end of the first year you were fully up and running...and thrust into an awful lot of responsibility almost immediately at that point’ (Transcript 7, 135-177).

Once inducted into the group, relationships with peers continued to be a powerful influence on new HMIs. Interviewee 2 stated that ‘There was more discussion in peer groups...about how the work was carried out and what to do (ie. more so than s/he felt was the case by the time s/he left HMI in 2011). It felt like a stronger, I’m not sure if collegiate (sic.) is quite the right word, but...the notion of *primus inter pares* was very evident, there was the lead (inspector), but then we were all in it together...and also, in those days, there were national conferences for HMI...You picked up the ethos, the ways of working, the importance that your predecessors put upon certain aspects of the work and you...picked up the behaviours, I suppose...of appropriate peer pressure. Colleagues would point things out in a constructive way to either promote one sort of behaviour, or minimise a less attractive one...One that sticks with me was in the way of feeding back...not to treat people to whom you were feeding back as specimens’ (sic.) (Transcript 2, 260-274). A notion of tradition, however vaguely expressed, is apparent. The HMI concerned felt strongly conscious of it (Transcript 2, 277-8). Despite the lack of a direct reference, it is not unreasonable to infer that those ‘certain aspects of the work’ included the independent nature of the office.



Though inducted into HMI somewhat later than the two referred to above, Interviewee 3 described similarly positive early experiences of working with other HMIs (Transcript 3 256). In one example, an experienced HMI was ‘...very good in explaining what he wanted to get out, if you like, what hypotheses were and very good at helping me understand how to do retrieval’ (Transcript 3, 256-258). Another was ‘...very thorough...gave me very precise jobs to do and would say, “Yes. I like it like that. Could you add this?” and so on; very, very helpful’ (Transcript 3, 256-268). More generally, ‘I would say I don’t understand this and...people were very helpful, very, very supportive set of professional people’ (Transcript 3, 708-9). Interviewee 5 summed up the experience as ‘...very much a very, very excellent induction in that first year’ (transcript 5, 416). Similarly, for interviewee 8, shadowing more-experienced colleagues was a key to learning the role (Transcript 8, 140-149).

Interviewee 6 joined Ofsted in 2001 and worked within the Early Years remit, becoming an HMI some time after starting work within Ofsted. As such, induction was about introduction to the organisation, as distinct from the office of HMI. The HMI described a less-systematic introduction, fraught with practical difficulties, ‘...so that there was a very difficult start’, which led in turn to perceptions that Ofsted was ill-prepared for bringing in people from backgrounds other than those with which it was more familiar (Transcript 6, 13-28). For this HMI also, however, peer support from experienced colleagues was just as influential in learning about the role as it was for others (Transcript 6, lines 450-2, 546, 579).

Interviewee 5 recalled being informed in 2003, along with a similarly newly recruited colleague, about a new brief concerning training for a new inspection Framework, to

be introduced that year. 'I remember...getting a 'phone call...we were on some course (or) conference and we were up in Newcastle and...were about to fly down to Guildford...getting a 'phone call telling us that we needed very shortly to be over in, I think it was Hammersmith...because we'd been recruited onto the Framework team to do the training and so we both looked at each other and said 'We've only been in Ofsted a few months, what do we know?' And that was it. Then we were...literally thrown into, at a fairly high level...in charge of all that...I was told that I was in charge of the Section 10 assessment process...so that meant the examining of all those inspectors...and the monitoring of the training that was actually provided by the...contractors...and I remember...saying to the divisional manager at the time, well, I've only been in Ofsted...barely a year, I'm not sure I know what that's about and s/he said to me "You are an HMI. You do what HMI do and you get on with it"' (Transcript 5, 370-399). As the HMI noted, you learn 'damn quick'.

It is difficult to discern much by way of major change in the nature of the early experiences of the HMIs in this sample, though perhaps some of emphasis. Possibly, the time frame is too narrow for major changes to be apparent, or perhaps the nature of the change, or the experience of it was gradual. For the interviewees, some of the changes that they sensed were important, but the kind of HMI, the role, the background experiences and qualities deemed important in recruitment remained largely consistent. Where there is a greater sense of differences, they appear to relate more to matters concerning the inspection remit for which the HMI joined the office.

## **Chapter 6 The Findings - Gaining experience**

This chapter looks at how the HMIs' concept of the role developed after their initial experiences on joining. The material was analysed and is presented in the same way as in the previous chapter. The sub-sections cover themes that emerged from the analysis of the transcripts, relating to changes in the nature of the work, its organisation and the management of the HMIs. It includes their reflections on operating 'in the field' as inspectors, including their perceptions of the pressure on them and of the changing environment within which they worked.

### **Organisation and workload**

As the HMI appointed to the role earlier than any other in the sample, Interviewee 7 remarked upon what s/he saw as significant changes during his/her period of office to the way that HMIs were managed. Initially, '(C)ompared with what it became, it was a very flat structure...and relatively few promoted posts... and the rest of us were on...the same grade, which...led to a good deal of camaraderie and team spirit, because you were all in it together' (Transcript 7, 121-134). Line management appears to have lacked the structure and formality that it acquired later (Transcript 7, 146-154) and the changes were responsible, in the view of this HMI, for destroying the collegial nature of the organisation (Transcript 7, 793-819).

Organising the workload appears to have been substantially the responsibility of the individual HMI. When Interviewee 7 joined, '...every HMI had a absolute pile (sic.) of what we called brown envelopes through the door every day...which were

instructions from the centre, or reports, and...one of your daily tasks was to decide what to do with this' (Transcript 7, 382-4). Many of the tasks related to the HMI's subject work and were carried out within divisional teams, organised both regionally and nationally, bringing the HMI into contact with a range of colleagues (Transcript 7, 141-165). The HMI described a broad variety of tasks that included helping to write parts of the National Curriculum and work with the then national assessment agency (Transcript 7, 182-201).

With the inception of Ofsted, there was a change, not just in terms of how HMIs were organised and managed, but also in the focus of their work; 'I joined a team called Monitoring...and our job was to actually monitor (sic.) the implementation of the new inspection framework by this new registered inspector...it involved joining an inspection to watch them at work and, particularly, key aspects of inspection. It wasn't so much lesson observations as how they ran the meetings and whether they filled the schedules in properly, whether the discussions were of sufficient...quality to merit the outcome...and you would also join feedback to the headteacher at the end of the inspection to see that it was carried out in a professional manner' (Transcript 7, 301-333). The HMIs were monitoring more than one inspection in this way each week (Transcript 7, 370).

For Interviewee 7, the change led to some loss of the camaraderie and team spirit that had been his/her early experience of HMI, due to significantly reduced levels of contact with other HMIs (Transcript 7, 401-409). The HMI found a new focus for his/her particular skills, taking responsibility for checking on the quality of inspection reports and that inspection evidence bases supported the reported

judgements and helping to devise the processes for this work. The task included sometimes a process of de-registering inspectors whose work did not meet the required standard (transcript 7, 301-333). For interviewee 7, the change was not especially welcome; 'I mean, in terms of time, (the work went) from being a wide-ranging job, providing advice to government, to a pretty narrow role just looking at inspections' (transcript 7, 337-344).

In 1996, Interviewee 7's work took another direction as HMIs acquired responsibility for a new stream of work monitoring schools that had failed their inspections. If the idea of 'failing schools' sounded something of a tolling bell within the education profession, HMIs were not oblivious to the potential impact

'(It) didn't sound all that attractive, but to start dealing with schools that were failing (and) we found Failing Schools a bit of a negative title...so we changed it to School Improvement Division...and that...gradually expanded...as the work expanded...' (Transcript 7, 441-444).

The new work, eventually, proved welcome, particularly because the HMI became involved closely with devising new processes and ways of working to support the tasks (Transcript 7, 444-463). Whilst the particular area of work may have been new and different from the HMI's previous experience, there is still here a sense that aspects of the work remained within the HMI's control. In addition to checking that schools had been placed in special measures correctly, the HMI's role involved monitoring the schools' progress, with a view to removing them from the category. That was a source of some satisfaction and pride for Interviewee 7 (Transcript 7, 530-550).

Further organisational changes in 2005 saw the HMI taken into other new lines of work that proved to be much less welcome, including reprising, though with some important differences, an earlier responsibility lost after 1992 for monitoring the work of local authorities (Transcript 7, 751-780). The differences, however, put pressure on the HMI's sense of professionalism: 'I was asked to inspect things that I was in no way qualified to inspect, either by experience, or anything else' (Transcript 7, 828).

As with Interviewee 7, when Interviewee 1 joined HMI, the work was divided between a regionally based role and one within a national programme of subject inspections (Transcript 1, 160-165). The HMI worked alongside colleagues to programme inspections around themes identified by subject-specialist groups (Transcript 1, 165-170). An element of personal control over the pattern of work is evident, if mediated by the requirements of the group. Once an allocation of inspections was made, it was the responsibility of the individual HMI to work out the practical details. 'I programmed it. I timetabled it...I chose the schools. You made all the arrangements and off you went. At the same time, I would be built into...full inspections of schools and I would be the (subject) specialist...usually, we were programmed for full inspections in our phase' (Transcript 1, 179-193). That pattern of work, however, was not universal.

The inception of Ofsted, quite soon after Interviewee 9 joined HMI in 1990, brought a radical change in the focus of his/her work, linked with the fundamental shift that it represented also in the nature and function of school inspections. This HMI was allocated to investigating how 'quality assurance' processes worked in educational systems around the world (Transcript 9, 132-145), including making numerous visits

abroad (Transcript 9, 192-219, 632-637). Having been involved closely in devising a new approach to inspection, the focus of Interviewee 9's work altered again, once the system was established. 'I was then involved in monitoring the quality of inspections...working a good deal of my time in London... So that would have involved writing and reports. It would have involved attending (Parliamentary) select committees...so, I was more and more removed from actual school inspection' (Transcript 9, 192-193). Interviewee 9's experiences were unique, but there is some vestige here of earlier opportunities to influence national policy.

Joining in 1997, subject work and a sense of collegiality were for Interviewee 2 still at the core of what HMI was about. Interviewee 2 recalled that '...in the culture, there was still a strong subject base...So, in my first few years...until 2003...annually, we would go away and do (subject) things together and discuss as HMI drawn from across the whole organisation, but who had (subject) in their background' (Transcript 2, 298-307). The HMI described the work as enriching, because of the range of interests and specialisms the different colleagues brought, such as teacher education.

This HMI appears to have been able to stave off some of the effects of changes in the focus of HMIs' work, having become involved, like others after 2002, in checking on the quality of routine school inspections by seizing an opportunity around a year later to be involved more closely in the subject-based inspection work for which s/he had hoped originally, as a specialist subject adviser (Transcript 2, 148-181, 190-205), an area of work that, evidently, did not disappear straight away. The HMI's experience illustrates, nevertheless, how this line of work became increasingly less prominent after a 'first, glorious year'.

Interviewee 3 confirmed that the importance of subject-based work was still evident on joining in 2001. HMIs were still, at that point, involved in few routine school inspections (Transcript 3, 228-236). Even at that time, Interviewee 3's experience of subject work appears to have been similar to that described by Interviewee 1. By this time, a strong feature of the subject work was related to the implementation of the national Key Stage 3 Strategy, a development welcomed by this HMI in order to improve the subject provision for pupils. The HMI described a considerable degree of control over how this work was undertaken, within the demands of a nationally organised survey (Transcript 2, 199-230).

Though not subject based, involvement in thematic, national surveys could, for those inspectors involved, be every bit as stimulating and engendered an equally strongly expressed sense that such work was fundamentally a part of what HMI represented. Interviewee 3 recalled working a surveys into community cohesion, anti-bullying, and anti-racism (Transcript 3, 421-430). Links between such inspections and national policy themes are apparent and, once again, the HMI had a sense of such work being influential nationally (Transcript 3, 199-230).

Interviewee 4 joined HMI in 2001 as Ofsted's remit widened to encompass further education and skills training. The HMI was aware of differences in the nature of the work undertaken by HMIs in different Ofsted remits and, particularly, the limited role for school inspectors (Transcript 4, 100-115). This HMI was able to take advantage of a wider range of opportunities afforded by new lines of work taken on by Ofsted and also of a growing sense that inspectors should be able to work in different remits.



After posts involving some managerial responsibilities, Interviewee 4 was appointed, in about 2007, to lead the HMIs undertaking school surveys and early years work (Transcript 4, 364-371). 'I...really enjoyed it...because a lot of it was around setting up survey work, meeting the Department (of Education), meeting stakeholders to look at what surveys we should do, line managing a team of national advisers, which was a new challenge' (Transcript 4, 374-386). Whereas for some HMIs, such cross-remit developments were difficult and uncomfortable, for this one at least, it would seem that it brought an opportunity for professional growth and, again, a chance to be influential at a national level. The fact that a non-specialist could be given managerial responsibility for schools HMI is itself an indication of the shifts taking place within the inspectorate.

Interviewee 5 joined in 2002 and began straight away with a role that centred on monitoring inspections. Having no experience of the working arrangements for those colleagues who were HMIs prior to 2000, this HMI began in what had become by then a more centrally controlled environment (Transcript 5, 429-442). The HMI pointed out that s/he had little control over the content of the work schedule, because its construction revolved around the requirements for the routine 'section 10' inspections of schools and that appears to be a significant change from the experience of earlier HMIs. Being controlled centrally did not mean, however, that the schedule was fixed rigidly. 'I seem to remember mine being changed quite often by people who wanted you to do X, or needed you to do Y ...' (Transcript 5, 465-469). The flexibility was, however, seemingly not the HMI's. Interviewee 1 confirmed the trend towards more centrally managed programmes of work. '...we brought in people to

manage management and programming and we had this whole infrastructure there called Ofsted, with all these people that were brought in' (transcript 1, 713-715).

Interviewee 5 was drawn rapidly into working on the next phase of changes to the inspection regime and the extensive programme of training that necessitated (Transcript 5, 336-360). Evidently, the transformation from inductee to 'expert' was rapid and appears to have been a little bewildering (Transcript 5, 336-360).

The sense of not being altogether prepared for the new demands being placed on HMIs extended to other aspects of the work, such as the links with local authorities re-instated after 2005 (Transcript 5, 675-678). Interviewee 5 recalled that, by 2005/6, 'I was just doing a little bit of subject work, not a lot, because I had these other things, responsibilities, and then, suddenly, I was pulled in to do quite a bit of (subject) work, because the current person in charge...had gone off sick...and then...I was asked if I would oversee it and then I was asked if I would take over (the) role...on a temporary basis...So, I ended up in 2005/6 with this sort of quite horrendous role of having to do the JAR (local authority area reviews), everything else, and be in charge of (subject)...and I just remember thinking, oh heck, I've ended up...with too many jobs' (Transcript 5, 706-764).

Joining in 2004, Interviewee 8 also described how HMIs did not always feel well prepared for the new requirements placed on them, such as the work with local authorities. For this HMI, this particular aspect of the role was the most challenging (Transcript 8, 336-337). '(T)hat meeting...with the local authority, would involve the education side of things, but also the social care side of it...but the amount of

paperwork beforehand to look at, interpreting the surveys from the young people in the area, the teenage pregnancy, all those sort of things, masses...of data...to interpret and then these really intense meetings over a two-day period with, they'd wheel in the person from social care, they'd wheel in the person from education. You've got to ask them the questions about the data, then produce your annual performance assessment...that nobody ever liked' (Transcript 8, 334-361).

### **Being on inspection**

In the period before routine and regular institutional inspections of schools, it would be rare for HMIs to undertake whole-school inspections and, as some of the interviewees who were HMIs at that time have indicated, institutional inspections had a different purpose then. The change came in two distinct waves, firstly with the introduction of 'section 10' inspections, the first to be carried out under a national framework and for the purpose of individual institutional accountability, and subsequently in the change to 'section 5', which significantly increased the frequency of institutional inspections. Accordingly, the extent to which HMIs were involved in institutional inspections changed in line with those developments.

Interviewee 7 confirmed that, when s/he joined in 1987, HMIs inspected schools only occasionally (Transcript 7, 204). Though rare events, inspections were bigger than is the case now and the focus of the inspection was different (Transcript 7, 215-221), as was the format. '(W)e used to have to answer these huge schedules at the end, on the Thursday night meeting, filling answer...after answer about the quality of this, that and the other and it used to drive everyone crackers and result in really

lengthy semantic debates...often about what does that question mean, rather than how do we answer it...so it was quite entertaining' (Transcript 7, 228-240). It was the case also that individual inspectors' interests influenced the approaches that were taken, giving rise to some idiosyncracies (Transcript 7, 665-677).

On those rare occasions prior to 2000 when HMIs inspected schools, the make-up of the inspection teams largely comprised HMIs themselves. For those HMIs who experienced inspections at that time, that difference affected both the ways of working during the inspection and represented a different culture amongst HMIs than was the case later. Interviewee 1, who joined HMI at a similar time to Interviewee 8, stated that 'It was the culture of HMI, didn't matter who you were and it didn't matter what your role was, when you were on inspection, you were for the lead inspector...he, or she was boss...and that was a culture that was very important' (Transcript 1, 473-485). Interviewee 9 recalled that '(I)f I led one, or two full inspections of a school in the year, that might be quite unusual...and they were major events. An inspection of a secondary school, for instance, might take two weeks and involved up to 25 HMI...covering every single subject and beyond, in terms of management, careers education, links with the local community; not a stone was left unturned....' (Transcript 9, 87-108). Contrast the descriptions of inspections prior to 2000 provided by interviewees 8 and 1 with this recollection by Interviewee 3 of the change to section 5 inspections: '(Y)ou just had a team of...somewhere between, depends on the size of the school...two and six, probably, inspectors, who were there for two days and inspected the whole school and went away again' (Transcript 3, 445-448).

If the growing demands of a widespread, national system of inspections brought with them a greater degree of standardisation in practice than had been the case and, consequently, a reduction in the extent to which HMIs could act autonomously, the change did not occur overnight and not simultaneously for all areas of HMI's work. Interviewee 7 described the diversity that still existed post-2000, with regard to subject and survey inspections. 'I would be looking at these (inspection) note books... and...not a single one of them had anything like the same pattern. They were not written in the same manner at all. It, completely, reflected the oddity of the person who was managing it' (Transcript 3, 133-141). The extent to which HMIs' autonomy was removed after 2000 may be a matter of degree. A sense that individual HMIs could still adopt very different approaches remained for some time into the current millennium, as Interviewee 6 noted (Transcript 6, 656-660).

