

Unit 4: Report Writing

INTRODUCTION

Generally, it is considered that the amount of report writing that inspectors do, is an important indicator of their productivity. It is indeed a good measure of the extent to which their expertise is available to schools.

It is therefore imperative that report writing will be part of your key activities as a supervisor and monitor of educational standards. This unit aims at assisting you to write accurate and informative reports, following your visits to schools. Please note that report writing is only part of your supervisory functions and should be carefully balanced against other activities.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- Differentiate between types of inspection reports
- Analyse observations and data
- Identify key issues from analysis
- Draft reports according to a set format
- Report main findings to supervisors.

PURPOSE OF WRITING REPORTS

Questions about why inspectors write reports when they visit schools often elicit a variety of responses. However, most inspectors agree that stakeholders in education need to be informed as to what extent schools are meeting the demands of the curriculum, and what standards of achievement pupils are attaining.

Teachers need to be advised about improvement of instruction. This is normally done in the form of recommendations emanating from strengths and weaknesses identified during visits. It helps to discuss the issues during the post-lesson conference so that the teacher is not surprised when such remarks appear in the report. This is also one way of enabling you to write a report which is fair to the teacher.

Note further, that school management may need your assistance to improve the effectiveness of their institution in order to meet the expectations of the society to which they are accountable. Your reports, therefore, will also form a basis on which the community will compare the efficiency and effectiveness of its schools.

Many organisations, including Ministries of Education in some countries, have embraced the concept of performance appraisal as a means of improving productivity among employees. These appraisals are often linked to promotions and rewards. Your report will form a basis on which the Ministry of Education will take decisions on promotion prospects and salary adjustments for teachers.

Useful information pertaining to the training needs of the teachers can be obtained by reflecting on previous reports. This will enable you to decide who to train and in what area. As indicated earlier, the number and quality of your reports will also be used to measure your productivity as an inspector.

Sections of the Ministry of Education like the Standards Control Unit, the Curriculum Development Unit and the Personnel Management Unit will be some consumers of the reports material. It will assist them to monitor educational standards, implement the curriculum and manage personnel effectively.

Your reports will help schools to enhance their performance and efficiency by highlighting their strengths and identifying the key issues. It is therefore necessary that your reports not only reflect weaknesses but also point out strengths.

The Ministry of Education has policies which facilitate the attainment of set goals. It will be informed through your reports on the state and level of implementation of these policies and further on, the successes and failures of these policies. Your reports will therefore provide valuable feedback to the Ministry.

Types of Reports

The list below categorises the types of reports that you might need to compile after visiting schools:

- quick memo
- institutional or full inspection report
- crisis report - "fire brigade"
- report on special aspects of a school
- report on teacher/headteacher
- teacher assessment report
- subject inspection report
- annual report
- disciplinary report

Activity 4a

Carefully analyse these case studies and decide on the type of report you would write for each case.

Case Study 1

A Member of Parliament has taken the Minister of Education to task about poor conditions (low standards, low attendance, high drop-out rate and parental dissatisfaction) in a remote school and wants to know what the Minister intends to do about it. You are a member of the team that has been sent to inspect the school.

Case Study 2

There is a strike at a nearby school. You have been sent to investigate.

Case Study 3

The Permanent Secretary wants to know why the English results are poor in a certain region of the country.

Case Study 4

You were passing through a boarding school where you discovered that the water supply had been cut off for three days. You decide to report on the situation.

Case Study 5

You have been informed that the local community is unhappy about the behaviour of the headteacher. You are sent to investigate and write a report.

COMMENT

You should have indicated the following choices for the case studies:

Case Study	Report Type
1	full inspection
2	crisis
3	subject
4	quick memo
5	headteacher

Now look at what each of these types entails:

Quick Memo

As the name suggests, these are written quickly and normally are in point form for immediate action. Usually they are followed by a comprehensive report at a later stage.

Institutional or full inspection report

This type of report projects a holistic picture about the whole school and contains detailed information about:

- standards of achievement of pupils
- quality of teaching and learning
- administration and organisation in the school
- physical infrastructure and assets
- professional aspects and other curriculum related issues
- conclusions and recommendations

Crisis report

This type is written after attending to, or resolving, a crisis. Normally the main aspects to be addressed in the report are:

- the nature of the crisis
- the method used to collect information (i.e. interviews, observations, etc.)
- conclusions
- recommendations

Report on a special aspect of a school

You may want to write this report after you have inspected a school in one area of interest. These areas could be on learner attendance, food provision, staffing situation, hygiene level, etc. It covers basically the same aspects that the crisis management report deals with.

Report on a teacher

This one is written after a routine supervisory visit. It focuses largely on teacher quality and competencies i.e. lesson planning and organisation, marking, record keeping, etc. Assessment of the teacher is often built into the report.

