

BUILDING RESEARCH CAPACITY COLLABORATIVELY: CAN WE TAKE OWNERSHIP OF OUR FUTURE?

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Introduction

Colleagues and friends, it is a great honour and privilege to give this address as the incoming President of BERA. Education remains of central importance in public policy, seen as a key route out of poverty and disadvantage for people of all ages and as a means of promoting social cohesion in an increasingly globalised and diverse society. Schooling has been described as a conversation between generations about what counts as knowledge, the values which should govern our behaviour and about what it means to be an educated person. Moreover, in a world where knowledge creation is seen as critical to economic competitiveness and where the demand in advanced capitalist economies is increasingly for intellectual and emotional labour, improving national educational standards across all sectors is seen as vital.

It is precisely because of the public policy importance of education that much is rightly demanded of educational research. Thus, comments about the quality and usefulness of educational research with which we are familiar, have at least partly to be understood in that context. Such comments are not new. What is new is the response at UK government level to increase investments in educational research, the Teaching, Learning and Research Programme being the most obvious example. This investment has aimed to tackle issues about the quality and usefulness of research in two main ways, firstly by funding large scale projects on topics of enduring concern, and secondly by investing in capacity building. It is on the challenges of capacity building that I wish to focus, but first let me say a word about the meaning of the term. It has its origins in the international development literature of the 1980s (Schuller 2007). The focus was on developing indigenous skills and leadership, as opposed to the transfer of technology or technical assistance in order to lift people out of poverty in a sustainable way. Thus, building capacity is not only about training individuals; it can be pitched at several levels, including organisational and sectoral as well as national (Schuller 2007 p86). The aim is sustainability through empowering these various levels to take ownership of developments. It has become increasingly clear, through our work on understanding the relationship of educational research to policy and practice, that capacity refers not only to educational researchers themselves but to the users and commissioners of research to understand what diverse forms of educational research have to offer.

Moreover, as Geoff Whitty suggested in his Presidential Address in 2005, a key role for research is feeding into public debate on education. We must avoid the trap of seeing the relationship of educational research to policy and practice as essentially a professional or intra-professional matter. Whitty (2006:170) reminds us that we do not always have to be close to government to influence policy, and that there may be ways of strengthening the public mind on education to increase 'resistance' to superficial but seemingly attractive policies. So, in this address, I want to challenge us to develop capacity in the wide and diverse field of educational research, and to suggest that we need to lift our heads up from our own day-to day concerns at the level of our departments and institutions to embrace a collaborative approach across the system as a whole. By a collaborative approach I mean an approach which seeks to:

- develop quality across the UK system, despite the increasing concentration of research resources;
- engage users of educational research and inform public discourse on education;
- build sustainability.

I suggest, further, that BERA is uniquely placed to lead such an approach.

I have divided what I want to say into four main sections. First, I want to say something about the quality of educational research, drawing on evidence from ESRC about where education stands in debates about quality compared to the social sciences in general. In this section, recognising that educational research is a broad and diverse field, I argue that BERA needs to be inclusive and respectful of this diversity, that the best of research stands comparison with that in other social sciences, and that BERA should be at the forefront of debates about quality. Secondly, I offer three main arguments for developing a collaborative approach to capacity building. Thirdly, I describe one attempt to enhance educational research capacity across a system, the Applied Educational Research Scheme in Scotland, outlining some of the dilemmas of collaborative capacity building viewed from my perspective as chair of the Scheme. I conclude by drawing attention to the nascent Strategic Forum for Research in Education (SFRE) as an important arena for monitoring the health of educational research in general and of capacity building in particular.

The Quality of Educational Research

The critical evaluations of the quality of educational research in the UK and elsewhere over the last ten years have been largely couched in terms of a failure to provide a secure evidential base to inform policy and practice. I do not want to repeat the main criticisms that were made, they will be well known to this audience. Nor do I want to review the debates about the nature and purposes of educational research which have followed, save to highlight that these critiques and debates have featured strongly in recent BERA conferences and in Presidential addresses. However, they are not new. ‘Educational research is a broad and diverse field, in which different epistemologies, theories, research designs, methodologies, purposes and aspirations to knowledge claims can be found’ (Pollard 2007a:p3). This diversity was alluded to by John Nisbet in the first Presidential Address to the inaugural meeting of the British Educational Research Association in 1974 when he described five main ‘styles’ of educational research and two ‘models’ - the agricultural/ ‘big science’ model and the social anthropological model. Presciently, he sketched the attractions to policy makers and practitioners of the education science model of research with its promise of identifying the one best method of teaching. While sceptical about what this model could deliver, he nonetheless saw educational research as a spectrum with no clear boundaries and suggested that researchers should be ‘responsive to the merits of both [models], so that they can recognise excellence and spot the flaws, whatever the style’ (Nisbet 1974 p.3).