Interviewee 5 described how, prior to 2005, HMIs' involvement in whole-school inspections remained unusual. 'They only did them when a contracted "section 10" inspection had...been failed' (ie. the inspection, rather than the school). The HMI recalled one such inspection. '(T)here had been a huge political issue about it...and there'd been a huge appeal...and they put a team of HMI in to do a Section 10 inspection...and...I was put on that team and...it was very high-powered, high-profile stuff, as you can imagine, because everybody was watching HMI do a Section 10 inspection and...in those days, there was, what, 15 of you, or something and you...you did the whole shebang...' (Transcript 5, 572-598). The HMI thought that his/her prior experience of inspecting was a factor in him/her succeeding on this occasion, in contrast to other, more-experienced HMIs who were also on the team (Transcript 5, 590-598).

Once the change to ‘section 5’ was established, the working pattern of HMIs altered as a consequence, but, whilst the mechanics of inspecting and some of the ways of working described by HMIs who were familiar with preceding regimes altered, the sense of inspecting as being an exacting experience persisted. Interviewee 8 described ‘section 5’ inspections as markedly different from the earlier approaches described by Interviewee 7. ‘(I)t was intense, day one, it was intense day two ’til 12, then you had, it wasn’t even a team meeting. It was ...writing the report, more or less...then...we’d bring all that together, so feedback would start at about...three and we’d...go through the report for an hour and a half with the senior leadership team, almost reading what the draft report would be like...and, of course, the flaw in that was you’d have somebody making copious notes, so when the draft came through, they would say, you said in feedback this, or you said in feedback whatever it was and I also came across twice, both of them were on service children’s education inspections...where we’d been recorded, unwittingly’ (Transcript 8, 287-305).

If for some, the changes meant a more-challenging environment within which to work, not every HMI felt that particularly. ‘I very rarely found...discord, or antagonism from schools and, even if you’re saying to a school, not really good enough, is it...you find ways of saying it in a way that’s acceptable and moves the school on...I have, occasionally, worked with inspectors who are a bit sharp and...don’t seem to have the human touch, if you like, and I think that can make schools very unhappy, but for instance, I inspected (school name) twice, which was difficult, but I would say that they were cordial inspections’ (Transcript 3, 450-466). The interviewee cited a later, very cordial meeting in a completely different context

with the headteacher from the school concerned. ‘I found my inspections of schools, whether it was on surveys of subjects, or aspects of education, or even school inspections, by and large, to be cordial and good...one school I put in special measures, where the headteacher cried, which was a bit of a facer, but honestly, the school was...awful; violent, nasty, it was really difficult’ (Transcript 3, 450-466).

There seems to be an urgency and immediacy in such an inspection that was less apparent in the descriptions of inspections prior to 2005. Gone, it seems, was the facility for detailed, lengthy and deeply reflective discussion, in order to reach judgements. Interviewee 8 pointed out that some elements remained consistent, however, particularly with regard to the ways in which the inspector established a productive relationship with a school. Even so, ‘there was still that challenge, ’cos they (ie. the school) didn’t like it’ (Transcript 8, 313-319).

### **Reaching judgements**

One of the most obvious changes in inspection practice concerns the way in which inspectors reached their judgements. Interviewee 7, the earliest to be appointed of the HMIs in the sample, describes the process in the late 1980s. ‘(T)here were no national standards like there are now with National Curriculum levels...so the judgement on whether a school was doing particularly well in English, or maths., was just HMI’s view about that school in relation to other schools that they’d seen...’ (Transcript 7, 228-240). Changes came with the National Curriculum and its associated testing regime, developments with which HMI was associated closely (Transcript 7, 235-7). Despite their involvement, some of the changes did not assist HMIs in reaching

judgements that they felt were useful in their work, particularly when alterations were made increasingly to the guidance and frameworks to be used (Transcript 7, 977-985).

Nevertheless, it was in the making of the judgements, the communication of them, and the power of the role in effecting changes that the HMIs found a strong sense of job satisfaction (Transcript 7, 465-477). Interviewee 7 stated, 'I found (school improvement) work hugely rewarding, seeing schools improve. You weren't supposed to give advice...and I did avoid it, except that you could give advice by telling 'em what was working and what wasn't...and the critical thing for me was what the kids were like in the classroom...so I always banged on about the quality of teaching...and I saw some absolutely wonderful teachers...who were drafted in subsequently to special measures (schools) and took over difficult classes and turned 'em round in a relatively short time...' (Transcript 7, 621-639).

New techniques and approaches were being developed and influencing the work of HMIs. Interviewee 1 recalled a colleague who '...was very strong on what we would now call value added, you know, the fact that, if we judge schools only on the outcomes and examination results, then actually, that's not a fair picture. We'd done a lot of work on that, actually' (Transcript 1, 235-238). Interviewee 1 had a strong sense that, over the course of his/her career, the basis on which and the way in which HMIs reached their judgements changed negatively, but that older ways of doing so somehow persisted simultaneously. '(W)hat I worried about a great deal was that we were actually looking at people (as part of the recruitment of HMI) who were losing the qualities to be professional inspectors and to make professional judgements...(but) I rarely found that to be the case, because there's enough of a



culture and enough of us around and enough of the people who'd listened, who would change that and would turn them into professional people, who made professional judgements' (Transcript 1, 559-569). Here, again, is an echo of the idea of reporting without fear, or favour.

Nevertheless, there appears to have been something qualitatively different about those judgements and Interviewee 1 thought that more-recently recruited HMI found it difficult to balance the demands of the new inspection criteria with the professional judgement required to see 'the bigger picture' (Transcript 1, 559-578). Interviewee 1 tried to describe the skills and aptitudes that underpinned his/her idea of professional judgement. 'They are the ability to actually look at performance, look at the organisation and structure of something and the ability to actually pull all of that together, and this is sounding like smoke and mirrors, but you know it isn't, and reach a professional judgement' (sic.) (Transcript 1, 370-380). The HMI understood the central problem, however; 'No-one knew the criteria by which they were being judged' (Transcript 1, 380-390). S/he still wished to distinguish the exercise of professional judgement from the application of criteria, regarding the former as inspection and the latter more as auditing (Transcript 1, 392-407).

In the mind of this HMI, the way a judgement was arrived at appeared to rest not just on the process, but also in the manner of delivering it and the outcome intended from its delivery. That involved doing so '...in such a way that you don't cripple, you actually empower as best you can...Do good as you go, that's what I was brought up on. That is the role of an inspector, and HMI,...to leave people capable of making the change that's necessary' (Transcript 1, 392-407). The reference to long-established

maxims is explicit here. For this HMI, the making of inspection judgements and the potential of that for improvement remained at the core of the role and the values s/he attached to it well into the decade post-2000 (Transcript 1, 403-422).

Interviewee 9 echoed some of the comments made by Interviewee 1; ‘...a great deal of what we did in those days was done because we were HMI. There was a sense that we didn’t need written criteria for inspecting teaching...You were an HMI...that says it all...so, if I asked a question such as, I’m going to inspect geography in a primary school today, do we have any indications of what would be seen as good practice in geography, the answer was no...you, simply, went in and applied your HMI wisdom and experience to make the necessary judgements about that’ (Transcript 9, 87-108).

Interviewee 9 was involved closely with developments that came to have as much impact on the way in which inspectors reached their judgements as did the production of inspection criteria. ‘I took over an outfit in London, which included...all our research and statistical work, all our analytical work...and that’s what I did, basically, for the rest of my career...I had, at one stage, seventy-odd statisticians working for me...and it was through them that we began establishing things like what was, first of all, called...PICSI reports...then PANDA reports, then RAISEonline (see Appendix 4 for definitions) and developing systems of measuring value added’ (Transcript 9, 195-224).

Interviewee 2 provided a sense that, whatever the particular tools used and ways of working, the tradition of HMI as described by Interviewees 8 and 1, continued. ‘(It’s very easy to, sort of, clutch your heart and say the HMI maxim of doing good as you

go, but I actually believed it and still believe it, that an inspection service, process, has a powerful part to play in bringing about improvement in the practice of teachers and, consequentially, the outcomes for young people and it was always...exhilarating to go into a lesson and into discussions with leaders of...education in schools...and get an understanding of what it's like to be learning...and learning is a constantly fascinating process' (Transcript 2, 580-588). The effectiveness with which it was done was, for this HMI, a direct effect of how it was done. 'You don't sit and pontificate and direct and be didactic...you feed back to them what they have said and offer an additional, additive view; that sort of thing, so, the way of helping people without hurting them' (Transcript 2, 287-291).

For all that new inspection tools were being utilised, experience remained for some of the HMIs a key to reaching judgements. Interviewee 3 recalled that '...you see that, in some way, in some schools, they do it a bit like that, in some ways, they do it like that. You're constantly balancing this in the back of your mind...you've got that experience at the back constantly and it just adds up and adds up' (Transcript 2, 368-380).

Sometimes, it was necessary to justify judgements and that is where, increasingly, more-explicit evaluation criteria began to play a role and even to be the basis for correcting inspectors' views (Transcript 3, 509-524). Even so, Interviewee 3 was drawn back to an approach rooted in experience; '...the critical bit seems to be making it fair...to say "This is the evidence the inspectors are looking at. Have we missed something?"...Tell me where to go next. Tell me what I should be doing tomorrow"...and then, of course, sometimes, you've to say "We've seen a few

lessons in this department; nothing like national standards, absolutely not... and, I think, if you're absolutely crystal clear about your evidence and precise, you don't talk in generalities, but you're very precise about what you mean... I mean, you speak as you find, don't you? You report the evidence' (Transcript 3, 465-476, 505-506), that is, without fear, or favour.

Interviewee 5 thought that there were qualitative differences in the ways that inspectors formed their judgements, according to the type of inspection involved. S/he described subject and survey inspections, whilst they continued, as more open, dialogic and focused on influencing practice in schools as much as obtaining a national picture of something. On such occasions, the HMI was reaching into a bank of personal experiences, which were important elements brought to bear when interpreting the evidence from the inspection; the evidence was fundamental, but the interpretation of it required comparison with experience, as much as with any official inspection guidance. Routine, whole-school inspections after 2005 were different, guided much more by information available prior to the actual inspection, which seemed to pre-figure the conclusions reached (Transcript 5, 886-911).

The 'newest' of the HMI within the sample group, interviewee 8, was also the first to describe what appears to be a fundamentally different approach to reaching judgements, linked with specific changes to inspection guidance, the purpose of which was to direct inspectors' judgements more overtly, at least in certain circumstances, so called 'limiting judgements' (Transcript 8, lines 229-239). As a result and soon after the changes, the HMI described experiencing more significant challenges from schools to his/her judgements.

Interviewee 8's evidence seems to point to a change in the climate of inspections, which accompanied a possible shift in the balance between individual experience and the requirements of inspection frameworks as the drivers of professional judgements, and the new transparency in the inspection regime brought with it new challenges from those being inspected. Though from a primary phase background, Interviewee 8 found himself/herself inspecting outside his/her area of expertise, just as HMIs always had.

‘Did a secondary school in (geographical location), where the Head wouldn't let us leave, because we were saying it was a Satisfactory school...I was very fortunate that...I was...allocated a team with somebody who had loads of secondary experience and you could allocate them the data...(but) They (ie. the school) knew what they were talking about, so if they were saying we'll take you to the highest court in the land, I'd say, well, that's your prerogative' (Transcript 8, 239-254).

There is a sense here of greater prominence being given to particular forms of evidence, in this case data about pupils' achievement, of the HMI's sense that aspects of the work required particular sorts of expertise that had not been the case previously, and of an increasing awareness of and concern about a propensity amongst providers to challenge the inspectors' judgements, including through litigation. Across the different types of inspections, the stakes became increasingly high (Transcript 8, 368-384).

Against that background of increased insecurity and lack of particular expertise, a sense of the collective nature of HMI as a group appears to have been re-deployed to

provide support to individuals, when needed. ‘I do think that we were...well served by...that network of other HMI that you could say, I’ve got this inspection in a secondary school, I’m looking at the data, just have a look at it for me...(Name) was great. I would send him, ’cos he’d do it with primary, I’d send him the secondary PANDA and he’d say “Make sure you ask ’em about modern foreign languages, ’cos...it’s not doing very well at the moment and it’s been failing over the past few years and then I’d do the same for him’ (Transcript 8, 279-284). Ultimately, however, Interviewee 8 indicated that it was still the individual’s sense of professional experience, if focused differently, that enabled an HMI to reach a judgement; ‘It’s about having that confidence that you know the framework inside out and you know you’re gonna make that judgement and you will defend that’ (Transcript 8, 459-461). Though perhaps different in tenor, there is, arguably, still a sense here of HMIs’ independence in reaching and conveying judgments.

### **Conditions of work**

Interviewee 7 provided a sense that the rapidity of change in working practices was perhaps a function, if not a consequence of the development of information technology. ‘(I)t’s difficult to remember how much of this (when the HMI joined initially) operated almost in the absence of any information technology. Everything was on paper. So, reports were typed up and, if you wanted ’em changed, the whole thing had to be completely re-typed...and so...there was an emphasis on getting it right first time, because it was such a time-consuming problem for the secretarial staff...to change everything’ (Transcript 7, 372-381).

New ways of working did not necessarily mean better. Interviewee 2 echoed Interviewee 7's sense that working in a pre-digital age placed more-exacting requirements on the quality of HMIs' work. 'I remember the intense rigour when I joined HMI of getting documentation absolutely right and it went through several layers of, not just proof reading, way beyond proof-reading level, we weren't just spotting commas and spelling, it was...whether there was coherence within the document, whether it agreed with previous documentation.' (Transcript 2, 620-626). It was this HMI's sense that the standards required previously became less evident (Transcript 2, 627-629). When Interviewee 3 joined in 2001, however, an emphasis on a particular style of writing was still evident. 'The style of writing for Ofsted was rather different...I'd just done an Ed.D, so I'd written a long thesis and...so I was used to that kind of style...but this was a different style...far fewer clauses...Everything was straightforward, plain English language that communicated with the reader very quickly...I was anxious to get it right' (Transcript 3, 313-318).

Interviewee 5 gave an indication of the significance of the changes brought about by the new inspection framework in 2005. Working on the preparations for the change, 'We were literally, from something like May to August,...up and down the country like nobody's business, in and out of hotels, sometimes training, you know, one group one day and another group another day and it would be nothing to...be up in Newcastle and then down in Plymouth' (Transcript 5, 469-503).

For the newest of the HMI in the sample, Interviewee 8, changes in the nature and balance of the workload, similarly, brought a sense of increased pressures. Initially, 'I think there was a realistic timescale in those days. You would be given time to

prepare and you were given time to report-write (sic.) afterwards...Now of course, it's bonkers, really...because...unless you finished it off on the Friday (and) you can write it over the weekend, it's impossible. If you put a school in a category, that's your following week gone' (Transcript 8, 491-500, 592-593).

### **In the public glare**

Greater openness about inspections, brought about through the creation of public guidance documents detailing such things as the criteria used by inspectors to form their judgements and the publication of inspection reports, brought about a shift in the climate within which HMIs worked. For the longer-standing HMIs, that involved their work becoming part of the public domain to an extent greater than they were used.

Interviewee 7 recalled how unusual public scrutiny was prior to 2000.

'(W)e, occasionally, copped for a school that hit the headlines...it had passed its inspection, but for some reason, something had gone drastically wrong and we, you were sent in to have a look at that. I mean, (name of school) was one...that had a strike...and I was sent in...I put it in special measures on the quiet, but of course, that became public' (Transcript 7, 603-607).

It was not only publicity that brought the previously private work under greater scrutiny. Interviewee 1 stated, '(T)he School Improvement Division actually got taken to judicial review over a judgement on a school. They put a school into special measures and the (local) authority took them to court and, basically, the court said you can't have this, because the School Improvement Division was still working on the fact that we have this group of experts, HMI, who will come in and they will



actually tell you that you are failing. We won't share the criteria with you. We won't share the process with you. We will just reach this judgement at this point... That was the final bastion of a group of people who still felt that they had the power without the responsibility to allow the people they were inspecting to be part of a shared understanding of criteria' (Transcript 1, 385-392). The pressure for greater openness was evidently coming from multiple sources.

Responding to such public accountability prompted Ofsted to acquire new expertise, for which previously it had no need. Interviewee 9 thought that 'There was... a recognition that we had to work much more closely with the Press than was ever the way in the past, so the Press Office became very close to the chief inspector... and increasingly so' (Transcript 9, 501-522). Even individual HMIs found themselves drawn into particular exercises that reflected the greater public accountability.

Interviewee 2 '...did two presentations, supported by very senior... management of Ofsted, once before a committee of the House of Commons and once before a committee of the House of Lords and I remember feeling very confident that we could speak with authority... because we had the data' (Transcript 2, 523-613).

Other HMIs continued to enjoy more-traditional means of publicising the inspectorate's work. For Interviewee 3, the role brought opportunities to speak at conferences, to represent Ofsted officially (Transcript 3, 794-796). Increasing external scrutiny of the work of the inspectorate meant, however, that senior officers sought to exert greater control over what was reported and how it entered the public domain. 'You've then got your battle with the chief inspector... whoever that might be at the

time, about what you want to say and what they would rather you said and there was always a little bit of that' (Transcript 3, 501-504).

The controversial nature of some of the work also brought it more often into the public domain. 'At least one of my reports made the front page of the Times Educational Supplement...so I was very pleased about that...You sort of think, oh good, I've made a difference somewhere' (Transcript 3, 530-534). The report in question raised issues about schools' curricula and the impact of performance tables on the choices made by secondary schools and, consequently, what was offered to young people, the report stating that the decisions made by schools were influenced too often by a desire to affect the performance tables, rather than to meet the needs of the young people. True to the spirit of reporting without fear, or favour, the HMI stated 'I really, really get...angry about the use of children for the school's sake. That's the wrong way round. The school exists for the children...So, I was saying some things of that nature, about some of the things that headteachers did, which were not what they should have been doing...and HMCI wasn't totally pleased about it...(but)...it's looking at genuinely how children learn properly, not fiddling figures to do it. I thought that was quite immoral' (Transcript 3, 627-646).