Report on a headteacher

This report is written after an inspector visits a school to monitor and offer support to the school management. It hinges on administrative issues, physical environment of the school, management styles, leadership qualities, etc.

Subject inspection report

This report is written after an investigation into the state of a certain subject. It can be school based, regional etc. It focuses on the subject content, methodology, availability, procurement and storage of teaching materials, subject management and performance of pupils.

Annual report

This type is compiled at the end of the year and is a summary of your activities for the year. It also addresses the strengths and weaknesses identified. It also provides statistics of the area under your care. The content of this report is normally included in the district/regional annual report.

Disciplinary report

This report follows an investigation into some misconduct or misdemeanour in a school. This is normally used as a basis to formulate punishment. Normally, it follows a set format for such a report and makes reference to the code of conduct. Note that this report has legal implications and should be handled with great care when recommendations are formulated.

FORMAT AND STRUCTURE OF REPORTS

There is need to streamline all reporting procedures in the system to ensure uniformity without compromising adequate reporting on vital aspects of education. It is hoped that the broad structures discussed in this section will assist you to format your reports.

Activity 4b

Most reports on teachers include the following information:

- Information on the school
- Teacher's personal details
- Teacher's assignment/responsibility
- Lesson delivery
- Planning and preparation
- Teacher qualities
- Recommendations

How does this information compare with one contained in the format used in your country? What else could be included?

Activity 4c

Look back at Activity 4a, Case Study 1. This report should be a full institution report. What are the components (main features) that will make up this type of report?

COMMENT

If you are not in possession of the teacher report format and full inspection report format, you may consult your supervisor for copies. You should be given copies of these report formats.

INFORMATION AND DATA ANALYSIS

The art of collecting information and analysing data is a special one. As an inspector, you will meet several situations in your job where you will be required to draw conclusions and make judgements and recommendations. Hence you will be expected to acquire and perfect these skills.

Various methods are at your disposal to enable you to collect information accurately and quickly. You may consider looking at previous statistics, previous examination results, student work, your own notes and other observations you might make.

Activity 4e

The chart below gives an analysis of 'A' level subject results of a school at the end of 1996. Carefully study the data and attend to the three tasks.

1. Draw a bar chart to represent subject performance.
2. What conclusions would you draw from the data provided about performance in individual subjects?
3. What would you recommend to the school?

ANALYSIS OF 'A' LEVEL RESULTS: 1996 - SCHOOL CANDIDATES ONLY

SUBJECT	TOTAL NO OF CANDIDATES ENTERED	A	B	C	D	E	O	F	TOTAL NO. OF CANDIDATES WITH Es OR BETTER	% PASS RATE
ENGLISH LIT.	17	2	2	1	9	3	0	0	17	100
SHONA	18	1	1	3	9	2	2	0	16	89
DIVINITY	24	0	0	4	9	8	3	0	21	88
HISTORY	18	0	0	1	4	2	9	1	8	44.4
GEOGRAPHY	25	1	1	1	6	6	5	3	17	68
ECONOMICS										
PHYSICS										
BIOLOGY										
MATHS	6	0	0	0	0	2	4	2	2	33.3
ADD. MATHS	8	0	0	0	0	3	2	3	3	37.5
NDEBELE										
MAN. OF BUSINESS	8	1	1	1	2	1	0	8	8	100
ACCOUNTING										

Total number of candidates entered = 40

Total number of candidates with 2 Es or better = 33

Percentage pass rate = 82.5%

A is highest possible grade

E is lowest possible grade

O is converted from 'A' level to 'O' level pass

F is fail

COMMENT

You probably have realised that it is not possible to pinpoint the actual causes of poor candidate performance in specific subject areas. This is largely because a wide range of factors about pupil performance is not given. However, it is possible, from the available

data, to make broad recommendations. You can advise the school to review the results and institute appropriate remedial action where poor performance is manifested. You can further recommend that they acknowledge good performance.

ORAL FEEDBACK

Oral feedback entails communicating information verbally and is within the confinement of professional confidentiality. During the oral exchanges, the teachers' or headteachers' views are recognised and when a full report is written, these views should be accommodated.

Some instances where oral feedback is often necessary are:

- to the teacher after a lesson observation
- to the school management team immediately after an inspection
- to your supervisor

Activity 4f

- (a) Write down the importance of giving oral feedback immediately after the visit.
- (b) List the problems you would anticipate in giving oral feedback and explain how you would solve them?

COMMENT

Teachers and headteachers are often anxious about the outcome of an inspection visit, since this has implications for the effectiveness of their schools, their promotions, salaries and job security. It is therefore important for you to give an oral report that:

- articulates all the issues emanating from the visit
- is brief and to the point
- emphasises issues under investigation
- is corrective rather than vindictive

WRITING THE REPORT

Much value is attached to report writing because the report is a permanent record. In many cases, it is the only means by which the Ministry of Education gets to know about the state of affairs in a particular school. It therefore follows that you should exercise great care in compiling your reports.

