

## Towards New Strategic Initiatives for Research Capacity in Education: A Discussion Paper

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### Introduction

The present article contributes to the consultation process on capacity in educational research which ESRC has initiated through Town Meetings and other forms of liaison. At the heart of the article is an attempt to clarify goals and responsibilities in the field. This is seen as a precondition for the generation of more strategic proposals. An outline of ideas for one such initiative, incorporating suggestions from previous parts of the consultation sequence, is then provided.

It is hoped that the article may lead towards a more concise propositional paper for ESRC's Training and Development Board - and an initial outline of such a proposal is appended (see, for example, the diagram on p.5 for an overview). It is recognised that developments of the sort envisaged here would need

extensive tailoring for each part of the UK.

The article is in five parts. This introduction leads on to a contextual review. The third and fourth sections are perhaps the most important in focusing on the goals, responsibilities and provision associated with what is offered as two major goals of educational research and enquiry. The final section considers the management of synergies between such goals and provision.

As a taster of the argument, in the broadest sense, two major goals of educational research and enquiry are taken to be:

1. Enhancing educational outcomes through the improvement of practice; and
2. Developing new knowledge and understanding about education

Of course these goals are related, and each should inform the other. Indeed, each is weakened if it fails to engage with insights derived from the other. However, in terms of the forms of contemporary social organisation and practices through which these goals are pursued in the UK, the view taken here is that these foci of activity are becoming increasingly distinct. The first is the primary realm of professional reflection and enquiry, tends to be

grounded in the concerns of particular educational sectors and, in that it is connected to the quality of educational provision, is a core responsibility of sectoral agencies in each country of the UK. The second is the primary realm of social science, draws on theory and methods across sectors and is the core business of ESRC and research-intensive university departments across the UK and internationally. Both contribute, together with many other influences, to policy making and thus to the development of education systems as a whole.

For many years, enlightened educationalists have sought to integrate these activities and there is much to be said for this stance in principle. However, the contention of this paper is that, in present circumstances, the balance of advantage for the medium-term period post-2008 is to think very clearly about the particular needs of each. Without such clarity, capacity building in education is likely to be somewhat muddled and ineffective.

### Contextual review

The context facing education research is becoming well known. However, some basic points are:

- a. ESRC's Demographic review raised matters of *scale, focus* and
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*age profile:*

- Total education staff in HE are over 5000 (HESA data) but only 2000 were 'research active' in RAE 2001 terms. The primary expertise of many lies in teacher education and professional practice.
  - Education is a major 'importer' of expertise from other social science and humanities disciplines.
  - Education academics are a significantly aging population, with over 70% of staff aged over 45.
- b. The *quality* of educational research has been challenged in the past, and will certainly be challenged again. However, it can be argued that the quality of the best is now comparable to that in other social science fields. Commitment to evidence-informed policy and practice underpins demand for high quality research.
- c. The RAE 2008 is expected to continue the process of *research differentiation* between HE institutions. It is possible that significant funding for high quality social science research will be concentrated in a smaller number of institutions - perhaps a dozen. There may be an uneven distribution of these institutions within the UK.
- d. The *investments* in capacity development which were made by HEFCE and others in TLRP and by the Scottish Executive and Funding Council in AERS are expected to finish in December 2008. In both cases, it can be argued that significant opportunities have been provided and taken. There are expected to be some valuable legacy resources from these initiatives - but overall strategic follow-through has yet to be determined.
- e. Education as a field of research and enquiry has *broadened* significantly in recent years, and it is no longer primarily about school education. Children's services, early years, post-16, FE, HE, adult, workplace, community and lifelong education each provide a focus for activity - particularly in relation to the improvement of policy and practice.
- f. The range of active *stakeholders* in educational research activity has increased in recent years, reflecting

the importance of education in economic, social and cultural affairs, the broadening of fields of application and UK devolution. However, the field is characterised by poor coordination.

g. We need to be realistic about funding of future initiatives. All funders have to address their core missions and to justify expenditure with clear performance-related evidence. Proposals for investments in educational research and enquiry must reflect this.

Holding these contextual factors in mind, the article moves on to discuss provision in respect of each major goal.

### **Goals, responsibilities and provision to enhance educational outcomes through the improvement of practice**

#### *Goals*

The capacity of teacher enquiry and forms of reflective practice to enhance the quality of professional judgement and classroom practice has been demonstrated for many years in education - influenced, in particular, by the example of Laurence Stenhouse. Additionally however, in professions and forms of practical action well beyond teaching, we have the rationale and examples offered by John Dewey and Donald Schon. The insights are enriched further, from a quite different direction, by contemporary work on expertise. There seems to be little doubt that the development of expertise in any field depends on high levels of conscious, self-aware practice, problem solving and refinement. The result of this is a growth in both differentiated understanding and implementation skills.

Contemporary challenges to educational provision in all sectors, reflecting diversity, globalisation and social, economic and cultural imperatives, also requires high levels of flexibility. From adult, higher, further, school and pre-school, tutors, lecturers, teachers and carers must respond to new needs and circumstances if they are to offer the best provision for the learners in their care and thus maximise learning

outcomes.

