

	Example of Good Practice	Kemnay Academy Cluster Position
22	Clear evidence of implementation of national policy documents and recommendations, e.g. 5-14 National Guidelines, Achieving Success in S1/S2, National Testing; Managing Pupils' Learning: Continuity and Progression From P7 to S1; Meeting Needs Pupils Attaining Levels A or B in S1.	Academy has implemented some advice from "Achieving Success in S1/S2". (a) Broad band setting in English and Maths. (b) Consultation held on blocking S1/S2 subjects but timetabling restrictions have prevented progress. Audited S1/S2 curriculum against National Guidelines for minimum time allocations. Increased time to Mathematics and English from flexibility factor. Social Subjects integrated course taught by one teacher. Full implementation of National Testing in English and Mathematics.  About to study "Managing Pupils Learning". Continuity and Progression from P7 to S1. Elements may be included in next sessions development plan.
23	Secondary senior management team open evenings/meetings for parents of P7 pupils transferring to S1.	Two SMT meetings - January and June prior to transfer.
24	Clearly defined remit for 5-14 Co-ordinator.	SMT member operates as Academy 5-14 co-ordinator.
25	Provision of parent information booklet about transition from primary to secondary.	S1/S2 Curriculum booklet published annually and issued to all S1 parents in August.
26	Provision of pupil support materials on transition.	"Welcome" booklet issued to all P7 pupils.
27	S1 pupil-devised materials to pass to P7 pupils, e.g. <i>How to Survive First Year</i> .	No use made of pupil devised materials. Plan to evaluate present "Welcome" booklet using S1 pupil.
28	Video support materials, e.g. school produced video of S1 pupil talking about their initial experiences of secondary school; promotional video about the school.	
29	S1 contact with primary school, e.g. through letters, visits, electronic correspondence.	
30	Residential experience for P7 pupils moving to S1.	
31	P7 pupil self-review sheets.	
32	Buddy system organised - senior pupils matched with new S1 pupils requiring additional support.	Buddy system organised - S6 Prefects matched to all of new S1 pupils.

The evidence from several reports on the value of educational research suggests that a major weakness is often the inability of researchers to communicate their findings to practitioners in an effective way. Against this background, the appearance of Aberdeenshire Council's Newsletter 'Research Into Action' is to be greatly welcomed. It provides an accessible digest of developments that are likely to be of interest to classroom teachers, and highlights important conference presentations. It is to be hoped that it will also offer a forum for teachers to report on work they are carrying out in their own schools. They might even like to suggest the kind of larger-scale research projects that they feel need to be undertaken. In this way, communications between researchers and teachers could improve to the benefit of all stakeholders – not least the pupils.



*Walter Humes*

*Walter Humes*

Professor of Education and Head of Educational studies  
University of Strathclyde

*Walter Humes takes up his new appointment as Professor of Education for Research and Development at the University of Aberdeen on August 1 2004.*

## An analysis of key aspects of educational research policy in Scotland

*Walter Humes*

University of Strathclyde

[The following is a shortened version of a paper presented at a Scottish Educational Research Association Seminar.]

### Starting points

In the past I have been fairly critical of certain trends in educational research and of the way in which the research community in Scotland operates. More specifically, I have expressed the following views:

1. A great deal educational research is too narrow and inward-looking, and insufficiently connected to the wider debates about social policy within and beyond Scotland. The focus has been on 'nuts and bolts' rather than on big ideas.
2. The relationship between researchers and funders has sometimes been collusive and unhealthy – the 'small world' of Scottish education has disadvantages as well as advantages.
3. There has been something of an obsession with a fruitless search for methodological purity. That is not to say that educational research should not be systematic, informed and rigorous but it is

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to call for recognition of the fact that it is a diverse field of study in which a wide range of methodologies are valid.

4. A fair amount of political naivety has been in evidence. There has been insufficient awareness of how the policy process works, of the strategies of control employed by politicians and officials, and of how consultation exercises are managed and a 'consensus' emerges.
5. The research community has been complicit in its own containment by buying in too readily to government priorities and not subjecting the dominant policy discourse to sufficient scrutiny. Examples of current concepts in need of critical interrogation would include lifelong learning, social inclusion and citizenship.

These criticisms could be expressed more positively thus:

I believe in a mixed economy of research – in terms of topics, methods and sources of funding. Attempts to limit the territory for research investigation should be challenged.

