

# RESEARCHING POLICY AND POLICY RESEARCH<sup>1</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

The UK government has indicated that it sees a role for research in policy-making. For example in a speech to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) when he was Secretary of State for Education and Employment, David Blunkett said this:

Social science should be at the heart of policy-making. We need a revolution in relations between government and the social research community – we need social scientists to help determine what works and why, and what types of policy initiative are likely to be most effective (Blunkett, 2000).

David Blunkett called for three types of research. That which:

- gives a coherent picture of how society works: the main forces at work and those which can be influenced by government;
- evaluates policy initiatives and systematically reviews existing evidence;
- and, if we are to encourage a more open debate of ideas, we also need ‘blue skies’ research... If academics do not address this, it is difficult to think of anyone else who will (Blunkett, 2000).

Government funding of research in the social sciences is an indication of its commitment to take research seriously. As indicated by the Commission on Social Sciences (CSS) (2003), accurate figures on spending are difficult to come by but there are some noteworthy statistics. The funding given to ESRC both absolutely and as a portion of the funds allocated to all Research Councils shows a significant increase – 115% greater in cash terms in 2001/02 than in 1991/92. While ESRC was by far the lowest funded of the research councils, the Commission reports:

...the clear ramping up of expenditure for the social sciences in the last few years... As a consequence of the 2000 Spending review, ESRC gained a greater proportionate rise in its budget than any other research council. Following the setting of a new baseline for 2003-04, ESRC again has the largest proportionate budget increase of any research council for the next three years (CSS, 2003: 148–149).

Education attracted over £35 million in research grants and contracts in 2000-01 (Table 10.16, CSS, 2003: 146) and has seen the fastest growth in completed PhDs between 1994–95 and 2000–01 (Table 10.9, CSS, 2003: 138). Here in Scotland we have seen the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council and the Scottish Executive Education Department collaborate to invest £2 million pounds over 5 years to enhance educational research capacity and to conduct research in school education seen as a pressing need, particularly in relation to the national priorities in education. The Applied Educational Research Scheme is designed to involve a wide range of researchers, policy-makers and practitioners in research intended to inform policy. Furthermore, the funders have explicitly encouraged educational researchers to work with researchers in other disciplines and to draw on relevant concepts and theories across the social sciences in designing projects and in enhancing capacity. All this points to a certain level of seriousness in the government’s wish to see research play a more prominent role in policy. It seems essential that the educational research community responds and is seen to respond equally seriously to the unprecedented

opportunities that are now before us. In doing so, however, we need to remind ourselves that the relationship between research and policy is not straightforward, measurable and direct. Indeed the British Educational Research Association (BERA) held an invitational workshop for researcher and policy communities in Edinburgh in November 2002 to explore some aspects of that relationship and a report written by Tony Edwards is now available (BERA, 2003). More generally, ESRC has sponsored an Evidence Based Policy Network ([www.evidencenetwork.org](http://www.evidencenetwork.org)) which has three nodes in Scotland, one of which in the University of St Andrews is devoted to understanding ways in which research might influence policy ([www.st-and.ac.uk/~ruru](http://www.st-and.ac.uk/~ruru)).

This paper is intended to contribute to the ongoing debate about research and policy and is in four main parts.

Part one outlines the ways in which research evidence might be used in policy-making. Part two distinguishes two different kinds of research and attempts to identify some key requirements for research to be able to provide robust evidence to inform policy. Part three argues that research has to be concerned with the policy process as well as with the substance of policy if it is to be of real use to policy-makers. The paper concludes with some comments on the need for us to take knowledge transfer seriously. In general, the paper concentrates on the contribution of research to policy and does not set out an agenda for policy-makers in relation to research. It is also worth stressing that it does not deal with research based practice, an equally difficult and contentious area (Simons, 2003). A final caveat is that the paper takes the current situation in Scotland as its starting point in terms of the research-policy interface. It does not, for example, challenge the 'two culture' thesis (Ginsberg and Gorostiaga, 2001) nor attempt to grapple with issues of the policy-research interface in Europe (Schuller, 2004).

#### THE USE OF RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Writing in the 1970s, Weiss described various ways in which policy-makers of any political party might use research evidence. These were as follows:

- Knowledge driven – the fact that knowledge exists sets up pressures for its development and use.
- Problem solving – involves the direct application of the results of a specific study to a pending decision.
- Interactive model – researchers are just one set of participants amongst many in the policy-making process.
- Political model – research as political ammunition, using research to support a pre-determined position.
- Tactical model – research as a delaying tactic in order to avoid responsibility for unpopular policy outcomes.
- Enlightenment model – the indirect influence of research rather than the direct impact of a particular policy process.