Interviewee 4 thought that the increased level of public interest in the work of HMI began to influence how the inspectorate went about its work. 'I think you, increasingly...were conscious that what you were coming up with had a resonance in the world outside and you needed to be aware of that in how you operated' (Transcript 4, 578-584). The high profile contributed, nevertheless, to a sense of professional pride, as indicated by Interviewee 4. 'We did one on service children's

education...which involved negotiation with the MoD...We did a very high-profile Early Years...programme...they all made quite nice waves, you know, in the political arena...we did one on special educational needs, which was hugely significant as well. So, I liked that kind of work' (Transcript 4, 386-398).

Political considerations could intrude directly into an individual's work. Interviewee 4; 'You were conscious of the large p (politics), because as government priorities changed, then they had an influence on what Ofsted would look at' (Transcript 4, 587-588). The context had an impact also directly on this HMI. 'Once I got into (inspections of) children's services, I was very aware of the political agenda...and in the survey work we were aware of the political agenda...' (Transcript 4, 526-535).

Interviewee 5 remembered '...being 'phoned...and being told to get myself over to, and monitor such and such a school...inspection, because it was...political dynamite and it was already in the papers and they needed to make sure it was...monitored securely, so that if there was any comeback...and I'll never forget that, 'cos...I think it's been in special measures virtually since' (Transcript 5, 442-461).

Interviewee 8 thought that the difference by the end of the decade was the result of the change in the potential implications that inspections represented, connected with the heightened public awareness. Comparing the climate as it was before the HMI joined the inspectorate and after 2005, 'There are real high stakes. There were no high stakes, when HMI...came to (my school). It was me and him, not even chair of governors, and it was a very personal thing to me. It...got copied to (name of local authority director of education)...but that was it. So...in that period of, what, nearly twenty odd years, the change has been, (from being) about me and HMI and the

judgement made about me to that very, very public arena...that as soon as your inspection report is published, it can still make headline news on your local paper...certainly if you go into a category' (Transcript 8, 953-960).

By the end of the decade, at least one HMI had the sense that the climate was markedly more hostile and gave also an indication of the by then greater significance of data. 'The worst one...was a secondary school I inspected, which generated a complaint...Headteacher was a national leader, was working with another school that were in difficulties (sic.) The, their data was green (statistically significantly positive) for attainment. Their data for value added was blue (statistically significantly negative) in quite a lot of cases. They ignored that...They'd not been inspected for a couple of years, couple of frameworks beforehand and, because they weren't getting what they wanted, it ended up with a massive row. I mean, it was a huge, big team of us, because it had got a sixth form as well, so there were probably six of us. Thank the Lord we'd got a QA, another HMI, who'd come up on the second day...the Head walked off; (s/he) was resigning straight away. The senior leadership team were rude. They were aggressive. That complaint lasted for, probably, six months and it's very personal, because...what did they pick up on, the fact that I was a primary Head. How on earth could I know about all these things? So, they'd got very personal' (Transcript 8, 640-654).

### **Management**

Some attempt to control, or at least to direct HMIs' work has long been apparent. Inspectors have been required to account for their time since the early twentieth

century. As early as 1846, it was deemed necessary to clarify in guidance the things expected of HMIs. In 1858, the Newcastle Commission, though recognising the benefits of inspection, made an early public admission of complaints about widely differing standards of inspectors, a complaint that echoes today, and inspectors themselves registered concerns that inspections were insufficiently rigorous. Such observations have led to calls for still greater managerial control of inspectors (Dunford, 1998).

Prior to 2000, however, Interviewee 7 described a somewhat arms-length relationship with management. 'I edited all the reports from the team and all the (reporting) letters that went out, which was a huge job...So, apart from getting used to which HMI within your team could write, or couldn't, you also got to know those who wrote...pretty much the same thing regardless...from time to time, the team manager would ask me was I having problems with so and so...so I had to answer tactfully. I had no desire to drop anyone in it...' (Transcript 7, 665-720). There is here some notion of accountability and clearly of management scrutiny of the work of individual HMIs, but equally, it would seem that the HMI in this instance had little difficulty in maintaining a degree of distance.

The HMI gave a sense, however, that the ability to sustain some distance declined over the course of his/her career. 'I was frightened of getting a manager who I'd relatively little respect for, but that didn't happen.' (Transcript 7, 819). Nevertheless, 'I had less and less respect for management, whether it was simply growing old, or not, I don't know. Not necessarily individuals, but...I thought...gradually poorer quality of management' (Transcript 7, 851-910). It would seem that, for this HMI, the

combination of changes in the way inspections were undertaken and a sense that greater managerial control was being exerted over the work of the inspectorate contributed to an increasingly less-satisfactory experience of the office.

The HMI illustrated the extent to which managerial control began to have an effect on the work of the inspector teams and the individuals. ‘We had our own format for schools in special measures reports. I don’t mean when they went into special measures, but subsequent monitoring...and we could tailor the report...to suit the sort of inspection we were doing...part of which was the summary at the end of how well the school had responded to each of the key issues it had been given when it went into special measures. Well, (the organisation) did away with that...we had to conform to the framework as per all schools, which...made it more awkward for writing...and we couldn’t see the reason for it, to be honest’ (Transcript 7, 998-1014). Evidently, aspects of the traditional independence of HMIs were declining.

Interviewee 2 echoed that sense of greater managerial control and central direction of the work of HMIs extending into the area of subject and survey inspections. ‘(A)fter the first year...senior management decided that (subject-based conferences for HMIs) were not...well-aligned with the business purposes of the organisation, so the power, the opportunity, the resources to do them was taken away...right from the top...It was taken at that level, because I think business pressure, when, after Mr Woodhead departed, there seemed to be an increased priority in relating everything that was done to a particular part of the work programme and, if it couldn’t be seen to contribute directly, it might have been regarded as a nice thing to do, but it wasn’t so strongly related to the business purposes’ (Transcript 2, 310-343).

That there was management oversight of the work of HMIs in the early part of the decade is apparent, but it does not seem to have been particularly pervasive. On joining in 2001, Interviewee 3 described how HMIs were informed about the work programme. 'We were given, sort of, a list...which told you what you were doing...this would be the divisional manager's job' (Transcript 3, 196-293). There was still a degree of distance from management. '(A)t the time, we had somebody in charge of Key Stage 3 who I never saw...(s/he) would send me notes that said..."Can you tell me...what you're doing with the programme in schools?" And I would write and say "Could you give me an idea, please, what this survey's about?"...and s/he would send me an email; "Refer to my email of March the 22<sup>nd</sup>." I didn't actually work here on March the 22<sup>nd</sup>. I don't have any emails prior to the end of April, May. Is it possible you could tell me who has it? And (he/she) would just abandon (the task. S/he), obviously, was just off doing something else' (Transcript 3, lines 270-279). It was an arrangement that provided for considerable autonomy on the part of the HMI, though seemingly more inadvertently than by way of principle. '(Y)ou got so many days on this, but it's up to you how you do it, you know...you were in charge of your time...I could decide when I would go and inspect my Key Stage 3 schools. I could say, right, I've got three to do in (geographical area). I'm now going away for a week...because I'm going to do...one after another...or sometimes, I might do just one locally and then come back and do some writing...I could make up my own timetable. It was mine. I loved that' (Transcript 3, 729-738).

The changes seem to have occurred gradually at first, brought about at least partly by some of the HMIs themselves. When the time came for Interviewee 3 to take on the

role of leading surveys, s/he took the opportunity to redress some of the managerial inadequacies s/he had experienced and, in so doing, there is more of a sense of that area of inspection work being managed, coordinated and structured (Transcript 3, 509-524). Inspection had now reached a stage of development, where the basis on which judgements were reached had increasingly to be made clear. '(Y)ou had to check that these inspectors, the text was actually matching what their judgement was...and you have to go back to some sometimes and say "You've said excellent here, but the criteria says that children should be, at a minimum, reaching expected standards and better than that. They're not...making progress at the school, so...can you be more careful?"...or the other way round, sometimes, people being quite disparaging about something that they don't particularly like, but was obviously working'(sic.) (Transcript 3, 509-524).

Interviewee 5 had a sense that, early in the decade, performance was monitored, but described little by way of formal management processes (Transcript 5, 551-553).

Reports about an individual's performance could, nevertheless, result in preferment for particular work, or some form of performance-related pay. 'In those days, you got bonuses...people might get a bonus at the end and there was a clear notification that nobody who was in their first year...would get a bonus...well, for some damn reason, I got a bonus...and I think it was literally the divisional manager cocking a hoop at...being told what he could and couldn't do, 'cos he was like that, but you can imagine, that caused a bit of a furore' (Transcript 5, 600-612).

By the end of the decade, HMI appear to have been more acutely aware of management. For Interviewee 8, '(t)he accountability went up...because...there was



all your performance management stuff. So, your feedback that came back (from schools) and it's all there, you know, and that was always from schools that hadn't been happy with it. There was a school...I inspected. They fought from day one. They were Satisfactory. They weren't Inadequate, but they weren't Good and it was a battle all the way through the inspection. So, the feedback, negative. I was arrogant. I'd done this, I'd done that. So, you know, when you go to your line-management meeting...when you go for your performance management, at some stage, there's all the positives, but have a look at this, what do you think, and you know what was coming' (Transcript 8, 631-642).

Whilst it seems that there was, even from Interviewee 3's early days in the role, some form of appraisal process for HMIs, it does not appear to have impacted significantly on the HMI's experience (Transcript 3, 145). That situation changed and, on taking up promoted posts, the HMI became responsible for the appraisal of others, a responsibility which did not, apparently, sit comfortably with personal views of how HMIs should be managed.

'I don't like managing people in that manner. I think management is about developing people. Clearly, making sure that people do their job (sic.), but HMI could have this silly thing...people who got the lowest number of marks and some kind of personal special measures. These are people who are very well educated. These are people who've gone through a very complicated system of appointments and they have proven themselves in the public gaze...These are people who know what they're doing. You can not appraise them as if they're doing a very boring job...and I just thought, I didn't want to be part of it' (Transcript 3, 666-676).

The strength of the HMI's reaction suggests a more-pervasive degree of managerial control of the work of the inspectorate by 2009 than was the case at the start of the decade, something evidently not to this HMI's liking. 'I preferred to be inspecting schools. Inspecting inspectors, I found, was a bit dull...I'm going along with a colleague that I know very well and I've got to sit on their inspections and tell them whether it's any good, or not. Oh, mercy!...Doing this week in, week out and, of course, the inspectors themselves are thinking...I know how to inspect, why have I got an ADM (assistant divisional manager) watching me? It was foolish. I thought it was a waste of my time...I like talking to kids in schools. I like seeing what perceptions kids have...what they understand about (a subject) and that was just magical and here I am listening to somebody, someone else's section 5 as they're going through this long list of judgements and, you know, losing the will to live (and as for management meetings; oh, merciful heaven!...It was all to do with meeting...management targets...for inspections, the number of, limiting the number of complaints that were upheld, this sort of stuff...management meetings were to do with targets and organisation and where people are gonna meet and why can't HMI behave themselves and stop complaining' (Transcript 3, 805-847).

As with Interviewee 3, for Interviewee 4, taking on promoted roles meant increasingly being responsible for implementing some greater control over others, for example, when taking over line management responsibility for a team of HMI subject advisers. 'National advisers were a bit of a law unto themselves...some of them had been doing the role for years and felt that they should be doing it forever and they weren't supposed to be doing it forever. Some of them were very new to their role (sic.) and, at the time, there was a great belief that Ofsted should increase its survey

programme...and I thought that was fantastic, 'cos it was...an area where they should use their inspection knowledge in a different way' (Transcript 4, 374-386). That different way was not, however, to be as autonomous as it had been, but directed more towards priorities determined by others. A sense of lacking control could equally be a feature simply of how work was allocated. Interviewee 6; 'You could be doing back-to-back inspections week after week and away a lot. Then you seemed to have little to do, at times, and it was just that lack of, I suppose, any control over my working life. It wasn't totally lacking in control, but very little. It was just a schedule' (Transcript 6, 667-670). That increasing sense of a lack of control over what work was undertaken was echoed by other HMIs.

## **Chapter 7 The Findings – HMIs’ reactions to changes**

Following the approach and format of the last two chapters, this chapter looks at the HMIs’ views about how the changing environment affected their work and their sense of the office. The themes include reflections on the status accorded to the office and an associated issue of the extent and nature of the office’s influence, and the impact of the policy environment, as represented in changes to inspection frameworks and broader demands placed on Ofsted, on the practice and experience of inspecting.

### **Status and impact**

Most of the HMIs had a strong sense of the importance of the office, linked with the impact they thought that it had. Interviewee 7 stated ‘...it seemed to me a job that I’d really want to do...for many people, it was the pinnacle of jobs in education at the time...it was seen as the fount of all wisdom’ (Transcript 7, 26). Early experience at least tended to confirm that view (Transcript 7, 67-69). Later, for Interviewee 3 also, becoming an HMI was about reaching a career peak. ‘I was so pleased to have become an HMI. To me, HMI were the bee’s knees’ (Transcript 3, 337-343).

Interviewee 1 saw HMI’s relationship with central government as important. ‘(W)e were the professional arm of the Department’ (transcript 1, 201-202). The office had a national perspective. ‘(Y)ou were the voice as well as the eyes and ears for your subject...we also had a huge influence on education itself. It was a very, very powerful group of people, highly prestigious, but most importantly hugely influential, frighteningly so at times and then...that all changed’ (Transcript 1, lines 223-230).

The HMI thought that the functions of informing the formation of and subsequently reporting on the effect of government policy were lost (Transcript 1, 259). If HMIs were still reporting without fear, or favour, the focus of the things on which they reported was perhaps shifting.

Interviewee 9 thought that the link with government did not disappear, although HMIs' influence manifested itself differently. '(W)e were...having to handle an incredible number of inspection judgements...because everything that moved, in those early days, was given a grade and there was an extraordinary amount of statistical information available, which...I was keen to make best use of...Every lesson observation would lead to...dozens of judgements being made. It was important to capture those electronically and be able to shuffle them about and analyse them...(for) ministers' questions, or parliamentary questions. Somebody might ask "is the teaching of French better in classes with sets, rather than mixed ability"...and we could...answer questions like that by trawling through the data...it was never, perhaps, used as fully as it could have been...because the volume of this data was so enormous, there might be questions about the quality (of the data) and I think that's probably right, but it was also used for annual reports and for briefings for ministers...on a very regular basis' (Transcript 9, 268-289).

The interviewees recalled no obvious intention to abandon the level of influence enjoyed by HMI, although the avenues through which it was exerted changed. '(S)ome chief inspectors more than others worked very hard to cultivate good relationships with the media...and that was the chance to get lines from the chief inspector into the...press offices...phrases like "satisfactory is not good

enough”...that would be one avenue of influence, which the old HMI would never have dreamed of dirtying their hands in the somewhat-sordid world of Fleet Street’ (Transcript 9, 501-536).

Interviewee 2 thought that a relationship with central government continued, but the nature of that relationship became ambiguous. ‘Ofsted, undoubtedly, still clings to the idea that it’s an independent body...once any changes take place in the way Ofsted goes about its business, there’s always internal discussion about how much of those changes are inspired by contact with Secretary of State, ministers, DfE, etcetera and that’s something to which we are not privy and, in the more-sensitive days of change, when at national conferences of HMI, such thoughts and/or probing questions came from the floor, they were never fully answered to people’s satisfaction’ (Transcript 2, 462-470). Overall, however, the HMI did not think that the changes enhanced the status of the work (Transcript 2, 498-499).

Even for those without a background in schools a sense of the tradition of the office contributed to the perception of its status, linked with an association with government. Interviewee 4: ‘I think you were...very well aware that this was an historic role...and HMI occupied a position that was different from other inspectors...you can go back to people like Matthew Arnold...it was historically very significant...and...it was hard to get. I mean...in the early days, it was something...I...had to go through the whole process of your name being put forward to the Privy Council’ (Transcript 4, 60-91).

Even by the middle of the decade, the idea of HMI as a professional pinnacle of some sort was still extant. Interviewee 8; ‘HMI was always that echelon above...HMI was

still that different tier, somebody once described it...it's the milk with the cream on top, the HMI bit' (Transcript 8, 95-98). For this HMI, like Interviewee 4, the badges of office were still important. '(T)he core of the role, if your full-time job is being HMI, you are Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools, your name's gone before...Privy Council' (Transcript 8, 845-849). Nevertheless, the HMI thought that there were significant, qualitative changes in the work over the course of his/her experience. 'I thought...I would be writing about where things were working well and doing, maybe, a piece of work that would be shared, but of course, it didn't happen. You just get out there and inspect and that's what it became' (Transcript 8, 898-902).

Even so, this latest of the HMI interviewed in the sample, like his/her peers, reviewed the experience positively overall. It was '...the best job, the most honourable job I ever had was being an HMI...it was to do with the respect that, I think, even though we had some difficult conversations, it was the respect from the professional community...that they had for HMI...It was, in my opinion, the old motto of doing good as you go, we were able to do that...I remember when I first joined...we had a talk from...a very senior HMI, very experienced...and he gave us a talk about the kind of history of it and he kept referring to this do good as you go element to being an HMI and I felt that was something you could do...it was just a wonderful experience to do that, but it was about that respect with which the office, the HMI office is held' (Transcript 8, 451-487).

## **The changing nature of the role**

The HMI with the most experience prior to 2000 had a sense of significant changes over the course of his/her career. Interviewee 7; ‘(I)t was a pretty stable picture, when I joined, that rapidly became hugely different, both within HMI and nationally’ (Transcript 7, lines 208-209). The first point of significant change came in 1992 with the inception of Ofsted. ‘(T)here was a great deal of unease and uncertainty, because...it was a long time before you knew whether you were going to carry on...in a job, or not...because they knew that there were never going to be enough inspectors to inspect all schools, so they’d have to recruit some...and the option was whether HMI was going to expand enormously to encompass all this, or whether it was going to disappear altogether, because it was too small to be fit for purpose. In the end...they came down on a relatively small HMI supervising a lot of privatised inspectors’ (Transcript 7, 241-251).