Professional enquiry is thus both proven and appropriate as a foundation for quality and responsiveness. For this reason, government agencies and other providers in all sectors are working towards ways of supporting such forms of professional development. Indeed, it is increasingly recognised that the publication of standards and other protocols is not enough. It is also necessary to provide practical support for scholarship and professional enquiry to improve practice.

#### *Responsibility*

*Responsibility for provision to support the development of professional expertise in each sector should primarily rest with the funding and regulating agencies for such sectors within each country.*

One of the reasons for a relative lack of continuity and slow emergence of an established infrastructure for professional development is that it has significant financial implications. The scale of the workforce in education is huge, even when it is considered in the distinct sectoral parts through which it is organised.

Notwithstanding such factors, there is a need to build a much more consistent infrastructure for professional development across all sectors, based on the application of common principles about professional learning and expertise. Although such important work will be of interest to ESRC and complementary to its own provision, scholarship, professional enquiry and development is *not* the core business of the research council even in this applied field.

#### *Provision*

Despite the best efforts of many, practical support for pedagogic enquiry has, hitherto been rather patchy. Thus, recently for English schools we have had Best Practice Research Scholarships and Networked Learning Communities and this direction is also indicated by the new TDA standards. In Scotland the Chartered Teachers Scheme provides an interesting case. In Wales,

the GTC has run a programme of awards for pedagogic innovation - and, indeed, each of the GTCs makes a significant commitment in principle to the role of research in professional development. Across the UK, there have been many initiatives by local authorities - though there are also others which are less committed. In post-16 education, LSRN flourished for a while and QIA are now beginning to explore new provision. In higher education, SRHE encourage pedagogic research and the HEA has funded a series of small-scale projects, as well as the education subject centre, ESCALATE. UCET's research committee regularly discusses such opportunities and the ways in which members help to develop and exploit them - whilst they last.

On the other hand, the new TDA standards set out expected capabilities of teachers at all stages of a career - including the growing awareness, use and production of evidence about outcomes and processes in teaching and learning. The BERA/SRHE proposal, summarised by Pamela Munn, made four proposals which seem to be of particular relevance to this primary goal. It suggested:

- a. Development of an appropriate 'research training element' within undergraduate programmes of ITE and in PGCE courses or their equivalent is of foundational importance for long-term teacher development;
- b. The on-line materials being produced by TLRP and AERS should be supported as a way of supporting both student-teacher and ITE staff in practice-based enquiry;
- c. The 'Meetings of Minds' fellowship scheme pioneered by AERS and TLRP should be preserved to offer high quality mentoring to colleagues with research potential in less research intensive HEIs; and
- d. A junior research career fellowship scheme should be funded to target mid-career practitioners switching to teacher education roles in higher education - a suggestion which was later expanded to include the needs of academics in HEIs wishing to conduct pedagogic research in their subject area.

The Teacher Education Advisory Group of Universities UK has recently consulted with HEFCE and others on a New Blood Scheme for HEI Schools of Education. This builds on a TDA initiative reflecting its concern about the aging workforce in teacher training in HEIs, the sustainability of subject knowledge expertise and the quality of practice-based research more generally. The proposal is to create 150 lecture-ships for each of three years with the £81m total cost shared between HEIs and their school partners and the TDA and other funding bodies (subject to a TDA bid to DfES under the Comprehensive Spending Review).

This sort of provision will undoubtedly be of considerable interest to organisations such as BERA, SRHE, UCET, LSDA and the HEA.

In the period following RAE 2008, willingness to cooperate on activities of this sort among institutions with a high commitment to professional education but weaker research infrastructures may be considerable - if it is appropriately facilitated and supported.

### **Goals, responsibilities and provision for social scientific development of new knowledge and understanding about education**

#### *Goals*

The case for high quality and relevant research in the contemporary world barely needs rehearsal in an era which aspires to evidence-informed policy and practice.

The age profile signaled by the Demographic Review alerts us to the fact that we need to significantly increase the number of younger and new researchers in education with high level social science skills and understanding. This is problem of quantity as much as quality. As in almost all areas of social science, there is also likely to be a particular shortage of researchers with quantitative skills. If we do not overcome these projected shortages, there is a real risk that the aspiration for evidence-informed policy and practice

will be impossible to achieve in education.

#### *Responsibility*

*Responsibility for strategic leadership to ensure the development of high quality social scientific research on education across all sectors should primarily rest with the ESRC as the major UK-wide funder of independent social science.*

This is ESRC's core business, working with partners such as UK government departments, higher education funding councils and HEIs themselves. ESRC's limited resources should be focused on the development of expertise for the social scientific study of education. The scale is far smaller than for the improvement of practice - with only some 2000 'research active' staff entered in the 2001 RAE. Whilst this figure is almost certain to fall in 2008 submissions, there is likely to be a future need for greater provision for researchers from other disciplines who come to work in the field of education.

In recent years, AERS and TLRP have created many opportunities for colleagues to gain experience of large networks and projects. Their strategies aspire to embed development in the social practices of the community - though there is more explicit institutional engagement in Scotland. In Wales and Northern Ireland there is considerable awareness of the challenge facing the field - though formulating sustainable strategies has proved difficult. In principle however, it certainly seems appropriate that key higher education institutions should be take responsibility for actively creating and sustaining capacity building infrastructures for the communities which they serve.