Activity 4g

Go out to a school, observe a lesson and write a report.

COMMENT

It is advised that your report should be factually correct i.e. it describes correctly what actually happened.

It should be complete i.e. it should give a full and clear picture of competencies and their effectiveness.

It should be positive, that is, it should help the teacher/headteacher to improve their performance. It should not raise emotions.

It should be simple and understandable i.e. written in a language that will be understood by the consumer, a language that is straightforward and correct.

A good report about a teacher may include:

- the performance of the teacher: the use of a variety of teaching techniques, the use of teaching materials, the interaction with pupils, the voice projection during presentation, class management and discipline, knowledge and mastery of subject matter, language usage, ability to recognise and address learners' needs and personal performance.
- pupil performance: how pupils respond to questions (oral and written), how pupils interact with one another, how they interact with the teacher, their learning, discipline and their appearance etc. The most important thing to describe is the standards of achievement of the pupils.
- the learning environment: general appearance of the classroom, quality, quantity and relevance of teaching/learning aids etc.

In its assessment function, the report evaluates standards and performance of both teachers and pupils. Thus work could be judged as good, satisfactory or unsatisfactory, in varying degrees. In short, the report should be a combination of descriptions and judgements. Finally, recommendations should be justified by facts within the report.

In finalising your report, keep the following important aspects in mind and wherever possible:

- maintain good communication skills
- stick to an appropriate register

(a) Avoid obsolete terminology that is common in reports e.g.

'It goes without saying ...'
'It has been brought to my attention ...'
'Needless to say ...'

(b) Make use of the passive to make reports more objective e.g.

'Several lessons were observed ...'
'A meeting was held ...'
'The number of participants invited was ...'

(c) Avoid over-technical jargon or verbosity. Plain English is best in reports. Compare the following reports on an injury sustained by a worker in an office.

My employee's current indisposition is the unfortunate consequence of a work-related occurrence where failure of the said employee to extract two left digits from the aperture caused by the receding motion of the filing cabinet resulted in temporary incapacitation of the left hand used for typing.

Plain English: My secretary is off work because of fingers injured while closing a file drawer.

(d) Avoid offensive expressions e.g.

‘The teacher is ignorant of the syllabus ...’

‘The head is lazy ...’

‘The deputy head must be present at all assemblies ...’

• Use of the appropriate layout and length:

(a) Use concise, brief paragraphs in your report.

(b) Use main headings and sub-headings to make the report easy to follow.

(c) Make sure the stages of the report follow a logical sequence especially in terms of headings.

(d) Keep to a consistent format for the different types of reports.

(e) Keep reports short and to the point. Long reports do not get read and so have no impact: two to six pages is the ideal range for a report, depending on the type and purpose.

(f) Care should be taken to avoid contradictions in the report.

(g) Recommendations should arise from observations made in the report.

(h) The report should highlight both strengths and weaknesses.

As an inspector, your duty is to undertake follow-up with heads of schools. You are charged with the responsibility of monitoring action plans as well as the effectiveness and feasibility of programmes initiated by the individual school. Inspectors, in addition, make follow-ups on examination results, whole school performance and make certain that established needs are met and appropriate action taken.

Furthermore, it is the inspector’s duty to followup those recommendations made during school visits. They also make sure that the recommendations are addressed, where appropriate, through a planned workshop.

SUMMARY

You have now come to the end of this unit on report writing. You have looked at several aspects on report writing and have been asked to write at least one report yourself.

It is advised that you reflect on the learning outcomes and make sure you have acquired the necessary skills. It is also suggested that you write several reports to sharpen your newly acquired skills. To have feedback on your work, you are advised to solicit comments from your supervisor on the format and nature of your reports.

REFERENCES

Bell, J. (1987) *Doing your Research Project: A Guide for First-time Research in Education and Social Science*

Chief Education Officer’s Circular Minute No.14 of 1988, Ministry of Education, Zimbabwe

- Mortimer, L.A. *Report Writing: Main Points of the Address*, Ministry of Education, Zimbabwe
- Midlands Region (1996) *'A' Level Results Analysis*, Ministry of Education, Zimbabwe
- Phaswana, K.J. (1997) *Tips of Report Writing: Department of Teacher Training and Development*, Ministry of Education, Botswana
- The Ofsted Handbook: Guide on the Inspection of Special Schools*
- The Standards Control Unit: Some Guidelines of Report Writing by Heads*, Ministry of Education, Zimbabwe
- Training Manual for Registered Inspectors*, England
- White R. and Wight J. (1989) *Scottish Centre for Education Overseas, Report on a Seminar*, Gaborone, Botswana