An essential requirement is more political understanding and sophistication on the part of the researchers: this involves greater skill at explaining the role and value of research, more effective negotiation with key stakeholders, and better access to politicians (not always mediated through officials).

Another requirement is good communication with users and more effective dissemination of research findings. This raises issues about links with local authorities and non-departmental public bodies, and the need to write for different audiences using appropriate styles.

Above all, I want to see researchers showing more courage in defending academic values and resisting pressures to tone down or play up particular findings because they suit the purposes of particular players.

### RAE 2001 and its implications for Scotland

To what extent has the situation been affected by

the results of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) 2001? The absence of any 5 or 5 star ratings in Scotland raises important questions about research quality, research capacity and the next steps, both for individual institutions and for the system as a whole. Most of the work currently being submitted reaches national but not international standard. That relates to work submitted. There is, of course, a great deal more work that is actually done. The proportion of staff in Faculties of Education not submitted is high, particularly in certain institutions. Some of the reasons for this are to do with mergers between former colleges of education and universities – many staff are developing researchers and may well be returnable next time. But important though that kind of explanation is, I do not think it is enough in relation to the issue of quality.

Another way of addressing the quality issue is to ask where the best research in Scotland has been carried out in recent years and try to identify the key features of it. No doubt there will be different views on this but I am confident the example I have chosen for illustrative purposes would receive a fair measure of endorsement from a wide range of people. The Centre for Educational Sociology (CES) at Edinburgh University has had a distinguished record or research output since 1972 when it was established. There have been difficult periods, both in terms of staffing and funding, but over the piece the standard of work has been high and the impact strong. William Richardson of Exeter University has recently described CES as 'a beacon of broadly-based and collaborative social science research into education'. What have been the key features of its success?

1. **Diverse funding streams.** CES has never been over-dependent on SEED and its predecessor bodies.
2. **Methodological variety.** CES is noted for big quantitative surveys using sophisticated statistical techniques but also for a range of qualitative studies and, importantly, a strong basis in sociological theory.
3. **Effective leadership.** This has been evident under both Andrew McPherson

	Example of Good Practice	Kemnay Academy Cluster Position
11	Classroom observation / co-operative teaching	Primary 7 teachers follow classes in Academy.  Secondary staff studied group work use in primary schools (4-5 years ago)
12	Learning Support department visits	Support for Learners secondary teachers visit each primary school to gather information on pupils with learning difficulties.  EBD teacher works jointly in primary and secondary.  Support for Learners team (Depute Rector, SFL PT, EBD teacher, PT's Guidance and Psychologist) meet at transfer time to exchange information and agree needs.
13	Guidance department visits.	Principal Teachers of Guidance visit primary school twice. (1) General visit to talk to pupils about Academy and issue "Welcome to Kemnay Academy" booklet. (2) Each PTG visits each primary to meet pupils who will be in their house.
14	Primary/secondary liaison policy.	No written primary/secondary liaison policy.
15	Regular review of liaison procedures.	Annual discussion of liaison procedures by Cluster when annual calendar agreed and Cluster Development Plan written.
16	Joint INSET e.g. ethos issues, curricular issues.	No recent joint INSET.
17	Council education department link officer acts as co-ordinator in area/associated schools group structure.	Education officer attends meetings, but has no co-ordinating role.
18	Regular meetings of area/schools group.	Regular meetings of Cluster group, reduced in frequency due to reduced funding.
19	Area/ schools group budget	Small Cluster Group budget.
20	Area/schools group development plans.	Annual Cluster development plan written.
21	Use made of Taking a Closer Look at Primary/Secondary Liaison.	

