

FROM THE EDITOR

It is not unusual for Scotland's education system to be enmeshed in changing political discourses. Throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s policy initiatives seemed to be emerging from Front Benches at the rate of at least one major initiative per week. Or so it seemed. However, now we are in more settled times although loud acclaim for the wonders of a specific raft of policies is heard more rarely. This has certainly been the case concerning New Community Schools (NCS): the policies and their implementations are not reflected in headline news. Rather, since they were launched as pilot projects in 1999, these new collaborative relationships between nursery, primary and secondary schools and other services to children, have been funded and supported by the Scottish Executive with notable absence of fan fare. Yet, as our first article notes there is something very special about these schools. Not only are they the result of an attempt to address social inclusion by integrating programmes within Government, at all levels of action right down to local neighbourhoods and communities, but they are also a positive response to the recognition that "agencies" must work collaboratively if there is to be a seamless response to the needs of the socially excluded. In the findings of a small-scale research study, the authors, McCulloch, Tett and Crowther, note that various worries abound, especially on conflicting target setting agendas: will raising achievement be sacrificed to the target of increasing inclusion in schools? Will there be damaging pressures on staff time when successful collaboration for NCS requires time for planning, sharing ideas and adopting new working methods? The authors conclude that it is better for policy and practice to focus upon small achievable goals rather than to be caught up with big objectives which are difficult to reach. Whilst teachers in all sectors — nursery, primary and secondary — may well appreciate the macro aims of achieving 'social inclusion' and 'capacity building' their own specific practice may best be geared to everyday contact and collaboration between staff in schools in the NCS project. From small acorns do large trees flourish.

A second article on NCS considered how success in this complex policy could be assessed. The authors, Allan, Mannion and Duffield, studied the response to the NCS initiative in one local authority. They focused upon participation and social capital (taken as connections between individuals at home, in the workplace and with voluntary associations) and the purposes of the NCS initiative, as perceived by locals and frontline professionals, the nature of integrated working practices and the impact of these on the people involved. Their theoretical and substantive approaches, therefore, were firmly located in delineating the probable potential for multi-agency support for NCS. They noted that learners may well benefit from defining their own 'Personal Learning Plans', which can be a source of social capital. However, the devices are in danger of being merely tokenistic emblems of learning and achievement.

The authors draw attention to the macro agendas behind the initiative; multi-agency support for social inclusion, raising achievement, encouraging collaboration among professionals and increasing civic engagement. They suggest that through NCS it is possible to articulate areas of growth and changes in how individuals live, work and learn together. Through such insights, it becomes possible to identify what measures might mean in practice to various stakeholders but such insights begin with the small-scale and — over time — grow in importance, trust and support. It may be that the agenda of the government, the community, the school and the learner are not necessarily compatible.

Participation is the theme, also, of the article by Deuchar. More participatory approaches to school organisation, he argues, have been reduced over the past twenty years with curriculum changes, emerging out of political demands for

'individualised learning' and 'enterprise'. However, there are possibilities, he notes, for both enterprise and citizenship, ethics, fairness and values in education. Enterprise and individualism, in other words, are not necessarily introduced at the expense of communitarianism and collectivism. His small-scale research which involved observing pupil councils in operation and speaking with participants, noted that these councils are vehicles for expression of active citizenship and democratic participation in schools. As politicians speak of the 'third way', Deuchar notes that schools councils could be an educational 'third way' bringing together the apparently opposing dichotomies of capital and welfare, individual enterprise and collectivised and communitarian learning.

Concerns about inclusion, citizenship and participation inform, also, the article by Macleod and Munn. In examining educational provision for those with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) alongside provision for those with other forms of Special Educational Needs (SEN) the authors draw attention to the differing discourses of 'special needs'. They suggest that whilst pupils with SEN may now be educated within the mainstream, those with SEBD may find fewer opportunities for inclusion. In a helpful overview of the literature over the past thirty years, they delineate the many factors which have been influential in definitions of SEN. In particular, they focus upon the ways in which the individual, medical or deficit model (IMD) has managed to re-surface in various guises and through specific political and educational discourses. The article concludes by urging the maintenance of the 'label', along with a better understanding of the causes, of SEBD. Such understanding, they argue, can best be achieved through further robust and sustained research in this field so that 'effective' and 'successful' interventions may be grounded not merely in policy but also, most importantly, in practice.

The relationship between policy and practice underlies most current academic and practitioner research. Rarely are articles submitted without the expectation that the findings will impinge on practice in the field and also feed back to policy-makers. This is certainly the case with the article by Howieson, Raffe and Tinklin on the New National Qualifications (NNQs) in S3 and S4. Their paper results from an ESRC research project and deftly draws attention to the continuing need for research to inform efficacious policy-making. One without the other would indeed be absurd.

