

Liquid Modernity: Exploring the research contract nexus within contemporary Scottish political culture

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ABSTRACT

This paper contributes to our understanding of a supposed free-market in research, where knowledge-transfer is to government, which then brokers the evidence into professional fields. Education research contracts are put out to tender by Scottish Government and a constellation of factors constructing this phenomenon has epistemological and political parallels with neo-liberal doctrines shaping research in the US and elsewhere. Conceptions of research capacity are discussed, and the relationship of universities and other research actors to applied research is explored. The empirical knowledge presented locates these matters within the idiom of neo-liberalism and Bauman's cognate idea of liquid modernity where networks are bound to thrive. Neo-liberalism is demonstrated in terms of a paradigmatic material shift in state funding and topic focus. The public sphere is shown to shrink in comparison with a vibrant Third Sector. It is theorised that market-researchers are most suited to delivering the numerical political knowledge used to govern. Market-researchers are neo-liberal knowledge workers suited to utilitarian intellectual labour, and, unlike critical academics their quantitative research outputs are congruent with Lyotard's account of research under post-modernity: system-compatibility is a paramount yardstick of worth. That said, ideological leanings within academia foster convergence towards the commercial market research field: academics, as capitalist entrepreneurs, are involved with supporting market research companies.

NEO-LIBERAL CAPITALISM

During the Scottish Education Research Association (SERA) annual conference in 2011 educational research professors expressed perceptions of marginalization, noting their increasing exclusion from government policy networks and also a decline in the amount of funding they received from government for education research (Hepburn, 2011). This SERA *cri de coeur* inspired me to pursue their concerns. Effectively I had to address a gap in our existing knowledge about research contract allocation in Scotland. It was an interesting time to pursue this research given that an arguably populist and left-leaning nationalist government was in power in Scotland. Its values, one might anticipate, would enunciate particular political colourations in research studies, including difference from a very commercial market-friendly policy context in England (Ball, 2004, 2011). My research questions include:

- During the past decade in Scotland what research subjects did the Government contract?
- Which organisations received the contracts?
- Can the research contracted be identified as neo-liberal?
- Which research methodologies are dominant?

This paper argues the assumed exclusion of Scottish university researchers, noted by this professoriate, represents a multiplicity of political transformations. It attempts to place these in an intellectual and political context associated with the commitment to the economic order of free-markets. Scotland, I found, contrary to what could be inferred from a nationalist policy rhetoric, was not qualitatively different from England in this applied research field.

Western Governments assume that unleashed market forces create benefits in terms of national economic growth (Ball, 2007, 2008; Whitfield, 2006; Arreman and Holm 2011). Research is constitutive of the knowledge economy, and given the historic position of universities in society as repositories of knowledge and research expertise, one would expect them to continue to dominate the research environment. However, universities are now merely one of several feeders of the knowledge transfer evidential nexus. That trajectory of political movement into the societal margins, and simultaneously towards the cash-nexus, is consistent with major, and, for many, cataclysmic transformations sweeping away cherished forms of academic life.

Universities have undergone a major attenuation in their academic power in relation to core staffing: Gornall and Salisbury (2012: 135) discovered academic staff members form only a minority amongst all staff members in higher education in the UK. As long ago as 1995 Halsey (1995) demonstrated power slipping away from academics towards national government, students and industry as the consumers who demand that their agendas are serviced. Now Gornall and Salisbury (2012) have demonstrated the negative material effects on academic lives of donnish dominion's decline, where 'hyperprofessionalism' demands working hours far in excess of European directives. Apple (2006:153) claims that reconfiguration of the academy, through its exposure to market forces, denies an audience for the critical insights of interpretative education research.

Critical researchers wear no mask of objectivity when they deconstruct orthodoxy, so their research cannot help to maintain the aura of legitimacy required by any social order which seeks its own survival. It is Policy Science, not Policy Scholarship that bolsters performativity and acts as a social balm (Ball, 1995; Humes and Bryce, 2003). Instrumentalist Policy Science is undertaken by market researchers, defined here as Private Sector and Third Sector workers in a contract-oriented business environment. I am defining Private Sector simply as 'for profit' organisations. Relevant definitions of Third Sector include Onyx et al (2010: 43), who define the Third Sector as "organisations that may be funded by government, but are legally independent of it. They are also non-profit, being creatures of neither the state nor the market." The National Audit Office defined this sector (www.nao.org.uk/sectors/third) as:

"the range of organisations that are neither Public Sector nor Private Sector. It includes voluntary and community organisations (both registered charities and other organisations such as associations, self-help groups and community groups), social enterprises, mutuals and co-operatives".

This instrumentalist Policy Science, operates outside traditions of criticality, creating a parallel universe of knowledge where Policy Scholarship has little impact. It is in the nature of a free market economy that sectional short-term interests are served. Involving the capitalist nexus in research may damage the integrity of knowledge (Philo and Miller 2001), dividing the research field into further distinctive groupings in line with Bauman's (2007) concept of life in liquid modernity, which stresses differentiation and collapse of hierarchy.

