

# researchintelligence

News from the British Educational Research Association

Spring 2011 ISSUE 114

## THEMED ISSUE

### Education research in the current financial and accountability contexts

## ARTICLES

More, for less?

Whatever happened to joined up policy?

The impact of the RAE – a broader view?

Research quality assessment: Unintended consequences

Critical mass of education research groups

Why the notion of 'impact' in research is wrong

Assessment Reform Group: Investigation, argument and influence

Simulacra and simulations: Research futures

Media and Racial Justice

The Value of Educational Effectiveness Research

# from the president

## BERA has come of age!



Yes, it is official. We now have an address we can call our own, with our new offices in Endsleigh Gardens, London and two new members of staff: Farzana Rahman and Mark Donoghue. In the next several months members will find their inquiries being re-directed from KSAM's Lynne Fletcher and Emma Pettigrew in Macclesfield to Farzana and Mark in London. And as that begins to happen, I should like, on the Association's behalf, to offer Lynne and Emma a big thank you for their contributions.

We are particularly delighted that the Institute of Education has been able to offer us such an excellent location and hopefully these offices will quickly assume their 'headquarters' role for meetings and call-ins by members. Mail will be processed through the Institute's Bedford Way address but an increasing number of our meetings will begin to be held in Endsleigh Gardens, with a not insubstantial saving on meeting room hire costs.

Elsewhere in this issue there will be more details on the new office and staff developments but now for other news.

First, I am delighted to announce the launch of our new *Insights*. With former President Pamela Munn's expert stewardship and the

journalistic skills of Stephanie Northen, the *Violence in Schools* and *Social Inequality* publications are now available at [www.bera.ac.uk](http://www.bera.ac.uk). These highly accessible reviews represent major contributions to debates in UK education from top teams of researchers in Manchester and Edinburgh. Look out for new developments in this series over the next year or so.

Look out too for our new series of research methods books, now well underway with one of our long-term and major partners, Sage.

Our ethical guidelines are also being updated and by June of this year we expect to have the new 2011 version (last updated 2004) in place. As the most downloaded resource on the BERA website we are confident that the new version, updated primarily to take account of developments in research contracting and management, will be just as successful.

Members will also have had the news of the *British Journal for Educational Technology*, *BJET*, joining our portfolio of publications. This is a major boost to our profile and will enable us to continue the legacy of Becta, recently dissolved by the government, in ensuring that world-class research in educational technology has a UK vehicle for

## contents

## research intelligence

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### 04 news

BERA Staff profiles

BERA Committees: Academic Publications

### 06 Education research in the current financial and accountability contexts

More, for less?

Whatever happened to joined up policy?

The impact of the RAE – a broader view?

Research quality assessment: unintended consequences

Critical mass of education research groups

Why the notion of 'impact' in research is wrong

A farewell to the Assessment Reform Group

Simulacra and simulations: Research futures

dissemination. We are delighted to forge a new partnership with Wiley-Blackwell and Nick Rushby (Editor) in this highly important venture.

There is more news on the publications front and those watching the website will have noted the release of tender invitations for the publication of the *British Educational Research Journal*, *BERJ*, from 2013, and a proposed new journal, currently with the working title *British Educational Research Reviews*, *BERR*. Our long-established partnership with Taylor and Francis/Routledge continues to enable *BERJ* to flourish under an excellent editorial team (chaired by Ian Menter, Glasgow) and the journal remains a brand name for our Association throughout the world.

I am delighted to record significant feedback, all good, on the new thematic dimension to *RI*, so professionally put together by our editor and Council member, Alis Oancea (Oxford). Our publications' story is really 'on song' and indeed the up-to-the minute news is that we are currently discussing the acquisition of another well-known research journal - watch this space!

There are developments on all fronts of our business and I can only touch on them here. For example, we are in the middle of a tendering process for the contract to manage our annual conference. Our Events and Networking Committee (chaired by Danny Durant) is pulling out all the stops to ensure the success of the 2011 Conference (in London this year) and the identification of new events across the UK. The Academic Publications Committee (chaired by Sally Power, Cardiff) is overseeing the prodigious growth in the publications portfolio outlined above.

