

## RESEARCH ABSTRACTS

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SOEID-FUNDED PROJECTS:

### BASELINE ASSESSMENTS: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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A number of countries have recently identified the need to develop schemes for assessment of children's broad educational achievements on entry to school, commonly referred to as Baseline Assessment. The UK is at the forefront of these developments and baseline assessments are now part of legislation (Education Act, 1997) in England and Wales. This review of the literature and relevant baseline assessment schemes was commissioned by the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department to inform decision-making in Scotland. It begins with a brief examination of the relationship between the types of assessment used in education and the purpose of such assessment. It locates these matters in the context of current developments in early childhood education. The review then examines current developments in a number of countries, beginning with an outline of such developments in different parts of the United Kingdom. A range of baseline assessment schemes currently used is examined and the salient features of each scheme highlighted. A number of critical issues which need to be addressed in the development of baseline assessment schemes are then examined. Following a brief comparative analysis, the researchers conclude that the evidence shows that:

- baseline assessment provides a reasonably valid basis on which to plan children's learning experiences and a means of identifying effective primary schools;
- a single national scheme is preferable to an accreditation process. National accreditation procedures promote an inefficient use of resources by encouraging each local authority to devise local schemes;
- current baseline assessment schemes have taken a narrow perspective on assessing children's learning although more recent schemes attempt to cover all the recommended curricular areas;
- for information at national level, a single scheme used by all primary schools is desirable;
- incorporating a pedagogic purpose with a value-added purpose within baseline assessment is feasible but the nature of the scheme should give priority to the former;
- in most current baseline assessment schemes assessments are undertaken with four-year-old children in reception classes. Given the diversity of pre-school provision for four year olds in Scotland, the researchers suggest that summative assessment should not take place until children start formal schooling to avoid disadvantaging the developing mixed economy of local authority, private and voluntary providers;
- teachers and others working in early childhood education do not appear to find the assessments obtrusive to the teaching and learning process.

And finally on the basis of findings emerging from the literature, the researchers recommend that a baseline assessment scheme should be developed for all children in primary schools in Scotland. Account should be taken of assessment of children in their pre-school year and the scheme should give priority and display sensitivity to the need to promote children's learning. It should be easily managed within normal classroom activities, cover all curricular areas, and teachers should be given adequate guidance and support in undertaking baseline assessment. Mechanisms for coordinating the value-added component of such assessment should be established both at local authority and national levels and research into the development of the scheme should be on-going.

## EVALUATION OF TVEI

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The Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) was first introduced as a pilot scheme in 1984 and later extended to all local authority funded schools as a national programme which ran until 1997. At Education Authority level the 'projects', as TVEI activities were known, lasted for varying periods within the overall duration of the initiative. During the whole period education authorities in Scotland received approximately £100 million to fund TVEI activity. The scheme sought to equip all school and college students in the age group 14–18 years with the knowledge and skills required for success in adult working life. The ultimate aim was to develop a more highly skilled, competent, effective and enterprising workforce with particular recognition of the demands that are placed upon them in a changing technological society. Towards the end of 1996, the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department commissioned an evaluation of the TVEI extension and the main lessons are summarised here.

The evaluators conclude that TVEI helped to promote a 'change in climate' in which relating what was learned to the world of work became an integral part of the provision of schools and colleges. Practices, which had taken place in some schools (for example, Education Industry Links, Understanding Industry Days, Industrial Awareness Days, Education Business Partnerships, Work Experience) became common to all schools and have continued to be so. The objectives of the extension were also perceived to have complemented Scottish Consultative Committee on the Curriculum's (SCCC) guidelines and many of the processes and practices of management and organisation which were introduced by TVEI remain in place today. A notable example is the practice of bidding for resources. Additionally, the extension was appreciated by schools catering for children with special educational needs. Specific developments included networking for staff and students, work experience and the provision of specialist equipment.