Bauman's (2000) idea of liquid modernity conjures a global social world pervaded by uncertainty. The collapse of long-term thinking and planning is replaced by fierce labour markets promoting division and encouraging individualistic competitive attitudes (Bauman 2007: 8). 'Society' becomes a mere network. Deregulation ushers in a planetary lawlessness. The research contractor nexus is a thirsty child of liquid modernity whose existence facilitates a culture of surveillance through evidence (Foucault 1980), because, dependent as it is upon limited financial assets in a competitive market place, it will not be inclined to bite the hand that succours it.

The 2014 Research Excellence Framework reinforces an impact agenda which is, arguably, creeping neo-liberalism. Research impact is intrinsic to the applied research sub-field examined in this paper. The research contracts put out to tender fulsomely detail the expectations of government. But these fraught micro worlds and tales of woe do not sit in isolation from macro narratives. Friedrich von Hayek (1945) argued that our freedom is best

protected through a free market economy. The UK Coalition Government and the Scottish Government First Minister's very public and continued celebration of the 2012 London Olympics team GB is indicative of their desire to celebrate the ideological spirit of competition, demonstrating to world markets that we are a fit and rugged nation. Sandel (2012) in opposition believes that the commercial values inherent in market-oriented thinking have degraded civic goods by reducing them to commodities. Ball (2004:1) remarks "in policy rhetorics which laud 'the private' there is deafening silence in relation to the role of the profit motive, and a systematic neglect of business failures, and of business ethics."

Compulsive academic over-working may be an effect of the loss of academic tenure in the UK, creating 'hyperprofessionalism' (Gornall and Salisbury, 2012) as academics anxiously justify their relevance whilst experiencing the pressure of audit culture aimed at policing them (Strathern, 2000). Enders (2011: 8) notes the growing impact of "market-like" forces impacting on universities. Wilmott (1995) charts the 1990s as being a period of the growth of a quasi-market of league tables of university research performance. Most of the research contracts reported in this paper are quantitative, not interpretative evaluations. Denzin *et al* (2006, 772) critically comment that the scientifically based research movement, resurgent in the US,

"ignores the contexts of experience. It turns subjects into numbers. It turns social enquiry into the handmaiden of a technocratic, globalizing managerialism. It gives research a dirty name."

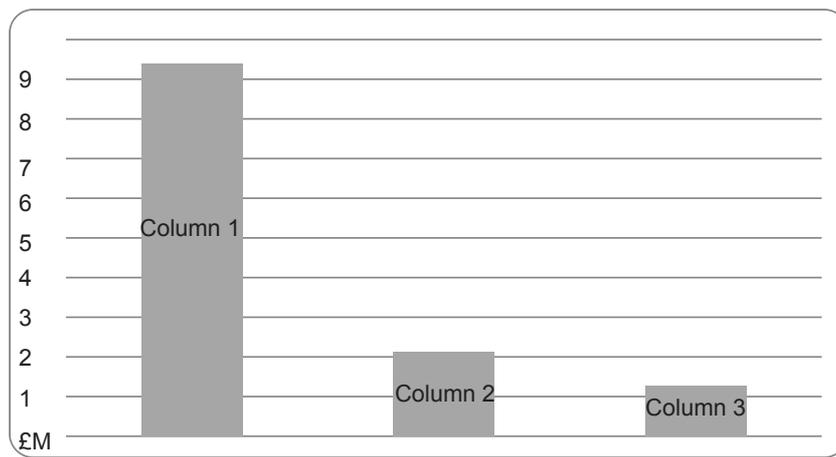
Ball (1995) argued that an absence of intellectual criticality ('policy scholarship') typifies official policy research, concluding that it is scientifically vacuous, limiting itself to the question-begging 'what works?' ideology. For Ball the construction of policy as apolitical represents the attempt to avoid deeper contestations (Ball, 2006:127. Ball, 2011.); Olssen and Peters (2007:313) claim:

"...that in a global neoliberal environment, the role of higher education for the economy is seen by governments as having greater importance to the extent that higher education has become the new star ship in the policy fleet for governments around the world."

These distant political thunders may not appear relevant to Scotland, but neo-liberal research commissioning characterises the dynamics of Scotland's evidential aspirations. In December 2011, I submitted a Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 request to the Scottish Government for information on all education research contracts let by the Scottish Government during a ten year period from 2002-2003. Data was provided in response to this request in April 2012. This data is presented subsequently in Tables II, III and IV below. In the summer of 2012, I submitted a second request for updated information on the period from November 2011 to July 2012. Data was provided in response to this request in August 2012. This data is presented subsequently in Table I below. It is important to note at this juncture that the entire data set used represents the Government's own construct of education research given in the e-mail responses I received, not the author's analytic. The author decided not to question the relevant Scottish Government officials on possible exclusions from the data provided (such as funded activity relating to the national Curriculum for Excellence development programme, possibly definable as research, but perhaps classified under other expenditure headings by the officials). Figure I below aggregates the data from Table I with the data from Tables II, III and IV and presents funding allocation differentials – resulting from the Government's allocation of applied research funding - by sector, Column 1 representing contracts won by the Third Sector, Column 2 showing these for the Public (University) Sector and Column 3 representing the Private Sector's allocation, over the period (2002-2012).