Several BERA Presidents have since drawn attention to the diversity of the field. Most recently John Furlong (2004) described the epistemological debates characterising educational research and Geoff Whitty (2006) suggested differentiating for ‘principled and tactical’ reasons, between research *of* and research *for* education. This suggestion has been built on by Pollard (2007a) in his ESRC commissioned paper on capacity

building in educational research where he distinguishes two major goals for educational research:

- Enhancing educational outcomes through the improvement of practice.
- Developing new knowledge and understanding about education.

While consistent with the idea of a spectrum and arguing that that each goal may be weakened if it fails to engage with insights derived from the other, Pollard suggests that these foci of activity are becoming increasingly distinct.

‘The first is the primary realm of professional reflection and enquiry. It tends to be grounded in the concerns of particular education sectors and, in that it is connected to the quality of educational provision, is a core responsibility of sectoral agencies in the UK. The second is the primary realm of social science. It draws on theory and methods across sectors’ ... (Pollard 2007a p3).

Pollard then suggests that in developing a plan for strategic investment in capacity building ESRC should be focussing on the second goal, and that regulatory and funding agencies such as the TDA, HEFCE and so forth should be focussing on the first.

It is important in this increasingly diverse and complex field to re-affirm BERA as a broad church, home to a wide range of educational researchers in which those in different traditions are treated with respect. If Pollard is correct in seeing increasingly distinct foci of activity for the many stakeholders, BERA should continue to play a leading role in:

- Encouraging debate about criteria of quality for such a diverse field – in particular about whether common criteria exist;
- Unpacking the nature of the link between diverse kinds of educational research as an ‘engaged social science’ (Edwards 2002) and the improvement of policy and practice;
- Protecting space for ‘blue skies’ research whose immediate application and usefulness to policy and practice cannot be predicted.

Debates about quality in such a diverse field can sometimes conflate different kinds of research. It is therefore important to look at sources of evidence about quality. ESRC through its annual reports provides one source about the quality of educational research which it funds, i.e. as a social science. Looking at the annexes to ESRC’s Annual Report 2005-06 and in its Annual Report 2006-07 we see that education compares favourably with other social science disciplines. Table 1 shows applications and awards by discipline. In 2005-06 Education was ranked 10th out of 19 disciplines in terms of success rates, the same result as for 2004-05. It had a 20% success rate, a decline from 24% in the previous year and well behind the most successful disciplines, Linguistics 39%, Demography 37%, Social Anthropology and Psychology each at 34%.

Table 1: Applications and Awards by Discipline

Discipline	Rank Order 05/06	Applications					Awards					% success rate				
		01/2	02/3	03/4	04/5	05/6	01/2	02/3	03/4	04/5	05/6	01/2	02/3	03/4	04/5	05/6
Area Studies	8	6	4	6	13	12	3	0	2	4	3	50		33	31	25
Demography						3										
Economic and Social History	2	34	43	32	32	41	14	16	12	8	15	41	37	38	25	37
Economics	5	64	85	117	77	112	25	29	48	30	34	39	34	41	39	30
Education	10	75	67	62	83	100	20	11	11	20	20	27	16	18	24	20
Environmental Planning	6	14	14	19	19	17	7	4	5	2	5	50	29	26	11	29
Human Geography	13	47	53	51	56	43	22	13	18	19	6	47	25	35	34	14
Interdisciplinary Studies	13	26	20	25	46	35	4	9	4	11	5	15	45	16	24	14
Linguistics	1	21	29	35	30	38	9	9	18	12	15	43	31	51	40	39
Management and Business Studies	11	61	45	55	63	65	10	7	12	14	12	16	16	22	22	18
Political Science and International Relations	7	42	60	70	63	62	13	13	15	12	16	31	22	21	19	26
Psychology	3	172	176	184	240	268	6	51	78	72	91	27	29	42	30	34
Science & Technology Studies	4					6					2					33
Social Work	4					3					1					33
Social Anthropology	3	34	36	27	26	35	10	14	9	9	12	29	39	33	35	34
Social Policy	10	25	35	36	38	64	9	5	11	8	13	36	14	31	21	20
Socio-Legal Studies		17	16	11	32	9	5	6	5	6		29	38	45	19	
Sociology	9	82	115	93	97	126	26	28	33	25	30	32	24	35	26	24
Statistics and Computing & Methodologies	12	14	12	8	20	12	7	4	2	5	2	50	33	25	25	17
Total		734	810	831	935	1051	230	219	283	257	282					