We might thus have ESRC providing strategic leadership, funding councils and others contributing resources, and selected HEIs taking responsibility for provision in defined UK areas or in respect of particular educational themes.

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### Provision

Three forms of provision are highlighted below: fellowships, higher degree studentships and a UK network.

*Fellowships:* In their recent paper, BERA/SRHE proposed the creation of Junior Research Career Fellowships for mid-career professionals switching from professional practice in education to a career in higher education and for HE staff wishing to focus on the study of pedagogy. In my opinion, the laudable objectives as stated in the paper relate primarily to the quality of teaching and learning in ITT and HE generally, and might therefore, on earlier arguments, be seen as the responsibility of the TDA or HEA. However, a scheme modeled on the RCUK Academic Fellowships may be more appropriate for the development of social science capacity per se. Five year funding of £25k pa 'provides a contract researcher with a more attractive and stable path into academia' and leads to a permanent position at the participating HEI.

*Higher degree studentships:* Additionally, in the earlier BERA paper submitted by John Furlong, the Association quite properly asked for current levels of financial support for higher degree studentships to be maintained.

*A UK network:* ESRC has a small but growing portfolio of strategic initiatives designed to support and develop capacity in vulnerable fields of UK national interest, with that of Advanced Quantitative Methods being a primary example. The latter is establishing a linked network of UK-wide centres of excellence through which the commitment and expertise of participating HEIs can be enlisted to a common purpose. Should education follow this example?

Following the major funding periods of TLRP and AERS, a UK-wide linked network could provide a way of recognising both the progress which has been made and the emerging challenges which the field

faces. Rather than rely on a single centre, the strategy proposes to engage institutions in a structure of mutual and complementary support. Additionally, if required, the participating institutions could be selected to cover a range of strategically important educational themes.

An RAE-assessed quality threshold would be a likely condition for eligibility to apply to join a network for the development of social scientific research capacity in education. So too would be a commitment to collaborate on capacity building activities within the network and, where appropriate, beyond it. Selection could be managed through an open bidding process with each institution indicating how it would contribute to the overarching aims of the initiative.

Prior to establishment, there would also need to be a more formal evaluation of the current strengths and weaknesses of the field in methodological terms - as there was when TLRP's capacity building provision was initiated. At that point, the first 'particular priority' was: 'the development of skills in the design, conduct and management of quantitative studies, including experimental, quasi-experimental and survey techniques, capable of evaluating the effects of teaching and learning upon learners' attainment across various contexts'. There were also priorities on the combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches, on inter-disciplinarity and on the transformation of research-based knowledge to enhance impact. User engagement in research is another possible theme, as is the value of specific disciplinary study. A new evaluation could be drawn from the work of the new Strategic Forum for Research on Education, thus benefiting from the rigour of the OECD framework which structures that organisation.

Within the network, each collaborating partner might be expected to:

- Provide a medium-term development plan in relation to their contribution to the 'particular priorities' which have been identified for the field as a whole, and sub-

sequently to provide reports on, and updates to, this plan.

- Offer one or more particular areas of exceptional theoretical or methodological expertise, so that the network as whole embraced a range of approaches, fit for addressing a wide range of research questions.
- Develop expertise and a portfolio of work in relation to particular substantive themes.
- Actively engage with ESRC's NCRM, the RDI and other provision across the social sciences as a whole.
- Be accredited for ESRC research training and offer appropriate Masters, EdD and PhD provision.
- Provide systematic, focused and progressive career development support for all contract research and other academic staff with particular reference to research skills and opportunities for advanced study.
- Welcome and recognise staff and higher degree students from education departments in 'Associated HEIs' - institutions beyond the network, perhaps with relatively weak research infrastructures - and provide quantified services such as seminars, conferences, specialist library facilities and support for pedagogic research and scholarship as negotiated.
- Contribute specialist expertise to public-domain, web-based research resources for capacity building in educational research and enquiry, building on the existing work of TLRP, AERS and others as appropriate.
- Offer expertise for a 'Meetings of Minds' Fellowship scheme, or similar, for the support of emerging researchers beyond research intensive institutions.
- Establish Executive and Advisory Groups, with the former providing for clear leadership and accountability and the latter including provision for the representation of views from higher degree students, junior CRS, colleagues across selected social sciences, Associated HEIs and other appropriate groups.

Table 1. An overview of existing and proposed provision—a proposal to the ESRC

Career stage or institutional circumstance	Non-ESRC provision	Direct ESRC provision	Indirect ESRC provision via an Ed Res Network
<b>Under-graduate</b>	Under-graduate research training elements within ITE and PGCE courses		
<b>Post-graduate</b>	Practitioner enquiry as a central element of continuing professional development	Research studentships (existing provision)	On-line materials for developing research expertise (existing TLRP resource)
<b>Post-doctoral or early career</b>		Post-doctoral fellowship (existing scheme)	Career development for CRS  Meetings of Minds fellowships (existing TLRP scheme)  On-line materials for developing research expertise
<b>Early or mid-career researcher making transition to education</b>		Academic fellowship scheme (new provision suggested)	
<b>Early or mid-career practitioner making transition to academe</b>	New Blood lectureships  Junior research career fellowships		On-line materials for developing research expertise
<b>Staff in Associated HEIs</b>			Seminars, conferences, library facilities, support for research and scholarship  On-line materials for developing research expertise
<b>Established researchers developing their expertise</b>		RDI NCRM and nodes Professorial Fellowships (all existing provision)	Emphasis on methodological priorities
<b>New specialist knowledge generation</b>			Focus on particular, strategically selected substantive themes