The total spending by the Scottish Government for 2002-2012 on applied research was by sector: Third Sector = £9,400,596.00; Public Sector = £2,143,006.00; Private Sector = £1,278,940.00.

FIGURE I: RESEARCH CONTRACTS BY SECTOR (2002-2012)



From Figure I, and from the Tables below, we can see the comparative magnitude of the economic capital allocated to the three sectors, 2002-2012. The Third Sector dominates this applied education research market-place. An immediate conclusion to draw is that the evidence base of public policy in Scotland relies significantly upon the work of research companies whose HQ is outside Scotland which some are, and for whom research is a limited part of an extensive commercial portfolio as their websites also demonstrate. The Third Sector's history and purpose is contested and highly complex (Alcock and Kendall, 2011) and to do it justice another paper would be required. It cannot be inferred that the Third Sector is not part of a commercial market solely on its legal status as being non-profit, nor should it be assumed that the political playing field is entirely level, given the deliberate national policy interest in fostering this sector's growth, and network within government at its outset providing it with powerful political capital compared with its competitors, as Alcock and Kendall's (2011) account reveals.

As mentioned above, in the summer of 2012, being mindful of ensuring the data used in this paper was as recent as it could be, I e-mailed the Scottish Government requesting details of an update regarding recently commissioned projects. The response from Government is given in Table 1 below. Table I embraces the period November 2011 to July 2012. Table I (and the Tables II - IV) below reinforce the neo-liberal interpretations developed by the author later. These contracts demonstrate, I conjecture, the Government's commitment to neo-liberalism. Ball's extensive scholarship cited throughout this paper about capitalist encroachment upon the public sphere did not address the field of national research contracting nor the Third Sector's relationship to a capitalist hegemony. A summary of the financial figures in Table I are as follows: Third Sector = £2,928,927.00; Private Sector = £145,462.50; Public Sector = £37,656.80.

TABLE I: Research Contracts let November 2011 to July 2012.

Project title	Contractor	Public/private	Grant
Behaviour in Scottish Schools	Ipsos MORI	Private	129, 652.50.
Commission on the delivery of rural education: Analysis of Calls for Evidence	ODS Consulting	Private	10,050,00.
Growing Up in Scotland: 2012-2016	Scottish Centre for Social Research	Third Sector	2,928,927,00.
Consultation Analysis Framework: National Framework for Child Protection & Learning in Scotland	Reid-Howie Associates	Private	5,760,00.
Early Learning & Childcare Provision: International Review of Policy, Delivery & Funding	Edinburgh University Centre for Research on Families and Relationships	Public	17,989,00.
Review of Child Neglect in Scotland	Stirling University	Public	9,917.80.
Scoping Study: Exploring the scale & nature of child sexual exploitation & trafficking in Scotland	Bedford University	Public	9,750,00.

Table I shows that the Public Sector received markedly fewer financial resources compared with the other two sectors. Also demonstrated in the Table is that Government's classification of education research is unconventional. The fact that topics relating to education form a subset of topics resourced by applied education research contract funding, and that the financial figures indicate significant use of research expertise in the private and Third Sectors, is consistent with the sense of marginalisation expressed by the academic Scottish education research community. Nevertheless, full economic costing regimes imposed on researchers within the academy may have meant the universities' bids for contracts were deemed uncompetitive: research contract costing might have meant universities became too expensive for government agencies to use. Because there is no requirement to publish completed studies in peer-reviewed journals, means that we cannot say if this cheaper knowledge was impoverished. Nor does Freedom of Information give the public access to bids submitted which ultimately means we can only surmise reasons for certain funding trajectories. That said the national policy environment tempts one to prefer certain conjectures over others: From 1997-2012 New Labour aimed to ensure that Public and Third Sector organisations collaborated. It allocated major funding, and gave official space in the Cabinet Office, to build the Third Sector's capacity to secure publicly funded contracts (Chapman et al, 2010:614). The current UK Coalition Government rhetoric maintains that cutting back Public Sector funding will enable the 'big society' to emerge, with the Third Sector being positioned to drive that society as an "object of governance" (Carmel and Harlock, 2008: 156); by implication that driver may also accommodate Scotland's policy culture.

Some argue this growth of the Third Sector reflects 'lean management': the commercialisation and delegation of government, research in our case, contributes to Third Sector growth (Pevcin, 2011). Anticipating my comparative data set, and presenting a comparator with a past landscape characterising Scotland's educational research culture as a way of foregrounding historical transformation, we now find that power-knowledge, to use Foucault's framing, is dispensed differently, as the financial metrics on research contracting demonstrate the shrunken role of the Public Sector, and the scale difference in absolute research funding between the Third, the Private and the Public Sectors.