One of the most-significant changes at that time involved the great expansion of the inspector workforce. ‘(W)e were hugely sceptical that there were...enough people out there...with the experience and quality to do the job...and, indeed, on the training courses that we ran...there were an awful lot of people who didn’t measure up... So, there was quite a tension between those of us on the ground, who were taking them out to schools and training ’em and those at the top, who were saying, well, you can’t keep rejecting this lot, or we’ll never have enough...there was a lot of pressure’ (Transcript 7, 259-273).



Other changes followed, though not immediately. ‘(A)ll of the work that I’d done and enjoyed on the subject and nationally, it didn’t disappear overnight, but it did fairly rapidly...All those structures went, although HMI tried to cling onto them. I mean, the subject committees continued to function in terms of meetings, but they didn’t have any role any longer, because they weren’t inspecting anything...they continued to be chatting shops without a job to do’ (Transcript 7, 282-295).

Interviewee 2 felt that HMI ceased to be ‘the eyes and ears’ for their subject areas. ‘I can’t give you a year for that, but...for several years...tried to put up a case for annual reporting of subjects, because it’s what the community wanted...I know there was...disbelief, really, when we had to let our communities know that there wouldn’t be annual publication...there was a sense of reduced influence internally, because senior leadership said “we don’t want to know about (subject) every year.”...and there was a lot of disappointment amongst subject leaders...and the (lack of) esteem that was apparent within the organisation’ (Transcript 2, 412-462). For this HMI, the change of emphasis was associated directly with changes in HMCI.

Interviewee 5 thought later that one chief inspector, at least, sustained subject work as an important feature of HMI and thought the change to triennial reporting as acceptable. ‘Christine (Gilbert) was pretty pro subject work and she always used to say that s/he felt it was one of the things that HMI did that the public knew about...and that one of the most public things we ever did were the long reports for the subjects and they were the things that, actually, people outside took notice of, which was very true...you could be quite amazed by how many people had read your

report...that was the throw back to...what HMI did, had always done' (Transcript 5, 844-862, 913-914).

For some time, quite what precisely is not clear from the interviewees' recollections, subject inspections continued, alongside institutional inspections. During that ill-defined period, subject inspectors continued, it seems, to enjoy considerable autonomy. Interviewee 5; '(A)ll the sorts of things that we had to do, like grade descriptors for our subjects and the inspection schedule...we set up the inspection schedule for the subject inspections and contact with the schools and everything.' The HMI described a qualitatively different approach for this type of inspection. 'In schools, people always used to say...we will be able to get to discuss what we could do better...It wasn't an advisory role, but...it was much more developmental than, I think, the school inspection was perceived' (Transcript 5, 864-886). That final comment seems to hint at another change in the nature of inspection as, increasingly, the focus switched towards the high volume of institutional inspections demanded; a perception, perhaps, that the routine inspections were somehow less developmental experiences for schools.

Notwithstanding the reservations, the HMI retained a sense that inspection, in conjunction with other major national policy initiatives, resulted in benefits for pupils. '(T)hroughout my time in HMI (there was) a huge improvement in primary education and it rattles me no end now when people talk about this...because, when I joined HMI in '87, I have to say appalled is not too strong...what I saw in classroom after classroom...maths was largely stick 'em in front of a scheme textbook and work at your own pace. English was, similarly, Ronald Ridout, or whatever. Most of the other

subjects, art, PE and so on, you might get a gifted teacher now and again, but they were peripheral...So, the changes that came around with inspection and the National Curriculum lifted primary education beyond belief...and, similarly, with things like the National Literacy Strategy. There were people who criticised the National Literacy Strategy, who...I would have, broadly, been on the same side, but if they'd seen what I'd seen in '87...the National Literacy Strategy was asking so much more of kids...anybody who tells me that primary education's not better than it was is talking through the back of their head' (Transcript 7, 477-499).

It was not only the changes to how inspections were being carried out that affected this HMI's view of the office. 'I think another change, in atmosphere, was, there was a great esprit de corps in pre-HMI Ofsted (sic.), partly because..., sometimes, you would be running an inspection and sometimes one of your colleagues would be...and so you didn't want to let them down...and a great interchange across the country, because of the different teams you were involved in, and...a lot of it changed when Ofsted came into being...We went from...a strong feeling of camaraderie within the team, but...I felt...that, gradually, withered more and more...1992 onwards towards 2008' (Transcript 7, 393-412).

Interviewee 7 was not alone in having this perception, but Interviewee 8, the last of the sample group to join HMI, drew on a network of HMI colleagues, in a manner that does not seem entirely different, however, from the collegial relationships described by other HMIs, who enjoyed the role before the changes (Transcript 8, 277-279). The support provided by the network wasn't only practical. 'One thing I will say about HMIs, if you're getting that attack and you're getting that stress, your

colleagues and the senior management team rally round...the pastoral care was pretty incredible...you felt part of an organisation that actually looked after you' (Transcript 8, 408-422). Nevertheless, comments by Interviewee 8 suggest a similar sense that new ways of working, or new approaches to managing the work of HMI, undermined the collegial, or corporate ethos amongst the group and reveal a determination to preserve longer-standing ways of working and notions of what it meant to be an HMI, however informally (Transcript 8, 612-628).

The sense for longer-established HMI of a loss of camaraderie appears to have been combined with the changing demands on the role and the impact of internal restructuring within the organisation. The recollection of details is not sharp, but there is, nevertheless, a clear sense of the impact of shifting sands and frequent changes, which had not begun auspiciously for this HMI. '(Y)ou were asked to opt for a, one of...maybe five, six different teams...none of which were hugely appealing to me and, I don't think, to anyone else' (transcript 7, 297-300, sic.). By 2008, it seemed that the role was substantially different from what it had been some two decades earlier. '(T)he last three years and the changes meant that I'd no desire to carry on...The work that I'd enjoyed very much and been a privilege to do had almost disappeared for me' (Transcript 7, 939).

Interviewee 1 thought that there was a qualitative change in the nature of the role. '(I)n this century, HMI were a different animal...old HMI who'd stayed on would bridle when someone said so, you're an Ofsted inspector. HMI would say "No, I'm not. I'm HMI"...What it meant was, I'm not one of those paid mercenaries. I'm actually the real deal and we had the notion of HMI being the professional arm of

Ofsted, because, to begin with, we did none of those inspections... We did the monitoring. We actually were still looking at particular areas and themes... drawing together information on national policy, what was happening in schools' (Transcript 1, 305-315, sic.). That sense of a view grounded in what HMIs saw as happening in schools is at the heart of a view of the office as independent, of forming and reporting its own evaluations, including in relation to government policy.

As the decade progressed, the focus of the role changed. 'HMCI comes along and says "I want HMI back into the inspection model again, because of quality"'. (Though not made explicit, it seems likely that this is a reference to David Bell.) Chris Woodhead had used us... to train more and more inspectors and to be part of leading from the front... we've progressively been the professional arm... of Ofsted, doing other things, not the inspections themselves, monitoring the system. We needed to get back into it and that actually meant an increase in the number of HMI, but it also meant an increase in the number of HMI with specific skills of inspection and that... is what I see as the major change... (W)e went from having no involvement in the inspection programme to being the drivers of every inspection, because we were leads and all the rest of it' (Transcript 1, 528-631). The interviewee continued, pointing out how limiting that role came to be seen by HMI.

Interviewee 7 referred to '...the narrower and narrower field that inspectors came from... when I joined HMI... you'd get these odd-ball people, who'd not spent a lot of time in schools at all, but were extremely clever and... contributed a great deal... whereas... gradually, HMI recruited existing inspectors' (Transcript 7, 911-913). Interviewee 1 described the change similarly. 'HMI, when I joined, were, like

herding cats...absolute madmen, some of them, very eccentric...but totally committed' (Transcript 1, 305-315).

The changed focus for the role and the rapidity of the changes required recruits with a different set of prior experiences and a fundamentally different outlook from previously. 'What happened was...we want HMI who, with the minimum of training, can move into inspecting schools...and the focus was progressively on what's been your inspection experience within your local authority...So, we were taking people who were ready made inspectors, not taking people who had an educational philosophy and that was the difference. We had people who could inspect and apply the criteria' (Transcript 1, 541-569). After recruitment, 'We were throwing them into being inspectors very quickly' (Transcript 1, 588). 'The consequence of that was HMIs who were concerned about the mundane practicalities of carrying out the task and not, arguably, the autonomous professionals of old' (Transcript 1, 687-691).

It was this HMI's perception that the more-recently appointed colleagues also found the redefined role ultimately to be somewhat restricted. 'I was very conscious of very able younger colleagues coming through, who were frustrated as anything, because they didn't feel that they had any influence on education...they didn't feel their expertise was being used....They had been brought in to be inspectors and lo and behold that's all they were...it was all programmed for them and it was one constant treadmill, which they could take very little responsibility for' (Transcript 1, 631-691). The HMI did not think, however, that the different emphasis led to HMIs who were less able than their predecessors (Transcript 1, 541-569).

Interviewee 1 felt some responsibility for passing on to newer recruits some core principles of HMI. 'There was an element of keeping the tradition alive, but principally because, if you don't do the job the way I was trained to do it and apply your professional judgement fairly and consistently and in as humane a way as possible, then you don't actually do the job well...it was not so much about keeping HMI alive, it was making sure that the people out there who were supposed to be doing a job in education, which was helping institutions and individuals to improve, were actually doing that...' (Transcript 1, 403-422). The HMI found it increasingly difficult, however, to maintain that approach (Transcript 1, 648-669).

Though perhaps affected less than others personally, Interviewee 9 was still aware of the impact the changes were having. 'I tended not to have to do those sorts of things, which were challenging, to say the least, to established HMI, and there was a good deal of unhappiness, I think, about some of the things which the perceived centralisation of inspection was asking inspectors to do' (Transcript 9, 390-399).

Interviewee 2 also remarked on the idea that the role of HMI was increasingly restricted. This HMI thought that, in part, economic considerations were a factor driving changes. Around 2003-2005, '...that's when the financial strictures came in and...it became a narrower field of operation. It had a more-functional feel. You felt you almost had to take on management, if you wanted to do some creative thinking with colleagues' (Transcript 2, 387-395). Faced with several changes that seemed, in the view of the HMI, to undermine the very role to which s/he felt closely committed, s/he used whatever means were available to re-instate as much of the sort of work that s/he valued as possible, but found that increasingly difficult. For example, 'I was

often invited to (external) regional, or national conferences...in former years, we could accept our own invitations; in latter years, we had to seek approval of our line managers' (Transcript 2, 450-470); a hint of 'wings being clipped'.

By the time Interviewee 3 joined in 2001, some of the changes that had caused concern to HMIs were embedded. More significant for this HMI was what might be described as a second wave of change that came shortly afterwards and which s/he associated with the change initiated by David Bell, when he became HMCI, giving HMIs a much more-prominent role in leading institutional inspections, which brought with it other challenges with which HMIs were unfamiliar. '(I)t was probably my third year...you had to start inspecting schools then...and this changed the job considerably, of course, and the survey work, inevitably, had to shrink to an extent, because you were now leading school inspections...with additional inspectors who'd been doing this a long time and they're looking at you, thinking "Go on, then. You know how it's done, do you?"...you had to say "Yes, I know how it's done" and do it...I didn't disagree with that. It seemed to me that HMI should be involved in inspecting schools. I thought it was rather odd that HMI very rarely inspected schools and did, largely, reporting of national trends and so on' (Transcript 3, 395-419). As a consequence, '...you became less and less autonomous, of course' (Transcript 3, 736-740). Interviewee 3 felt that the revised focus of the role and the operational requirements for making it work also resulted in HMIs having less control over their work. '(A)s the years went by and the job shifted and there was less autonomy for HMIs...because school's needed notice, so it had to be timetabled in. You had to know a long time in advance when you were going to be doing these section 5 inspections. Your autonomy, clearly, was limited' (Transcript 3, 722-752).



On joining Ofsted in 2001 from a different inspectorate and with substantially different experience of the inspector role, Interviewee 4 noted that ‘(S)ome of them (HMIs) were quite frightened when those changes came, I think. I remember they weren’t really prepared for it’ (Transcript 4, 111-117). A different perspective on the role appears to have brought with it a different view of some of the issues that perplexed other HMIs in this study. ‘When I joined Ofsted, HMI thought they could write whatever style they liked, flowery, long sentences and...didn’t like to have their writing challenged...and there is a difference between the old-style HMI...because they were, supposedly, good writers and, stylistically, they could write...that’s changed and it’s probably taken away one of the degrees of independence that HMI had, actually’ (Transcript 4, 644-648). This HMI corroborates the view of others in this study that the degree of autonomy enjoyed by individual HMI reduced throughout the decade from 2000, but viewed that change less negatively than others.

Alongside the implied challenge to previously established ways of working, the HMI felt also that it was important to challenge the way in which HMIs exercised their professional judgement, something that was perhaps at the core of what, for some, it meant to be an HMI and of what they reported. For example, ‘(T)here was a reason to challenge some of the judgements...’cos my feeling was that...the bar wasn’t set high enough...it was reflecting a state of play which was not good and...too many (judgements) were coming out as good...that was my feeling’ (Transcript 4, 284-290). Implied here is a view that the traditional independence of HMIs was being eroded, but, for this HMI, appropriately.

Interviewee 5 reinforced the view that the major change in the nature of HMIs' work came with the introduction of Section 5 inspections. '(I)n the July of 2005...every HMI had to be trained and some of them didn't want to be trained, did not want to be institutional inspectors...so that was a huge shift in HMI...because...David Bell came in and said...HMI should be at the leading edge of actually inspecting schools...Then, when we changed to Section 5 inspections...every single HMI was expected to lead inspections...well, quite a lot of them didn't want to, so, the newer echelon, if you like, those people who had come in doing Ofsted inspections already...were almost the people who knew more than the current HMI; only about that area, don't get me wrong' (Transcript 5, 630-642). Here is further evidence that the change affected the recruitment of HMIs.

Joining HMI as part of that recruitment drive, Interviewee 8 provided further indication of how significant the change to Section 5 was for HMIs. 'I have one distinct memory...of a conference in Birmingham, which was...very ill-tempered... It would be Christmas 2004 and it was ill-tempered, because it was when the regional inspection service providers...came to give a presentation, because this, for the very first time, was HMI working with and being accountable to, in their eyes, another organisation...It was a pretty heated thing. 'Course, new lad, I'm sitting there thinking what's all that? Nothing to me...but people like (name)...was really angry...What I thought I was joining in 2004 was not the organisation that I ended up working for, April 2005' (Transcript 8, 181-191).

## **Changes to inspections**

For the earliest-appointed of the HMIs in the sample, Interviewee 7, some of the changes in 2005 to inspection practice and methods that the change to 'Section 5' brought did not represent improvement. 'There was a move to shorten inspections ...and...part of that was that you didn't need to look at lessons...You could judge the quality of teaching by the outcomes of teaching. Well, that was a complete anathema to me...I'd always felt...if I was gonna judge a school, I wanted to be there and see what the kids got...(subsequently) I did fewer lesson observations, but many more than I was meant to...because I thought, well, I knew they were wrong' (Transcript 7, 853-884). The HMI, evidently, tried to retain ways of working that s/he saw as representing fundamental principles connected with the role, in the face of alterations that challenged the very basis of inspection, as the HMI understood it. '(O)ne of the flexibilities within what we were doing was that...I was doing these short inspections...and I was in charge. Well, since I was in charge, I did what I...wanted to do...' (Transcript 7, 893-904).

Interviewee 9 had less experience of implementing some of the changes in how inspections operated, but was associated closely with devising some of the different ways of working. For example, s/he played a major role in developing Ofsted's use of data in inspections and saw that as a significant improvement, including for schools. '(O)ne of the unsung contributions, I think, of Ofsted to the quality of schools...has been that handling of data...in an increasingly sophisticated form...it was, first of all, developed to provide inspection teams...with all the information they needed. It was

felt, in the very early days, schools were asked to provide an incredible amount of information and data for inspection teams before they went in...but it was then realised that a lot of this information, if not available already, might well be possible to be handled electronically...so we didn't have to spend a huge amount of time making demands on schools' (Transcript 9, 233-255, sic.).

This HMI's view contrasts with that of Interviewee 7. Whereas for Interviewee 7, it was essential to maintain as much direct observation of a school's work as possible, specifically the teaching, Interviewee 9 thought that data could make inspections more effective and also more varied in the approaches taken. '(I)t was recognised that data could also mean less inspection...and one of the things I was able to do was...often...second guess overall judgements about the quality of the school...and I could, perhaps, be something like 95% sure that I knew what the overall judgement of the school would be and that led to quite a bit of discussion about the balance between analysis of data and the role of inspection. What inspection did, of course, was enable us to say why the grade was 'satisfactory', or 'outstanding'...but it led to proportionate inspections and the recognition that some schools needed more inspection than others, or more-frequent inspection than others' (Transcript 9, 319-350). A tension between data as replacing judgement and as facilitating inspection is evident.

It is perhaps not unreasonable to suggest from his/her descriptions of the sorts of things that this HMI wanted inspectors to do that there was at least a remnant of the pre-Ofsted notion of HMI as gathering information to produce a national picture of the state of education, although obviously, there was a much bigger body of

inspectors involved in the work by 2000 and most of them were not HMIs. '(T)here was always a tension between what I wanted inspectors to look at and what inspectors wanted...I...always, wanted to say well, while you're in the class, can you just give me some indication about how gender issues are handled, or how refugee children within the class are and...can you just tell me...how's the behaviour of disadvantaged boys in that class and how many classroom assistants are there and what are they actually doing?...'(T)here was sometimes a reluctance to consider inspection as a research methodology...and people got very precious about we're not researchers, we're inspectors, we tell it how it is...I wanted a rather-more rounded picture, which would have been a bigger inspection system' (Transcript 9, 319-350). The longstanding assertion of inspectorial independence is still apparent here.

For this HMI, as for Interviewee 7 (Transcript 7, lines 965-978), changes to inspection frameworks caused something of an inconvenience, although for somewhat different reasons. 'There was a tendency to change frameworks rather more frequently than I would have liked...as a statistician, I would have liked inspection frameworks to have run their course, in a four-year cycle, say, or a five-year cycle, or whatever... As it was, we changed horse in mid-stream quite a bit...and even the scales that we used for grading schools changed a great deal, from a seven-point scale initially to five, to four...I was very much involved in the review of how the grading systems worked and how we could change them' (Transcript 9, 381-387). The HMI recognised, however, that the effects of such changes were probably felt more keenly by the HMIs who were charged with implementing them (Transcript 9, 399-402).