While this list is helpful in alerting researchers to the ways in which their research might be used, there are a some problems with it. First it tries to separate political motives from other motives. It can be conceptually difficult, for instance to separate the tactical from the political. More fundamentally, however, it underplays the complexity of the policy process and in particular underplays the role of ideology and the value base of policy – an issue which is the focus of a later paper (Weiss, 1995). This is most obviously the case in social and education policy but applies also to science and medicine. A very recent example, is that of the President of

South Africa, Thabo Mbeki's refusal until recently to accept research evidence of the direct causal relationship between the HIV virus and Aids. In education, sociological studies of grammar and secondary modern schools did much to contribute to the debate about the desirability of selection at age 11 but this evidence in itself was not sufficient to abolish selection. These kinds of studies helped to raise awareness of the consequences of selection among and within schools and added a different dimension to the debate about the validity and reliability of the IQ test as the main vehicle of selection. The key driving force behind the abolition of selection, however, was the ideological commitment of the Labour government of the 1960s. Conservative governments of the 1980s and 1990s with a different ideological stance changed tack and began reintroducing selection. Nor is the existence of overwhelming research evidence any guarantee that a policy will follow. The Mbeki example speaks for itself. Such evidence may make the absence of a particular policy harder to defend, of course, but in itself research evidence, however robust and compelling, does not guarantee that policy will follow. As Davies and Nutley (2002: 3) argue, 'the use of evidence is just one imperative in effective policy-making... policy-making itself is always inherently political.'

Thus in thinking about the relationship between research and policy, we need to be clear about the education policy process itself and about the kinds of research evidence that might be expected to be taken into account by policy-makers. It is thus essential that we, in the research community, research funders, and the users of research are clear about different kinds of research evidence and their usefulness.

#### TWO BROAD KINDS OF RESEARCH

Most commentators on research distinguish between 'blue skies' or basic research and applied research, a distinction also drawn by David Blunkett in his speech reported above. Blue skies research is unpredictable, high risk for funders and usually not intended to have a direct and immediate effect on policy. This kind of research develops ideas and theories which may lead somewhere or nowhere in policy terms. Research on brain functioning and its relationship to cognition, for example, is not intended directly to influence policy in the short term, although its longer term impact on the nature of teaching may be considerable. This is research for enlightenment referred to by Weiss above, whose results seep into the woodwork of society and gradually become the taken-for-granted ideas influencing policy. A further example is the basic research on gender in Scottish education begun in the early 1970s by the Centre for Educational Sociology, which now provides baseline information for the recent growth of interest in this topic by policy-makers (Riddell, 2003). This kind of research can be funded through the dual support mechanism which funds research which all higher education staff are expected to undertake and/or via bids to Research Councils or others.

Applied research, on the other hand, can be seen as providing an evidential base to which policy-makers can reasonably turn to inform policy decisions. This research probably constitutes the bulk of educational research in the UK and it is this broad area of study that might be classified as policy related research. That is to say the research has been commissioned with the intention of informing policy decisions. Governments and increasingly research councils too, tend to fund this kind of research. A brief glance at the research priorities of the Scottish Executive or the list of projects put out to tender by the Department for Education and Skills illustrate this kind of research. Research on the mainstreaming of children with special educational needs, the evaluation of the roll-out of new community schools and so on are clearly intended to help inform policy. This kind of research tends to see the education system as part of a social and political process and thus to be concerned with system level issues. Within this category of applied research, too, would be included the wide range of classroom based research which focuses on

different aspects of teaching, learning and assessment. Many but not all of these kinds of classroom based studies tend to be small scale, some focussing on the impact of particular policy initiatives on classroom processes, others interested in understanding particular aspects of learning, classroom relationships or school cultures; others again concerned to test and improve a particular approach to teaching and learning, such as early intervention studies.