Recruitment of new members is a key focus for our Membership and Engagement Committee (chaired by Uvanney Maylor, Bedfordshire) and I would like to call upon all members to support this drive. We want to attract educational researchers from every sphere of the education system, whether they are from public, private or academic institutions. Leaflets have been sent to every school of education and hopefully you will be able to alert colleagues to the benefits of membership, including free copies of *BERJ*, free on-line access to *BJET*, free SIG membership, discounted conference fees and indeed this outlet itself, the *RI* - with on-

line editions going back to the very inception of the Association. First and foremost though, membership offers community identity and networking. Outside of the USA and AERA, we are the largest and most influential learned society in educational research in the world, counting among our members international scholars of the highest quality and influence.

As I write I am conscious that I am moving into the last quarter of my tenure as President. In a future *RI*, I will do more justice to those who selflessly serve our community through work across the committees, awards panels, working groups and SIGs. For the moment, I wish to acknowledge that all of their efforts are voluntarily given and thank them and their institutions on behalf of the Association. Volunteers are the lifeblood of the Association and with our elections coming up soon, I urge everyone to think of seeking election and continuing the excellent work of the existing Council and committees.

**John Gardner**  
Queen's University, Belfast

## 22 awards

Meeting of Minds: Media and Racial Justice

## 23 conference

BERA 2011 Conference News  
BERA 2011 Conference Debate:  
The Value of Educational  
Effectiveness Research  
Doubts about School  
Effectiveness Exacerbated

## Introducing the new BERA office staff

### Mark Donoghue

Mark's main responsibilities as BERA Administrator will include looking after the website, membership support and queries, the membership database and the Special Interest Groups (SIGs).

Mark has primarily worked for charities, but also for an MEP and a think tank. Prior to joining the BERA office he was Committee Administrator at London TravelWatch.

He enjoys listening to a wide variety of music, reading crime fiction, going to the cinema, history, watching football, learning about other cultures and trying to learn Spanish (and other languages).

### Farzana Rahman

Farzana manages the new BERA office, which is based in Room G10, 9-11 Endsleigh Gardens, Endsleigh Street. Farzana will oversee the workflow in the office and ensure that the BERA administration is run smoothly and provides value-added service to BERA members.

Farzana brings with her a wide portfolio of experience ranging from commercial and charity/not for profit experience. In all her previous roles, she established a strong presence as the central coordinator and "hub" for organisational activity. Farzana has most recently worked at British Land and the Aga Khan Foundation (UK).

Farzana will be travelling to Thailand and Bangladesh in April to volunteer at Thayang Elephant Sanctuary. Look out for some information on fundraising for the project! From there, she will travel to Bangladesh and teach English in local schools in Sylhet district. Farzana is currently learning Japanese and is budding Florist (pun intended), with a particular interest in Ikebana which is traditional Japanese flower arranging.

## Introducing the Academic Publications Committee

In the last issue of *Research Intelligence*, BERA's President, John Gardner, outlined the various changes that are underway in BERA to take forward the Association's ambitious agenda in the most effective way. One of these is the establishment of four standing committees, including the Academic Publications Committee (APC).

As researchers are keenly aware, publishing is an increasingly important part of educational research activity and is now seen as the key yardstick against which the quality and impact of research itself can be measured. It is also the principal means by which the education research community creates links to policy and practitioner communities. For these reasons, BERA is seeking to strengthen its publication portfolio through ensuring that the high quality of current activity is maintained and that new opportunities for publishing are taken advantage of in a responsive but strategic manner.

The APC is tasked with developing this portfolio and advising Council on how publications can fulfil BERA's objectives of consolidating the effectiveness of education research in relation to policy, quality and capacity.

### Current activities

The APC seeks to ensure that BERA develops a balanced portfolio of publications, including peer-reviewed journals, research news, research books and resources and occasional publications.