Through a brief historical account of the period from Munn and Dunning of the 1960s, plus support for 'assessment for all' and eight modes of learning in the 1970s, Howieson, Raffe and Tinklin focus upon NNQs as the 'climbing frame' of access points, units and courses with flexible opportunities for vertical and lateral progression. This framework, resulting from the introduction of Higher Still, with its focus on a 'unified system of post-16 education and training', articulates with the Standard Grade, and addresses the current political drive for individualised learning and progression through levels within curriculum areas. The authors describe results from a survey of Scottish Secondary Schools and case studies of four schools where they find a substantial number of schools — notably independent and special schools — moving from the Standard Grade to other units and courses, such as the Intermediate 1 or Intermediate 2. Although there was evidence of some anxiety about such moves, possibilities for improved progression appeared to outweigh any concerns by teachers and school managers regarding negative developments. Indeed, those interviewed in this survey, appear to see some advantages of a 'climbing frame' with its inherent curriculum flexibility for not only for Higher Still but also for ages 14-16, if not younger. As the authors note, the Scottish Executive (SE) support loosening the bonds between age and stage and allowing more scope for school-level decision-making; but these directives may not be feasible when applied to the whole system. They conclude by urging the SE to recognise that local flexibility needs to be pursued within a framework which ensures coherence and consistency. And that is, fundamentally, the responsibility of policy-makers, not school teachers.

In her article on the perceptions of school teachers as they welcome children to P1 classes, Maria Cassidy draws attention to the government's drive to improve learning outcomes through a framework for planned learning experiences for all pre-5 settings in Scotland. By 2004 almost 98% of children entering primary school have had some form of pre-school experience. Through an appraisal of previous research which focused upon training, beliefs and practices for pre-5 education and care, Cassidy's own study focused upon the practices of P1 teachers involved in the transition process. It asked what expectations teachers had of children as they started school and whether the information primary teachers received from pre-school assisted their planning for the children's learning during P1 classes.

The results are interesting as they refer, once again, to the relevance of research for policy-making. Cassidy notes the importance of work undertaken in pre-school establishments being the planning, policy and practice of the next stage of education. Whilst the pre-school curriculum and pedagogy are different from those found in the primary school, she suggests that there continues to be a case for the continuity of programming for children's learning from one sector to the other.

It had been our aim in this edition of the SER to focus not only on the relationship between policy and practice in Scotland's education system, but to extend that perspective to education in Scotland and other countries of Europe. Having a European dimension, we suggested in the editorial of SER 35(2), would provide our own educational community with wider discourses, some of which would resonate within our shores. Our request for papers to be submitted with this European dimension resulted not in a flood but did produce a number of interesting contributions. One is printed here. John Dakers writes on the results of a consultancy undertaken for the EC in the field of Mathematics, Science and Technology education. Although 30 countries were represented on a Working Group, Dakers compares current initiatives to promote science and technology in Sweden and Scotland. He refers to Sweden's commitment to social constructivist principles where tutors and learners were engaged in a 'learning process and a meeting of minds'. He contrasts this with Scottish initiatives such as the Scottish Science Centres funded by the SE and supported by the Scottish Science Advisory Committee (SSAC), which was established under the auspices of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. He suggests that in this administrative environment, some of the freedom of scientific inquiry and expression which was found in Sweden, may well be lost. The understandable conclusion may be that whilst no single initiative can change recruitment to the science and technology areas, it would serve policy-makers well if they took time to look at experiences and successes from other parts of Europe.

Such comparativist and internationalist insights have been the lifeblood of the work of Margaret Sutherland. In her memoir, Professor Sutherland surveys Scotland's contribution to these studies from the pioneering stance of 1876 through to the present day. She notes that by the mid-20th century, early interest in German systems of education were overtaken by enthusiasm for Sweden and debates on the comprehensive school. Study of Scottish practice from elsewhere was particularly strong in Commonwealth countries. However, a period of interest in the 1970s was succeeded by a less favourable climate: by 2004, the membership of the British Association of International and Comparative Education included only five people living in Scotland. Sutherland argues for education researchers to look at the world beyond Victoria Quay and raises the question of a future renaissance of Scottish work in comparative education.

In this edition, we are pleased to conclude with our regular column on Education in the Scottish Parliament. Once again, Mark Priestley has located those specific, relevant and important debates and discussions which have been held in the Parliament. Priestley refers readers to specific committee papers, now available on the Scottish Parliament website. As MSPs move to their new Parliament Building at

Holyrood, we wish them well in their further deliberations about Scotland's education system and its continued positive developments. We hope that the articles contained within these pages will assist our MSPs as they ponder future policy making. We would ask them, most sincerely, to take note of the underlying messages of this — and other — editions of SER: to relate all policy-making to rigorous research which has been carried out through robust methodologies and has produced coherent conclusions. We hope that this may be an aspect of our contribution to the partnership between research and policy-making.

It is in this context we propose the broad theme for the editions in 2005 to be the impact of research on education policy formation. Furthermore, we are planning a "Special Issue" of the journal on the theme of "the role of research in the professional education and induction of teachers in all sectors". We are delighted that Professor Ian Menter (Chair of Teacher Education, University of Glasgow) has agreed to be guest editor in this venture, made possible through a generous bequest from the estate of the late Professor Stanley Nisbet.

GARI DONN
Editor

JILL DUFFIELD
Deputy Editor