Source: ESRC Annual Report 2005-06 Annexe Table B

In 2006-07, Education was ranked 7 out of 19 disciplines in terms of the number of awards made but its success rate fell dramatically from 20% to 13%. Success rates tend to vary quite markedly from year to year, for example Human Geography's success rate in 2005-06 was 14% and in 2006-07 was 38%. Trends over 5 years show quite wide variation by discipline. So I would suggest that this indicator of quality is less useful than that of evaluation grades for projects funded by ESRC.

Table 2 shows the evaluation grades for funded projects by discipline for 2005 and for the period from 1996-2005. Evaluations are carried out by peer review and are classified in one of four categories, outstanding, good, problematic and unacceptable. It reveals that 27% of all end of award reports for all disciplines in 2005 were evaluated as outstanding compared to 24% of Education. Over the period as a whole the comparable figures are 22% for all disciplines and 23% for Education. Thus we can see that in terms of Education as a social science discipline, the best of educational research stands comparison with those of other social sciences. Ian Diamond, Chief Executive of ESRC made this point in his BERA address in 2005. It is also worth noting that no evaluations graded Education as problematic or unacceptable in 2005. Over the ten year period 7% were graded as problematic against an all discipline figure of just over 9% and just over 1% was regarded as unacceptable against an all discipline figure of 0.5%.

Table 2: Evaluation Grades by Discipline 2005

Grades						
Discipline	O	G	P	U	Un	Total
Area Studies	1	2	0	0	0	3
<i>Cumulative Total(1996-2005)</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>41</i>
Economic and Social History	6	12	1	0	0	19
<i>Cumulative Total</i>	<i>57</i>	<i>95</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>166</i>
Economics	16	27	3	0	0	46
<i>Cumulative Total</i>	<i>110</i>	<i>373</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>530</i>
Education	4	13	0	0	0	17
<i>Cumulative Total</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>207</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>300</i>
Human Geography	10	16	0	0	0	26
<i>Cumulative Total</i>	<i>52</i>	<i>203</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>279</i>
Linguistics	5	3	1	0	0	9
<i>Cumulative Total</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>68</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>116</i>
Management and Business Studies	6	5	1	0	0	12
<i>Cumulative Total</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>194</i>	<i>53</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>282</i>
Planning	1	6	0	0	0	7
<i>Cumulative Total</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>96</i>
Political Science and International Relations	7	18	1	0	0	26
<i>Cumulative Total</i>	<i>99</i>	<i>229</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>363</i>
Psychology	19	57	2	0	0	78
<i>Cumulative Total</i>	<i>125</i>	<i>395</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>547</i>
Social Anthropology	3	4	0	0	0	7
<i>Cumulative Total</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>94</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>153</i>
Social Policy	1	8	1	0	0	10
<i>Cumulative Total</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>105</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>154</i>
Socio-Legal Studies	1	6	0	0	0	7
<i>Cumulative Total</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>68</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>105</i>
Sociology	7	33	5	0	0	45
<i>Cumulative Total</i>	<i>110</i>	<i>370</i>	<i>57</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>539</i>
Statistics, Computing and Methodology	1	6	0	0	0	7
<i>Cumulative Total</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>119</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>182</i>
Social Sciences	2	10	2	0	0	14
<i>Cumulative Total</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>20</i>
TOTAL	90	226	17	0	0	333
<i>Cumulative Total</i>	<i>860</i>	<i>2629</i>	<i>363</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>3873</i>

Grades

- (O)utstanding: High quality work making an exceptional research contribution
- (G)ood: Good quality work making a strong research contribution
- (P)roblematic: Work of an acceptable quality but with weaknesses in some areas
- (U)nacceptable: Poorly conducted research with unreliable results