It is the robustness of this base and the claims to knowledge that it can make that have generated some debate in the journals and led to questions about the purposes of such research. It should be no surprise to us that policy-makers at all levels in the system want to know what works. Education spending is a significant part of our gross domestic product, it directly affects all children and young people 5–16, and an increasing number of those under five and at 16+ participating in further or higher education or in the vast range of opportunities now characterised as adult learning. There are several issues which we need to address if we want to develop the robustness of this evidential base and contribute to the substance of education policy. These are as follows:

- Accept the legitimacy of the question, what works. Teaching is an intentional activity directed towards bringing about learning outcomes for pupils, [and students] (Elliot, 2001) and it is reasonable that governments should wish to know how to best to do this and indeed how to measure accurately whether learning has taken place. Accepting the legitimacy of these kinds of questions is not the same as providing an unambiguous answer or, indeed, colluding with governments to undermine the independence of research, as Humes and Bryce (2001) suggest. Much of our knowledge derived from a what works agenda is tentative and uncertain, reflecting the complexity of learning and teaching and the systems which accompany them. Furthermore, research evidence on what works can be very uncomfortable for governments when policy initiatives do not seem to be producing the intended outcomes. It is to recognise that if educational research is serious about informing policy then some of it has to be concerned with what works, in what circumstances, and why it works. (A recent example is the investigation on the effectiveness of classroom assistants and home-school link workers, introduced as part of the *Better Behaviour, Better Learning* recommendations (Munn, *et al.*, 2005).) This point is intimately concerned with the claims to knowledge which educational research makes. For instance, continuing with the example of research on behaviour in schools and classrooms, the statistical survey of teachers' perceptions of indiscipline made claims to generalisability (Munn, *et al.*, 2004) which the work on classroom assistants did not (Munn, *et al.*, 2005).
- In undertaking and, crucially, in reporting our work, then, we need to be clear in a straightforward, technical sense about the knowledge claims arising. This is one of the hall marks of good quality educational research. This is not to argue for or against a particular research design rather, that the knowledge claims should be consistent with the design being adopted and the research questions being addressed. Policy-makers need to know if claims to generalisability are being made and on what basis. If results are tentative, or offering speculations, or insights about particular settings, as many are bound to be, this needs to be made clear to the reader.
- Researchers need to be clear too about the relationships of their work to important concepts and theoretical developments in related disciplines. Educational research will inevitably draw on sociology, or social policy, or politics, or psychology or history or philosophy. Knowledge claims can be informed and strengthened by such a sensitivity and we can become

aware of gaps in the kind of research being pursued. Work under way in the Schools and Social Capital Network under AERS is a prime example. Where in Scotland, however, is there a group of researchers interested in the economics of education, analysing and comparing education spending in local authorities? This is not to ignore the important work of e.g. Midwinter (2003: a; b), Fairley (1998) and others whose research interests encompass finance, educational governance and local authority policy and processes. There have been valuable contributions on particular topics (see Paterson, 1998). It is to highlight the absence of a group of researchers (similar to that in London's Institute of Education) exploring Scottish education's use of resources.

- We need reviews of research that bring together research findings on a particular topic. We are seeing the beginnings of such so called systematic reviews under the auspices of the EPPI Centre in the London Institute of Education and via the Campbell Collaboration, which is concerned with social and educational policies. These reviews are different from the traditional narrative reviews of the literature with which educational researchers are familiar, in that they identify 'an explicit research question to be addressed; [are transparent about] the methods used for searching for studies; [use]exhaustive searches which look for unpublished as well as published studies; [have]clear criteria for assessing the quality of the studies; [have clear criteria for] including or excluding studies based on the scope of the review and quality assessment; [use]joint reviewing to reduce bias; [produce] a clear statement of the findings of the review' (Evans and Benefield, 2001). There are of course many criticisms of this approach to reviewing perhaps best summarised by Hammersley (2001). These are that it can privilege certain kinds of research design such as randomised control trials and experiments; that some research should be conceived as providing a mosaic about a topic rather than a series of repeat studies; and that most seriously it reduces reviewing to a series of rules of procedure, a technical process that ignores or distrusts tacit knowledge. However, narrative reviews are not without their problems as Hammersley acknowledges and it can only be helpful to educational research to have a debate about the kinds of research and the kinds of reviews that can be useful to policy-makers. Hammersley (2001) is worried that systematic reviews will lead to a privileging of certain kinds of research being funded, notably large scale surveys, randomised controlled trials, or quasi-experimental work. This is not the case so far in Scotland where recent funding strategies have encouraged studies employing a wide range of methods, including a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Moreover, there is nothing to prevent those researchers working in the qualitative tradition in policy related work to be explicit about the kinds of knowledge claims being made and of the contribution that this tradition can make to policy.
- We need longer term funding, especially of qualitative research projects, to enable the comprehensive collection of data that will provide robust evidence concerning the phenomena under investigation. Qualitative research which relies on only one kind of data, for example interviewing, is necessarily limited in the kinds of claims it can make and very short projects are rarely good value for money for the funders, researchers or policy-makers. Data can be superficial and lack situational analysis.
- We need to have more cross-sectional and longitudinal studies since the effects of many interventions will only be identifiable over time – for example new community schools in Scotland, the presumption of mainstreaming for