The evaluation found that the specific nature of TVEI focus statements enabled managers and decision makers to be clear about aims and rationale for the programme. Factors contributing to this success which may be replicated in other initiatives were that:

- it had a clear focus and coherent approach understood at all levels;
- it was a well funded initiative;
- it was supported by appropriate staff developments;
- it was integrated into the way schools and colleges worked, rather than 'bolted on';

- it was adaptable within boundaries to suit local needs;
- it was focused on young people's learning needs and the variety of teaching approaches required;
- it had monitoring and evaluation built-in.

The overall impact of the programme was summed up by one headteacher who reported that:

TVEI did not run counter to anything which we might have been trying to do in the school at the time. It complemented it and more—it gave a different focus. At the end of the day, its effects on change in the school—in terms of attitudes, approaches, outlooks, ambitions, but above all in terms of what the children are learning, why, how, when and where—is difficult to underestimate. My school has changed much for the better as a result of TVEI. Our main problem now, in different circumstances, is how to maintain that momentum. But it will never be reversed.

## THE FE/HE ROUTE: NEW PATHWAYS INTO HIGHER EDUCATION?

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This research focused on the growth of links between further education colleges (FECs) and higher educational institutions (HEIs) which were designed to provide opportunities for students to progress into higher education with credit gained for their studies in further education. This is referred to as the FE/HE Route. The project was undertaken in two stages: firstly, an examination of links at course and institutional level (reported by Alexander *et al.*, 1995; Gallacher *et al.*, 1996); and secondly, a longitudinal study of students who began their higher educational careers in Higher National Certificate/Diploma (HNC/D) programmes (reported here). Overall the results confirm that the FE/HE Route is emerging as a means of encouraging participation in higher education among traditionally under-represented groups.

The researchers identify two groups of students who pursue quite distinct educational careers within the FE/HE route: an older group composed of those aged 21 and over; and a younger group of 20 year olds and under. The two groups differ in terms of their educational careers at school, post-school prior to entering the HNC/D, and within the Higher National programmes. The concept of an educational career which develops over time, and reflects the opportunities for students to progress through a series of steps towards educational goals which are established as the career unfolds, was an important finding in the research. The older group of FE/HE students undertook significantly more post-school education than the younger age group in order to prepare for studying an HNC/HND. It appears that the decision to transfer into higher education generally only occurs once these older students have had some success in further education but their success rates on Higher National programmes, progression to degrees and degree programmes are comparable to those of the younger group. The researchers suggest that this success is associated with their involvement in post-school education. However, there is no evidence that the majority of FE/HE students who progress to degrees set off at the HNC/D stage of their educational careers with a degree in mind. This decision emerges once they have embarked on their Higher National studies. Additionally, for many students

contemplating further education, especially the older group, a further factor seems to come into play: that is the geographical convenience of the college/university to their homes. It appears that the FE/HE route attracts a student group many of whom wish to study in relatively close proximity to their homes, and for whom convenience of travel is an important factor influencing their choice of college.

The study also investigated the nature and extent of problems experienced by FE/HE students prior to, during and after their transfer to degree courses. These include problems associated with assessment procedures, teaching methods and staff availability. To a certain extent although these problems reflect the different learning cultures of FE and HE, they also indicate that the responses of HEIs to these issues has been limited. FE/HE students would welcome more assistance in making the transition to degree programmes. In examining the destination of FE/HE students who progress to degrees, the researchers found that a relatively high proportion of FE/HE students enter the newer universities. Thus, while the FE/HE route is creating new opportunities to enter HE, particularly for older students, these opportunities would seem to be limited in that the full range of HEIs is not equally open to all students. In addition, there is evidence that a significant proportion of FE/HE students do not transfer into degree programmes with the full amount of credit which is, in theory, available to them. While the vast majority of HND students entered their degrees at the highest possible level (year 3), the same is not true of HNC students. This indicates that the credit transfer framework does not ensure an automatic transfer at the highest level and the point of entry will vary depending on the programme involved and decisions made by the students. Nonetheless, an interesting and encouraging result is that the success rates for FE/HE students who enter degree programmes appear to be very high.

