

A FORLORN ASPIRATION? THE STORY OF SUCSE

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ABSTRACT

The Scottish Universities Council for Studies in Education (SUCSE) began informally in 1965 as a meeting of the staffs of the Education Departments of the four ancient Scottish Universities. *Scottish Educational Review* and the formation of the Scottish Educational Research Association were first discussed at these meetings. In 1971 the Council was formally constituted as a representative voice of the Scottish University Departments of Education. One aspiration was to coordinate degree courses across the universities in a distinctive Scottish MEd degree with credit transfer to promote mobility. In the end the organisation was unable to survive the divisive climate and the rapid developments of the 1980s.

THE SCOTTISH DEGREE IN EDUCATION

In the 1960s, the Scottish degree in Education (the EdB or BEd) had an outstanding reputation. Introduced after World War 1 by the four ancient universities, Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow and St Andrews (of which Dundee was then an associated college), it was slow to become accepted until the late 1940s. Then, in the absence of any other advanced qualification, it quickly became an avenue to promotion in teaching and to administration, to lectureships in university and the rapidly expanding teacher training colleges (as they were then termed) and for entry to the new profession of educational psychologist. In city and county education authorities, directors of education and their staffs and the advisers who played a large part in curriculum development were appointed from its graduates. Since the course of study covered both education and psychology and there were no other professional courses for educational psychologists in Scotland, the Scottish EdB/BEd became the only qualification for educational psychologists (and was formally recognised by the British Psychological Society as such). By 1964, there had been 716 EdB/BEd graduates from the four universities: 183 (26 per cent) practising educational psychologists, 83 (12 per cent) directors of education (or deputed or assistants) and advisers, 215 (30 per cent) in university or college appointments, and 208 (29 per cent) in schools, many in promoted posts: most of the 27 others had died (Nisbet, 1965). The degree was unusual in its time in that it required a research thesis, and many subsequently distinguished researchers (throughout Britain and the Commonwealth) took their first steps in research in the Scottish degree. The syllabus for the degree in the four universities was sufficiently similar to establish an acknowledged identity for the Scottish degree, different from what was available in England. (In these days all changes to courses were by Ordinance of the Privy Council, which had to be circulated among all four ancient universities for approval.) It made little difference that the universities themselves, never well disposed to the study of education, insisted that it be called 'a second first degree', refusing it the title of 'postgraduate' because (50 years ahead of the times) it combined research with taught courses.

All this changed with the publication of the Robbins Report on Higher Education in 1963, which signalled a massive expansion of student numbers. In Scotland, it led to the establishment of the University of Stirling with a quite different education department offering professional training for teachers, previously the exclusive preserve of the colleges of education, and introduced a Bachelor of Education degree

in the colleges of education (as they were now to be called). The ancient universities had no choice but to change the title of the old Scottish degree to MEd. It was also a time when new paradigms were beginning to appear, challenging the old established concepts in the study of education (Nisbet, 2002) which carried an implicit positivist interpretation of educational research as an experimental procedure involving measurement and testing, based primarily on psychology. Sociology became 'top' of the social science subjects; case studies and an ethnographic approach became fashionable.

I had been appointed to the Chair of Education in Aberdeen in 1963, and although we slowly began to build up a research programme and to introduce Education as an undergraduate subject for the MA degree, the MEd (and its associated first stage leading to a Diploma in Education) was the major concern of our Department. In December 1965, I wrote to the other Education Professors in Scotland suggesting a conference in January at a country house near Edzell, The Burn. The formal reason was that in Aberdeen 'we were discussing the revision of regulations for the MEd degree, which (after Robbins) has replaced the EdB'. An underlying reason was my concern for the reputation of the old Scottish education degree, which I saw as necessarily linked to a common offering of the older universities and which seemed likely to be eroded by new developments. In retrospect, that initial invitation in 1965 may be seen as a reactionary strategy concerned essentially to preserve what was good in the old structure of the Scottish MEd. But more than this, it recognised changes coming, and aspired to enable the University departments to work together in their response to this challenge. Individually, the departments (especially my own) were small, but jointly could perhaps be better able to influence the pattern of reform. In the longer term it proved to be an over-optimistic aspiration, but for the next ten years or so it had considerable success.

THE EARLY STAGES

The first two-day meeting in January 1966 was attended by 25 staff from the four ancient universities (Stirling had not yet been established). This was virtually all those in the Departments of Education at that time. At Edinburgh's suggestion, Psychology staff also were invited, but in the event only two from Aberdeen and two from St Andrews attended. At this meeting, Kenneth Richmond (Glasgow) put forward a proposal to found a journal; Ian Espie (Glasgow) prepared a report on this in October 1966; and in June 1967 the first issue of *Scottish Educational Studies* (later renamed *Scottish Educational Review*) appeared, with Bob Bell (Edinburgh) as Editor. Much later, at the meeting in May 1973, the proposal to found a Scottish Educational Research Association (SERA) was first aired by Brian Dockrell and Gerry Pollock (SCRE); a planning committee drew up a constitution and organised the inaugural meeting of SERA in September 1974. These at least were two successful outcomes.

These informal meetings continued annually from 1965 on. They provided an opportunity for the university departments to exchange information about the many new developments: the colleges were developing their new BEd degree courses, all on different lines; the Open University in Scotland was opening up new options; and the Psychology Departments were beginning to press for greater control over professional training in 'their' field and over the MEd route to a career in educational psychology. The meetings also set up working groups to formulate the University Departments' responses to government consultation papers, giving the departments a stronger voice than individual comments.