pupils with special educational needs, the literacy and numeracy strategies, wider access to higher education. We are beginning to see more of this kind of funding in Scotland. Some rich data sets already exist, for example, the National Child Development Study and the British Cohort Study of 1970. New data sets will shortly be coming on stream, such as the recently funded Millennium Cohort and the British Household Panel Study which now has a Scottish enhancement (begun in 1999). It would be good to see more regular use of these kind of data encouraged by funding for secondary analysis and featuring as a routine part of research training.

- We need to collaborate with other social scientists, for example in economics, law and social policy, all areas which education policy touches and where there are interesting developments in inter-agency working.
- We also need to collaborate with HMIE on a number of different levels. HMIE reports are an important source of evidence for policy because they are perceived to be based on school and classroom realities, derived from multiple data sources. Reports from individual school inspections are collated to provide overviews of standards and quality and of particular aspects of education. Inspectors are thus in a very strong position in terms of reporting strengths and weaknesses across the system and in identifying gaps. Furthermore, they come to the business of inspection with strong professional backgrounds and a wealth of tacit knowledge about teachers' culture. To date, there have been few opportunities for HMIE and researchers to share knowledge and understanding about schools and classrooms. Such opportunities would be beneficial in bringing to bear different kinds of perspectives on particular issues, perhaps leading to an enhanced appreciation of the different evidential base being brought into play. A more pragmatic level of co-operation might be the active recruitment of researchers as associate assessors in inspection teams, and/or staff secondments between HMIE and higher education institutions. Much remains to be debated and discussed here, but, as researchers, we ignore an important and influential source of evidence about schools and classrooms at our peril.

This section might be summed up as the need for a more strategic approach to knowledge creation. Davies and Nutley (2002: 7) list a series of questions which any serious research and development strategies ought to address, including questions about research capacity, knowledge production, and dissemination. They also suggest a much closer relationship between researchers and policy-makers, suggesting that:

Researchers will need to become much savvier about the policy process and far more engaged with their policy customers. Policy people, in turn, need to gain a greater and more sophisticated understanding about the research process and what it can accomplish in reasonable time.

To this, I would add that policy-makers need to be clearer about the distinctions between data description, a narrative account of what was found, and data analysis, an attempt to go beyond narrative by ascribing meaning to the data drawing on the research literature to inform understanding. This implies a good understanding of what previous studies on a particular topic have to say and time to do this work, and a good understanding of relevant theoretical developments, not only of substantive areas of policy, but of the policy process itself.

#### RESEARCH ON POLICY-MAKING

In thinking about the relationship between educational research and policy we need to be clear about how we understand policy-making. Many analysts for convenience

categorise policy in terms of three distinct stages:

- Policy formulation
- Policy implementation
- Policy evaluation.

While these categories can be helpful, and indeed were used to help structure the BERA workshop mentioned above, many would agree with Ozga (2000) that we should think of policy as a process, involving struggle and contestation rather than as a product handed down in tablets of stone. All policies involve values issues and hence debates about their worthiness. Policy does not emerge fully formed like a butterfly from a chrysalis but rather as a result of conscious decisions to do one thing rather than another. Even so, such decisions will not be supported by everyone and the competing rationales and explanations for particular policies are an important area of study. Policy does not in this view, translate unchanged from legislation or guidance to practice. This view of policy processes will open up the research agenda about the relationship between research and policy and avoid us getting trapped in a rather sterile debate about the relative merits of positivism and interpretivism which currently threatens to bedevil the issue of evidence based or evidence informed policy because of its focus on data and data description, rather than on meaning. Such research would also enrich the relationships between educational researchers and teachers, encouraging a critical and reflexive approach to policy as part of initial teacher education and continuous professional development. Further, it would encourage research on educational research policy itself. A few examples of the kinds of questions which such an approach would open up are:

- What is the rationale for a particular policy?
- Who has influenced this rationale?
- In whose interests are the policy? Who will benefit and who will be disadvantaged?
- What are the likely consequences of the policy for other parts of the education system?
- How is the policy understood and enacted in different parts of the education system?
- Has education policy-making changed post devolution in the UK in the ways that were anticipated?