The change to 'section 5' heralded more-frequent and increasingly rapid amendments to inspection frameworks, including the criteria to be used by inspectors in reaching judgements. Working as s/he did more centrally and dealing with inspection issues as matters of policy, rather than practice, Interviewee 9 was acutely aware of the power of inspection as a mechanism for implementing national policies. '(I)nspection criteria were a great way of highlighting what we thought was important at the time and we had no statutory powers to enforce what was going on, but by the very nature of asking a question, you were setting an agenda, which schools and authorities would be very wise...to address. If they knew we were gonna ask about safeguarding, then the trick was to get your house in order and that was a very potent weapon...that control of the criteria and the criteria changed. Things fell off the agenda and things were added to it' (Transcript 9, 462-468). There is, perhaps, here an indication of a switch in the function of inspections from what we might term the classic role of HMIs as observers of, evidence-gatherers for, and commentators on the impact of national policies (in addition to their function in disseminating good practice), to one where inspections were more a mechanism for assisting in getting the policies put into practice. The change was, perhaps, most apparent with regard to the national literacy and numeracy strategies introduced for Key Stages 1-3 (Transcript 9, 472-492). Arguably, such a switch represented a move away from 'reporting without fear, or favour', although that pre-supposes much about the ways that the HMIs went about the task.

It is, perhaps, unsurprising that this HMI, who was for the early part of his/her career involved in establishing international links for Ofsted, was particularly conscious of policy perspectives developed against a background of comparative international

studies and a broader context of governmental concern about Britain's economic competitiveness. The HMI traced a connection between such macro-level considerations and the particular facets of education on which inspections were developed to focus. '(O)ther influences (in pressing changes on the inspection system)...were the first PISA, the first international assessments...and that too was influential in tightening up some of our inspection approaches...it was a consistent theme that chief inspectors (who) loved phrases like "raising the bar"' (Transcript 9, 501-536). Interviewee 9 thought that the changes re-directed inspectors' focus, but regarded that as necessary (Transcript 9, 541-577).

There does seem to be in this HMI's perceptions a translation of the work of HMI from arms-length judges of the effectiveness of national policy, using some form of indistinctly described, though deeply held principles and ideas about the purpose and value of education that were somehow immutable and not constrained by national policy priorities, to being a channel for particular policy concerns, which may, or may not have been devised in accordance with previously existing value systems. Any reading of the literature on the earlier work of HMI will demonstrate, however, that the distinction was never quite so categorical.

Like the others, Interviewee 2 noted a substantial shift in the focus of inspection with the introduction in 2005 of section 5, particularly what s/he regarded as a negative impact on the inspectorate's subject expertise (Transcript 2, 523-613). Other observations by Interviewee 2, however, echo Interviewee 9's thoughts. 'One of the strengths of "section 5" is its clear focus on outcomes and progress for learners...(but inspectors) are scrambling around to try and make sure they're compliant with, not

only the Framework, but several updates on the Framework and small aspects of it since they last read it' (Transcript 2, 580-613). Interviewee 3 also noted the reduced emphasis on subjects, but had a generally positive view of the new regime. '(S)chools had then to get used to the fact that you were in school a lot less. You didn't do subject reports...but...I didn't mind it. I thought, I'm unwrapping the story of the school...' (Transcript 3, 441-450). If the previous primacy given to looking at the teaching of subjects was gone, new elements demanded a not-totally dissimilar approach, although '(It) did change the way in which the team was deployed. It changed the way in which you reported' (Transcript 8, 792-803). Quite how was not made clear.

Interviewee 4, an HMI whose background was in the further education sector, had a different perspective on the change to section 5 and saw a greater degree of continuity with past practice than some of his/her colleagues. 'I think there's an ultimate similarity throughout all the years as a sort of principle of inspection...that we go in without fear, or favour...and our job is to report independently and what we see...however much it's a political arena...I think there is a continuity from the very beginnings of how inspectors are meant to operate...I think, probably, in the context of education, there is, in a values sense,...a commitment to...trying to bring about improvement...and people go to become inspectors because they want to make a difference...I think there is a collegiate (sic.) belief in that...they may interpret it in different ways and it might lead to making different judgements, but I think that, fundamentally, is why people do the role' (Transcript 4, 28-57). Here is an echo of the view expressed by Interviewee 1 and a notion of an underlying principle of inspection transcending all of the changes.



For this HMI, the detail changes were simply to be taken in one's stride. '(Y)ou just adapt to different frameworks, don't you? I can't say it was one of those things that necessarily kept me awake at night...I just got used to the fact that you do things differently...but the fundamentals are still the same. I don't think inspection changes because the Framework changes' (Transcript 4, 610-615). Nevertheless, the HMI regarded some of the changes associated with new frameworks as more significant than others. 'The report structure changes have been really interesting and that does pose different challenges...if you go back to section 10 reports, they were massive, repetitive documents...and then they sharpened up...that is a change that you have to think hard about when you're writing' (Transcript 4, 626-633).

Interviewee 8 recalled the impact of the detailed changes on inspectors in the field and the increasingly rapid pace with which they happened' (Transcript 8, 714-734). Like interviewee 9, this HMI noted the power of inspections to focus schools on issues that were deemed to be of prime importance nationally. For example, the introduction of so-called limiting judgements, intentionally, raised the profile of particular aspects of a school's work, such as safeguarding children and young people. 'There was the Victoria Climbié stuff as well...Wasn't it in 2008...that the Framework changed? I can remember being on the helpdesk the September that had changed and it was when schools were going into special measures...if the single central record had missed off somebody's CRB (see Appendix 4 for definitions) number...it was a constant line of 'phone calls from Heads, or from inspectors out in the field' (Transcript 8, 749-768). Clearly, the impact of the changes could be highly significant for all concerned.

The changes in the inspection framework and evaluation schedule had practical implications for how HMIs led and organised their inspections. It is possible to interpret these changes as attempting to bring greater clarity to the criteria to be used and so to assist inspectors in reaching judgements and to make the job of reaching judgements more-easily understood by other parties. It may be also that pressures and ever-increasing concerns about the consistency of inspectors' judgements, within the teaching profession, within Ofsted itself, and amongst other interested parties and commentators, added to the efforts to reduce the facility for variations. It is equally possible to view the same developments as removing from inspectors their professionalism by restricting the options open to them.

### **Responses to a wider remit**

For some, it was changes to cross-remit working and the new roles which that entailed that changed the idea of what HMIs were fundamentally. Interviewee 7 recalled the difference that becoming involved with inspections of local authority children's services after 2005 made. 'I think HMI had been predicated on a notion of people who had expertise in a particular area, inspecting what they knew about, (but when asked to inspect in a new field)...I mean, (name), who trained us, did the best he could in the circumstances, but there was no way you could seriously train someone to look through pages and pages of statistics on breast-feeding, road accidents...I was unhappy doing it, because I always felt it was important you were secure about what you were judging...and I wasn't' (Transcript 7, 832-839). There is clearly a feeling here of being de-skilled.

Against a background of feeling ill-equipped for the role, the HMI adopted strategies designed to enable him/her to survive and at least to complete the required tasks. 'I ended up producing a joint area report for (geographical area) and, I mean, it went fine, but it pretty much panned out just as I feared. I could challenge the local authority on (the) masses of statistics I'd got, but they'd always got someone who knew ten times as much about what was happening on the ground as I did and...I wasn't prepared to stick my neck out at that point and argue with 'em...If they seemed reasonable, I trusted (them) which I knew wasn't the best thing to do, but I thought, if I'd been lumbered with this task...I was gonna make the best job I could of it' (Transcript 7, 921-931). This example arguably indicates that the changes impacted negatively upon HMIs' ability to sustain that long-standing maxim of HMI, reporting without fear, or favour.

The HMI dealt similarly with the changes in emphasis that national policy brought. For this HMI, the heightened concerns about safeguarding children and young people '...began to take over from the core of what I'd been interested in...which was standards...and teaching and management and so on and it was not unlike what I've described from local authority inspections. It was an area that I'd not got a lot of expertise in, nor did I particularly want to wade through paper to check that the teachers had been subject to the right vetting and so on...I knew it was a sensible thing to do...so, as a lead inspector, I invariably gave it to someone else' (Transcript 7, 1026-1038). For Interviewee 1 also, the changes and new requirements meant adapting, but for this HMI at least, there appears to have been more sense of the challenge being worthwhile. 'I was having to find a new way and a new place to

apply what I would describe as my generic HMI inspection skills. I was constantly changing. It was thrilling' (Transcript 1, 346-363).

All of the HMIs interviewed conveyed a sense of the changes coming from the top down and an awareness that inspection practice was being driven to an important degree by the national policy (and so political) context. Interviewee 9, whose role was more central within Ofsted than others' in this sample, illustrated the point about the source of the changes. '(S)ometimes it would have been at the direct involvement of a chief inspector...the question would then be to what extent was there political interference, or involvement...or it would be issues of national concern, safeguarding...it might be education of refugee children, or whatever stories were important at the moment' (Transcript 9, 472-492).

Each HMI responded individually to their experiences of the pressures. If Interviewee 7 might be said to have acceded to them and Interviewee 1 to have risen to them, whilst Interviewee 9, for whom the changes involved little by way of actual alterations to his/her particular role, accepted them, Interviewee 2 appears to have attempted directly to modify them by trying to exert influence. A seeming lack of success in exerting influence did not prevent the HMI from dealing with the situation in his/her own way and, in deciding on a course of action, time-honoured principles associated with the office of HMI both re-asserted themselves and provided inspiration. 'I think the maxim of "do good as you go" does, can lead...HMI into subverting systems and doing things in a better way, not in contradiction to an imperative, it's not intended to be disruptive, they are the sort of things, behavioural things, that individuals believe will add to the authority of what Ofsted says and, if

that's subversion, it's a very constructive activity...HMI have...always debated long and hard...and, as one senior leader, exasperated at a divisional meeting, shook his head and said "It's like herding cats"...but he said he wouldn't do away with it for the world, because it enriched the whole business' (Transcript 2, 737-750).

Interviewee 3 recalled that a range of views about the changed focus of inspections existed amongst HMIs. When asked about the impact of the 'Every Child Matters' legislation and the rising importance given to safeguarding in schools, the HMI responded '...you had to try and make sure that that was threaded through the whole of what the school did. A bit convoluted at times, possibly, and very difficult for schools...Nonetheless, as an approach to schools, that every child matters...to me it is a much better educational vision' (Transcript 3, 614-622). In this matter, it seems that, for this HMI, the new demands represented improvement, at least partially.

When it came to the impact of the changes on other aspects of HMIs' work, however, the HMI expressed more concern. 'I think there was a change of management view...and...we were, allegedly, one Ofsted, but of course, there were very, very different jobs. The jobs of looking after the Early Years Foundation Stage and then some of the college, when the ALI (Adult Learning Inspectorate) people came in...we clearly weren't one Ofsted...and we would spend quite a lot of time trying to be one Ofsted, only for the next...managerial thought to be "Oh. Do you know? We won't bother at all." Why have we just spent hours and hours of our time talking in great length to our people who were inspecting social services and what we could do together, only to then find no, you're not going to talk to them anymore...and I thought it was bizarre...I thought we were less effective than in what I think HMI

were about, which is to be able to report impartially, intelligently, and usefully about the state of education and what kinds of things schools might do to help children and we were losing our ability to do that' (Transcript 3, 682-700). A sense of the pressure on the age-old maxim about how HMIs went about the job is clearly apparent here.

Interviewee 4 viewed the intention to have more cross-remit working amongst HMI positively, although some frustrations were apparent when s/he reflected on the actual experience. An opportunity to inject some challenge into the process appears to have been relished. 'There was a feeling that the JAR (Joint Area Review) judgements were too soft and, in particular, in relation to looked-after children, so I took it on myself as a kind of personal crusade to reduce the grading for looked-after children in JARs...and I regarded it as being a bit of a failure, if I didn't get one of the grades reduced' (Transcript 4, 278-282). That approach revealed tensions. 'HMI do not like their judgements being challenged...sometimes people were very upset, but...you knew that, at the end of the day, a hell of a lot was at stake...because...there were some very high-profile judgements made in JARs that...you had to get right, but I do think it went across some of the independence (of) HMI...and...there were some HMI who got back to me and said "At the end of the day, it's my judgement" and I had difficulty saying, well actually, it's not your judgement. It's the chief inspector's judgement, but...they were used to working in...situations where there was only one, or two of them. In a JAR team...big stakes, wasn't it?' (Transcript 4, 326-336). For this HMI, restricting the previously cherished autonomy of HMI seemed necessary in order to achieve the desired improvements in the provision that was being inspected, in pursuit of national policy goals.

Nevertheless, this HMI also found the challenge of cross-remit working difficult at times. 'I think my response was "Well, I don't think that would be the best use of my expertise, since I'm looking...at almost everything else Ofsted does"...that was something that happened then which I think I would have resented, although a lot of my colleagues relished the fact that they could go into schools...but I wouldn't have enjoyed it, I don't think' (transcript 4, 488-501). Just as there was for Interviewee 7, there is here a sense that, to some degree at least, the success and impact of HMIs still rested upon personal expertise.

Despite the potential offered by the idea of cross-remit working, the HMI seemed to think the results of the efforts were mixed. 'I think there were some effects on the role...I know that colleagues probably felt that they'd lost that sense of identity and...coherence...They got other opportunities to work...with other people in Ofsted, which was good, but I think it did lose something' (Transcript 4, 202-209).

Ultimately, the HMI thought that it didn't work. 'I don't think there was ever one Ofsted...there was a lot of energy spent on it...I think Ofsted, as it expanded, increasingly found it impossible to do...I think...one of the biggest things that started to make that impossible was the incorporation of the Early Years provision...huge number of inspectors, very different status from HMI; never worked in terms of holding one Ofsted together and once you got social care in there as well, it clearly couldn't be one Ofsted...I don't think it ever had that cultural togetherness about it' (Transcript 4, 505-519).

More than most of the HMIs interviewed, Interviewee 6 regarded the drive for more cross-remit working as an opportunity and a step in the right direction. For this HMI,

a sense of disappointment that work intended to bring together the different remits did not work fully is more apparent than in the responses of the others. For example, speaking about the move to re-instigate closer working with local authorities referred to by Interviewee 7, the HMI stated ‘I think, to start with, there was a bit of a fanfare. We got together...these were the things we were looking for and you could feel, yes, that’s really good, but then it seemed to reduce...I think the intent of meeting up with education colleagues, looking at the schools in that area...which is never easy...didn’t fit with the model that Ofsted was wedded to’ (Transcript 6, 411-439).

The sense here that the attempt to bring about a more-unified, multi-disciplinary corporate body failed ultimately echoes the views of Interviewee 4; Interviewees 4 and 6 were exactly contemporaneous in their time with Ofsted and both joined HMI from non-school backgrounds, giving them different perspectives on things from the other members of the sample group. Like his/her contemporary, Interviewee 6 thought that the approach to managing the new structures was not up to the task (Transcript 6, 345-352). Whilst the HMI remarked on what s/he saw as the failure ultimately of the efforts to integrate the different arms of the service, it seems that the changes were not without benefits. ‘I learned an enormous amount...I’d managed...services for looked-after children, but really, hadn’t got...anything like a grasp of...the...attainment for the looked-after children; part of the culture, where they’re looked-after children, you can’t expect too much...a shameful approach, but that was the culture...so that (ie. the cross-fertilisation between the different inspection remits) really helped sharpen it up’ (Transcript 6, 250-262).



Interviewee 8 seemed to echo the full range of views about the changes to the role, seeing positive aspects in what the policy drives appeared to be seeking (Transcript 8, lines 776-785). There were, nevertheless, significant dilemmas with which HMIs had to deal, as a result of the changes.

‘I remember you (ie. the interviewer) in a meeting...when it was on the agenda for a team meeting and you, rightly, said, I think you’d had experience that week of it, you’re giving a grade for safeguarding, you drive away from the school...on Monday morning, you open the paper and there’s something happened. There’s been a similar Soham case, or whatever it is, and you made the point, I can still remember it...how can you live with the fact that you’ve given a (grade) one, because the paperwork fits’ (Transcript 8, 811-818).

### **Changes in leadership and organisation**

For the HMI appointed earliest amongst this sample, interviewee 7, some of the changes in the way HMIs were managed jarred with his/her sense of being a professional. ‘(T)here was a...failure to see that there was an awful lot more expertise within HMI than they were prepared to use, or even knew about. I went to one conference where there was some chap explaining how to run a survey. Well, I’d run umpteen surveys, you know...but this chap hadn’t run one. It was just his notion of how you might do it and I thought, well...we might be a dwindling number, but there are enough to know the sort of schedules you need to produce and how you need to organise...this’ (Transcript 7, 853-884). Such a response might be the understandable, perhaps, predictable response of an older-established and more-experienced person to

the possibly equally predictable naïvety of less-experienced, but newly promoted personnel, but that does not invalidate the sense that experience was not being valued.

It would seem that the HMI was not alone, at least according to his/her own recollection, in reacting to controversial changes in the context for HMIs' work. 'I never felt personally that I had to compromise my views, but...there was certainly a tension...we were conscious of people right at the top of HMI who altered the message to suit their...agenda...I can remember HMI being up in arms, because HMCI...came to us at the annual conference and said ministers had asked us to look at, I can't remember what it was. Well, there was absolute uproar that ministers should be asking HMI to look at something...because HMI were an independent body who decided themselves what they should be...looking at' (Transcript 7, 1056-1083). There is here, arguably, a notion of more-overt challenge to the passionately held independence of HMI, which reflects the comments of Interviewee 9, though expressed less emotively, that the correlations between national policies and inspection practice were increasingly close. A close contemporary of Interviewee 7, Interviewee 1 shared his/her colleague's view HMI's long-standing independence was being eroded (Transcript 1, 170-179).