Source: ESRC Annual Report 2005-06 Annexe Table N

It would be very helpful in gauging the quality of the field if other major funders of educational research, such as government departments and charities, provided similar statistics on research outputs based on public criteria. These bodies have well established criteria for awarding research grants and it should not be too difficult for a review system focussing on the quality of completed work to be set up. Such a system would need to include peer reviewers as well as potential research users in evaluating quality. We need such a system both to enhance the prestige of some awards which can be seen by some as less prestigious than those from research councils and to provide evidence to put alongside anecdotal and sometimes idiosyncratic claims about quality. The costs of such a system would need to be carefully calculated and thought through, but the potential benefits in terms of providing evidence about quality to funders and others seem to me to be considerable. A move away from peer-reviewed output measures of quality, such as being proposed for future RAEs, has made us aware of its benefits, despite the poor outcomes for education in the 2001 RAE. I will return to the consequences of this later.

The quality of practitioner research, part of the process of enhancing educational outcomes for learners in the busy world of teachers and others is more difficult to gauge. Some of it is private to a school, department or individual and does not get published. Many higher degree programmes, including taught doctorates, however, feature practitioner research as a major component and information about completion rates in such programmes would provide us with one source of evidence about quality. The programmes are quality assured through institutional systems which involve external examiners. We certainly know the number of Ed.D programmes recognised by ESRC as providing good quality research training and we could perhaps start with completion rates in these programmes as one, admittedly not straightforward, measure of quality. This year, thanks to sponsorship by SAGE, BERA is awarding two prizes for research based practice. The awards will be made during the conference and the entries provide another possible indicator of quality in this field. A further indication of quality could be the number of teachers reaching the benchmark occupational standards where the carrying out of a substantial piece of practitioner research is a major element. In Scotland this would mean an analysis of Scottish Qualification for Headship and Chartered Teacher statistics.

The point I am making here is that in making judgements about the quality of educational research we first need to make clear that the criteria being applied are congruent with the aims and purposes of the research being undertaken. Thus, the quality criteria for practitioner research, which has as its primary purpose the direct improvement of classroom practice, are unlikely to be identical to those applied to researchers investigating education as a social or political phenomenon, and these may be different again for those doing blue skies research on brain functioning or child development, or on the nature of knowledge, for example. BERA needs to be at the forefront of these debates, extending and developing the work of Furlong and Oancea on assessing quality in applied and practice-based research. The public remain largely unaware of the diversity of educational research and the consequent debates about quality.

Why We Need a Collaborative Approach to Building Research Capacity

I take as my starting point the urgent need to develop research capacity not just of educational researchers, highlighted by the ESRC (2006) demographic review as essential, but of policy makers and practitioners. A comprehensive capacity building strategy has, by definition, many elements to it, including research studentships, early career fellowships, professorial fellowships and so forth, as well as formal and informal research training and development opportunities for people at various stages of their careers. BERA has been represented in discussions on these matters. These parts of the strategy tend to be based on individual institutions and funded by Research Councils and major charities. Even here, however, an overview at system level is not easy to come by. As work by Lawn and Furlong reveals, we know very little about ourselves as a field and about the structures which govern us. The particular aspect of capacity building featured in this section is that of collaboration and I remind you that I mean collaboration at a system level, as including research users as well as doers, and involving institutional joint working.

I would highlight three reasons for a collaborative approach as part of an overall strategy if we wish both to increase the number of people engaged in educational research and the quality of the work they do:

- the increasing concentration of research resources
- the dangers of a separation of research and initial teacher education
- our developing understanding of the complexity of the links and relationships between research, policy and practice.

A fourth reason, which I do not develop here, but want to air, is that I see collaboration at a system level as an important educational value, reaffirming ourselves as an educational community, and reaffirming our concept of education as a public good rather than as primarily a matter of private interest and competitive advantage.

1 The increasing concentration of research resources

The results of the RAE in 2001 were very disappointing for Education. Peter Gilroy reviewed the consequences in 2002. Some 33 of the 94 University Departments of Education were rated 4-5*. This means that 65% of Departments had no funding from the QR stream. The concentration of resource continued in England with the decision to cap the unit of resource to units of assessment rated 4 and to privilege 5 and 5* departments. In England there is one 5* rated department, and eleven rated 5. Scotland and N Ireland have no 5 or 5* departments and Wales has one 5* part of a social science unit. There are of course other sources of funding to do research but QR money comes with few strings attached and has a major impact on the financial health of departments often demonstrated via staffing and workload. We can expect further concentration of resource as a result of the 2008 RAE. That is part of its function. Moreover, the result is likely to be the most important influence on the kind of research in education that is undertaken in the future.