*The British Journal of Educational Research* (BERJ) is the flagship journal of BERA and has gone from strength to strength in recent years. While we may have some doubts about an over-reliance on citation data as an indicator of quality and reach, it is encouraging to note that the impact factor of the journal has increased in each successive year. In 2009, BERJ's Impact Factor was 1.035 and it was ranked 40th of 139 international journals in the area – which is very high for a general education journal.

Until recently, BERJ was the only peer-reviewed journal of the Association. However, in recent weeks we have been delighted to add the very influential *British Journal of Educational Technology* (BJET) to our list. BJET has an impact factor of 1.255 and ranks 32nd of the 139 international education journals. The Journal had previously been affiliated with Becta. However, the decision in May 2010 to close Becta as part of a package of measures to reduce public expenditure enabled BERA to make a bid for this highly prestigious journal.

No less important is this publication – BERA's research newsletter, *Research Intelligence*, with its variety of discussion pieces, research issues and announcements.

BERA is also working with SAGE to develop high quality research methods books for those studying education and related areas. In 2010, there were two calls for proposals which received an impressive 38 submissions. The APC is currently working with SAGE and the shortlisted authors to ensure that the books will be authoritative and accessible – essential reading for all education students! Also important for future education research capacity building are BERA's Online Resources. These can be accessed through the BERA website (at <http://www.bera.ac.uk/bera-resources/>) and are an invaluable source of information for educational researchers at all stages of their careers.

This year also saw the launch of *Insights* – a series of occasional publications targeted at non-specialist audiences. The first two, on violence in schools and schools and social inequality, are to be released soon, so do look out for further details on the BERA website.

None of these activities would be possible without the hard work of the APC members. The membership includes both elected and ordinary BERA members with experience and enthusiasm for academic publishing.

## Committee members



**Sally Power** is a professor in the School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University. She is an elected Council member and chair of the APC. Her main research expertise is in the sociology of education. She has extensive experience of publications and is currently co-editor of *Sociology* and the Routledge book series *Foundations and Futures in Education*.



**Marie-Pierre Moreau** is a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Bedfordshire. Her research focuses on the construction of inequalities in education and the workplace. She is a key member of the BERA-SAGE education research methods working group within the APC.



**Pat Sikes** is Professor of Qualitative Inquiry in the School of Education at the University of Sheffield. Pat's key interests lie in the use of auto/biographical approaches, particularly in the study of aspects of educators' lives and careers, and in issues around ethical research. She is also an elected Council member and is Deputy Chair of the APC.



**Jean Murray** is a professor and Research and Knowledge Exchange Leader in the Cass School of Education at the University of East London. She chairs the BERA On-Line Resources Board and is an Associate Director of ESCalate (the Education Subject Centre for the Higher Education Academy).



**Viv Baumfield** is Professor of Pedagogy at the University of Glasgow. Her work focuses on the role of universities in the creation and translation of knowledge about learning and teaching through collaborative research partnerships with teachers. In addition to co-editing *BERJ*, she also supports the work of the APC in relation to the BERA-SAGE research methods series and *Insights*.



**Alis Oancea** is based at the University of Oxford and is an elected Council member. She has published widely in the fields of philosophy of research, research policy and governance. She is editor of *Research Intelligence* and a member of APC's *Insights* team and the BERA-SAGE education research methods series working group.



**Becky Francis** is Director of Education at the RSA and Visiting Professor at King's College London, and at Roehampton University. Her expertise and extensive publications centre on social identities (gender, 'race' and social class) and educational achievement, and feminist theory. She used to chair BERA's Publications Committee and therefore provides important continuity for BERA and the APC.



**Tony Rea** is Head of Continuing Professional Development in the Education, Health and Social Care faculty, University of Winchester. His research interests lie in informal learning, outdoor education and the impact of educational visits to developing countries. He supports Alis in her work on *Research Intelligence*.



**Alison Kington** is a Senior Research Fellow in the School of Education, University of Nottingham. Her main research interest is 'classroom life' and investigate issues such as variations in the work and lives of teachers, the impact of school leadership on pupil outcomes, and effective classroom practice. She is a key member of APC's *Insights* team.