SCOTTISH EDUCATION AND RESEARCH CONTRACTING

Nisbet's (1995) historical data on the period from 1984 to 1993 presents a Public Sector which undertook most of the education research completed in Scotland. The total spend was £33 million, which formed just 0.2% of the annual expenditure on public education. 44% of research funds originated from the Scottish Office Education Department (SOED) Research Intelligence Unit, 16% via other government agencies, 16% from trusts and foundations and 11% from research councils. Of the £33 million total, universities received 52%, colleges of education 21%, Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) 13% and private agencies just 14% (Nisbet, 1995: v and 58). Over the last decade the contrast with those 'Nisbet years' is stark: a massive decline in total spending on education research coupled with changes in the nature and extent of the Government's reliance upon research contractors, as the data presented in this paper demonstrates. Little wonder that academics nearing the end of their careers regard the Golden Age of education research as falling during the years spanning 1960-70 (Tight 2010: 107). The more recent secondary data acquired by request from the Scottish Government archives can be used to pursue these discontinuities, with the data reflecting official classifications of education research.

Following the seminal Rothschild Report of 1971 the UK government embraced the principle that applied research should be undertaken on a customer-contractor basis and, further, that universities must compete for funding. This principle has continued to lubricate a fiercely commercial research market-place, and its effectiveness for improving education has not gone unquestioned (Coffield, 2012). In 1970 Margaret Thatcher, then Secretary of State for Education and Science, laid the New Right's ideological foundations for the research culture transformations documented in my paper. Nisbet (1995: 2) states:

“...the move from a basis of patronage - the rather passive support of ideas which were essentially other people's related to problems which were often of other people's choosing - to a basis of commission. This means the active initiation of work by the Department on problems of its own choosing, within a procedure and timescale which were relevant to its needs.”

Nisbet (1995: 1-2) added that education researchers experienced a loss of autonomy as a new discourse of pragmatism constrained wider, more serendipitous research possibilities. Researchers' labour had become “annexed by the system”, and they complied, accepting “market principles as a basis for funding”. The constrained period of the 1980-90s he contrasts with an alleged joyous optimism and irreverence typifying the lost world some older generations will associate with an anti-establishment late 1960s: Nisbet (1995: 79) opined and insightfully prophesied that:

“Irreverence is out of fashion...There is rivalry between institutions ...The rivalry was always there, but there was co-operation and exchange of ideas freely in discussion. This is what has gone.”

Nisbet (1995: 80) conjectured that the politicization of research was intensifying. Also, Nisbet (1995: vi) observed an increase in private agencies competing for Public Sector research contract income:

“The most noticeable change in the last ten years has been the increased competition and stress in research activities, as in other public services...the researchers freedom of action and choice has diminished”.

The capitalist market research brands he identified as operatives included: MVA Consultancy, Social and Community Planning Research, Roger Mullins Associates, System Three, KPMG Management Consultancy and BRMB International. Internet search engines reveal a global reach for some of these companies whose education related market research is merely one strand of a wider portfolio of commercial interests. Contrary to certain education policy analysts (Menter *et al*, 2004) the current Scottish Government, despite retaining a comparatively robust Public Sector, is a neo-liberal quasi-state; the embryonic commercialisation trends described have grown significantly in recent times. Scotland's national politics have been characterised as neo-liberal (Mooney *et al*, 2008; Jackson, 2009). Mooney *et al*, (2008) found New Labour imposed similar policies north and south of the border, engineering a ‘Scottish Third Way’. Mooney *et al*, (2008: 389) also state the Scottish National Party (SNP) retains a “strong commitment to an economic conservatism and a ‘softer’ form of neo-liberalism”. The consequences have resulted in academic criticism: in the sphere of urban landscape development, for example, Jackson (2009) argues communities in Glasgow are suffering as a result of the application of neo-liberal development reforms, resulting in greater social exclusion, because the private investments do not lead to community regeneration but serve rather to undermine communities’ solidarity with Glasgow’s socialist past.

RESEARCH ORIENTATION AND OFFICIAL DATA

The data reported derive from my Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 request submitted to the Scottish Government on 5th December, 2011, and my additional request submitted in the summer of 2012. My request was for information specifically about all education research contracts let by the Scottish Government during a ten year period from 2002/3. The Government official disclosing these data informed me that before 2002 such data “are not recorded centrally” so to go further back would be “extremely difficult and time-consuming”, adding that it is legal to publish them for research purposes. Tables II, III, and IV below detail the data provided on the period from 2002 to 2011, in response to my first Freedom of Information Request (of December 2011). This data was provided in April 2012.