If all our efforts at capacity building focus only on highly rated departments, there is unlikely to be sufficient critical mass to cope with the exodus of the post war baby boomer generation of educational researchers into retirement. We know from the ESRC

Demographic Review of the Social Sciences (2006) that Education is a net importer of researchers from other social science disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology. We also know that 52% of staff in education are aged 50 or over. Some of this profile may be explained by time spent in school teaching or other professional practice before taking up a career in higher education. This category of late entrants to academic life needs particular attention in my view, as part of a capacity building strategy. Many come into higher education on the basis of their professional expertise as teachers and have no research training or experience of doing and/or managing research. This leads me to my next reason for advocating a collaborative approach:

2 The dangers of a separation of research and initial teacher education

It seems that there is an increasing separation between initial teacher education provision and highly research rated education outlets. HESA statistics reveal that there are over 5000 education staff in Higher Education but only 2000 were 'research active' in RAE terms in 2001. The primary expertise of many staff lies in teacher education and while some will publish in their areas of expertise, producing text books and other teaching resources, potentially contributing to the improvement of practice and of learning outcomes, they will tend to see themselves as outside the ambit of the RAE. Many of us know from our own direct experience that even in highly rated departments in RAE terms, there can be a differentiation in terms of teaching load and opportunities for career advancement for example, between staff whose main focus is teacher education and the rest. Teacher educators can be seen as second class citizens – a quite extraordinary state of affairs given the importance of school education in public policy, and of teachers as a key influence on children's learning.

Another startling statistic is that of the Russell group of research intensive universities, only three of the twenty offer undergraduate degree programmes such as the B.Ed which lead directly to a teaching qualification. None of these is in England. The remainder concentrate on one year PGCE programmes. Furthermore, only one or two of the 5 and 5* rated departments in the 2001 RAE (not an identical population to the Russell Group) offer the BEd. Whatever the exigencies that have led to this state of affairs, it is unfortunate, to say the least. This sends an unmistakable signal about the place of research in undergraduate programmes of initial teacher education. Of course, we wish to educate beginning teachers in matters of curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and so forth and produce competent teachers. Their critical engagement with research on these matters is part and parcel of their programmes. However critical engagement has at least two interpretations. First, it can mean that beginning teachers know about and understand research findings on a particular topic – the teaching of reading for instance. They are able to appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of the research and to explain why and how the findings are used (or not) in their teaching practice. Here the relationship between research and practice is relatively straightforward and the direction of influence is from research to practice. Secondly, critical engagement can mean the fostering of a 'researcherly disposition' (Munn and Ozga 2002) in beginning teachers, encouraging a habit of mind in which they routinely question the taken for granted about the context in which they work - how schools are organised and function, the rationale underpinning curriculum provision, class race and gender differences in attainment and so on. Here the relationship between research and practice is less obvious and direct. Alexander (2004:10) provides a neat summing up of the point I'm making.

The continental view of pedagogy . . . brings together within the one concept the act of teaching and the body of knowledge, argument and evidence in which it is embedded and by which particular classroom practices are justified.

Now, of course, we could question whether such a coherent body of knowledge, argument and evidence exists. BERA is currently co-sponsoring a pedagogical review of research to explore this question. However, my contention remains that the separation of highly rated research departments from initial teacher education, whether in terms of undergraduate provision or in the lack of connection between staff whose primary role is PGCE teaching and research active staff, is worrying and is an important reason for promoting collaborative capacity building in educational research.

3 Our developing understanding of the complexity of the links and relationships between research, policy and practice

The critiques of the quality of much educational research referred to above, have led to an intensification of interest in understanding the nature of these links. BERA has sponsored seminars on the topic, we have seen ESRC funded research seminar series, and indeed TLRP has as a key feature the development of new forms of collaboration between researchers, policy makers and practitioners. The main findings of this work may be summarised as follows:

- the existence of different occupational cultures of researchers, policy makers and practitioners: Raffe (2002), reflecting on 30 years of policy research highlights the different timetables, criteria for good research and areas of interest in the worlds of policy makers, practitioners and researchers. Policy makers work to short time horizons and as Social Science Commission indicated, policy researchers need to be ‘up to date and street wise’ and able to present information clearly, concisely and in a non jargonistic way (SSC 2003: 70) if they are to attract the attention of policy makers and, one might add, practitioners, too. Many commentators on the nature of teachers’ occupational culture point to the intense busyness of the teacher’s day, the prescriptive nature of their work in terms of what to teach and what to assess. They also identify the strong pressure exerted by their high level of accountability in terms of crude targets of performance, the most important and visible being the academic attainment of their pupils. In as busy and high pressured work environment as a school is there time for teachers to keep up to date with research findings and engage more directly with research?
- the trumping of research evidence by politics and ideology in policy making: There are many examples here, the most recent being the debate about grammar schools within the Conservative Party where David Willets’ attempts to present an evidence based case for them no longer being at the forefront of education policy was swamped by ideology and the practical politics of what was possible within the Party.
- a concern to develop new forms of dissemination of research findings: We have seen the development of research briefings, research commentaries, press releases and so forth as well as the more traditional research reports and scholarly articles.

- the growing importance of ‘research translators’ – research officers in organisations whose role is not to undertake primary research but to review and summarise research findings.
- the need to fund development work arising from some kinds of research findings so that they can be more directly useful in the classroom, involving teachers, local authorities, research translators and expert staff development personnel.
- the need to be more explicit about the ‘warrant’ for knowledge claims arising from research.

One of the most important insights emerging from this work is that capacity building refers not only to educational researchers themselves but to the users and commissioners of research. We need to pay much more attention to different forms of engagement and especially to those which recognise different forms of expertise and nourish the co-construction of research questions and shared analysis of data.

To sum up this section, there is an issue about the supply of educational researchers and about the distribution of funding for research in terms of the demands being placed on education as a key area of public policy. BERA needs to be at the forefront of measures to improve the supply and to take the lead in improving quality in educational research, not just for those staff coming into educational research as novices, but across research careers. It also needs to stimulate imaginative ways of overcoming the concentration of research funding if educational research is to flourish and sustain connections with practice communities. BERA is a key player in looking after the health of the field as a whole, in a context of inter-institutional competition and the progressive concentration of research funding. In the current issue of *Research Intelligence*, Andrew Pollard (2007b) challenges us to develop ways of collaborating to build our collective expertise and take a degree of control of our own capacity building.

The Applied Educational Research Scheme

I want to turn now to the Applied Educational Research Scheme (AERS) in Scotland as an example of a national approach to research capacity building and to discuss some of the challenges and opportunities presented. In discussing these I will focus mainly on the national and organisational levels and offer a personal perspective, based on my own experience, and some evidence from the Scheme itself.

AERS is a £2 million five year programme, announced in 2002-03, starting in 2004, aimed at developing educational research capacity in Scotland. It is jointly funded by the Scottish Funding Council and the Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED). Key features of the background may be summarised as follows:

- i) the recognition of the need to invest in educational research capacity in Scotland in the context of the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise in which no Scottish education outlet was rated 5 or 5*; furthermore, only four of the seven universities with faculties of education were rated 4 so as to receive research funding;
- ii) the encouragement by the then Scottish Higher Education Funding Council of research collaboration among Scottish universities through various pooling initiatives in the sciences, and social sciences¹;
- iii) the opportunities to enhance educational research presented by the completion of the mergers of all the former teacher education colleges with universities;
- iv) a rethinking of the relationship between policy and research within SEED and the wider Scottish Executive to encompass concepts and theories to help inform policy development, as well as more traditional interests in the evaluation of policy initiatives and in the ‘what works’ agenda.

AERS is organised in terms of three substantive networks and one generic network whose remit is research training. This generic network has a responsibility to develop an MSc in research training which will meet ESRC recognition criteria and thus have a kitemark of quality, and to provide a range of ad hoc training which will meet the needs of those working in the substantive networks. The intention is that the MSc will provide a framework for the five of the seven faculties of education who currently do not have ESRC recognition to develop and submit their own programmes for recognition. A further aspiration is for existing ESRC recognised research training provision to make use of the modules as they come on stream. The MSc is being developed as an online resource and as a freely available public good for all universities and educational researchers to use as appropriate.