**Nick Rushby** runs Conation Technologies which is an educational and training consultancy focusing on the use of learning technology. His research interests are centred on the effective use of learning technologies and on innovation in education and training. He is the editor of *BJET*



**Ian Menter** is Professor of Teacher Education at University of Glasgow and chairs the Research and Development Committee of the Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers. He is co-editor of *BERJ*.

## BERA Committees

BERA is now operating through a committee structure. The four standing committees are: General Purposes (chaired by the BERA president, John Gardner); Academic Publications (chair: Sally Power); Events and Networking (chair: Danny Durant); and Membership and Engagement (chair: Uvanney Maylor). The paper by Sally Power in this issue of *RI* introduces the Academic and Publications Committee. Subsequent issues will introduce the other committees.

## More, for less?

### Education research in the current financial and accountability contexts



**Alis Oancea,**  
University of Oxford

#### The current context for research

Since *RI* 113 went to press, several decisions affecting education research have come to light, the effects of which are played out in different ways in the four countries of the UK. We're now in a world of university funding reform, with likely consequences for initial teacher education; of (post-Comprehensive Spending Review) savings and retrenchment in many parts of the public sector; of debates about "the importance of teaching"; of less, but more selective, quality-related research funding; of reduced non-research funding for higher education; of no ESRC research grant applications under 200k; of a new ESRC Delivery Plan; of Doctoral Training Centres; and of preparation for REF 2014 (incidentally, we also have, since February, a REF sub-panel for education and, since March, confirmation of the weighting of quality, impact and environment). The overall level of resources for research may be lower, but expectations certainly aren't.

In conjunction with high-profile reviews, such as the Browne review of higher education funding in England, or the Donaldson review of teacher education in Scotland, these decisions are fast shaping the context for the production and use of education research in a range of settings, from higher education institutions, to the professional development of teachers, and to resources for engaging with research in schools, colleges, local government, and government departments.

This issue of *RI* focuses on challenges and opportunities for education research arising from this context.

#### Research assessment: the BERA/UCET review of RAE 2008

In August 2009, UCET and BERA commissioned a review of the impacts of RAE 2008 on education research in all countries of the UK (Oancea, with advice from Furlong and Bridges, 2010 – available electronically from [www.bera.ac.uk](http://www.bera.ac.uk)). The review, carried out between September 2009 and January 2010, investigated the influences, as perceived locally, of RAE 2008 outcomes and processes on individual departments of education, on different groups of staff in departments of education, and on education research as a field. The study used two sets of empirical data, collected via an initial survey of staff in a sample of 30 institutions, followed by a series of in-depth interviews with a range of key respondents in nine further institutions. A supplementary report to the review, by Steff Hazlehurst, Bryn Morris and Dylan William summarised the financial outcomes, in 2009/10, of the RAE.

The figures presented in the supplementary report indicated that the number of staff submitted by institutions to RAE 2008 was 17% smaller than in 2001, UK-wide. In 2009/10, on the background of a decrease by £3.4 million of the total funding available to education research, the likely financial outcome for institutions seemed varied,

with positive outcomes for some institutions (typically post-1992 universities and others with relatively small research groupings) and less welcome results for others.

However, even before the 2010 CSR, the landscape of RAE 2008 "winners" and "losers" was actually far more complex than the post-2009 figures alone on the distribution of mainstream QR funding among education departments might have suggested. Recent decisions by the Funding Councils (2011) to shift funding away from 2\* and towards 3\* and 4\* make this landscape even more challenging.

**"This issue of *RI* focuses on challenges and opportunities for education research arising from the financial and policy context."**

#### Positioning

The RAE was perceived by respondents to the review as a key mechanism through which institutions defined their benchmarks of performance and positioned themselves in the wider HE landscape. RAE-informed positioning encompassed:

- *institutional* positioning, i.e. the position of a department within an HEI as a whole, and its contribution to the general standing of the HEI; and
- *disciplinary* positioning, comprising *intradisciplinary* positioning (the position of a department in relation to other education departments in the country), and *cross-disciplinary* positioning (the position of education as a field among other social science disciplines).