TABLE II: Third Sector Research Contracts	
Contractor	Amount
Scottish Centre for Social Research (SCSR) Early Years Longitudinal Survey: Growing Up in Scotland Survey	£4,412,292.00
National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) PIRLS 2006	£234,141.08
Scottish Leadership Foundation Literature review on Leadership and Management Development in Social Care	£17,977.50
Scottish Book Trust Evaluation of the Reading Rich Initiative	£50,848.12

National Foundation for Educational Research Skills for Work Courses Pilot Evaluation	£101,276.12
National Foundation for Educational Research TIMSS 2007	£437,620.52
LGBT Youth Scotland Exploring the Interface Between Service Responses to the Needs of LGBT Young People and Child Protection Policy and Practice	£11,673.62
Youth-link Scotland Being Young in Scotland - 2007 sweep: Youth-Work and Civic Participation	£24,087.50
NSPCC Centre for UK-wide Learning in Child Protection (CLiCP) Evaluation of the Children's Services Women's Aid Fund	£120,297.00
National Foundation for Educational Research Fieldwork to support Scotland's involvement in PISA 2009	£469,326.00
Scottish Centre for Social Research Review of the Children's Legal Representation Grant Scheme	£69,995.00
ETS (Educational Testing Services) Purchase of ALN (adult literacy and numeracy) tool	£79,078.56
National Foundation for Educational Research Fieldwork to support Scotland's participation in programme for International Student Assessment (Pisa 2012)	£443,056
Total: £6, 471.669.02	

TABLE III: Private Sector Research Contracts	
Contractor	Amount
TNS BMRB Research on Attitudes and Perceptions of 'Enterprise in Education' Amongst the Business Community	£31,349.00
DTZ Pieda Consulting Evaluation Of The Use Of Intensive Support and Monitoring Services (ISMS) Within The Children's Hearing System	£117,041.00
George Street Research Head teacher and depute head teacher appointment procedures: analysis of consultation responses	£12,490.25
DTZ Pieda Consulting Parents Access to and Demand for Childcare 2006	£161,074.88
George Street Research Evaluation of ScotXed partnership	£36,620.34
TASC Agency Sponsored Research Programme: The wee democracy project: Exploring the interface between the rights of the child and family life in Scotland today	£8,131.00

Ipsos MORI Evaluation of Free School Meals Pilot P1-P3	£76,216.38
Simon Jaquet Consultancy Services Evaluation of Arts and Minds, Confident to Earn and Learning Teams projects	£57,957.00
York Consulting Ltd (Edinburgh office) Evaluation of Leading to Deliver	£39,891.25
George Street Research Evaluation of financial education in Scottish primary and secondary schools	£40,727.85
GEN Consulting Perspectives on early years services: qualitative research with service users	£56,562.14
Eddy Adams Consultants Ltd Work Experience Scoping Research	£57,707.78
Ipsos MORI Research to support the consultation on the next generation of National Qualifications in Scotland	£97,554.38
George Street Research Research to support Consultation on safeguarding our rural schools and improving school consultation procedures	£92,061.25
Centre for Enterprise Skills utilisation literature review	£19,886.88
ODS Consulting Researching online and blended learning with adult literacies learners in Scotland	£20,850.38
Ipsos MORI Evaluation of Campus Police Officers within and outwith Schools	£76,444.00
National Institute of Economic and Social Research Calculating Sampling Errors for Employers Skill Survey 2008	£10,863.00
Geoffrey Cohen Measurements of Participation in Scottish Higher Education	£17,550.00
Blake Stevenson Ltd Review of process and experience within the Getting it Right For Every Child Domestic Abuse Pathfinders	£40,324.50
Blake Stevenson Ltd Evaluation of Activity Agreements Pilots	£44,470.00
George Street Research Review of Teacher Employment in Scotland: Analysis of responses to Call for Evidence	£17,705.00
Total: £1,133, 478.26	

TABLE IV: Public Sector Research Contracts	
Contractor	Amount
Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) Mainstreaming Pupils with Special Educational Needs	£84,000.00
SCRE Fieldwork to support Scotland's involvement in PISA 2006	£208,795.00
Criminal Justice Team, Social Work Department, University of Edinburgh Parenting Order Pilots	£79,088.00
University of Dundee School of Education, Social Work & Education Group Work: Transition into Secondary	£44,272.00
University of Strathclyde Evaluating the use of Self-evaluation indicators for care settings and schools in improving the educational outcomes of LAC and young people: A pilot study in Glasgow	£9,969.00
University of Glasgow, Faculty of Education Research to Support Schools of Ambition	£250,592.00
Edinburgh University, Centre for Educational Sociology (CES) Meeting needs for longitudinal data on the transitions of young people in Scotland - an options appraisal	£34,157.00
Cardiff School of Social Sciences Formative evaluation of AERS	£30,538.00
University of Strathclyde Improving the Educational Attainment of Looked After Children: Research to Identify Good Practice	£89,548.00
Centre for Law and Society Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime - Sample Safe Guarding Exercise	£18,048.60
Dr Lisa Woolfson (university affiliated) Evaluation of Extended Preschool Provision for 2 Year Olds - Pilot Programme	£198,739.76
Scottish Centre for Employment Research Student Income and Expenditure Survey 2007/2008	£143,559.15
University of Edinburgh, Moray House School of Education Flexible Research Contract: Lifelong	£30,000.00
University of Wales, Swansea Research Capacity Review in the Social Services Sector	£12,499.00
University of Dundee School of Education, Social Work & Education Evaluation of the Professional Development Programme for Educational Psychologists	£19,629.00