The substantive networks are broadly conceived, each driven by theoretical concerns and each committed to three particular research projects. They focus on school education with a particular interest in the five national priorities and the lowest performing 20% of the school population. The networks are Learners, Learning and Teaching, Schools and Social Capital, and School Management and Governance. Each network is located in one of the three universities forming the AERS consortium which bid for the work, (Edinburgh, Stirling and Strathclyde) and each is led by a network

¹ These included Physics, Chemistry, Engineering and Mathematics, and Economics. All were concerned with specific research projects – only education had an explicit research capacity remit.

convenor and a senior research fellow with clerical support. The leading of the networks involves both creating interest in the network through a series of events and seminars and sustaining momentum within projects. Each network has three projects, a total of nine projects thus being funded through the Scheme. Each project has a Principal Investigator whose role involves research capacity building as well as the research. Projects involve both larger numbers and participants from a wide range of stakeholders in education than more conventionally conceived projects.

In thinking through network organisation and management, AERS has developed a framework for participation so that all concerned can consider the nature and extent of their involvement. Level 1, the most popular level, commits participants to being on mailing lists and receiving information about network events and outputs. Level 2 implies a more direct involvement in project work but to a lesser extent than level 3 which commits participants to a specific time commitment. In addition, AERS has provision for 18 non-stipendiary fellows, who sign a fellowship agreement committing them to spending specific amounts of time in particular projects. These agreements are co-signed by fellows' line managers signalling an institutional commitment to time being spent on AERS activities. In return, AERS provides travel and subsistence and on the job training. The AERS Fellows are seen as the next generation of principal investigators. We estimate that there are around 260 academic participants in AERS and about the same number from outside academia across all participation levels.

From the outset, AERS was committed to a collaborative and inclusive approach to building networks and to taking forward the programme as a whole. It has been very important to encourage the involvement of staff in all seven education faculties in Scotland and to extend an open invitation to policy makers and practitioners, including those of the third sector. The following gives a flavour of the range of work undertaken to raise awareness of the programme as whole and to build networks.

- Visits to vice-chancellors of the four non-consortium universities and meetings with Deans of Education to gain support for AERS and encourage active participation by staff;
- 'Roadshows' in various parts of Scotland to present the idea of networks and stimulate discussion and debate about AERS;
- An annual forum in which to present AERS and report progress.
- The production of a widely distributed newsletter.
- Various seminars, research training activities and informal events held by individual networks.

The Scheme is governed by a Management Committee on which a range of bodies is represented and an Executive Committee comprising the network convenors is the vehicle for taking forward operational decisions. Each network has its own advisory committee.

A Personal Perspective on the Experience of Collaboration

At a system level AERS is:

- developing a new approach to knowledge production through the operation of networks involving a range of stakeholders and as Ozga (2006-07:12) describes in

the Schools and Social Capital Network, 'strong linkages between producers and end users (involving trust, reciprocity and good communication.)' The Learners Learning and Teaching Network in its support for extensive and quasi autonomous communities of enquiry has sought the same strong linkages. This has the potential to strengthen research, policy and practice links through a recognition of distributed expertise among researchers, policy makers and practitioners. This in turn should provide a greater warrant for the relevance and authenticity of the research problem. However it does not of itself necessarily improve research quality. It has also taken much longer than anticipated to engender trust, reciprocity and expertise. A key question for AERS, then, is about the time needed to develop expertise and to get it acknowledged in the performativity systems via networks. So one dilemma is the tension between the process of knowledge production and the demands of performativity in terms of outputs.

- pursuing the development of research training through a combination of different modes. One of these is formal learning, provided by the MSc. We characterise such learning as formal because it tends to focus on propositional knowledge and/or to encourage the application of propositional knowledge to the research student's project. Several commentators would argue that learning in the workplace though doing the research and through formal and informal interactions with colleagues is equally important. Thus coaching and mentoring have come to be recognised as significant. This is now becoming well established in schools but is less so in educational research. In particular where what is learned is context specific and/or tacit, informal modes of learning are clearly essential (Eraut et al 2000; Wenger 1998) with membership of such communities of practice being of critical importance in becoming accepted as a legitimate member of the profession. The existence and possible benefits of a 'social practices' model of research training are highlighted by Rees et al (2007). The AERS Fellowships are designed to structure coaching and mentoring arrangements while the less demanding levels of network participation permit more informal learning on the job. It is noteworthy that some Fellowships are held by those working in the voluntary sector and in local authorities. Moreover the data collected by the nine projects can be used as resources in debates about research methods and approaches to data analysis in the MSc. The dilemma here lies in the balance between formal and informal learning and the avoidance of an over-reliance on the job training, with the potential limitations in terms of progression and coherence, for example.
- developing new skills of project management among experienced researchers as they work with large and diverse teams with capacity building a key feature of projects rather than as a hoped for by product;
- encouraging new researchers to work with experienced staff beyond their own institution and hence the possibility of developing a sense of a collective national identity in the research enterprise;
- leveraging additional resource from institutions for educational research. The funding did not permit the charging of overheads and as a way of demonstrating commitment to capacity building two of the three consortium institutions provided a studentship fees + living costs for research associated with a network. The costs of the network convenors and PIs are likewise contributed by institutions although this