In facilitating this model, ESRC would take responsibility for strategic and conceptual leadership, assembling the funding consortium in each UK country, and (as appropriate for each country) managing the selection, progress and evaluation of participating institutions. Depending on future decisions, it might be possible to build on the infrastructures already established by AERS

and TLRP.

In summary, ESRC could be asked to:

- a. Fund a fellowship scheme designed to draw new social science researchers into education research (similar to the RCUK Academic Fellowship scheme);
- b. Maintain current levels of support for higher degree studentships; and
- c. Lead the formation of a UK-wide

network of institutions for the development of capacity in educational research.

**Collaboration and synergy between these elements**

This article argues for clarity in goals, responsibilities and provision. In so doing, it juxtaposes various forms of professional enquiry into practice with the social scientific

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study of education. This argument is not intended to diminish either. They are both essential to the future development of knowledge, understanding and policy.

Fortunately, we already have a number of institutions which are dedicated to exploiting such synergies. The research associations, BERA, SERA, SRHE, SCUTREA, UCET, etc draw their membership from a wide range of practitioners in schools, further, higher and adult education and might see themselves as having a key role in maximising collaboration and synergy between these approaches. Simi-

larly, charitable foundations such as Nuffield, Esmée Fairbairn and CfBT are particularly committed to the application of social science and are likely to continue to provide a bridging role.

The field of policy-making can be seen as a third area of activity which this discussion paper does not really explore. In addition to political considerations, policy is quite properly informed by social scientific evidence and practice-based knowledge— and thus by both of the strands of provision which are discussed above. The professionalisation of review processes and evolution of evidence portals, databases and websites is beginning to create

an infrastructure to support policy-making, and I would again argue that an explicit focus on this goal would be helpful for future provision – but that is for another occasion.

This article attempts to provide a rationale behind proposals which might be put to ESRC and other agencies. It is not a proposal in itself. However, Table 1 (p.5) hints towards concrete proposals to achieve more comprehensive coverage.

This paper was prepared in May 2007 as a contribution to a series of ESRC 'Town Meetings' to discuss future UK provision for capacity building.

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# Using Drama to Disseminate the Outcomes of Educational Research

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## Introduction

There is a growing interest in using drama to disseminate the outcomes of research in the social sciences. For example, Gray and Sinding (2002) describe how they developed dramatic performances in hospitals and other locations to communicate their findings about the experiences of cancer patients. Davis and Sumara (2006) have developed a readers' theatre production around their research on student and practising teachers who do not see themselves as 'good teachers'. These examples are part of a wider interest in using non-conventional methods for communicating research outcomes to various audiences. For example Clough (2002) has written about using fiction in the communication of research outcomes, while Douglas and Carless have described how they use songs and poetry to represent other people's lives in the context of health research.

In this article we describe our experiences of using drama to com-

municate the outcomes of TLRP-funded research. We start by describing the programme of drama-based activities which we developed with our collaborators and how we attempted to evaluate the impact of these activities. We then discuss some of the issues arising from using drama in this way, particularly those which are relevant to research capacity building.

## Developing drama-based activities around primary-secondary transfer

Our drama project grew out of an earlier TLRP-funded project on Home School Knowledge Exchange (see [www.home-school-learning.org.uk](http://www.home-school-learning.org.uk)). One strand of this project was concerned with transfer between primary and secondary school, and how this might be supported through home school knowledge exchange activities (see Osborn et al 2006, Greenhough et al 2007). Several of the issues which arose from this strand had a strong emotional content - for example, those concerned with chil-

dren's and parents' hopes and fears about life in secondary school and the impact these had on family life. These issues seemed to be particularly amenable for portrayal by means of drama, and we received further funding from TLRP to explore how drama might be used to communicate our research outcomes to a range of different audiences.

Right from the start of the project we recognised that we were not drama specialists and that we needed to develop collaborations with people who were. Our two main collaborators were Theatr Iolo, a Cardiff-based theatre company who specialise in working with children and young people, and Focus Productions, a Bristol-based TV company who specialise in documentaries on social issues. At the start of the project we shared our aims and ambitions with Theatr Iolo and Focus, and made available to them summaries of our findings and case study data around primary-secondary transfer. Together we

designed and implemented the following programme of drama-based activities:

Pre- and post-transfer drama workshops were designed and run by Theatr lolo in contrasting primary and secondary schools in Bristol and Cardiff. These workshops involved children, their teachers and their parents and allowed for dramatic exploration of a range of issues to do with primary-secondary transfer. For example, in the 'Ridiculous Rumours' activity primary children invented far-fetched rumours about secondary school and discussed their nature

The play 'Ready or Not?' about primary-secondary transfer was performed live by Theatr lolo at the BERA, TLRP and ABER conferences in 2006/7, for teachers and advisers of Rhondda LEA, and at an open event in Cardiff as part of the ESRC Festival of Social Science 2007. The play was written by Glenys Evans of Theatr lolo using case study material from the HSKE project and material generated in the drama workshops.