To take the example of the abolition of selection mentioned above, research framed by ‘why’ questions would seek to explain the social and cultural changes which made the unfairness of the IQ test so politically potent in the 1960s and which made the re-introduction of selection politically acceptable in the 1980s and beyond. (See Paterson, 1998, for a fuller discussion.)

This is not to suggest that we necessarily encourage a division between educational researchers interested in the policy process and those interested in substance — indeed it is quite difficult to separate the two — although there is bound to be a difference in emphasis. It is to suggest that a what works agenda and a concentration on what counts as a robust evidential base is going to be pretty limited and limiting in the contribution which educational research can make to policy. We need to engage with values issues and with what Humes (2003) has called the why questions as well as the what questions in policy research. In short, we need not start with the existence of a particular policy and consider its impact or ‘delivery’, we can also explore the value and other assumptions underpinning policy. This is hard and demanding work, if done well. It also brings into question

the values stance of the researchers. A great deal has been written about this in methodological texts and no research can be entirely value free. However, where research spills over into advocacy an important boundary has been crossed and the BERA (2003:9) symposium identified this fine line. There is a risk for researchers of spilling over into “arguing for the desirable” [to the researcher] while ignoring political exigencies and thus damaging policy-makers’ perception of research. Research on the policy process, however, is one which policy-makers themselves can find difficult and threatening. Paradoxically, it can be of value in analysing the implications of taking one course of action rather than another and in clarifying policy assumptions.

There are further dangers, of course, for any researcher working in highly sensitive policy-related areas. The most important risk is to their independence, the critical autonomy so essential to the working of any democratic society. Nisbet (1995), Paterson (1998), and Humes and Bryce (2001 and 2003) articulate this danger. Humes and Bryce (2001: 349), for example, argue that ‘policy communities need to be intellectually engaged, challenging and innovative if they are to serve civic society in a constructive way’. They are concerned that a focus on evidence informed policy can be a means of exerting control over researchers, first by flattering their importance to policy processes, and then by drawing them in, to discuss the ‘nitty gritty’ of policy development and implementation, rather than the bigger and, some would argue, more challenging why questions itemised above. How can we prevent this happening? As a starting point for discussion between research and policy communities, the following suggestions are offered:

- the continued raising of the relationship between research and policy in writing, seminars and discussions involving researchers and policy-makers.
- the persuasion of diverse policy communities that understanding of the policy process and the social and cultural conditions which make education policies desirable and feasible is in their interest. We researchers need to be more active here. Where is the study building on the work of McPherson and Raab (1988), *Governing Education*, in the context of devolved government? This account of the educational policy process was highly illuminating and influential in understanding how policy worked.
- the establishing of networks, as under AERS, to promote a better understanding of the two cultures of research and policy and, thus, by recognising the key features of these cultures work to promote the co-creation of knowledge.
- individual researchers need to have the courage and confidence to develop their roles as public intellectuals contributing to the vibrant and intellectually engaged ethos which Humes and Bryce (2001) note as important.

While some may regard these suggestions as hopelessly naive and as ignoring the undoubted power relationships which exist between policy-makers and researchers, care needs to be exercised so that educational research is not perceived as inward looking and remote from the day to day concerns of teachers, children and parents, more concerned with intellectual purity than the real and demanding world of education policy. Of course, tensions exist and plenty of examples can be found of research evidence being commissioned and ignored. There have also been occasions when researchers would have wished to disseminate SEED funded research in advance of contractual arrangements about dissemination. However, a greater understanding on the part of researchers of the ‘real politik’ of policy-making and more open discussion of the issues raised must surely be the way forward in a democracy.

These concerns are not new. A further aspect of this way of researching policy is that of illuminative evaluation, described by Partlett (1977) and his colleagues nearly thirty years ago. Illuminative evaluation is an approach in which researchers seek to understand how policy is interpreted in schools and classrooms, as well as with effects or outcomes. This approach will be of benefit to policy-makers and, indeed, might be seen as an important characteristic of a mature democracy. Partlett also highlighted the importance of research sensitivity to unintended outcomes.