University of Dundee School of Education, Social Work & Education Evaluation of the Professional Development Programme for Educational Psychologists	£19,629.00
University of Edinburgh The experiences of asylum children : a literature review (CRFR framework contract)	£5,600.00
University of Glasgow Head teacher recruitment and retention	£84,916
University of Edinburgh Behaviour in Schools Research 2009	£136,637.00
Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research Young Runaways in Grampian Pilot Evaluation	£62,695.00
University of Glasgow Scottish Adult Literacy and Numeracy (ALN) Survey	£439,840.00
Centre for Educational Sociology (CES) Recognition of Achievement National Evaluation	£77,899.00
University of Glasgow Faculty of Education Literature Review on Teacher Education in the Twenty-First Century	£24,700.00
Total: £2,105, 350.51	

CRITICAL OBSERVATIONS

From tables II-IV it is clear that the Third Sector achieved the highest amount of research monies followed by the Public Sector and then the Private Sector. However, the SCSR received around £4.4 million for a quantitative survey about growing-up in Scotland which, if ignored, makes Third Sector income similar to Public Sector income. Nevertheless these data reveal that the Government is making significant investments in research outside of the Public Sector, and so for companies this research context is a potentially lucrative market.

One interpretation of Scottish Nationalism imputes an inclination to invest within the confines of Scotland's geographic borders, so it is noteworthy that several companies listed in the tables are located outside Scotland: very sizeable grants, as a proportion of total research contract spend, were awarded, for example, to the NFER located near London. In several other cases public funds are also invested outside of Scotland into different companies with headquarters distributed worldwide. Characterising these distributed providers, and the funder's belief system, as neo-liberal conjures the perspective that the research actor can be relevant and nevertheless stand beyond a professional and cultural context. That type of disjunction accepts the contested premise that the research object can validly be generated by those lacking direct knowledge of the professional cultures investigated. Consistent with this theorisation is the finding that quantitative research logics typify this field. That kind of methodological abstracted scientific research paradigm more readily lends itself to transfer and application over contexts, unlike the dynamic of qualitative methodologies which depend on cultural immersion. Lather (2006: 35) in talking about the resurgence of positivism and governmental "imposition of experimental design as the gold standard in research methods" reminds us that this represents a return to "the kind of imperial science" that an acceptance of differences in paradigm had undermined. Instead Lather argues that government does not see interpretative science as yielding objective

knowledge, a claim which would seem consistent with the commissioning of mainly quantitative research described in this paper. A significant number of the contracts allocated seem to show a preference for methodological positivism: the predominant methodology implied in the contract descriptions in all tables is quantitative. Being 'open for business' here is reflected in the privileging of positivism. Denzin *et al* (2011: 769) comment that "Qualitative research exists in this time of global uncertainty." It is seen as a threat that decolonizes or dismantles traditional methodologies thus conjuring the provisional and contingent character of socio-political formations (Denzin *et al*, 2011). Under what these scholars call a "re-emergent scientism" qualitative research "becomes suspect" (Denzin *et al*, 2011: 772). More substantively we see, in relation to topics, that the entire corpus of contracts across the three contractor types justifies imputing to Government a neo-liberal agenda: we find a societal control agenda relating, for example, to behaviour in schools, families, runaways and social care and criminal justice, and we find a leadership agenda, dealing, for example, with literature reviews on leadership and management, head-teacher recruitment and retention, schools of ambition not to mention several contracts associated with employment. It is also worth noting that a high proportion of the contracts listed in the tables constitutes evaluation studies, in other words, the a-theoretical probing of 'what works' critically adumbrated at the start of this paper.

Perhaps, in view of the data presented, the academic education researcher falls outside the scientific rationalities of the state's agencies, as far as this particular research field is concerned, like Bauman's outsider, 'the stranger' whose wider societal role is being attenuated and marginalized. Perhaps we might also conjecture that the very limited reliance on qualitative methodologies hints at a fear of the stranger's visioning being given scope to express itself through that interpretative paradigm's more discursive and cautiously nuanced narrative engagement.