The DVD 'Ready or Not?' was produced by Focus and nearly 1000 copies were distributed free to schools, directors of children's services, researchers and the media. The DVD shows examples of the pre-and post-transfer drama workshops, interviews about transfer with children, teachers, and parents, and a rehearsal of the play 'Ready or Not?'.

### **Evaluating the impact of the drama activities**

There was substantial evidence that the drama activities had had a major impact on their intended audiences.

The drama workshops were evaluated through short interviews with teachers and headteachers, informal discussions with parents, and by asking the children to complete a short questionnaire after the final workshop. It was widely felt that the workshops had had a positive effect on the children, by allowing them to express and explore their hopes and fears about transfer to second-

ary school. Comments from the children included *'it helps us to be more confident about moving to high school'*, *'it freed us of our fears'* and *'[I learnt] how you could make new friends and not to stay out of trouble'*.

The live performances of 'Ready or Not?' were evaluated by means of short feedback sheets completed by members of the audience immediately after the performance. These sheets indicated an overwhelmingly positive response to each performance. Comments included *'Great! we need far more of this, which is memorable in a way that a conventional paper cannot hope to be'* and *'brilliant, the best thing in the conference'*. A more detailed analysis suggested that the audience particularly appreciated the immediacy with which case material could be presented, the way the drama illustrated diversity in family life, and the importance of 'emotional truth' in communicating about research.

The impact of the DVD 'Ready or Not?' was evaluated by enclosing a questionnaire with the DVD mailing and asking for it to be returned with comments. While the response rate for this method of evaluation was predictably low, a number of responses were received from teachers, LEA advisers and lecturers in initial teacher training. Comments included *'a great resource for schools – very impressed by the content'* and *'it had great ideas for structuring drama sessions'*. In addition, in one case a teacher sent examples of Y6 children's work exploring transfer issues inspired by their viewing of the dvd.

### **The emotional power of drama**

These evaluations suggested that the drama activities had on the whole been successful in communicating issues arising from our research to a range of different audiences – including researchers, teachers, parents, and children. At the same time they suggested that one of the key components in this success had been in the power of drama to communicate emotional issues. This has of course long been recognised as a key feature of

drama – its ability to engage with the emotions of the audience. Yet this feature is not unproblematic and poses a number of challenges for researchers wanting to use drama in this way.

Perhaps the most fundamental question we asked ourselves was whether we had the right to engage with people's emotions in the course of disseminating our research. This question first arose when we were planning the drama workshops with the children. We were concerned that, in addressing their hopes and fears about primary-secondary transfer, we were in danger of making them more alarmed about the impending transfer than they would otherwise be. Our collaborators, Theatr lolo, were aware of this concern, and they built into the workshops activities which were intended to give the children solutions to possible problems – such as strategies for making new friends at the high school. The aim of the workshops was not just to elicit the children's hopes and fears but also to empower them to cope with the realities of transfer.

A similar issue arose with the play 'Ready or Not?' Inevitably, much of the script was concerned with the difficulties involved in transfer and the way these impinged on whole families. However we also wanted to convey the message that transfer could be a positive and uplifting experience. It was therefore agreed that the play should have an upbeat ending, with the 'children', who were now in secondary school, recounting for younger children the many good aspects of life in their new school.

### **Collaborating with drama and media professionals**

Our collaborations with Theatr lolo and Focus Productions were essential for the success of the project. At the same time, working with professionals from very different backgrounds raised a number of important issues and challenges.

Perhaps the biggest challenge was coming to understand and appreciate  
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ate the differences in our world views. Spending time together at the outset of the project, sharing findings and data and discussing what we might do together, was certainly time well spent. It also provided several thought-provoking comments, such as when the director of Theatr lolo said casually, 'Of course, drama is basically a lie'. What he meant was that in drama one is asking the audience to suspend its knowledge that there are some actors in front of them, and instead see them as the roles they are playing. However, as researchers, the notion that we were engaged in 'lying' was not part of how we saw ourselves.

Our collaborations with the media professionals also raised issues about ownership and autonomy. While the research was undoubtedly 'ours', it was important that Theatr lolo and Focus were able to identify with it so that they could fully engage with what we wanted them to do. It was important that we recognised their expertise as skilled professionals, and where appropriate, let them get on with the job. Thus the script of 'Ready or Not?' was essentially written by Glenys Evans of Theatr lolo, using our case study

data and the material generated in the drama workshops. This was essentially a high-risk strategy, as we had no idea what we would do if we didn't like the end product. Fortunately we did!

In conclusion, our experience of using drama in dissemination provided an important learning journey for ourselves, and no doubt for our collaborators as well. It has left us with some good memories and much to reflect on. We would certainly do it again, but not necessarily the same way. But then, this is probably true of most pieces of research...