This section has argued that, while educational research can and should contribute to the substance or content of policy, as indicated above, researchers should also direct their attention to the policy process itself and to the cultural conditions surrounding the introduction of particular policies.

#### KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

A further and final aspect of research and policy is the recent focus on knowledge transfer. This is a shorthand term for the ways in which research findings are made known outside the academy. There are many different ways in which this can be done but it can be a neglected aspect of policy research and indeed could be the subject of research itself, particularly in education where there are many constituencies potentially interested in the research findings. Thinking of knowledge transfer in the sense of making research findings known, rather than as a feature of globalisation, threatening the very nature of higher education institutions (Ozga, 2005), examples of the kinds of approaches in which educational researchers ought to be engaged are:

- Writing short briefing papers aimed at a particular audience;
- Organising and taking part in invitational seminars involving policy-makers and researchers and other interested parties;
- Writing press releases about the findings of their research;
- Undergoing media training so that researchers become skilled in talking to journalists and appearing in the media;
- Developing easily searchable databases of research findings on particular topics for lay audiences.

In short, we have to pay more attention to the ways in which our research findings penetrate the worlds of policy-makers and others and be prepared to devote some time and energy to this. We should not expect policy-makers to be waiting with baited breath for our research findings. We need to be pro-active in bringing these findings to their attention. We also need to be sensitive to the demands of the different world which policy-makers inhabit. 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 CSS indicates, policy researchers need to be 'up to date and street wise' and able to present information clearly, concisely and in a non jargonistic way (CSS, 2003: 70). Davies and Nutley (2002) summarise the conditions under which evidence may directly influence policy.

**Evidence into policy**

Attention is more likely to be paid to research findings when:

- The research is timely, the evidence is clear and relevant, and the methodology is relatively uncontested.
- The results support existing ideologies, are convenient and uncontentious to the powerful.
- Policy makers believe in evidence as an important counterbalance to expert opinion: and act accordingly.
- The research findings have strong advocates.
- Research users are partners in the generation of evidence.
- The results are robust in implementation.
- Implementation is reversible if need be.

Even so, what counts as evidence inside and outside the academy is not straightforward, uncontested, or value free.

This paper has hardly considered the role of teachers in researching policy, beyond emphasising the desirability of them adopting a critically reflexive approach to it. Teachers, however, are creators of policy as well as interpreters of policy made elsewhere. The new opportunities for professional development and promotion in Scotland stress the importance of reflective practice. This emphasis on reflective practice applies both to those aspiring to managerial roles and to those experienced teachers who wish to remain in the classroom. We now have opportunities in Scotland as never before, to encourage teachers to develop a 'researcherly disposition' even if they are not inclined to engage in research themselves (Munn and Ozga, 2003). In taking up these opportunities, teachers like researchers need to engage with the why questions, and the values questions about policy as well as with the what works questions. Teacher education institutions in Scotland, all now part of larger universities, have likewise an excellent opportunity to engage beginning teachers as well as more experienced teachers in exploring the connections between research and practice and between research and policy. Indeed they provide ideal sites in which to develop some aspects of the knowledge transfer agenda. Of course, knowledge transfer is a two-way process. Researchers need to develop new and more accessible ways of making their findings known. Likewise, however, teachers and policy-makers at local and national level have a reciprocal duty to engage in discussion and debate. We are not helped in Scotland by a media which, with a few honourable exceptions, tends to sensationalise or over-simplify research findings – a phenomenon not confined to research in education. We, as researchers, can play a role here in being more pro-active, in thinking through how and when to communicate and, given the professional development agenda and other structural opportunities now available to us, we should seize the moment.

The interest in evidence informed policy and the consequent commitment to enhance educational research capacity in the UK brings with it a challenge to educational researchers which they would do well to embrace. A response to this challenge, which focussed only on methodological and/or paradigm wars or saw it as a conspiracy to gag educational researchers, would seem to many to be self indulgent and to miss an opportunity that is unlikely to be offered again in the foreseeable future. Educational researchers in Scotland are particularly well placed to bring their work to the notice of policy-makers at different levels of the system.

The Scottish Parliament through its committees, the Executive through its networks and committees, and local authorities are all showing interest in research, as are non-departmental bodies, such as Learning and Teaching Scotland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority. It is often remarked that Scotland is a small system where dissemination of research findings and access to policy-makers is relatively easy. We should make sure that we are seen as an indispensable part of that system.

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#### NOTES

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