There were major upheavals in the University Departments themselves, described in detail by Bell (1983). In Edinburgh, for example, in 1968, Liam Hudson from

Cambridge was appointed to the Bell Chair of Education, which had been established in 1876. Immediately Hudson announced that he would give primacy to research, that the teaching commitment of the MEd could not continue to exist, at least in his department, and that he could not accept the word 'Education' in the title of his Chair. The ensuing controversy was reported in a full-page article in *The Scotsman* by Willis Pickard (November 18, 1970); the degree was transferred to the Department of Adult Education, and Hudson did not stay long.

THE FORMATION OF SUCSE

The 1970 meeting was held in the Golden Lion at Stirling in an attempt to encourage the hesitant Stirling Department of Education to maintain its part in the informal association. (The cost for lunch, afternoon tea, dinner, bed and breakfast, morning coffee and lunch was £5, 8 shillings, including 10% service.) But the strategy failed as the most of the Stirling group went off home at 5 pm. At this meeting the decision was made to put the meetings on a more formal basis, and a working party was set up to draft a constitution for a Scottish Universities Council on Studies in Education.

SUCSE was formally constituted in 1971, with a two-part structure, a Council of some 11 members, two nominated from each of the Universities and one from the Open University in Scotland, which was to meet about three times a year, and an Annual Standing Conference open to 'all members of staff who contribute to the teaching for degrees in Education in Scottish Universities, together with such others as may be invited'. (It is significant that this was not interpreted as including the BEd staffs of the colleges of education.)

This now became the pattern into the 1980s. The Council dealt with business matters of mutual interest, such as participation in in-service training, student grants and responses to papers from the General Teaching Council and the Scottish Education Department on the training of teachers and the supply of educational psychologists. Occasional meetings were arranged with the Scottish Office; and in the revised constitution of the Scottish Council for Research in Education in 1972, SUCSE was given three seats on the SCRE's Council. The Annual Conference, held in different centres each year with an attendance of about 30, moved towards the standard pattern of research presentations plus discussion on current issues, and eventually it was replaced by the annual SERA Conference. One of its agenda papers in 1972, on 'The future of University Departments of Education', arguing for 'some degree of rationalisation' towards a common pattern of provision of courses, is attached for interest as an Appendix.

The nearest that the new organisation came to a 'harmonisation' of courses was a proposal was put forward in 1972 for a 'Scottish MEd', whose component parts could be taken at any of the Scottish universities, with credit transfer across the universities. But this got no further than a shared pamphlet entitled *The Scottish MEd Degree*, published in 1973, which merely outlined the different syllabuses and admission requirements in each of the Universities.

THE LATER STAGES

The Council met regularly to submit observations on Scottish Education Department reports and initiatives, to exchange information, and on occasions to meet with the Research and Intelligence Unit of the Scottish Education Department to discuss research funding and priorities. However, financial constraints on university funding from 1979 on created a climate which was not congenial to cooperative working. Meetings of Council came to be poorly attended and eventually ceased altogether. The right to nominate three members of the SCRE Council was withdrawn. The eventual disappearance of SUCSE from the scene was unmarked and presumably unregretted.

Its demise was probably inevitable because it failed to incorporate the growing strength of some of the colleges of education in research and development, and its existence tended to perpetuate the unfortunate division between the colleges and the Scottish universities. (Different funding, the universities through the University Grants Committee on a United Kingdom basis, the colleges through the Scottish Education Department, proved an insuperable obstacle.) But the rivalry went much deeper than that, with the universities' exclusion from teacher training (except for Stirling, which was a constant source of irritation to the Scottish Office) and the dominance of the University Departments of Education in the field of research.

SUCSE was a product of its time when the Scottish Universities were smaller and closer. In the 1980s, when sweeping changes in teacher education and postgraduate courses resulted in a wide (and possibly rich) diversity, and research funding and higher education policies created a climate of competition, there was no longer a place for its aspiration of cooperative working.

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APPENDIX

SUCSE paper (1972) on 'The future of University Departments of Education'.

An attempt to plan ahead to 1977 or 1980 raises many questions. A major question is whether the University Departments of Education should continue in their present independence, or seek closer involvement in teacher training, both pre-service and in-service training. For the ancient universities, closer involvement means either a formal structure of a Faculty of Education, or, less formally, collaboration with College Education Departments on the basis of a sharing of duties. The Faculty structure seems impossible with the present division of financial and administrative responsibility, unless the University Department were swallowed up by the College. Informal collaboration is an uneasy arrangement, and past experience is not encouraging. However, the possibility of an entirely new structure for teacher training, pre-service and in-service, may need to be considered.

The alternative and more attractive policy of continued independence for the University Departments of Education is not without its dangers. Most important, there is the danger of isolation and ineffectiveness. Independence is practicable only in the context of future growth. At present, Scottish University Departments of Education come into the category of *small* departments. If they remain at their present size, they may have to struggle to continue their existence in the face of a UGC policy of rationalisation. This policy is based on the argument that one department of twelve works more effectively than two departments each with six staff. Each area of specialism requires a minimum of two members of staff for continuity and interaction: if an Education Department offers teaching in, say, six areas (for example, theory, history, comparative, experimental, curriculum, administration), a staff of six or eight is too small.

The demand for the MEd is greater than ever before. What is needed is a national programme for the expansion of facilities for post-graduate study in Education. This may mean some degree of rationalisation, so that not every option is offered

by every University Department. Instead, there should be some concentration on areas of special competence in each University Department. This in turn implies that the pattern of provision within the four ancient universities should be similar, to allow students mobility within Scotland.

Courses must be related to the needs of the education service as a whole, and Departments should identify the functions which they are to perform if they remain outside the area of teacher training. The crucial question then is: what is, and what is to be, the role of the University Departments of Education in Scotland.