For Interviewee 9, though broadly a contemporary of Interviewees 7 and 1, it was other changes connected with management that had more impact on the way HMI operated. '(W)e were...forever reorganising...and there were occasions when I felt that this was distracting chief inspectors...away from what the big issues were in education to (questions about) how many regional offices we should have, or should we be based in Leeds, or Manchester, and I do think there was a period of time when

we missed the wood for the trees by focussing on some of these details of how many hours HMI ought to work and should we be called teams, or divisions, or whatever, and I do think, sometimes, the management got in the way' (Transcript 9, 669-682). Though perhaps less concerned directly with the inspectorate's particular relationship with central government, there seems here to be a sense that the changes were leading to it being a less-influential body than that it once was.

The views of Interviewee 3 seem almost to represent a point of change in the balance of opinion amongst this sample group. On the one hand, the HMI had a clear sense that HMIs' practice needed to modernise (Transcript 3, 298-308). On the other hand, like Interviewee 9, this HMI found the increasingly frequent changes in organisational structure diversionary (Transcript 3, 653-665). Also, the HMI found unpalatable some of the ways in which new managerial approaches were seeking to assert themselves (Transcript 3, 653-665). If the demands posed by working in new ways and across a range of often-unfamiliar remits were seen as posing some threat to HMIs' traditional expertise, they all, to some extent, drew upon ideals associated with the role that seemed to them to transcend the particular moment. For example, Interviewee 4 concluded that '(O)ne of the really key things about being an inspector is not really to do with your knowledge base at all. It's about how you deal with people in organisations, you know, whether it's a college, or a school, or a local authority, it's the same principle.... You've got to get on with people in the right way. You've got to adopt the right approaches to work in an organisation. You've got to have a particular style about you... Not so much the kind of skills around making judgements; that came out of... the team meetings and other things, but the thing you need to get right more than anything is the way you work with other people in those organisations. You

can be...as knowledgeable as anything and, as you know, in terms of managing teams, it can still go pear shaped...if you ask the wrong thing, or say the wrong thing, or do the wrong thing' (Transcript 4, 436-450).

## **Chapter 8 Discussion and conclusions**

This chapter summarises the author's interpretation of the findings from the research, attempting to create a coherent account of what the research findings suggest about a history of HMI in the decade of interest. It seeks also to identify opportunities for further research and to acknowledge what this project has left undone. It includes reflections on the experience of applying the chosen method.

Its contribution to knowledge lies in going beyond the existing literature by looking closely at the role of HMI after the time at which most of that literature considers the role to be, in effect, obsolete, or to have changed beyond meaningful recognition. The thesis argues that, whilst there were undoubtedly important changes after 2000, the individuals carrying out the role viewed themselves as working within a long-established tradition. They sought to sustain core elements of that tradition, however vaguely described. When faced with events, or circumstances which they believed to be at odds with that tradition, this study suggests that they attempted to transcend those conditions. They did this by defining their own narratives, selecting courses of action from their own deliberations and choices, in the way that Aboulafia describes the concept of transcendence (Aboulafia, p6).

The thesis adds to the literature also by making the views of HMIs central to the narrative of events. Previously, HMIs have been effectively disenfranchised in the accounts of educational inspections, either because their views have been presented almost tangentially to the narrative, or simply left out altogether, or because they have been regarded as misguided, or ill-informed. This thesis argues that no account of the development of education at the start of the current century and the role of inspections

within that development can be regarded as comprehensive, unless the perspectives and stories of people who carried out the inspections are included. The research has made a small contribution to filling that gap by collecting such views and offering an analysis of them, both of which have not been undertaken previously. As such, the claim made here is that there is sufficient evidence, even from this small-scale study, at least to unsettle the prevailing and predominant narratives regarding educational inspections. Nevertheless, it is not knowledge that is either fixed, or immutable, but intended to enable further discussion. The contribution to history lies in leaving other historians with evidence to scrutinise and conclusions to debate in light of such scrutinies, so that other, more complete narratives may be written.

The thesis offers three particular contributions to knowledge. Firstly, it shows that, whilst the work of HMI changed in the decade after 2000, it did not do so instantly and that various facets of the culture of HMI persisted, contradicting Dunford's (Dunford, 1998) claim that the office effectively ceased to exist. Secondly, as a work of oral history, this study has given a voice at least to a small groups of HMIs, whose views are largely absent from the literature about inspections during this period and often dismissed when included . I have worked from a principle espoused by Thompson (see p. 68 above) that oral history provides a counterweight to meta-narratives, though it does not necessarily overturn them. That has been an important objective throughout.

Also throughout, it has been an exercise in the practical wisdom called for by Gardner (see. p. 50 above). I have pursued Danto's call (see p. 51 above) to pose scholarly questions and to root the answers in relevant source material, leading to what Gardner

(see p. 51 above) describes as an honest analysis of historical traces of the past. Like Bevir (see p. 54 above), I accept that the resulting claim to contributing to knowledge is propositional and not absolute. It is unequivocally a contribution to further debate, to history as a continuous exploration of the interface between the past and the present, as described by Southgate (see. p. 63 above).

### **The work of Her Majesty's Inspectors 2000-2010**

#### **What do HMIs' views indicate about how the role changed, or developed during the period?**

There is a sense amongst the interviewees that the ethos of HMI changed in the period after 2000 and, particularly, after 2005 and the introduction of 'section 5' inspections, as shown, for example, by the comments regarding changes in the inspection workforce (eg. Transcript 1, p.164 above) and the responses of serving HMIs to the post-2005 emphasis on insitutional inspections (eg. Transcript 5, p. 183 above). There are indications also that the broader remit given to Ofsted and the changes that they brought to recruitment and ways of working emphasised the idea that the role was subsequently different substantively from previously, for example, requiring HMIs to deal with subject matter with which they felt ill-equipped, for example, 'I was asked to inspect things that I was in no way qualified to inspect, either by experience, or anything else' and increasingly ill-suited (transcript 7, p. 149 above). It is not clear from the interviewees' responses how that affected the detail of their practice and there is a lack of precision in the interviewees' comments about the sources of the changes, though that may well reflect inadequacies in the interviewer's approach.

Equally, there is some sense in the responses that details, which, at the point of their occurrence, would have seemed essential for understanding events and for being part of them, such as Ofsted's constantly changing requirements for reporting on inspections, are simply forgotten, making it difficult to determine the significance of such matters. It is hard to find in the transcripts anything to indicate that the sense of something as having been lost from the role of HMI is anything more than nostalgia, rather than something actual. Nostalgia is, nevertheless, a very human response to change.

The evidence from this research suggests that, whilst there were important changes in the specific foci and balance of HMIs' work, the contention, for example of Dunford (1998), that the office ceased in effect to exist is too simplistic a view. This thesis argues that there is little evidence in the material from these interviews that HMIs became in any sense robotic, as was suggested by Kelly (2010). Nevertheless, a shift in emphasis away from the methods of operation described by Lawton and Gordon (1987) is apparent as HMIs applied the prescribed classifications of the inspection *Evaluation schedule* and responded to increasingly frequent alterations to the inspection Framework. Equally, the evidence indicates that, for each of the individuals interviewed, a sense of being required to exercise individual judgement, which Lawton and Gordon regarded as central prior to 1987, persisted as a fundamental aspect of the role. Also, the evidence suggests important changes in the role that echo the comments of Perry (2008) regarding the impact on HMIs of the changes to inspections post-1991 that led to the more-frequent insitutional inspections and a gradual reduction in the extent to which HMIs were influential in the setting of national educational policy.



### **How did the individual HMIs conceive of their role?**

The HMIs retained throughout the period a strong sense of personal identity connected with a perception of the role and that perception was constructed iteratively through an internal, reflexive dialogue, mediated by interactions with other individuals, with groups, and events; for example, in the contributions of interviewees 4, concerning the motivations for taking on the role (transcript 4, p. 150 above), and 8 on the influence of working with colleagues (transcript 8, p. 154 above). The HMIs provided little information to suggest other sources of influence. Organisational changes clearly had impact, affecting, as noted by interviewee 6 (transcript 6, p. 218 above), the degree of autonomy for individual HMIs and the choices that had to be made, for example by interviewee 7 (transcript 7, p. 227 above). As contextual factors determining to some degree the range of options available, the organisational changes may be said to have asserted an effect and those changes were associated with developments in government policy. In that sense, they were an influence, but seemingly somehow qualitatively different from the personal interactions, though quite in what way is unclear.

There were, additionally, personal factors that had to be considered that had a material effect on the choices made by the HMIs and which were themselves mediated in certain ways by various factors. Interviewees 3 and 9, for example, reached a point where the demands of promotion and managerial office brought a sense of personal dissonance for one (transcript 3, p. 187 above) and, for Interviewee 9, responding to the demands of the policy environment and political climate within which Ofsted

found itself demanded new ways of working that jarred with older established ideals (transcript 9, p. 192 above). Each HMI was situated in relation to a variety of factors that each had a bearing on the options s/he perceived to be available, the choices made, and subsequent actions.

It seems clear that the HMIs exercised choices throughout their careers as a means of responding to the changes taking place around them. Bonnett and Cuypers (2003) have demonstrated the problematic nature of autonomy, but the explanations provided by the HMIs for their decisions appear to satisfy several of the possible conditions for defining autonomy that Bonnett and Cuypers describe. Not all of the options chosen were comfortable and, over time, the HMIs modified their expectations, or views, in order to transcend the details of the situations and to retain a sense of their professionalism; this is apparent, for example, in the statements from interviewee 2, 'I think the maxim of "do good as you go" does, can lead...HMI into subverting systems and doing things in a better way' (transcript 2, p. 214 above), and interviewee 3, when recalling the many changes in the inspection framework, 'I mean, you speak as you find, don't you? You report the evidence' (transcript 3, p. 174 above). They suggest, *qua* Aboulafia (2010), that the HMIs defined their own narratives and selected courses of action based upon individual deliberations and choices.

There were equally indications that the HMIs retained a core of ideals about the purpose of the role, its essence, and sought the best available avenues for realising those ideals. Remarks by interviewees 1, 'There was an element of keeping the tradition alive' (transcript 1, p. 201 above), and 8, 'It's about having that confidence that you know the framework inside out and you know you're gonna make that

judgement and you will defend that' (transcript 8, p. 176 above), are noteworthy in this respect. It seemed, in part at least, that their choices from the available options were made on the basis of deeply held values in relation to the objects of the work, the education of young people, the particular areas of expertise that they had as educators, factors that had been central to their decisions to join HMI, and a commitment to the corporate body of HMI, reshaped by, but to some degree transcending organisational changes. It was not simply that the organisation, management, and context of the work changed, but there were also significant changes in the balance and focus of the work that made it different from the job that they joined to do, or from that which they had experienced previously. Based on the evidence from this research, whether, or not, the role fulfilled some part of the performative discourse outlined by Case et al. (2000), Jeffrey (2002), and Perryman (2006 and 2009), remains a matter of conjecture, or interpretation, but this thesis argues that such a view is not obviously inherent within the evidence collected.

The HMIs' descriptions of their careers provide only a vague sense of the sequence of events and, as a result, the source material lacks any clear chronology, making it difficult to relate the information to a detailed historical context, although that history has itself yet to be written, Chapter 4 above offering nothing more than contributory detail, but we might, in this case, take Dean's (1994) position and see chronology less as an essential matter of historical reality, but rather as an analytical tool, constructed by historians and imposed upon the sources. To an historian, notions of time must matter, but our subjects' experience of time is not the same thing as neatly formulated historical chronologies.

### **What do the HMIs' stories reveal about their personal responses to any changes?**

For all that they may have had reservations about, or disagreed with particular developments, the interviewees remained committed to the office of HMI. The status of that office was important to them, though not as a matter of personal aggrandisement. It was associated with notions of the role as a pinnacle of educational professionalism, however vaguely understood and defined, and the opportunities that it provided to exert influence in the interests of children and young people. As Interviewee 3 stated, 'I was so pleased to have become an HMI. To me, HMI were the bee's knees' (transcript 3, p. 190 above), and Interviewee 4 stated, '(T)here is, in a values sense,...a commitment to...trying to bring about improvement...and people go to become inspectors because they want to make a difference' (transcript 4, p. 210 above). Despite the various changes in the legislation, policies and protocols that governed the work, the HMIs retained a sense of connection with the work of their predecessors, as is apparent in their references to long-standing maxims guiding that work.

The comments from the HMIs, for example interviewees 1, '(I)f you don't do the job the way I was trained to do it and apply your professional judgement fairly and consistently and in as humane a way as possible, then you don't actually do the job well' (transcript 1, p. 201 above), and 2, 'You picked up the ethos, the ways of working, the importance that your predecessors put upon certain aspects of the work and you...picked up the behaviours, I suppose...One that sticks with me was in the way of feeding back...not to treat people to whom you were feeding back as specimens' (transcript 2, p. 154 above), and 4, '(O)ne of the really key things about

being an inspector is not really to do with your knowledge base at all. It's about how you deal with people in organisations... You've got to get on with people in the right way. You've got to adopt the right approaches to work in an organisation. You've got to have a particular style about you... the thing you need to get right more than anything is the way you work with other people in those organisations' (transcript 4, p. 221 above), suggest that, from their points of view, the quality of an inspection event was determined by the personal attributes of the inspector, his, or her ability to manage the inter-personal dynamics, rather than structural characteristics of inspection as a process; of course, they may simply have been unaware of the actuality.

The accounts indicate that individual chief inspectors were regarded as influential in the changes that the HMIs perceived, but those individuals do not feature prominently in the HMIs' descriptions of changes, leaving for further research questions about the precise nature of chief inspectors' influence. The purpose of inspection reports changed fundamentally in the years after the inception of Ofsted. Concomitant with that change were demands for new styles of writing and the standardisation of reports that stood in contradistinction with earlier, more-individual approaches, which HMIs regarded previously as indicators of their professional skill and autonomy. The tensions that this brought for some can be seen in the observations of interviewees 6 ' (I)t was just that lack of, I suppose, any control over my working life. It wasn't totally lacking in control, but very little (transcript 6, p. 189 above) and 9, '(T)here was a good deal of unhappiness, I think, about some of the things which the perceived centralisation of inspection was asking inspectors to do' (transcript 9, p. 201 above).

Nevertheless, despite evidence of commonalities and themes in their responses, what is striking is the individuality of the HMIs. All of the HMIs gave some sense of not being entirely in control of their working lives and, for some, increasingly less so as the various changes that they experienced progressed. Perhaps their ill-defined ideals of professionalism created in the HMIs an illusion of the possibility of control, or perhaps they simply did not like the things that they perceived to be happening. It is certainly possible to align their accounts of events with concepts conveying positive normative associations about the past and equally to rationalise their descriptions of change using negatively charged explanatory frameworks.

Questions about individual freedom ‘...*invite* confusion and misunderstanding because of their tacit presumption that persons can be free or not free *simpliciter*’ (MacCallum, 1972, p. 188; author’s italics). The HMIs were evidently making decisions for themselves, but within constraints, balancing life factors, transcending their situations in ways that reconciled for them contradictions between circumstances and personal preferences, using the ideas and language available to them (Weiler, 1992). They do not so much confirm a specific historical trajectory over the period studied, notwithstanding the fact that proponents of performativity and panopticism may discern elements conforming to such hypotheses, as provide insights into the constraints within which these particular actors worked. The accounts show the HMIs adopting strategies and methods to assert some autonomy against the prevailing political and cultural background (De Certeau, 2005). They allow us, as Holland and Lave (2009) have suggested, to explore the conventions of the HMIs’ practice and what the conventions meant to them.

The HMIs echo in their accounts a sense of a changing world evident in literature about the development of professional society, such as Perkin (1989 & 1996), Giddens (2000) and Stronach et al. (2002). What it meant to be a professional by the opening decade of the twenty first century required adapting to cope with new demands, which have been characterised by some as performativity, by others as managerialism, or governmentality, and, by some, in terms of notions such as accountability and transparency, language that may perhaps in contrast evoke notions of democratisation. It is evident that, for some HMIs, the changes were sometimes a matter of regret; see, for, example interviewees 2, describing the decreasing emphasis on subject work, '(T)here was...disbelief, really, when we had to let our communities know that there wouldn't be annual publication...there was a sense of reduced influence internally, because senior leadership said "we don't want to know about (subject) every year."...and there was a lot of disappointment amongst subject leaders' (transcript 2, p. 195 above), and 7, 'There was a move to shorten inspections ...You could judge the quality of teaching by the outcomes of teaching. Well, that was a complete anathema to me...I'd always felt...if I was gonna judge a school, I wanted to be there and see what the kids got' (transcript 7, p. 205 above).

The milieu in which the HMIs operated, or the HMIs themselves in their relationships to, understanding of, and belief about their historical environment, appears to have changed over the course of the decade. Understanding why, precisely, remains elusive on the basis of this evidence. Certainly, a causal explanation does not inhere within the responses provided during the interviews. The calendar of events impinged upon daily practices, but all of the HMIs resisted to some extent altering their practice, at least until reaching a point at which they wished no longer so to do.

Most of the interviewees reached a point at which some facet of their work could no longer be accommodated sufficiently comfortably alongside personal beliefs, or circumstances. That did not, for any of the interviewees, result in a loss of personal connection with an ideal, however vague, of HMI, of values in education, or with the function of inspection. The data from the interviews suggest a shift in emphasis, changing the scope and operation of inspections, but there is nothing inherent in this limited evidence base to indicate any fundamental ‘force of history’ at work, or of a performative, or managerialist sub-structure determining, or conditioning, events. Such concepts are hypothetical, explanatory frameworks, constructs, not once-hidden and now-revealed realities, and so no more valid than other accounts. The responses given by the interviewees may be considered by some, perhaps, to reflect the impact of such hypotheses, but the inspectors did not use the language of those concepts to describe their experiences, in the same way that they might, for example, have acknowledged the effects of gravity, or economic inflation. That may have been due to a lack of awareness, or of understanding, or simply of vocabulary, but it suggests that the supposed phenomena are not naturally occurring, but rather interpretations, fabrications by their proponents. They are not historical ‘facts’, in the sense of inhering within the actual events. Their appeal and power stem as much from the extent to which they serve the ontological purposes of their proponents, as in any relationship to actual events.