## Kemnay Academy audit of primary/secondary liaison

	Example of Good Practice	Kemnay Academy Cluster Position
1	Primary 7 report passed to secondary school and made available to all subject departments.	English and mathematics attainment levels issued to all staff.  Information on pupils with learning difficulties issued to all staff.  Medical information issued.
2	Information on National Tests taken and levels attained passed to secondary school.	All primary schools passed levels attained to secondary school.
3	Record of Achievement passed to secondary school.	
4	Timeline of important dates on P7/S1 transfer agreed amongst schools.	Full calendar of cluster activities and transfer arrangements agreed each year.
5	Folios of pupil work passed to secondary school.	
6	Moderation sessions to discuss and agree standards, e.g. writing	
7	Curricular visits to share expertise and practice.	Annual Maths, English and Modern Language visits to share expertise.  In previous sessions Music and Art specialists worked in both primary and secondary. Secondary teachers organised in-service on the practical aspects of technology.
8	Joint primary/secondary working parties to produce materials which encourage continuity and progression.	Joint working groups produced materials in Geography map skills and ICT. Agreed a set of themes for Modern Languages in primary.  "Tens" programme for maths teaching adopted and adapted in all associated primary schools and Academy.
9	Organised programme of induction	Extensive programme of induction activities. There is an open night for P7/S1 Parents along with guided tours during the school day in September. P7 attend Kemnay Academy for a full week in June where they follow their new timetable and meet all their teachers. See Appendix 1.
10	Joint primary/secondary curriculum projects/themes.	See (8) above.

and David Raffe and I am sure it will continue under Jenny Ozga. (Her recent book *Policy Research in Educational Settings* is to be recommended.)

4. **Talent spotting.** CES has been successful in recruiting talented new researchers and giving them opportunities to develop their skills.
5. **International dimension.** There has been a willingness to look beyond Scotland. Several projects have had UK and European dimensions. Visiting scholars have contributed to the internationalism.
6. **Collaborative approach.** Schools, local authorities and other agencies have been involved in many studies and research results have been fed back to the educational system in an open, democratic way.
7. **Intellectual independence.** Both Andrew and David have been prepared to engage in robust exchanges with governments (of different political persuasions) in the face of pressure or criticism.

These are qualities that we should all value and they can serve as a checklist against which to judge research capacity. A series of important questions arise. *Where are the leaders of the future going to come from? What are the career prospects of young researchers and researchers of varying ages who exist on short-term contracts?*

*How good is the research training that is offered? What kinds of research networks exist within and beyond Scotland? Are they adequate to meet the needs of the future? Is there sufficient academic freedom to enable researchers to tell the truth as they see it without fear of comeback through professional, political or funding pressures? If not, what needs to be done to defend that freedom?*

### Beyond the universities

The RAE is of particular interest to universities but the research community is much wider –

indeed the increasing emphasis on user perspectives is a clear indication of that. This leads into a consideration of a range of questions:

1. How serious is the desire to make teaching a research-based profession? The McCrone report and the development of routes to Chartered Teacher status raise difficult issues about the balance between 'professional' and 'academic' values. These have been subject to lively debate within the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS).
2. How effective is the encouragement of teachers as researchers through SCORE and GTCS awards? Some writers express caution about this approach, one referring to the limited value of 'un-coordinated digging at the chalkface'.
3. What will be the future role of SCORE when its SEED funding finally runs out and it is part of the Faculty of Education at Glasgow?
4. To what extent do local authorities support research and use research in researching policy decisions? The old criticism that Scottish local authorities were really only interested in soft evaluations of their practice may no longer be fair but the situation still seems fairly patchy and I can think of some authorities which might not unfairly be described as research-free zones.
5. To what extent do official documents show evidence of having been informed by research? Senior members of the inspectorate have expressed scepticism about the value of research and prefer to invoke the notion of 'best practice'. Interestingly, some of Learning and Teaching Scotland's publications do rather better. For example, one of its predecessor bodies, SCCC, produced *Teaching for Effective Learning* in 1996 which offered an accessible digest of some influential research on intelligence, learning styles and the links between

cognition and emotion. A more recent document, *Creativity in Education*, has attempted to do the same kind of thing in the area of enterprise and arts education.

6. Where do independent think tanks such as the Scottish Council Foundation, the Scottish Civic Forum and the Institute of Contemporary Scotland fit into this picture? The Scottish Council Foundation has produced a series of interesting publications about education which try to address topics in an innovative, creative way, unconstrained by the usual parameters.
7. How satisfactory is the current range of research publications in Scotland? This includes academic journals (such as *Scottish Educational Review*), newsletters of various kinds, SCRE *Spotlights*? Should more use be made of web-based forms of publication?

### Possible futures

The current situation is fluid for a number of reasons. We are still adjusting to the changed political context in Scotland following devolution, including the existence of two education departments (SEED and ELLD) and parliamentary committees. To this can be added recent or imminent staffing changes at senior levels within the civil service and the inspectorate, and restructuring of research arrangements within the Scottish Executive. Hugh Macrae of Perth and Kinross Council has suggested that the time is ripe for new thinking and has produced an unpublished paper on the desirability of a National Strategic Framework for Education Research in Scotland. It deals with the following: aims; audit of existing provision; assessment of development required; funding needed; roles and responsibilities of key partners. The paper represents an important contribution to the debate about the best way forward. With the establishment of the National Educational Research Forum (NERF) in England, Scotland needs to review its existing provision.