#### Focus and quality of research

Participants from most of the departments studied reported some form of influence of RAE 2008 (and of anticipations of the REF) on the focus of their department's research and on the ways in which it had been reflected in department-level research organisation and administration. Areas of reported "impacts" included:

- revising the research groups structure of a department;
- more intense and more formalised internal and external scrutiny of research activity, research outputs, and group and individual research performance;
- perceived pressure on individuals and teams to change the substantive or methodological focus of their research, to match departmental RAE strategies.

## Resource policies and sustainability of research activity

The interviews revealed three main kinds of perceived “impacts” of the RAE 2008 on sustainable research environments in departments.

- for one group, of newcomers to QR funding (or its equivalent in the different countries of the UK), particularly some of the post-1992 institutions, RAE 2008's immediate outcome was a contribution to “putting research on the agenda for the first time”, and to enabling strategic thinking around future development;
- in another group, of relative newcomers (a mix of pre- and post-1992s, some of which may have had QR funding prior to 2001, but not since), RAE 2008 had been seen as proof that research could be a lucrative, self-sustaining activity, rather than a drain on other types of institutional resources. HEI-level resource allocation policies were seen as crucial in determining the outcome of the RAE processes for this particular group of departments;
- a third group included those departments that had received funding both before and after 2001 and had used it to consolidate a core infrastructure to support a relatively large volume of research activity. Respondents from these institutions expressed strong concern about the sustainability of these developments following the outcomes of RAE 2008.

Participants in all types of institutions pointed out the strategic and motivational benefits of transparent allocation of resources at HEI level and the risks and shortcomings of too-tight performance management systems.

## Ethos of scholarship

Many departments studied had adopted, or been subject to, a top-down approach to preparing their RAE 2008 submission. With hindsight, respondents commented on how this approach may have affected negatively the development of a cohesive, harmonious climate in their department.

The succession of RAEs over the past twenty years was seen by participants as having brought to the surface many underlying tensions in academic work in education, as well as structural mismatches between existent career paths in education departments and existent rewards and resource allocation structures. For example, an area of particular tension was that between teaching and research-active staff (and between teaching and research as activities, with pedagogic research being relegated to an uncertain space in-between).

## Overall impacts of research assessment on education research

Respondents expressed concern about the potential impacts of RAE 2008 on education research as a field (including elaborate arguments about the perceived relative “4-ness” of different disciplines in RAE 2008). The most negative judgements expressed were those on the role of RAE 2008 in supporting positive climates in education departments across the board and in enabling improvements in teaching. The least negative judgements were of the fairness of Education Sub-Panel's judgements across different types of research and in all home countries.

## Contextualisation

RAE 2008 was seen by respondents as only one among a set of (not necessarily convergent) current and historical factors that shaped activity in education departments. These included the national research agendas and funding policies, the cumulative impact of successive RAEs and Research Council policies, the financial downturn, and the status of education research in UK HE in general.

In addition, the influences of the RAE and of similar mechanisms on individual researchers and on departments were mediated through several “layers” of institutional structures, be they HEI-internal (individual staff, teams, departments, schools, central HEI structures) or external (competitors, partners, users and beneficiaries, national and international structures). Throughout the processes leading to RAE 2008, each of these “layers” had occasioned different interpretations of the stakes, standards and likely implications of the exercise. The ways in which these interpretations had been articulated and communicated between the different “layers” at all stages of the process were seen by respondents as a crucial factor in determining the direction of RAE 2008 impacts in their department.

Finally, any influences that RAE 2008 may have had were multi-directional and depending on a range of factors. For example, in the case of the respondents to the RAE 2008 review, the direction and strength of individual perceptions of the influence of RAE 2008 varied with: management strategies at institutional and departmental level; the outcomes of RAE 2008 relative to RAE 2001, for each department (including whether the reputational and financial outcomes had been congruent or not); and the historical type of institution. The direction of perceived impacts reported also varied with individual respondents' status relative to RAE 2008 processes.