is not always recognised in workload arrangements. It has been estimated that £3 Million has been contributed by institutions in terms of staff time, over and above the £2 Million of direct project funding. The longer term sustainability of such an approach in an era of full economic costing is clearly open to question.

At institutional level AERS has:

- adopted a collaborative approach involving all seven universities with teacher education functions in developing research capacity. This has helped to create a sense of collective endeavour evidenced in multi-authored publications and in joint bids across institutions for research funding. While AERS is by no means the only approach to capacity building it is unique in bringing together over 60 level three participants in joint projects. Institutions still compete for some research grants and are some way off one national submission to the RAE but AERS sits comfortably alongside other collaborative arrangements among the institutions. For example the Deans of Education meet on a regular basis to discuss policy issues and trust each other to represent general interests in such fora as Teacher Workforce Planning Committee and the General Teaching Council for Scotland.
- provided a route to research for colleagues whose main expertise is in professional practice, especially through the Learners, Learning and Teaching network;
- added to RAE submissions particularly in research environment.

Publications are beginning to appear in peer reviewed journals and a special issue of Scottish Educational Review featuring work from AERS projects was produced this year. Perhaps inevitably most effort and attention has been focussed on networks. The potential of the Scheme to draw from across the projects and networks has still to be realised. The production of commentaries on the TRLP model is planned as one way of achieving this.

New researchers participating in the Scheme tend to speak warmly about the experience of belonging to a network. It has not all been sweetness and light, of course. Collaboration takes time and effort, good communication systems, and considerable tact and diplomacy. Distributed leadership can be problematic where serious difficulties need to be resolved. Being funded by two different bodies with different financial years and different accountability systems brings its own challenges. A final evaluation will produce a more comprehensive and critically reflective picture and will be useful in debates about the future of a collaborative approach to capacity building.

Conclusion

In this address I have stressed the need for BERA to play a leading role:

- in enhancing the quality of educational research through work to develop criteria evaluating different kinds of research;
- in developing a comprehensive strategy for capacity building not just for early career researchers but through research careers. There is a particular need for BERA

to support collaborative capacity building as the learned society representing the largest number of educational researchers in the UK.

In this context the work of the Strategic Forum for Research in Education is potentially a very important development. Information about developments is contained in the latest edition of RI. In brief the SRFE is occupying the space left by the winding up of NERF, but it has a UK composition and its remit is to act as a form of self-evaluation and information-exchange mechanism for education research stakeholders in the UK. BERA is playing a leading role, with our past President, Geoff Whitty, chairing the Planning Group which will have members of the academic community, users and sponsors of educational research as members. Funding to support the Forum has been secured from BERA, ESRC, DCSF and the CfBT Education Trust. ESRC has invited the Forum to focus on the medium term strategy for capacity building as its first task and to prepare a report on the issue for ESRC by June 2008. By that time evidence from a range of collaborative capacity building activities will be available, including AERS and TLRP as well as the recently announced pilot in Wales and some pilot activity in England. We can expect the Forum to collect evidence about the following issues, extrapolated from TLRP's definition of capacity building:

- the supply of well trained educational researchers across the diverse field of educational research;
- the system's ability to innovate, reflect on existing practice and seek continual improvement;
- opportunities and structures for research development across academic careers;
- the system's ability to identify where existing research can be used to inform public debate, policy and practice;
- how we identify research gaps and devise ways of seeking to fill these;
- ability to distinguish good research from bad and understand the need to reconcile different research studies where these give contrasting results.

BERA is the association that can most effectively resist forces of fragmentation and atomisation that are ever present. I began this address by quoting John Nisbet, BERA's first President and I want to end with a quotation from him. Here is his summing up of educational research:

I suggest comparing education to cheese, which has many varieties with different qualities. Research on cheese is complicated by the plurality of tastes and values ... We must recognise different styles of research and different ways in which it may contribute to education.
(Nisbet 1998 p.14 and p.22)

This is what BERA is in a unique position to do.

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To add:

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