

Abstract for UKES conference in November 2009

The impact of audit, inspection and scrutiny: some lessons from practice

The work of the various audit, inspection and scrutiny (AIS) bodies in the UK is essentially evaluative. And it is increasingly directed towards achieving change in the policies and practices of the organisations they examine – more guide dog than guard dog in the common metaphor. This paper reports how they seek to achieve such impact. It is based on recent empirical work by a team from the Universities of Edinburgh and Cardiff on *The Use of Evidence in the Audit, Inspection and Scrutiny of Government*. This has analysed eight AIS projects undertaken in the last year – by the Audit Commission, the National Audit Office, the Care Quality Commission and a London Borough Scrutiny Committee in England, the Welsh Audit Office and a National Assembly for Wales Scrutiny Committee, and Audit Scotland and the Scottish Inspectorate of Education.

What this reveals is that these bodies seek to maximise the impact of their work not just through its *substantive quality* – the relevance of its data, the rigour of its analyses and the persuasiveness of its judgements – but also through *procedural routines* by which they relate to the organisations under examination and other stakeholders. These routines are typically both formal and informal. Formally, there is an obligation on the organisation under examination to react to the audit, inspection or scrutiny with its response to its judgments and to state what action it proposes to take. Informally, the AIS body commonly achieves added impact through practices like seeking agreement on ‘matters of fact’, taking ‘second opinions’ to quality assure its work, engaging a wide range of stakeholders with an interest in change, conducting some of its work in public and stimulating media coverage.

Some of these practices may have value in other contexts where enhanced policy impact is sought.