#### REFERENCES

- Alexander H., Gallacher J., Leahy J. & Yule W. (1995), Changing patterns of higher education in Scotland: a study of links between further education colleges and higher education institutions, *Scottish Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*. 2, pp. 25-54.
- Gallacher J., Leahy J., Yule W. & Alexander H. (1996) *Further and Higher Education links in Scotland*, First report from the Patterns of Credit Transfer Project.

#### EARLY INTERVENTION: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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This report, which comes at a time when increasing interest is being focused on pre-school and early years of schooling, reviews the UK and international literature on the use of early intervention schemes and examines their scope, organisation and effectiveness. The researcher presents evidence gathered from published accounts on the most appropriate time to intervene, the effectiveness of alternative strategies and reported long-term benefits. Most of the documented and evaluated schemes have concentrated on literacy, but mathematical attainment (or lack of it) is also causing concern.

The strong message from the research literature on intervention is that there are no single-measure answers to under-achievement either in literacy or numeracy. Early intervention falls within the broader category of equal opportunities for all, where efforts are made to ensure that gender, race, disability and socio-economic circumstances do not lead to educational disadvantage. However, educational disadvantage linked with socio-economic deprivation appears to be very resistant to efforts toward positive change.

The author argues that effectiveness resides in mixed and comprehensive strategies rather than single-strand schemes. There is a consistent pattern in the research studies reported here that strategies, *per se*, do not result in specific improvements in reading. One example of a successful mixed-strategy programme included the following:

- high quality pre-school provision
- research-based curriculum and instructional methods which formed a continuum of improvement from pre-school to later stages
- reduced class size
- activities to build positive relationships and involvement with parents
- one-to-one tutoring from teachers for those falling behind in reading in their first year at school
- family support programmes.

Clearly, the research evidence on achievement in reading points to early intervention rather than later remedial action. Preventing early reading failure is seen as a far more effective strategy for schools to pursue and the evidence highlights the need for the kind of one-to-one tutoring by the teacher of six year olds at risk of failure advocated by specific programmes such as Reading Recovery. The author suggests that schools can make a difference in this area providing other factors are also present. Purposeful leadership, classroom practice which articulates with specific interventions, teachers trained in appropriate methods, increasing curricular time spent on literacy in the early stages and involvement with outside agencies are all associated with successful interventions. Significantly, the quality of teacher training is linked to the level of effectiveness of Reading Recovery (and by implication to all one-to-one tutoring). But the author identifies that such programmes need to be extended to include more phonological training. On the negative side, data on numeracy interventions are far less evident but there are some indications that numeracy should be more firmly located in the domains of thinking, mental reasoning and language than currently happens in the UK.

Overall the review provides a timeous summary of research findings in the area of early intervention - one which both teachers and Education Authorities should find useful. A copy of the full report has been placed on the SOEID Research and Intelligence Unit website. <http://www.hmis.scotoff.gov.uk/riu>

## **SPECIAL SCHOOLS: DEVELOPMENT PLANNING AND THE USE OF THE SCHOOL DAY**

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This research reports a small scale study of seven special schools and one special unit in two Education Authorities which was undertaken in conjunction with a large project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council entitled Special Schools and Multiple Policy Innovations (ESRC Award R000235843). Several commentators of special education have been critical of the failure of mainstream schools to undergo the radical reform necessary for inclusive policies to be successful. Special schools, in the meantime, appear to have taken up the challenge to alter their structure, culture

and practices. This has partly been in response to pressure from central and local government to be part of multiple policy initiatives and partly their own efforts at school improvement in order to protect their future. One such innovation is School Development Planning—the subject of this research.