The process of the review should include the identification of gaps in current research (e.g.

further and higher education seems to me to be under-researched, and there is a need for serious work on the economics of education). We also need to look at the balance between short, medium and long term projects – is too much research ‘quick and dirty’? – and at the balance between different kinds of research projects (development, evaluation, survey, ‘blue skies’, etc.). There are also difficult practical issues to do with contractual security and career development of research staff, and with the adequacy of technical support. Again, the question of inter-institutional collaboration needs to be looked at. Is that the best way forward? At present a fair amount happens informally, based on personal contacts. In the West of Scotland, Glasgow and Strathclyde universities have a synergy agreement whereby they are each other’s preferred partners in collaborative bids for funding.

Should there be agreed national priorities – agreed across all major funders, governmental and non-governmental, on the basis that this might be the best way of building research capacity and avoiding fragmentation of effort? Such a strategy has some attractions but also carries risks. For example, during the period 1979-97, given the dominant political ideology of the time, there was little government-funded research on poverty. The important work in this area that did take place was supported by the Rowntree Foundation. It is perhaps significant that even under New Labour poverty remains subsumed under the less emotionally charged term ‘social inclusion’. (Norman Fairclough’s splendid book *New Labour, New Language?* provides a fascinating insight into the shifting lexicon of government policy in this area.)

There are limits to what can be expected from coordination and rational planning. Stephen Ball has said that ‘too much coordination may lead to the systematic neglect of “unpopular” research issues. The possibility of surprises and radical critique arising from research may be closed down’. The notion of a seamless web of enlightened practice in which policy-makers, researchers, teachers and other stakeholders work together to common ends is something of an illusion. There are bound to be tensions deriving from different priorities and values. The fit should not be too comfortable. But a measure of tension is to be expected and may indeed ensure the

health of the system. I am firmly of the view that education requires a degree of critical edge if it is to move forward creatively.

In the final analysis, what really matters is the intellectual capital that research can generate and how it is invested in the educational system as a whole. To enable this to happen, the climate of ideas should be open, not heavily constrained by bureaucratic procedures and imposed priorities. Furthermore, there should always be a place for those operating on margins, the research dissidents if you like. Some capital – there will always be legitimate debate about how much – should be invested speculatively in areas that may not yet be regarded as important but may turn out to be so in the future. Exciting things often happen at the edge of disciplines rather in their mainstream. Significantly, those departments that did particularly well in RAE 2001 had developed strong links between education and other social science disciplines.

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### Your views are important

Positive responses both locally and nationally to ‘Research Into Action’ Issue 1 are very welcome. The principal article for Issue No 2 was on Curricular Progression from Primary to Secondary sectors. A number of requests indicated that a priority should be the provision of an example of good practice in transition arrangements and I am grateful to Graeme Legge, Head Teacher and Colin Shand, Depute Head, of Kemnay Academy for their agreement to reprint the enclosed proforma. Due to space constraints further information on Curricular Progression will now appear in Issue No 3 early next term.

Many respondents asked for an informed view on the future role of Educational Research in Scotland. I am grateful to Walter Humes for his significant contribution based on an initial presentation to The Scottish Educational Research Association and to Fran Payne, President of SERA for her agreement to have this reproduced in order to meet these requests.

There is clearly developing interest in the new and expanding role of Educational Research from Aberdeenshire staff, including those involved with the GTCS Teacher Researcher Programme,

Chartered Teacher courses and those wishing greater involvement as part of their Continuing Professional Development. The Director of Education and Recreation is willing to provide the resources to enable the establishment of our own Research Group and anyone who would like to be involved should contact me at [David.Meiklejohn@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:David.Meiklejohn@aberdeenshire.gov.uk) by Friday 2 July outlining your main interests. Dean Robson Research Fellow with the GTCS has already indicated his willingness to support this initiative.

### Date for Your Diary: Applied Educational Research Scheme (AERS)

Aberdeenshire Council is planning to host a national seminar of The School Management and Governance Network on Tuesday 7 September 2004. Further details will be issued to all schools or the start of next term.



*Scolty Tower, Banchory*