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## Widening Participation in Higher Education: A Quantitative Analysis

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### Introduction

Education participation in the UK has risen steadily for the last half century, and around one third of young people now enrol in higher education (HE). Nonetheless, when we look more closely at *who* is attending higher education, the picture looks somewhat more problematic. Even forty three years after the Robbins Report urged for fairer representation in HE of students from all socio-economic backgrounds, and some ten years after Lord Dear-

ing's review (Dearing, 1997) that urged the same, concerns about widening access remain acute. This is because access to HE in the UK still remains disproportionately limited to those from higher socio-economic groups. More than three quarters of students from professional backgrounds study for a degree, compared to just 14% from unskilled backgrounds.

Although there has been extensive research on widening university par-

ticipation (HEFCE, 2006), our understanding has been limited by the data we have had. In particular, whilst we know a lot about higher education participants from the data provided by the Higher Education Statistics Agency, we know much less about the non-participants. Even constructing accurate HE participation rates for different socio-economic groups is problematic. Our TLRP project *Widening Participation in Higher Education: A quan-*

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*titative analysis* has set out to overcome some of these data limitations and provide a quantitative analysis of who goes to HE and who does not, the type of HE experienced by different pupils and their HE outcomes. Here we give a taste of our findings, focusing on who does and does not go to HE.

A particular aim of the research is to understand a stylised fact that has emerged from the literature: namely that whilst individuals from poorer backgrounds are far less likely to attend HE, there is very little gap in HE participation by socio-economic background once you allow for A level grades. Specifically, for a given number of A level points, students from lower socio-economic groups are not much less likely to attend HE than students from higher socio-economic backgrounds. This suggests that education inequalities prior to higher education, in the school system itself, are at the root of the socio-economic gap in HE participation. The aim of our research therefore is to identify at what stage in the lifecourse, and for which groups of students, educational inequalities emerge. This will help inform policy-makers designing strategies to widen access, particularly on the timing and nature of school based initiatives.

### New data

Our approach involves using a new combination of large scale, individual-level administrative datasets that have been linked by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills. This includes data from the National Pupil Database and Pupil Level Annual School Census, i.e. administrative data from the school system, the Individual Learner Record and National Information System for Vocational Qualifications, i.e. administrative data from the Further Education system, and Higher Education Statistics Agency data on those who participate in HE. The data therefore contain information on the personal characteristics of all pupils (including ethnicity, free-school meal status, birth date, gender), as well as their prior achievement from

Key Stage 2 onwards (age 11). The data follow a particular cohort of children, namely state school students in England who were in Year 11 in 2001/02.

Because these data provide information on every individual in state schools in Year 11 in 2001/02, we can look at the trajectories taken by pupils from poorer socio-economic backgrounds and identify when their relative education achievement falls away. Unlike previous work using HE records alone (e.g. HESA data), our analysis is based both on participants and non-participants, allowing for a more robust analysis.

### Some numbers

Here we paint a very broad picture of who participates in HE and who does not. The numbers should give the reader a sense of the power of the new data set. Firstly, in Table 1 we examine the personal characteristics of those who participate in HE (first column) and those who do not (second column).

Unsurprisingly HE participants achieve more in school, from Key Stage 2 (age 11) through Key Stage

4 (age 16) and on to Key Stage 5 (age 18). Differences in prior achievement are dramatic: HE participants score, on average, 60 points (roughly equivalent to ten B-grades) at age 16 compared with 36 points (nine D grades) for non-participants. Similarly, at age 18, participants score 313 points (roughly equivalent to one A and two B grades) compared with 214 points (two C and one D grade) for non-participants. (Of course, this is a selected sample, because not all individuals will choose to stay on in education beyond age 16).

Students for whom English is an additional language (EAL) are more likely to participate in HE, consistent with research that has observed that such students catch up in secondary school with their non-EAL counterparts (Wilson, Burgess and Briggs, 2005). By contrast poorer students (those eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) at age 16), are less likely to enter HE. In fact only just under 6% of HE participants were FSM eligible. Some ethnic groups appear under represented in HE, namely, Black Caribbean, Other Black and White British students.

**Table 1. The personal characteristics of HE participants and non-participants**

Characteristic	Participants	Non-participants	Difference
Reached expected level at Key Stage 2	0.928	0.635	0.294***
Reached expected level at Key Stage 3	0.949	0.624	0.325***
Key Stage 4 points	59.852	35.616	24.237***
Key Stage 5 points	312.5	213.608	98.892***
Eligible for Free School Meals	0.056	0.166	-0.111***
English as an additional language	0.12	0.081	0.039***
White British	0.792	0.838	-0.046***
Black Caribbean	0.009	0.015	-0.005***
Black African	0.013	0.012	0.001***
Other Black	0.006	0.008	-0.002***
Indian	0.054	0.017	0.037***
Pakistani	0.027	0.025	0.002***
Bangladeshi	0.01	0.009	0.001**
Chinese	0.008	0.002	0.006***
Mixed	0.002	0.002	0.001***
Male	0.431	0.528	-0.098***

Notes: \*\*\* indicates significance at the 1 per cent level, \*\* at the 5 per cent level, and \* at the 10 per cent level

(Continued on page 10)