The HMIs’ accounts are still susceptible to such interpretations, but there is little in the responses of the sample group to indicate any conscious, or coherent application of either a performative regime, or a professional discipline, however defined. The



HMIs offer some sense of positive views about certain mechanisms associated with those discourses, such as the use of data in reaching inspection judgements (see interviewees 4 and 9 particularly), and also of negative personal responses to what might be characterised and managerialist approaches adopted by the organisation by which they were employed and which do seem to be connected with struggles to sustain personal notions of being professionals (see interviewees 2, 3, 7, and 8, for example). To that extent, the interviews offer examples of individual transcendence, actively working to deal with the changing conditions of working life, in so far as the HMIs recalled those circumstances.

One countervailing viewpoint, assuming that it is honestly held and accurately recounted, is sufficient to cast doubt about accepted narratives; this is not exactly ‘refutation’, in a strictly Popperian (1979) sense, but the existing accounts of events no longer fits all of the available evidence. That is the problem with which historians of and commentators on inspection and its role in the development of education at the beginning of the twenty first century must wrestle and to the solution to which this thesis offers a contribution.

### **Using the method of oral history**

This study has been guided by the idea of ‘participatory belonging’ as envisaged by Phillips (2010), facilitating the sort of ‘sensitive interpretation’ advocated by Bayliss (2007) and leading to the kind of mediated narrative described by Gardner (2010), in which the researcher’s relationship with the interviewees, though problematic, has been regarded as a resource enabling the evidence to be located and an interpretation

to emerge through the researcher's repeated interaction with the evidence. Whilst it has not been a rigidly pure application of clearly codified procedural rules, Jóhannesson's (2010) justification for the validity of the method is offered here, that is, that the intended purpose of the research, to explore previously unavailable evidence about the development of the role of Her Majesty's Inspectors in the period 2000-2010, is sufficiently clear and the author's iterative interaction with it through the creation of the interview transcripts and the production of the narrative in this thesis is an acceptable approach. Adopting Gardner's (2003) position, the resulting account probes the responses of the participating individuals and offers an interpretation grounded clearly in those responses, viewed through the prism of the researcher's personal experience and understanding. To reiterate Pring's (2000) counsel, the conclusions drawn and claims made in this thesis are limited. Crucially, the thesis stands open to further critical enquiry, not least by future historians, who may also review the evidence.

The narrative has been framed from the episodic memories of the interviewees, as suggested by Milewski (2012). The selection, ordering and presentation of the material from the transcripts were fundamentally acts of interpretation that required a degree of critical analysis, as called for by Perks (2010). There has been in this study an element of comparison between the transcripts, in order to achieve a degree of historical 'objectivity', as advocated by Bevir (2011), to pick up things that appear common, but also some recognition of the individual, as advocated by Berridge (2010). There has been no attempt to arbitrate between any of the accounts offered, because, as Geneallos (2010) suggested, that very notion implies a search for a single, correct interpretation. Rather, the creation and archiving of new source material and

an evaluation of it offered here, in that spirit of ‘participatory belonging’, provides an opportunity for further investigation of the relationship between past, present and future that Southgate (2003) suggests is the function of history and, hopefully, prompts a little dissatisfaction with the previously existing narratives about school inspections at the beginning of the current century sufficient to question those narratives.

It is acknowledged that this work of oral history is not straightforwardly empiricist, in that it is not concerned with revealing a previously hidden reality, just as Weiler stated (see p. 66 above), despite seeking to locate and to present new evidence about the topic. The historical narrative that the thesis offers is the product of discussions; taking Dilley’s stance (see p. 66 above), the findings are not necessarily replicable, but to seek some sort of validation for them through test measures misses the point, as Sandelowski pointed out (see p. 67 above). I have adopted Bolton’s viewpoint (see p. 67 above), in that the subjectivity of what the interviewees recounted is the point of the study. I have taken Mills’ suggestion (see p. 67 above), in that whilst the subjectivity is exacerbated by my own evaluations of the things that I was told, the resulting ‘fleck of interpretation’ is central to a work of history.

It must be acknowledged here that the limited extent to which this study has provided an understanding of how the HMIs saw themselves in relation to their roles means that, as Hiscocks (2015) has suggested, any conclusions drawn from this evidence base are inevitably problematic and flawed. Whilst the reflective aspect of the method of oral history has allowed, in the manner suggested by Thompson (2000), insights into how the individuals saw themselves, it has not facilitated clear conclusions about

the narrative of the events that they recalled. The sample is inherently unrepresentative, not least because the participants were self-selecting, in as much as they volunteered to be interviewed. It is argued that, nevertheless, following Ricoeur (1996), what the interviews have provided are traces of the impact of events. This thesis takes the view that those traces are important historically in their own right, adopting Coupland's (2012) stance that the method of oral history allows us to have not an account of actual events, but an actual account of how participants recalled events.

The research process has been one of identifying new sources of evidence and subjecting them to a heuristic and hermeneutic analysis, a personal interpretation and evaluation, influenced by the author's preconceptions and experiences, but leading to a plausible account of events rooted in reasonable comparisons between the accounts contained within the evidence and rendered so as to be fully open to challenge; that is the claim to the account being a contribution to the history of the subject matter. It is a work of history as described by Gardner (2010); the author has looked for and tried to make sense of some traces of past events and from them to construct a coherent account. Geanellos' advice was taken and the transcripts returned to repeatedly, with as open a mind as possible, to see what the material suggested. Nevertheless, the understanding of what the evidence indicates has been reached through the application of the author's personal perspective, to prompt, as Southgate (2003) would have historians do, dissatisfaction with the previously available narratives about school inspections.

I have accepted the interviewees' accounts as homogenous, as suggested by Tozzi (2012). That is something that is clearly open to challenge, but I argue that there is sufficient in the interview recordings and transcripts to allow the accounts to stand as testimonies re-constituting past experiences. As such and as Gardner (2010) advocated, the interviewees' recollections are the resource, capable of revealing personal experience. They are capable also of further critical enquiry, something that has perhaps not been undertaken sufficiently in this study.

Though the method of oral history affords opportunities, as Gardner (2010) suggests, for historians to seek clarifications of meanings, those opportunities were not always identified and taken on this occasion and, possibly, a weakness of this study is to have fallen foul of Borland's (2003) counsel regarding the potential for variations of meaning between interviewer and interviewee in a context such as that which underpins this study. Nevertheless, I cite again Hamilton's point (2008) that, whilst the aim of this study has not been to justify my personal ontology, a willingness to get close to an interviewee is required if one is to approach the sort of understanding of personal experiences that are the subject matter of the study.

I have accepted Southgate's (2001) contention that the ideal of an historian as someone necessarily distanced from his, or her subject matter is an ideologically situated idea. I have, as Bevir (2011) suggests, examined the evidence gathered through this research critically, in that, whilst the interviewees' accounts have been taken as personal testimonies, they have not been accepted uncritically.

I have, through the process of analysis and subsequent construction of this thesis, mediated the interviewees' accounts, a process in which, as Gardner (2010) suggests, some proximity to the subject matter is an advantage. Just as Jóhannesson (2010) suggests, my proximity to both the interviewees and the events discussed allowed me as an historian to draw on personal knowledge, experience and insights, notwithstanding the potential for understanding to be assumed in the manner of Borland's (2003) warning. Taking this research to be an example of what Philips (2011) calls 'participatory belonging', I have put myself at the heart of the research process and for all that that may be a position fraught with difficulties, as Gardner (2010) has argued, historical evaluation is the heart of history and historians' preconceptions are necessary for that to happen.

The process allowed for my thinking and the conclusions presented here to develop as the research proceeded, taking Jóhannesson's (2010) stance that this is legitimate. Following Cattarall (1997), my concern has been to make sense of the memories and experiences of those that I interviewed and to produce an imaginative, though not fictionalised account, with a supreme regard for the evidence collected, contextualising that evidence, but without diminishing, as Danto argues (2008) we should not, the interviewees' contributions. I contend that this is what has been achieved in this thesis.

Following Catterall (1997), the evidence has been researched, organised, processed and presented to facilitate the construction of a narrative. The problems that the process poses, in particular, possible unintended and unidentified assumptions about common experiences and understandings with and between the research participants,

and the limitations that they place upon the uses to which the the research outcomes may be put are acknowledged fully. There is no claim here to a universal, complete, or singular ‘truth’.

The author’s interpretation is supported through reference to the sources of evidence, the interview transcripts, in order to maintain fidelity to the sources in the manner suggested by Geanellos (2010) and to allow other historians to explore how that interpretation was reached. The author has taken the liberty allowed by Bayliss (2007) of making ‘cosmetic’ changes to language, editing and selecting from the source material in the interests of clarity. Similarly, a practical notion of ‘full transcription’ was adopted and no attempts were made at strict notation. The account presented and the conclusions reached, whilst seeking to draw the information into something coherent and understandable, do not diminish in any way the individuality of the participants’ contributions, in accordance with the principle described by Danto (2008).

Ostensibly, as Dilley (2004) suggested, oral history offers the possibility of direct access to historical events through live testimony from people who were actually there. As a source of evidence, it is apparent from this study that oral testimony is as contingent and limited as any other, perhaps even more so, and still relies upon interpretation and, therefore, the skill of the historian to determine historical meaning. Proximity to events does matter. It constrains perspective, obscures certain viewpoints, and restricts what it is possible to know, or even to consider; whilst it is possible to refer to matters about which these interviewees did not speak, demonstrating that the reasons for the omissions lay in the exigencies of their

individual standpoints would require further interviews and a different set of questions. Temporal distance does not overcome those issues, but reconfigures them and alters a historian's relationship to them. As Gardner (2010) and Sandelowski (1991) have argued, however, the partial knowledge concomitant on either position is not valueless.

An important challenge for historians is to decide just how little oral contributions should be taken at face value. As a general principle, all historical sources of evidence should be subjected to criticism. There is in oral history, however, an additional possible dilemma; as a representation of individuals' experiences, the accounts have, in large part, to be taken as an affirmation of how an interviewee saw events, in so far as they can relate their account at that point in time, as Bolton (2006), Danto (2008), and Southgate (2003) have suggested. The accounts provided by the HMIs in this study have been taken in that way.

This research illustrates, once again, the central problem of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, as described in much of the literature on oral history. As Hamilton (2008) and Stephens (2010) suggest, however, to regard that simply as a methodological weakness is possibly mistaken and certainly indicative of a particular ontological standpoint. Subjectivity is unavoidable in any field of human study and the intrinsic subjectivity of the accounts presented here makes them unique as historical data, valuable, as Perks (2010) might argue, for the extent to which they convey changing perceptions of the role of HMI. The approach allowed the participants to reflect on what they chose to include, or to withhold, rather as Milewski (2012) utilised a protocol of informed consent.



It may be that interviewing people with whom the researcher has some prior connection exposes further potential hazards, but empathy is not necessarily sympathy, or agreement, let alone solidarity, and seeking to understand another's perspective necessarily involves the formation of a relationship sufficient to facilitate the requisite interpretation of the data. The versions of events presented here are not necessarily representative of the author's views, or experience, and the author has remained conscious throughout of the need to maintain some form of critical distance, though it is unlikely that the influence of personal ontology has been eradicated; that is one of the areas affording opportunities for other historians to critique this evidence base and so to continue the historical debate. Furthermore, as suggested by Hamilton (2008), the nature of human dialogue involves some sense in which one participant leads another, such that an element of linguistic performativity would appear to be inevitable. Behaving ethically, when invading and making public people's private space, may even depend upon a willingness to get close to the interviewee. The interviewees' perspectives have been honoured in this study by the offer of an opportunity to comment on the interview transcript, in the manner suggested by Hastings (2010).

The relationship between the interviewer and the HMIs during these interviews was both natural and artificial. It was artificial to the extent that it was different from any previous relationship and yet, simultaneously, it contained trace elements of that relationship; both were forging a new and subtly different relationship and it was the act of construction that was to some extent 'natural', in that it grew out of and developed through the course of the interview. The interviews followed informal

conversational idioms and resulted in oral testimony of the kind that Stephens (2010) suggests provides insight into the relationship between individual and collective memories. Whilst the interviewer was aware of what appeared to be a high degree of inter-subjective understanding, for example, the HMIs said on a number of occasions things such as ‘You know what I mean’, or ‘We’ve talked about this before’, the extent to which actual understanding was common remains unclear.

This research has illustrated the conundrum as to what constitutes the source to which an oral historian, as an historian, owes fidelity. In the attempts to analyse the product from these interviews, it became less clear as to whether the source was the interview itself, as experienced, or the recording, or the transcript, or the researcher’s recollections of the event. What became obvious, if it were not initially, was the way in which oral history shifts the emphasis from reading to listening, which means, as Gardner (2010) pointed out, that the historical source material cannot survive the moment of its production without some method of recording, which inevitably involves mediation of the original.

In practice, transcription modified the sources used in this study as much as it captured them. Whilst noting the pauses, errors and stumblings may be useful for some forms of analysis, such things are, at least, of questionable value for historical purposes and added nothing in this instance, even though attempted. Indeed, some quite vigorous editing and selection were required to render material from the transcripts useable within the thesis. An oral historian leaves the transcripts as matters of historical record and, like all other records, the transcripts have their limitations as sources of evidence. Without applying current grammatical and punctuation

conventions, extracting meaning from the transcripts becomes difficult, and possible changes to those conventions in the future will entail further problems. The effect of very small changes during transcription, in order to make the transcript itself readable, results in some loss of subtleties of meaning and the production of this thesis even more so. Perhaps what is needed is a better way to interact with the primary record of the interview event, the oral recording.

Slowing down the recordings to allow the words to be captured removed all sense of the interview as a live event, destroying intonation and expression, humour, irony, and other devices, both the interviewees' and the interviewer's, all things centrally important to the act of communication, such that something necessary for full understanding is missing from the final analysis, but then it always is in any historical study. From this experience, the possibility of creating a transcript sufficiently detailed and complete to capture every inflexion, to interpret accurately every pause, or to represent the discussion as it actually occurred, the precise nature of the dynamic process, including non-verbal communications, and to reflect the type of relationship established between the participants seems, at best, impractical. Despite the researcher's best efforts and intentions, those interviewees who responded to reading the transcripts indicated that the transcripts did not seem to convey fully what they had intended, or the way in which they had intended it to come across, or sought to add to, or to modify the content.

It seems apparent from the experience of doing it that the process of transcription creates a new, its own, form and source of historical evidence, one concerned as much with the writer of the transcript as the person whose words it seeks to capture. Even

when ‘signed off’ by the interviewee, it is a worked-up, structured and amended representation of an event. Abridged and edited in many ways, such that, although undoubtedly a record of an event, that representation is necessarily an interpretation. The subsequent act of analysing the transcripts means that the extent to which the historical evidence drives the conclusions is removed even further from the actual historical source. Finally, selecting from the transcripts and editing for the final account in order to bring out meaning potentially obscured by the peregrinations of conversational language means that the historical account, this thesis, is inevitably the author’s version of events. This research has not elicited the HMIs’ experience, only this historian’s response to their descriptions of it. The research participants were asked to comment on the accuracy of the transcripts, in an effort to ameliorate the inherent methodological problems, whilst the author reserved the right to disagree and so the credibility of the analyses, interpretations and conclusions in the thesis is the sole responsibility of the author.

It proved impossible to create a fully coherent narrative from the fragmentary evidence provided by these interviews, even after using a rigid, chronological sequencing of the transcripts. The interviewees did not reminisce in a structured, or linear, let alone chronological fashion, despite the interviewer having an agenda for the interview; perhaps the structure was not sufficiently rigid to obtain a clear order in the interviewees’ reflections.

It proved impossible also to escape from the problems inherent in any act of research that relies on human memory. The whole point was to ask the participants for their recollections. It seems reasonable to suggest that memory is always subject to some

form of mediation, as Abrams (2010), Thompson (1988), Weiler (1992), and Seldon (1998) have indicated, although the impact of such mediation is a matter for debate. Nostalgia, for example, may result in an idealised representation of past events, or a sense of historical alienation and separation from those events. Arguably, both positions might be described as a form of distance or distancing, regarded by some historians as a virtue necessary for the genuine understanding of the past. If memory is inherently so unreliable, however, it becomes difficult to understand in what sense human beings may be said to know anything; that would seem to imply also that knowledge is something extraneous to people. Let Gardner (2010, p. 107) have the last word on the matter here; ‘Memory as exercised in the course of oral history interview may certainly present accounts that are indeterminate, contradictory or even demonstrably fallacious...(but)...we may indeed be content to listen to such accounts...as legitimate expressions of the ways in which human beings have always endeavoured to make sense of their lives in time.’

In oral history, the problematics of memory and time seem to be intertwined. Time may, or may not be a physical constant, but the recounting of memories by the HMIs demonstrates that human experience and perception of it is not. The often-unacknowledged tendency to regard historical time as a constant may well, therefore, be an error, as suggested by Bonneuil (2010) and Kobayashi and Marion (2011). The notion of multiple temporalities, as suggested by Southgate (2003), suggests that we should not be too anxious to identify commonalities between the experiences of individuals. It is hoped that these interviews stand as historically relevant accounts by individuals of how they responded, reacted and adapted to changes and constraints, though, undeniably, I did look for similarities and differences.

As a project in oral history, this research has been useful in getting at aspects of the past from people who have not (so far) left written records, thus fulfilling what Berridge (2010) regards as a primary function of oral history. As such, the interviews, acts of testimony, form an original part of the production and circulation of knowledge as envisaged by Tozzi (2012). Though no more reliable intrinsically as an historical source than other forms of evidence about the same topic, they are susceptible to an historically critical approach and, accordingly, just as useful, although this research has not gone far enough in that direction. Ultimately, what we are left with is what was actually said during the interviews, at least as captured by the recording device. The recordings mean that future historians can at least hear for themselves what was said and how it was spoken, allowing perhaps for the interference of recording and playback technologies. Acknowledging all of the issues outlined above, the point of the research was, nevertheless, to attempt an account of the work of HMI during a period of significant developments in the pattern and purpose of school inspections and to do so with a view to unsettling the seeming consensus amongst the narratives available in the previously existing accounts. Resources have not allowed proper comparison of the accounts presented here with other evidence and so Gardner's requirements for a meaningful heuristic exploration of the topic have yet to be met, but the thesis provides a contribution for such an exploration and the continued construction of history.

