



University
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Change in teacher education and educational research

Moira Hulme, University of Glasgow

Co-convenor of the BERA Teacher Education and Development SIG

In early 2013 BERA, with the RSA, launched a major Inquiry into the relationship between educational research and teacher education. At a critical time the Inquiry aims to 'shape debate', 'inform policy' and 'influence practice'. It follows the BERA/UCET report on the Prospects for Education Research in Education Departments in Higher Education Institutions in the UK (Christie et al. 2012). The Inquiry offers a welcome opportunity to examine the role of research in teacher education in the four jurisdictions of the UK and internationally. This is an important initiative at a time of far reaching reform. In 2011 the Coalition government published its plans for teacher education in England, the Donaldson review of teacher education reported in Scotland, and a review of teacher education infrastructure was launched in Northern Ireland. At the time of writing, the outcome of the Tabberer review of teacher training in Wales is awaited. In a period of turbulence, uncertainty and (uncontrolled) experimentation, cross-national comparison can help to identify areas of similarity, marked divergence and alternatives. Research in and about teacher education has an important contribution to make to public debate, policy formation and professional practice.

In 2013 attention turned once more to 'what works' (HM Government 2013, Goldacre 2013). Aspirations for evidence informed policy and practice in teacher education depend, in part, on the vitality of research cultures in Schools of Education. The 2008 RAE subject overview report of sub-panel 45 noted that teacher education was 'less strongly represented than previously' (RAE 2009:2) and cognate areas were 'underrepresented in relation to their key importance to national education systems' including assessment, classroom learning and effective teaching in subject disciplines. In addition to limited quantitative expertise, it was noted that 'more longitudinal datasets are needed, for example to provide sound evidence of long-term effects of different factors and innovations on educational outcomes' (ibid p.2). This is particularly prescient in the field of teacher education (in a period of increased policy divergence through devolved government). The distribution of education-related research contracts has shifted from higher education and government (in-house) commissions towards third sector and private sector contractors.

Sustaining efforts to build research capacity in teacher education is increasingly challenging. Instability in student numbers has destabilised staffing in university Schools of Education (Christie et al. 2012). Funding for research has contracted sharply from 2009. ESRC funding ended for collaborations such as the Teacher Education Research Network (TERN) of the north-west of England (2008-09) and the Welsh Education Research Network (WERN) (2007-09). The Teacher Education Group (TEG), which developed a bibliographic database of UK teacher education research (2000-08) for early career researchers, has been self-supporting from 2009. Analysis of the 446 studies included in the TEG database suggests that much research conducted in teacher education takes the form of small-scale, qualitative studies conducted by teacher educators with few large-scale longitudinal studies and limited cumulative impact (Menter et al. 2010). The major programmes of research undertaken through the ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) and the Applied Education Research Scheme (AERS) concluded in 2009. The Assessment Reform Group formally wound up in June 2010. In an era of 'impact' these initiatives highlight the complexity of knowledge mobilisation. Strategies to develop durable research partnerships – especially those that extend beyond time limited, one-way models of knowledge adoption – have considerable resource implications.

Funded opportunities for students of Education to develop research skills are uneven. Part-time enrolments in postgraduate Education courses fell by 19% between 2010/11 and 2011/12 (HESA 2013). The full impact of the Browne Review on postgraduate provision is still to be felt. Whilst the recruitment of PGR students in the last RAE period was healthy (around 7000 students), over 60% did not receive any funding and less than 4% were funded by Research Council studentships (RAE 2009:5). In 2011/12 the number of students recruited through the DTC Education pathway across the UK was 20% below target: 38 studentships were awarded against a target of 48. Of the 11 studentships awarded through the Scottish consortium between 2011 and 2013, none are in the area of teacher education.

Reviews of the 'best systems internationally' lend support to university involvement in teacher preparation and teachers' engagement in masters level learning across the career course. The Standards and Competences framework in Scotland and Northern Ireland expect teachers to engage with educational research, participate in professional enquiry and ask critical questions of education policies. A disposition towards enquiry is associated with the development of adaptive expertise and an 'activist' professional stance. The Scottish Government has provided £3 million over three years to support 'masters level learning'. There are aspirations for a 'Scottish Masters of Education' supported by common APL arrangements and mutual recognition of credits across providers. In Wales 430 NQTs are undertaking the Masters in Educational Practice (MEP) introduced in 2012 and funded by the Welsh Government. In contrast, in policy circles in England the complexity of learning to teach is reduced to notions of 'craft' and 'apprenticeship'.

Effective mediation of research knowledge is critical in strengthening research-practice links. Following the 'bonfire of the quangos' many resources for teachers disappeared or were frozen e.g. the Teacher Training Resource Bank (TTRB) and the Research Informed Practice Site (TRIPS). Research engagement continues to be promoted through the Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE), the Educational Evidence Portal and the EEF toolkit. Although BERA and SERA no longer support a practitioner conference, the BERA Practitioner Research SIG remains buoyant. Access to a wider community of scholars and research knowledge is important in the development of robust and critical forms of systematic 'professional enquiry'.

These are difficult times for UK higher education and Schools of Education face multiple challenges, especially in England. As a community of researchers it is important to challenge the re-emergence of 'craft' rhetoric and the allure of 'what works'. The prospects for research-informed teaching and teacher education are diverging radically between England and the smaller countries of the UK. Research is needed to guide professional practice *and* to inform the policy cycle. At present, across the UK, major shifts in teacher education policy are not accompanied by large-scale systematic research. During such turbulent and uncertain times, the BERA Inquiry has a vital contribution to make in stimulating public debate and articulating the potential contribution of research to teacher education across the UK.

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