**Table 2. The schools attended by HE participants and non-participants**

Characteristic	Participants	Non-participants	Difference
Level 3 reached at 17 by academic route	0.894	0.18	0.714***
Level 3 reached at 17 by vocational route	0.051	0.038	0.013***
Level 3 acquired via any route at 17	0.945	0.218	0.727***
School average GCSE points	45.522	39.156	6.366***
School proportion of FSM pupils	0.112	0.167	-0.055***
School proportion of non-white pupils	0.184	0.171	0.013***
School proportion of EAL pupils	0.091	0.087	0.004***
School number of pupils	1143.105	1076.909	66.196***
Community school	0.567	0.667	-0.099***
Voluntary aided school	0.186	0.128	0.058***
Voluntary controlled school	0.043	0.033	0.011***
Foundation school	0.197	0.152	0.045***

Notes: \*\*\* indicates significance at the 1 per cent level, \*\* at the 5 per cent level, and \* at the 10 per cent level

(Continued from page 9)

Other ethnic minority groups, such as Chinese and Indian students, are over represented in HE in the sense that the proportion of such students is higher in the HE participant group than in the non-participant group, although the difference in numbers is often relatively small.

We also examine the schools and

peer groups of participants and non-participants, and the routes they took through the education system. Table 2 does this for participants (column 1) and non-participants (column 2). HE participants overwhelmingly enter higher education with a level 3 qualification (equivalent to 2 GCE/VCE A-levels at Grades A to E) achieved via the academic route. Only 5% of HE participants in this cohort achieve level

3 via the vocational route: the path to higher education is still via A levels for those who attend higher education at age 18 (we cannot observe whether non-participants enter higher education at age 19, or indeed later in adulthood).

HE participants also attend different types of school. HE participants attend larger schools, and are more likely to attend a more autonomous school (e.g. a Voluntary Aided school or a Foundation school). HE participants are more likely to attend a school with a higher proportion of non-white and EAL pupils, although these differences are not large (they are significant). HE participants attend schools with a much lower proportion of FSM children. Furthermore, HE participants attend higher achieving schools, as measured by the school's average number of GCSE points.

**Transitions**

As well as wanting to know who goes to university, we want to understand the transitions young people from different family backgrounds make as they move through the system. We focus on FSM children and their achievement over the compulsory schooling period. We want to determine whether FSM children who start out with high

**Table 3. Comparison of Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 results for FSM pupils**

Key Stage 2	Key Stage 4					Total
	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	
<b>Group 1</b>	13,751 72.23 (0.41)	3,907 20.52 (3.61)	1,186 6.23 (20.74)	174 0.91 (43.68)	21 0.11 (66.67)	19,039 100 (2.80)
<b>Group 2</b>	4,918 36.39 (0.63)	4,747 35.12 (2.72)	3,003 22.22 (15.72)	765 5.66 (37.78)	82 0.61 (58.54)	13,515 100 (7.17)
<b>Group 3</b>	1,916 18.92 (0.52)	2,766 27.32 (2.28)	3,459 34.16 (11.80)	1,679 16.58 (31.27)	305 3.01 (56.39)	10,125 100 (11.63)
<b>Group 4</b>	685 9.51 (2.34)	1,134 15.75 (2.12)	2,417 33.56 (8.90)	2,284 31.72 (29.60)	681 9.46 (55.07)	7,201 100 (18.14)
<b>Group 5</b>	197 4.66 (1.02)	239 5.66 (3.35)	804 19.03 (9.70)	1,616 38.25 (28.47)	1,369 32.4 (49.89)	4,225 100 (29.14)
<b>Total</b>	21,467 39.68 (0.54)	12,793 23.64 (2.85)	10,869 20.09 (13.06)	6,518 12.05 (31.08)	2,458 4.54 (52.56)	54,105 100 (9.64)

(or low) achievement at KS2 (age 11) make less progress to KS4 (age 16) than non-FSM children. To do this, we separate individuals into five groups on the basis of their English and Maths scores at each Key Stage – with Group 1 containing individuals with the lowest scores and Group 5 containing individuals with the highest scores – and look at the number (percentage) of pupils who move into a different group between ages 11 and 16. We do this separately for FSM pupils (Table 3) and non-FSM pupils (Table 4).

FSM pupils who start with low achievement (at age 11) are extremely likely to end up with low achievement by age 16. Table 3 shows that 72% of FSM pupils with the lowest scores (Group 1) at age 11 remain in the bottom group at age 16. Equally initially high achieving FSM pupils are quite unlikely to end up being high achievers at age 16. Only 32% of those with the highest scores (Group 5) at KS2 are still in the top group at KS4. If we compare this to pupils who are *not* FSM eligible (Table 4), we see more continuity for non-FSM students. The probability of staying in the same group between ages 11 and 16 is around 59% for both initially low and

high achieving non-FSM pupils.

A more positive story emerges once we take into account the percentage of pupils who go on to participate in HE at age 18 (these are the numbers in brackets in Tables 3 and 4). FSM pupils who were average performers (Group 3) at both age 11 and 16 have a 13% chance of going to university, compared with a 14% chance for non-FSM pupils of similar academic ability. This pattern is also evident for pupils who improve their score over time: for example, similar proportions of FSM and non-FSM pupils who move from Group 2 (bottom 40%) at KS2 to Group 4 (top 60%) at KS4 go on to HE (38%).