## **Final Thoughts**

This thesis is based upon a single and, perhaps, naïvely simple view, that much of the literature concerning educational developments and policy in the first decade of the twenty first century identifies three distinctive, but related meta-historical themes, which attempt both to explain and to characterise educational changes and the impact of inspections, but contends, as Mills (2000) has argued, that such themes appear often to be examples of poor inductive reasoning. The thesis contends that a central problem for such explanations, as applied to the history of education in that decade and, particularly, in relation to the role of inspections, is that the evidence base is incomplete, omitting generally the views and experiences of inspectors and, in particular, those of Her Majesty's Inspectors as a distinctive body. At the end of the process, however, the problem with which the research started remains; the evidence can be used to support a view of developments that coincides with the existing meta-historical analyses, or as indicative of individuals asserting themselves within the broad context of events. This research has not resolved any of the issues central to the debate, but it has enhanced the evidence base for further study and interpretation.

The thesis has been unable to escape entirely from acknowledging the usefulness of the meta-historical themes as starting points for examining new evidence, but the evidence from an admittedly small-scale oral history suggests that those themes do not constitute explanatory theories in quite the manner seemingly presented in some

of the literature, in that the information provided through that process, though it may be configured in such a way as to align with the themes, has to be forced into the particular framework by the researcher's chosen approach to analysing it. The explanatory framework is then constitutive of 'reality' and the individual believes the explanation to be 'true'.

Lives may indeed be lived against a background of emplotments, such as professionalism and performativity, but their connections to those meta-narratives are less than clear when listening to individual accounts of experience. It seems evident from the responses of the HMIs in this study that they did not see themselves as operatives for, or agents of any totalising schema. It may be argued that the HMIs' lack of such consciousness does not remove their culpability, but if the consequences of human actions are matters beyond individuals' control and subject to a reality composed of processes in which cumulative effects cannot be foreseen, in what sense is it possible then to say that sentient beings are responsible? If Ball (2003) finds that inspections rob teachers of their souls, then inspectors are, by inference, guilty of the theft, unless what we do, or how we do it matters not. Claims such as these appear to have the effect of highlighting the humanity of one group, in this case teachers, against the dehumanising effects of a pernicious discourse inflicted by another. The result is simultaneously, intentionally, or not, the demonising of the assumed agents, in this case, inspectors. Other less-emotive approaches, however, serve merely to dehumanise everything. Such points of view do not appear, from the experience of this study, to be verifiable through empirical research.



The meta-historical themes remain as ways of thinking that help us to shape an account. They are not explanatory frameworks, in the sense of scientific theories, because they do not account for all of the available evidence and make no claim to so doing, but neither do their proponents always look for evidence that might contradict, or refute their explanations; when new evidence becomes available, it is examined with a view to picking out facets which align with the presenting hypothesis. Nevertheless, those meta-historical constructs continue to fascinate. Taking them as a prompt, as in this study, for examining new evidence accords to them some acknowledgement of their potential value.

A historian's fidelity must, however, be to the evidence, whatever its form and consequent problems, and not to personal ontological, or philosophical preferences. The core activity of imaginative interpretation of the past is not a licence to make things up regardless of evidence and even speculation must draw on reasonable and reasoned inference in light of the available evidence. Any attempt to superimpose one's own preferred constructs onto another's account, rather than trying to understand the other's point of view, is not history. In that sense and for that reason, some form, or degree of self-distanciation is required, however difficult it may be to achieve. The reader must decide if the attempt has succeeded here. As suggested by historians from Thompson (1978) and Hill (1974) to Southgate (2003) and Bevir (2011), however, it is not a matter of taking the historian out of the equation.

There do not appear from this study to be subliminal, underlying forces active in the history of educational inspections, but possibly cumulative effects of individual human activity. Such 'trends' are both socially constructed by the actors and

objectified through an observer's interpretative mediation, which is itself socially conditioned. In a sense, the resulting descriptions and hypotheses are both real and imagined, but based to a degree on empirical evidence. The complexity of the issue is increased by problems inherent in the nature of the relationship between the evidence and what it represents, adding further layers of interpretation and so distance from any actual events. Ironically, the problem may, perhaps, resolve itself into a straightforward, if simplistic position; our understanding of historical 'truth', or of 'reality', will always be uncertain, but, as Southgate (2003) has suggested, that does not mean that we should not try to produce the best explanation that we can, or that we should accept all explanations as equally valid, but that our explanations should take into account all of the available evidence, or risk being unhistorical. The contribution to knowledge made through such a process lies not in coming up with definitive answers, but in adding something to the debate that may not have been considered previously. It seems apparent that, whilst we may not recapture, or recreate the past, we may represent it, review and refine our knowledge of how human beings have interpreted, or understood it.

There is no intention in this study to deny, or to denigrate the views of any party with regard to experiences of inspections, or to suggest that there is no negative aspect to the work of HMIs. The intention is, rather, to assist in creating a fuller and more-rounded history than has been possible previously, by providing a broader evidence base, in order to facilitate a more-critical approach to the history of education at the turn of the century than has been allowed by the existing literature, much of which, it is acknowledged was not written to be history. This does not imply denial of existing evidence, but a critical and historical approach to it and particularly to the

predominant, meta-historical themes apparent in much of the literature, professionalism and the associated idea of de-professionalisation, combined with notions such as governmentality, the rise of managerialism, globalisation and commercialisation, of supervisory, or panoptic society, all connected with longer-established historical concepts, such as industrialisation and urbanisation, and the discourse technology through which they are deemed to operate, or at least to manifest themselves, performativity. The research has been an attempt to humanise the historical problem against a context in which only one side of the human story was being presented. The consequences of actions may only become apparent in the long term, though quite what constitutes 'long term' is by no means clear and may vary from context to context; but what then can be the basis for human decisions about actions, if what happens in the immediate and short terms (howsoever defined) is either unimportant, or inevitably misconceived? History is unlikely ever to have a complete picture of any aspect of the past, but a partial understanding is still knowledge, imperfect, but sufficient, if only as a basis for further investigation.

This study has probably not achieved Iggers' (1997) standard of 'thick description'. Insufficient attention has been paid to establishing context for the contributions. The history of education against which to set this study has yet to be written and so, it might reasonably be argued, it might have been better to start with that, Chapter 4 above offering only a beginning. It should be a next step for someone. Consequently, it is possible that this study has fallen into the trap of adding to the database, but not much to historical understanding. It is claimed, however, that Danto's (2008) criterion for a successful history has been achieved by revealing different facets of a current

narrative, whilst respecting fully the individual contributions and complying with Catterall's (1997) demand for a supreme regard for the evidence.

Although chosen in part precisely for that reason, this research has not explored sufficiently how the HMIs' backgrounds may have influenced their recounting of their experiences and, importantly perhaps, they came from different backgrounds. If we may take HMIs as examples of professionals (and it is, admittedly, a moot point, given the problems associated with definitions), their accounts suggest that to be a professional is not something inherent within a given occupation, or even a way of working. It is not a state of being in any existential, or meta-physical sense, but the extent to which the idea of being a professional is formative, or constitutive of an individual's sense of identity and being blurs the boundaries between positivist and socially constructed modes of interpretation. For these HMIs, at that time, the office still represented a career aspiration, a pinnacle, linked with ideals associated, if vaguely, with a notion of professionalism as an aspiration and an achievement. As we approach the end of another decade beyond that at which this study ends and in which still more major changes in respect of school inspections have occurred, it would be interesting to investigate whether that remains the case, or not.

This study has not assisted in helping historians to resolve conflicts between contemporary testimony, as recounted by individuals, and the content of always-imperfect documentary evidence. There is no final answer here to the issues of the reliability of human memory. The interview recordings mean, however, that future historians can at least hear for themselves what was said and how it was spoken. It remains possible, therefore, to explore further any imperfections in the recollections

of the HMIs who participated in this study and in the interpretations created by this author. Clio would surely expect that.

68,390 words

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## **Appendix 1 Interview Protocol**

Date and time of interview:

Venue:

Interviewee

1. Describe to the interviewee the purpose of the study, sources of data being collected, methods of collection, use to which the data will be put, how the confidentiality of the interview will be protected, how the interviewee will be able to review the data provided and the final product.
2. Ask the interviewee to sign a consent form.

Questions

1. Outline your career as an HMI.
2. What were your reasons for undertaking the role?
3. What were the main influences on how you carried out the role?
4. Were you aware of any changes to the role during your period of office? If so, what were they and how did you respond to them?
5. How do you see your experience as an HMI compared to others'?

## **Appendix 2 Participant consent form**

I am willing to take part in a piece of educational research on the role of HMI in the period 2000-2010. I understand that my participation involves;

- participating in an individual interview lasting 1-1.5 hours
- allowing the interview to be audio recorded
- allowing the recording to be transcribed
- allowing the transcription to be analysed and interpreted in order to produce a thesis
- commenting on the accuracy of the transcription
- allowing the transcription and original recording to be lodged with the Jack Kitching Archive: Records of the Board of Education Inspectors' Association at the University of London Institute of Education
- having sight of the draft thesis.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I have the right to withhold information and to withdraw from the study at any point up to two weeks after the interview.

Signed:

Date:

Print name:

## **Appendix 3 Participant Information Sheet**

Title of Project: Reporting without fear or favour; HMI 2000-2010, an oral history

Please will you take part in a study about professionalism and how the concept related to work of HMI in the period 2000-2010?

### **1. 'Why have you asked me to take part?'**

You have been selected to receive this invitation based upon your details as recorded in The Register of Her Majesty's Inspectors in England and Wales Association of Retired and Former HMI, Widows and Widowers, which indicate that you were active as an HMI within the period that is the subject of the study, and your proximity to the researcher's home.

### **2. 'What will I be required to do?'**

You will be asked to complete a very brief initial questionnaire about your experiences and then to take part in a 1-1.5 hour audio-recorded interview with the researcher about the following questions;

- a) Outline your career as a HMI.
- b) What were your reasons for undertaking the role?
- c) What were the main influences on how you carried out the role?
- d) Were you aware of any changes to the role during your period of office? If so, what were they and how did you respond to them?
- e) How do you see your experience and a HMI compared with others'?

### **3. 'Where will this take place?'**

The interview will take place at your home.

### **4. 'How often will I have to take part, and for how long?'**

You will be interviewed only once, after which you will have the opportunity to review a transcript of the interview.

### **5. 'When will I have the opportunity to discuss my participation?'**

You will have the opportunity to discuss your participation at the end of the interview and to comment on the interview transcript.

### **6. 'Who will be responsible for all of the information when this study is over?'**

The researcher will be responsible for all of the material from you participation. The audio tape and interview transcript will be offered to the Jack Kitching Archive (the Archive) at the Institute of Education, University of London and all copies transferred to its care after completion of the study.

### **7. 'Who will have access to it?'**

During the course of the project, only the researcher (Clive Moss) and his course supervisors at Sheffield Hallam University will have access to the information, audio tape and transcript. Thereafter, access to the material will be governed by the rules of the Archive.

**8. 'What will happen to the information when this study is over?'**

See comments above relating to the Jack Kitching Archive.

**9. 'How will you use what you find out?'**

The materials will be used in the writing of a thesis to be submitted for an Education Doctorate and used only as part of the assessment process for that qualification. No other use is planned currently.

**10. 'Will anyone be able to connect me with what is recorded and reported?'**

All information will be treated in the strictest confidence. All information will be anonymised in the transcripts and references in the thesis. There will be no record kept of individuals' names after the degree has been awarded. Transcripts will refer only to 'Interview X' and the venue recorded only as 'participant's home', along with the date and time of the interview. Individuals will not be identifiable from the transcripts by a third party. Access to the audio tapes, which will not be edited, will be restricted, in accordance with the Archive's procedures and the Archive will be asked not to provide access to the audio tapes for five years after they are lodged.

**11. 'How long is the whole study likely to last?'**

The study is likely to last between 2-5 years.

**12. 'How can I find out about the results of the study?'**

You will be contacted by the researcher once the thesis has been drafted and offered an opportunity to comment on it in writing.

**13. 'What if I do not wish to take part?'**

Participation is totally voluntary.

**14. 'What if I change my mind during the study?'**

You are free to withdraw from the study at any point up to two weeks after the interview has been completed. If you choose to do so, the information will not be used as part of the study. After two weeks, the information will form part of the study.

**15. Do you have any other questions?'**

If you have any questions contact the researcher as follows.

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16. Details of who to contact with any concerns or if adverse effects occur after the study.

If you have any concerns about your participation contact the research supervisor as follows.

Dr Paul Garland

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## Appendix 4 Glossary of terms

**ADM** – assistant divisional manager. A leadership role within Ofsted.

**CRB** – Criminal Records Bureau, now called the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). A service through which schools carry out pre-employment checks on the suitability of individuals.

**Community cohesion** – The Education and Inspections Act 2006 placed a duty on school governing bodies from September 2007 to promote community cohesion, with a concomitant duty on the chief inspector to report on schools' contribution, resulting in a specific judgement being added to the inspection framework for inspectors to report. Although the legislation contains no clear definition, draft guidance published by the then Department for Education and Skills (DES, 2001-2006)/Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF, 2007-2010) states 'As migration and economic change alter the shape of our increasingly diverse local communities, it is more important than ever that all schools play a full part in promoting community cohesion. Every school should be a thriving, cohesive community, but it also has a vital part to play in building a more cohesive society.' (DES.DCSF, last accessed at <https://www.education.gov.uk/.../Duty%20to%20Promote%20Community%20Cohesion>. Last accessed, 09/01/2017).

**Early Years** – A generic reference to pre-school provision for 3-5 year olds and also to the inspection remit and section of Ofsted concerned with that provision.

**Every Child Matters (ECM)** – A government initiative launched in 2003, partly as a response to growing concerns about the safeguarding of children in the light of nationally high-profile tragedies, which led to the Children Act 2004. It established the idea that services for children should collectively and individually promote five 'outcomes' for young people, specifically that they should stay safe, be healthy, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, and achieve economic wellbeing. The five 'outcomes' were incorporated into the inspection framework and inspectors were required to judge and to report on schools' contributions to each one.

**Full inspection** – A whole-school inspection.

**GTC** – General Teaching Council

**HMCI** – Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (the head of Ofsted).

**Hadow Report** – A series of government-sponsored reports on education published between 1923-1933.

**Inspection framework** – The various documents that set out the legal basis for school inspections, the things that inspections should comprise, and the guidance provided to inspectors on reaching their judgement, particularly the 'evaluation schedule', which guides the particular judgements to be reached and reported.

**ITE** – Initial teacher education (or teacher training)

**JAR** – Joint Area Review. A programme of inspectorial reviews, involving inspectors from a range of inspectorates, looking at contributions by a range of services within local authority areas to meeting the five ‘outcomes’ for young people specified by the Every Child Matters initiative (see above).

**Juvenile estate** – Provision for young offenders, referred to sometimes as the ‘secure estate’.

**Key Stages 1-3** – reference to the first three of the four phases of the National Curriculum, defined by the ages of the pupils (Key Stage 1 = 5-7, Key Stage 2 = 7-11, Key Stage 3 = 11-14).

**LEA** – Local education authority. Branches of local authorities responsible for running education services, prior to their replacement in 2004 by local authority children’s services.

**Looked-after children** – Children in public care.

**Monitoring inspection** – A focused inspection of a school that has been placed in a category of concern, following a full inspection (see above. See also ‘Special measures’ below).

**National Curriculum Council (NCC)** – The public body responsible from 1988-1993, when its responsibilities transferred into the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, for the administration of the National Curriculum.

**National Literacy Strategy** – A government-sponsored intervention programme that promoted a particular pedagogic approach to teaching literacy from 1997-2011.

**National Numeracy Strategy** – A government-sponsored research-based programme that ran alongside the National Literacy Strategy (see above).

**Ofsted inspector** – A term often used generically to describe any inspector carrying out inspections for Ofsted, although there was actually no such title officially until 2015. Prior to then, inspectors who were not HMI (Her Majesty’s Inspectors) and who were responsible for carrying out ‘section 5’ inspections (see below) were known officially as additional inspectors. For ‘section 10’ inspections (see below), inspectors who were responsible for leading school inspections were known as registered inspectors.

**PANDA** – Performance and Assessment report. These were reports prepared for inspectors to use as part of the evidence for judging schools. They replaced the PICS I reports (see below) and included the key measures of a school’s performance and contextual information.

**PICS I** – Pre-inspection Context and School Indicator report. Ofsted’s initial attempt to pull together the key information about a school, including performance data, to assist with the preparation of inspections and as part of the evidence about the school.

**PISA** – The Programme for International Student Assessment. A triennial survey by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development which ranks major countries according to the performance of sample groups of 15-year-old students in certain tests of knowledge, skills and attributes deemed relevant to economic prosperity.

**Plowden Report** – A government-commissioned report into primary education, published in 1967.

**Post-compulsory division** – Reference to a section of the inspectorate responsible for inspecting post-16 provision.

**QA** – Quality Assurance. Generic term used by inspectors to refer to the range of quality checks carried out by Ofsted on inspections and inspection reports.

**QCA** – Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. The non-departmental government body responsible from 1997-2011 for the National Curriculum and the national assessments and tests associated with it.

**RaiseOnline** – An electronic report of key contextual and performance data about a school, used by inspectors in preparing inspections and as evidence. It replaced the PANDA report (see above).

**School Improvement Division** – A division of Ofsted that was set up to manage the programme of monitoring inspections (see above) of schools placed in a category of concern.

**Single central record** – a record that schools are required to keep of key safeguarding checks relating to staff and adults at a school.

**Section 5** – Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. It established the legal basis for whole-school inspections and remains in force at the time of writing, though detailed amendments have altered the precise operation and format of the inspections from time to time. Typically, inspectors refer to such inspections as ‘section 5 inspections’.

**Section 10** – Section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996. It established the new national format of routine inspections of schools to be carried out by Ofsted. It was replaced by Section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (see above). Typically, inspectors referred to such inspections as ‘section 10 inspections’.

**Special measures** – A category of concern applied to schools receiving the lowest grading in inspections, deemed to require special measures, which took the form of additional and frequent monitoring inspections (see above), usually led by HMIs, with the intention of bringing about rapid improvement.

**Value added** – An attempt to measure statistically the relative impact of different schools on the progress made by pupils.

**Victoria Climbié** – An eight-year-old girl, tortured and murdered by her guardians in London in 2000. A public inquiry following her death led to major changes in approaches to safeguarding children.