DISCUSSION

Pirie (2012: 25) reminds us that research findings are not "*objets trouvés*": interpretative methodologies make it clear that 'findings' emerge through the cultural filtering process of 'data analysis'. Positivism, by contrast, maintains that the facts speak for themselves. The implied binary research culture divisions between academia and a more corporate sphere are a relic of a past academy (Sparkes, 2007: 537): Ball (2012, 24), for instance, describes how UK Public Sector universities embrace corporate global institutions. The life of the lone scholar is rapidly perishing under this academic capitalism (Whitty and Power 2000; Winter, 1995). Bruno Latour (1993, 1986) theorised that knowledge is culturally situated and therefore research actors of whatever institutional provenance who match the state's ambitions may be privileged as having the 'right' resources. This epistemological patronage is engaging leading scholars in the US as they fight against what they regard as an assault by neo-positivist fundamentalism mounted against critical and interpretive methodologies, denying them the status of research (Denzin *et al*, 2011; Lather, 2006).

Lyotard (1984) famously argued that reinforcing the western capitalist system does not require the provision of classical truth. If, as a consequence of research, that system's interests are toughened, then the research is meritorious. For this reason Alexander's (2012) negative appraisal of Private Sector research misses the point, as its performativity rationale for quality research is the benchmark that government is most likely to honour. The validity of research outputs may be judged by academic peer review and by industry-referenced in-house review; only the former makes a contribution to academic knowledge, while in-house review is unlikely to foreground the theoretical criticality favoured by scholars such as Ball (1995). The submission of research output from contracts to academic peer review appraisal is not a requirement placed upon research contractors, although given the critical importance of academic journal publications in academia this is a goal to which many aspire. Meanwhile, governments exploit the authority of science by using the concept 'research' to claim objectivity in order better to support partisan objectives (Ozga, 2009, 1998). Levin (2010) argues that cultural beliefs rather than putative objective evidence constitute the actual basis

of official education policy. Latour *et al.* (1986) claim that the practice of science reflects the operation of particular cultural values. *Ceteris paribus* neo-liberal governments logically may prefer private or Third Sector cultures in view of a definitive perceived affinity to their ideological outlook on governance.

The data given in the tables above is particularly surprising given the Scottish Government's recent investment in developing university education research capacity infrastructures through the Applied Educational Research Scheme (AERS), which, one might have anticipated, would increase the success of universities in winning government contracts. To advance a response to this apparent under-performance I draw upon literature arguing that network connectivity power is critical to success in markets. However, as previously noted, full economic costing imposed on university research funding bids could be a reason for these bids being treated as uncompetitive by civil service official selection panels.

Frances (2011) takes education research academics to task for their alleged failure to ensure their studies have professional impact, but she overlooks other complexities in the academic research environment which run counter to academic research achieving impact, such as the notion of 'full economic costing' that is prescribed by the university system to be applied in research bids. Nor does Francis acknowledge political contestations about the role of the university itself in society which, on some interpretations of the role of academia, involves a concept of relevance opposed to a more pragmatic political relevance arguably inherent in the contracts listed, and to the immediate needs of any particular formation in power at a given time (Collini, 2012; Nussbaum, 2010). Francis's (2011: 15) analysis does resonate with scholarship described in this paper, however, when she claims:

“...it is think tanks, private and voluntary sector organizations that are owning the policy-practice space in educational researchers' stead. This is without even counting the myriad and often bizarre practice proffered to schools by individual consultants and companies.”

The investigations of Ball and Junemann (2010) and Ball and Exley (2010) are consistent with her claim. Government embraces other actors outside the university sector to deliver general ideas and scientific intelligence to support its work (Ball, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c) many of whom may not have substantive professional experience in education itself: Ipsos MORI in 2012 (see Table 1) competed for a Scottish Government contract with a team of renowned researchers from Edinburgh University who had won the previous and related contract on behaviour in schools. Ipsos MORI secured the contract worth £128,572.50 for the study entitled 'Behaviour in Scottish Schools'. The *curricula vitae* of the senior researchers employed by this Private Sector company list research projects undertaken for corporate, rather than academic clients: academic publications or professional experience as educators in schools are absent as indicators of their scientific and professional capital in the company website. The Ipsos MORI website refers to engagement by members of staff with high level political networks in the British Government in London (www.ipsos.mori.com). Francis' (2011) analysis may be further limited by overlooking that company's appeal ('relevance') to the neo-liberal political class with which they are intimately networked. Dinan's (2012) analysis of policy-networks within Scotland endorses both the validity of Ball's (2012) perspective on capitalist infiltration, and conjectures in this paper that the network capital has, for example, accentuated the power of Ipsos Mori at the expense of Edinburgh University. Marginson (2006, 26) found that some academics, perhaps to accommodate this competition, demonstrate “a Jekyll and Hyde personality” which Ball (2012) explicates as follows:

“At home academic capitalists focus on growing academic research reputation, but overseas they chase income ruthlessly”.

