From the Editor

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This edition begins with an obituary tribute to the late Professor John Nisbet, written by Walter Humes. Over a long career, John Nisbet was one of Scotland's most distinguished educational researchers, and his death was noted with great sadness by the Scottish education community and the wider world of educational research. The Editorial Board is grateful to Walter Humes for providing his eloquent appreciation of John Nisbet's life and work.

John Nisbet's career was committed to the continuing development of educational research, and the first two papers in this edition focus on important aspects of the current Scottish context for educational research, and research culture within Scottish higher education more generally.

The paper by Chris Holligan examines data on the recent awarding of educational research contracts by the Scottish Government, but approaches this from the perspective of a powerful and deeply-researched critique of the wider economic, political and social context for the contemporary development of educational research. Holligan identifies a shift in Scottish Government funding, with a reduction in the significance of contracts awarded to the 'Public Sector' (i.e. the universities), and a very substantial growth in the awarding of contracts to the 'Third Sector' (i.e. non-profit organisations, but organisations which Holligan characterises as working 'in a contract-oriented business environment…outside traditions of criticality'). Holligan presents this 'within the idiom of neo-liberalism', and suggests that the researchers working for 'Third Sector' organisations are 'neo-liberal knowledge workers suited to utilitarian intellectual labour', drawing on Bauman's idea of liquid modernity to emphasise the 'networks' within which these researchers thrive, and Lyotard's account of research under post-modernity, where 'Third Sector' researchers' outputs are 'congruent with' the 'system-compatibility' which is a 'paramount yardstick of worth'.

The paper by Patrick O'Donnell considers issues surrounding the development of a research culture in an Higher Education Institution (HEI) largely based on the coming together of a number of existing Further Education (FE) colleges. His case study is Scotland's newest university, the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI). As O'Donnell emphasises, UHI is distinctive within the Scottish university sector because of its federal, collegiate model based on a number of geographically dispersed FE colleges and research institutions. He stresses that UHI faced particular challenges in addressing a 'RAE performativity discourse' as well as a 'Further Education (FE) performativity discourse'. This led to UHI 'setting up a normative space privileging certain identities, subjectivities and associated actions at the expense of others'. O'Donnell makes stimulating contributions to wider debates on institutional policies for building research capacity. These have particular significance for institutions bringing together specific FE approaches with those of Higher Education (HE), but they also have a wider significance for debates within HE on the potential for tensions between the imperatives to grow research capacity and output and the continuing requirement to address the learning and teaching needs of the student experience within institutions.

The remaining four main papers in this edition all relate to Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). Scottish education across the 3-18 age range is currently dominated by the national programme to implement this all-embracing curricular and assessment initiative. The proponents of CfE make very large claims for the uniquely innovative and progressive nature of this set of reforms. Many members of the Scottish educational research community have concerns that the wider claims and specific details of CfE were not originally based on sufficiently rigorous underpinning research and thinking about education, and that

developments have not been subjected to sufficiently rigorous critical evaluation by those responsible for taking the initiative forward. Some significant academic writing has already addressed these issues (for example, earlier work by Mark Priestley and Walter Humes). Recognising the need to grow continuously the body of research-based academic critique on CfE, it is hoped that each of the four papers in this edition will make a significant contribution to such a body of work.

The paper by Mark Priestley and Sarah Minty begins by placing CfE in the 'wider, worldwide context of curricular reform', and suggests that the 'curricular and pedagogical innovations' celebrated by the proponents of CfE may not be 'as new and radical' as claimed, and aspects of these developments can be subject to critique. Priestley and Minty then give specific focus to the extent to which the approach of CfE 'resonates with the existing beliefs and practices of teachers', stressing that CfE's emphasis on 'extension of autonomy to teachers as agents of change' makes this 'a major determinant of whether the new curriculum will be enacted meaningfully in a manner which is in keeping with the spirit of the policy'. Their analysis is based upon empirical research in a Scottish local authority. Priestley and Minty distinguish between 'first order engagement' (the extent to which teachers welcome the philosophy and 'big ideas' of CfE) and 'second order engagement' (the extent to which CfE 'fits with teachers' implicit theories of knowledge and learning, and whether there has been a thorough engagement with the underpinning ideas of the curriculum'). They find that 'first order engagement' has been generally positive, but that 'second order engagement' has been more problematic. In particular, Priestley and Minty highlight tensions between inter-disciplinary learning and specialist subjects, between skills and knowledge within CfE, and around assessment. They conclude with recommendations that those responsible for policy at macro (e.g. Scottish Government) and meso (e.g. Education Scotland) levels need to produce 'better defined processes for engagement' of teachers, emphasising that this does not imply 'a deficit view of teachers and schools', but is about 'creating a collegial culture where teachers are enabled to act as agents of change'.