School Development planning offers schools a process of auditing, determining priorities and targets, implementation and evaluation. In practice, pupils attending special schools experience a shorter day than their counterparts in mainstream schools. This is intended to take account of travelling time from home and perceptions that children with significant difficulties may become stressed by a longer day. With these two aspects in mind, the research set out to:

- explore the use of School Development Planning cycles within special schools and perceptions of their impact on teaching and learning; and
- investigate perceptions of the length of the special school day.

The findings from this particular aspect of the larger study of special schools and their culture suggests that there have been substantial changes in recent years. School development planning and the introduction of the 5–14 programme have had a very considerable impact on thinking and encouraged staff to talk to each other about what they do. This increase in staff participation through the process of development planning provided a structure for managing and presenting a framework for identifying priorities. All of this was generally welcomed by teachers but the researchers warn that there is still some way to go.

They identify a mismatch between the language of Government documents regarding development planning and the headteachers' and teachers' accounts of both their teaching and planning processes. Plans rarely focused on standards of attainment, accountability and the design of professional development directed towards the improvement of standards—the language of Government documents. In contrast staff reported that the planning process was more important than the plans, although these were used as a 'kind of checklist'. Additionally, school plans did not emphasise the impact of planning on learning; success criteria were not expressed and ideas of monitoring or evaluation of outcomes were rarely voiced. There was little evidence of performance management or accountability for targets set either in or outwith the schools.

With reference to the second aspect of the study, most teachers reported that their pupils could not cope with an extension to the school day, especially those with moderate learning difficulties and young or fragile pupils. Various features of pupils' behaviour and physical or psychological states restricted the level of activities which could be maintained.

By way of a conclusion, the researchers argue that there are difficulties associated with pressure on the one hand to conform with particular priorities, such as achievement standards, and, on the other hand, promulgating expectations that teachers should be forward looking and creative. At the moment, this appears to present special schools with particular difficulties.

## ROUTES INTO PRIMARY TEACHING

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The Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) routes into primary teaching vary in their length and in their intake groups, but both are intended to provide similarly competent trained teachers. However, the mix of training routes offers a broader entry base for the teaching profession than would be the case with a single route, but issues inevitably arise about the comparability and relative quality of teachers trained by these contrasting routes. This research project, jointly funded by the Scottish Office and the General Teaching Council for Scotland, was designed to identify similarities and differences between B.Ed. and PGCE trained teachers in relation to their background, deployment, quality (defined as strengths and weaknesses as perceived by headteachers who employ them) and career development. Additionally, the researchers drew out some implications for the appropriate balance of places between the two training routes.

The research concentrated on four discrete areas: the supply of teachers at the point of provisional and full registration; the experiences of probationers; headteachers' views of the two routes, and finally, the subsequent careers of teachers recruited from the two routes. The main findings were as follows:

- the B.Ed and PGCE groups demonstrate a number of different characteristics during both initial teacher education and probation (including for example, age and employment and deployment experiences as a teacher) which make direct comparisons difficult;
- the prevailing view amongst headteachers is that PGCE trained teachers are as good but no better than B.Ed. graduates. Training route does not seem to be a significant variable in relation to headteachers' employment and deployment preferences nor do the majority of headteachers see it a predictor of teaching strengths and weaknesses. This may be because other factors, such as individual characteristics, are also seen as important.
- for a minority of headteachers (38%), all of whom are B.Ed. or equivalent trained themselves, the training route is important. These may be a vocal minority but they clearly exist as a distinct group.
- for probationers, training route does seem to be important in that it relates in a significant way to employment and deployment patterns. B.Ed. teachers are more likely to complete the required probationary period more quickly than PGCE entrants, perhaps as a consequence of more stable employment patterns.
- however on the evidence presented in the study this difference is short-term and does not carry over into the post-probation period.

The report provides interesting insights into the career development of novice teachers and further information is available from the research team.