These entrepreneurs do what Ball (2012, 24) calls neo-liberalising work. Miller (2000) discovered synergies are associated with a 'revolving door' culture where British elites operate on a pan-European scale in an often self-aggrandizing manner. The concept of the revolving door refers to typically senior individuals (e.g. government ministers) who leave powerful, often government posts, subsequently securing directorships in the Private Sector and once there exploiting networks established previously in their Public Sector post. Miller (2009: 4) quotes from a speech made by the European Commissioner for the Internal Market and Services:

"In the case of legislators I am convinced that over the years there has been too much 'regulatory capture' by the sell side of the financial services market: Their lobbies have been strong and powerful."

Miller (2009) cites evidence of millions of pounds used by lobbying constituencies to promote greater deregulation. Education research academics may lack powerful networks with efficacy to play a role in accounting for some of the research contract success of Third and Private Sector actors, who might dedicate strategic resource to build the social capital which can then be cashed in during the struggle for power, as Bourdieu (Grenfell, 2008) would understand it, in this political field. A second exemplar of this theorising about the efficacy and rationale for building network capital lies in the Third Sector: The Scottish Centre for Social Research (www.scotcen.org.uk) was awarded a research grant of around £4.5 million in August 2004 for the 'Growing Up in Scotland' survey (see Table III). Among its corporate trustees are individuals with career track records of high level posts held in industry, government and academia. A third exemplar is The National Institute of Economic and Social Research, a Private Sector organisation on whose Council of Management sit eminent UK Russell Group university professors and a member of the House of Lords together with a cadre of research staff with conventional academic credentials (www.niesr.ac.uk/pdf/Annual%20Report/AR-2010.pdf). Scholarship indicates that the credibility of policy ideas is influenced by the prestige and interpersonal skills of their sponsors as part of a sustaining narrative (Ball, 2007; Arnot and Ozga 2010) which may explain why successful policy entrepreneurs tend to be found in institutions with high status, and ideally they also lie geographically close to influential social and policy networks. Mann (2011) theorises such contexts arguing that power sources intermingle in a process which he labels "polymorphously perverse" as the state seeks to avoid investing in a single and so potentially elite power source. Verger (2012:111) remarks that policy entrepreneurs "are usually based in a range of knowledge-based, such as ...think tanks, universities or big consultancy firms, which are located at the interstices of business, governments and academia." The steep decline noted in this paper in government funding awarded to universities for the type of applied contract education research examined in this paper is consistent with Nisbet's (1995) earlier recognition that the direction of such funding is towards a commercialised and Third Sector paradigm of knowledge creation. Here private or quasi-private research companies become the research provider serving the needs of a neo-liberal state (Ball, 2007; Ball and Exley, 2010). The insights of the scholarship explored in this section require us to be more circumspect about supposing that the possession of scientific research capital alone is sufficient to secure funding from government agencies. In conclusion, an over-exclusive focus on building the academic research infrastructures within universities and their networks with schools and colleges (see Murray and Pollard, 2011; Pollard, 2007; Munn, 2008; Biesta, et al, 2011) has limitations, as it underestimates the potentially critical role of political capital in winning scarce research resources in times of liquid modernity. As noted earlier academics are beginning to participate in what some cynics might dub 'the black arts', developing a dual personality. If that trend continues into the future the currently limited convergence of academia with industry will intensify and research capacity will take on a new and different resonance in this field. Finally, the field of contract research itself is an ideal setting for deploying Bauman's characterization of the human condition as nomadism: under liquid modernity modern

existence is characterized by flows where life is individualized and separated from traditional networks of support. In this globalised social world the plight of individuals is one of existential uncertainty and constant movement, cognitive uncertainty and the demands of 'hyperprofessionalism'. The advent of fiercely competing mission groups in British higher education (Pirie *et al*, 2010) has resulted in the partial collapse of traditional collegiate networks of support, exposing more scholars to suffer the fate of Bauman's wandering nomad, or mitigate it by adopting hyperprofessionalism as described by Gornall and Salisbury (2012), rarely switching off from on-line academic worlds. Pierre Bourdieu's vision of the field of academic life as a site of competitive struggle over forms of capital is therefore not unduly pessimistic in its portrayal of this competitive research field of society in general. My analysis and data set force me to the conclusion that Bourdieu is a realist.

Earlier in this paper I used the metaphor "bite the hand that feeds them" to conjecture a reticence of researchers in terms of critical probing of orthodoxies. Scholars have discovered that internationally the Third Sector does indeed present this docile "gloves on" habitus (Smith and Lipsky 1993; Onyx, et al, 2010). Future attempts by scholars to make sense of differential research funding allocation ought to move away from simplistic mantras of research capacity deficiencies often applied to explain why public sector university departments of education research seem to fare relatively poorly in the area under the prism of this paper. The more cogent thesis, I believe, entails positioning "research capacity" as merely one strand of other forms of symbolic capital, political, historic and cultural whose power collectively shapes the decision-making connected with funding decisions, and indeed processes of knowledge production. Institutional policies which merely dwell on research capacity building through the lens of scientific capital ought not therefore to be surprised if that strategy proves to be unproductive in the real world hinted at throughout this paper.

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