The paper by Stephen Day and Tom Bryce focuses more specifically on approaches to science education within CfE. Day and Bryce set their analysis in the wider context of national and international research studies which emphasise that 'there is a need for reinvigoration in science education'. They then analyse CfE policy documents on science education, especially those relating to experiences and outcomes (E&Os), 'through the prism' of Roberts' 'visions and image of science curricula'. This involves looking at a plan for curriculum development 'in broad and general terms' and at the more specific process of reform in practice. Day and Bryce highlight two competing visions for learning school science suggested by Roberts: 'Vision I' relates to 'the discipline of science itself', with its main purpose 'to develop the pool of future scientists'; 'Vision II' relates to engaging students 'with a variety of science-related situations that confront the general public'. From this perspective, they argue that 'there is a disconnection between the stated purposes of Scottish science education and the published E&Os'. In particular, while the original CfE aims for science education appeared to connect with 'Vision II', the detailed E&Os elaborate an image which connects with a 'Vision I' approach. Day and Bryce conclude that 'confusion as to the purpose(s) of education in science' will prevent the development of pupils 'towards functional scientific literacy', and that there is a requirement for greater clarification on the 'priorities' for Scottish science education, if 'significant change' is to take place. In this context, 'The imperative is *how* CfE science should be taught'.

The paper by Rachel Millar and Donald Gillies looks specifically at 'Successful Learners', one of the four capacities which have been so heavily stressed as the purposes of CfE. Millar and Gillies analyse the term 'successful learner' conceptually, pointing out that early CfE documentation was 'inexpansive in its treatment' of the concept. Each of the terms 'successful' and 'learner' is discussed in detail, and a range of potentially problematic issues is identified. For example, the term 'successful' raises issues around 'setting standards for ''success''', 'success as formative or summative' and 'success as an absolute or as a gradation'. Risks are identified, such as 'the potential danger of thinking of success in [a] competitive way, where success is only valued in an elitist fashion'. On 'learning', Millar and

Gillies emphasise that 'different views and ideas will have different implications for teaching and learning in the classroom', and therefore for how success in learning is viewed. For example, they caution that 'notions of learning which privilege rapidity of progress, the mechanical overtaking of itemised ''learning outcomes'', or the uncritical ingestion of information, would appear to run counter to a more fruitful view of what successful ''learning'' might involve'. This conceptual analysis is supplemented by an empirical study where the views of upper primary children on 'successful learners' are elicited using a Philosophy with Children approach. Millar and Gillies conclude that the term 'Successful Learner' is 'infinitely ambiguous, and can be used to support a whole number of different classroom approaches, some of which run counter to the ethos of CfE'. They suggest that 'fuller constructive collaboration between CfE advocates, teachers and learners is required for the concept to become useable, supportive and enabling rather than restrictive, divisive, or elitist'.

The paper by Walter Humes examines specifically the recommendations in CfE that there should be significant emphasis on 'the integration of knowledge, skills and understanding across different areas of the curriculum' ('interdisciplinary learning'). Humes provides an overview of what is said about interdisciplinary learning in official CfE documentation and associated supporting materials produced by Education Scotland. He draws attention to 'important earlier attempts to promote interdisciplinary learning', such as the work of Jerome Bruner and Lawrence Stenhouse, but notes the absence of references to this wider earlier work in official documentation and supporting materials. Humes then focuses on four issues which he sees as 'critical for the coherence and success of attempts to promote interdisciplinary work'. He identifies these as 'the way in which interdisciplinarity is conceptualised; ensuring that cross-curricular connections are convincing and intellectually challenging; devising pedagogic strategies that are effective; and addressing operational obstacles to interdisciplinary work'. Humes argues that CfE documents exhibit the general weakness of being 'under-conceptualised right from the start, insufficiently grounded in historical and theoretical understanding', and that this general weakness is reflected in the approach to interdisciplinary learning, so that 'further work is needed under all four of the headings…conceptual, curricular, pedagogic and operational'. Specifically, Humes poses a series of questions 'that need to be considered if the aims of interdisciplinary learning are to be achieved'. Without further work addressing such questions, he implies that the approach of CfE to interdisciplinary learning will remain in its present state – 'well-intentioned but rather ill-defined'.

As continuing features, the edition contains Morag Redford's careful review of the activities of the Scottish Parliament's Education and Culture Committee from September 2012 to January 2013, as well as a number of book reviews on: Education Studies; Social Capital, Children and Young People; Self-esteem; Children's Services; Primary Professional Studies; Silence in Schools.

Ian Smith, May 2013

Errata, Volume 44 Number 2, November 2012

We wish to draw subscribers' attention to a number of printing errors which appeared on page 24 of the November 2012 edition: in line 2 of the header, Graduation should have been Graduate; in the Introduction, in line 8, employmen should have been employment, in line 9, tudent should have been student, in line 10 delier should have been deliver, in line 11 statistcs should have been statistics, and in line 12 gher should have been Higher.