This suggests that children from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds – the majority of whom are lower achievers at Key Stage 2 – can potentially escape their disadvantaged position at age 11 and their HE prospects are not harmed in the long-run.

### Conclusions

Although we are not yet able to show the results of our econometric modelling of HE participation, our results thus far are nonetheless informative. In particular we show that

while poorer children are systematically less likely to do well in school and attend HE, those who make sustained improvements between 11 and 16 are just as likely to go to university as their richer counterparts. For such pupils, the eventual prospects of HE participation are not harmed by the disadvantages evident upon starting secondary school. Not only does this illustrate the crucial importance of outcomes during the school years, it also highlights the potential importance of interventions that target the achievement of disadvantaged pupils during this phase.

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**Table 4. Comparison of Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 results for Non-FSM pupils**

Key Stage 2	Key Stage 4					Total
	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	
Group 1	39,478 58.96 (0.66)	19,677 29.39 (3.57)	6,629 9.9 (17.30)	1,032 1.54 (38.47)	142 0.21 (63.38)	66,958 100 (3.88)
Group 2	16,160 21.31 (0.72)	26,520 34.97 (3.17)	24,646 32.5 (15.71)	7,791 10.27 (38.43)	719 0.95 (62.73)	75,836 100 (10.91)
Group 3	6,076 7.58 (0.63)	15,585 19.45 (2.71)	31,793 39.68 (13.99)	22,645 28.26 (36.84)	4,031 5.03 (61.30)	80,130 100 (19.62)
Group 4	2,163 2.58 (1.76)	5,738 6.86 (2.39)	22,815 27.26 (12.78)	37,080 44.3 (36.55)	15,903 19 (60.38)	83,699 100 (31.36)
Group 5	624 0.72 (3.37)	1,174 1.35 (2.56)	7,061 8.1 (10.89)	27,561 31.6 (35.81)	50,802 58.24 (64.40)	87,222 100 (49.76)
Total	64,501 16.38 (0.73)	68,694 17.44 (3.11)	92,944 23.6 (14.15)	96,109 24.4 (36.58)	71,597 18.18 (63.31)	393,845 100 (24.44)

## **Building Research Capacity**

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## **Teaching and Learning Research Programme Research Capacity**

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## **TLRP News**

### **TLRP Annual Conference 2008**

24th-25th November 2008, London

The Programme draws to the culmination of its present incarnation with a high profile showcase for policy makers on Nov 24th- 25th at the Queen Elizabeth Conference centre in Westminster, London. The first day will focus on Schools projects and will be co hosted with CUREE and the National Teacher Research Panel. The second day will be on post-compulsory and higher education and HEA have agreed to support this event.

### **Mapping the Ripples Survey**

<http://www.tlrp.org/capacity/mappingtheripples/>

TLRP's Mapping the Ripples project is collecting data on UK researchers to help inform TLRP's attempts to influence future research Capacity Building. Both TLRP Research staff and TLRP Award Holders are being surveyed at present – and further returns are invited.

If you have yet to complete the survey relevant to you please visit the website above—and please also forward the information to anyone you think may be able to help.

## **NCRM and RDI Events**

### **ATLAS.ti Intermediate Support Seminar**

27th February 2008, University of Surrey

At least two tutors will take participants through the basic tasks of early usage of this software while aiming to provide a clear idea of longer term direction using this leading CAQDAS package for qualitative data analysis. Full documentation and step by step support will be provided.

### **Introduction to Systematic Reviews**

12th March 2008, Queens University Belfast

This is a one-day workshop that will be of interest to policy-makers, practitioners, managers and researchers. No prior knowledge of systematic reviews is required. This workshop is being organised by the EPPI-

Centre at the Institute of Education, University of London.

### **Structural Equation Modelling**

13th –14th March 2008, Lancaster University

This is a two-day residential workshop organised by the Centre for Applied Statistics at Lancaster University. This is an intermediate level workshop which requires participants having some prior knowledge.

### **Real Live Methods Training Workshop: Analysing Real Live Mixed Methods**

18th April 2008, Open University, Milton Keynes

This workshop will outline and explore different approaches to analysing data generated using 'real life methods', by which we mean methods that try to get close to people's lived experience and to resonate with 'real life'. Such data are often, although not always, qualitative and unstructured in nature, and can take a range of forms including textual, auditory, observational and visual. This is an intermediate levels workshop which requires participants having some prior knowledge.

### **Evaluating Complex Social Interventions: Randomised Controlled Trials and Realistic Evaluation**

23rd April 2008, Cardiff University

This is a one day meeting to discuss several 'competing' facets to evaluating complex social interventions. With presentations from leading scholars in RCTs and Realistic Evaluations participants will be invited to discuss these methods in facilitated small groups.

For more information about these and other NCRM events please visit the NCRM website: [www.ncrm.ac.uk](http://www.ncrm.ac.uk) or call +44 (0)23 8059 4539, or email: [info@ncrm.ac.uk](mailto:info@ncrm.ac.uk)

The events listed here are just a selection of NCRM events in the coming six months. The searchable NCRM Training Database lists over 60 training and capacity building events over the coming year.