## This issue of *RI*

This issue of *RI* reflects on the findings of the BERA/UCET review but focuses on their implications for the state of educational research in the current financial and policy context, nationally and internationally.

In his article, Mike Younger reflects on institutional responses to the current financial and policy context for higher education in England. Pieces by John Furlong, David Bridges, Ralf Kenna and Bertrand Berche set the findings about RAE 2008 against the wider backgrounds of, respectively, neoliberalism, Europeanization, and “critical mass” for research in different disciplines. John Furlong discusses the extent to which new public management principles have been internalised by academic communities and asks, “what have the consequences of these processes been for what it means to be a successful educational researcher today?”. David Bridges's scrutiny of European initiatives for the assessment of education research prompts him to ask “whose power over the production of research is enhanced and whose is diminished by different approaches to research quality assessment?”. Ralph Kenna and Bertrand Berche analyse the relative size of research groups in education and in other disciplines and derive practical implications for the future of educational research.

Lesley Saunders and Warwick Mansell address, from two distinct perspectives, the issue of research “impact” in education. Lesley Saunders questions the value of the term “impact” as a “curious borrowing from Newtonian physics” and suggests alternative metaphors drawing on humanities' powerful ways of evoking human agency. Warwick Mansell's piece recounts the history and contribution of the Assessment Reform Group, initially a BERA initiative. Finally, an opinion piece by Chris Holligan warns against perpetuating – via assessment technologies – what he describes as the “existent hegemony attached to research status” in UK universities.

Together, these pieces are powerful reminders of the complexities and contestation surrounding decisions about judging and financing research in education. They also raise important questions about future experimentation with research assessment, in the UK and elsewhere.

## Whatever happened to joined up policy? Immediate challenges to teacher education and educational research in England



**Mike Younger**, University of Cambridge

The last six months have been challenging times in university faculties of education, and I would like to share some personal reflections based around three events.

1. One event has been much reported: November 2010, the Department for Education publishes *The Importance of Teaching: The Schools White Paper, 2010*.

As we know well, the White Paper promises a fundamental review of teacher education, including:

- a commitment to raise the quality of new entrants to the profession, allied to the expansion of *Teach First* to attract more high quality graduates into the profession;
- an insistence that teacher education must focus sharply on classroom practice and key teaching skills;
- an assertion of the importance of school-centred teacher education, with the development of Teaching Schools, underpinned by the claim that 'too little teacher training takes place on the job';
- a proposal for a *Troops to Teachers* programme;
- the development of University Training Schools: laboratory schools on the Finnish model, where such schools 'act as a link between teaching and the latest academic research and innovation'.

2. The second event: February 2011, an Ofsted inspection of a leading faculty of education, with an outstanding national and international reputation for teacher education and for educational research.

92% of the Initial Teacher Education and Training (ITET) trainees have a 1st or 2:1 degree, and over 90% of them are in a teaching post within six months of gaining their PGCE qualification. Ofsted inspections since 1997 – whatever their changing focus – have consistently rated the University's provision as outstanding, and the 2011 report (Ofsted, February, 2011) commends both the Early Years/Primary and the Secondary courses for 'the outstanding well-established and collegial partnerships based on... high expectations, a pursuit of excellence and a detailed and up-to-date knowledge and understanding of the theory and practice of teaching'. The inspectors note that 'the University's national and international reputation and its place at the forefront of many educational initiatives ensures high quality training immersed in research and current practice enabling trainees to become critically reflective practitioners and employable classroom teachers'. There are, the report concludes, 'no recommendations for improvement', a ringing endorsement of all that this particular ITET partnerships with schools has achieved.

3. The third event: the same first week of February, 2011, the Higher Education Funding Council for England announces government cuts of 9.5% to Universities Teaching, Research and Infrastructure Funding, thereby effectively eliminating totally all mainstream QR funding for all institutional research which is rated as less than 3.

The University, whose ITET provision has just been rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted, and 65% of whose education research outputs from 50 staff were rated 3\* or 4\* in the 2008 RAE, responds by instigating a full resource review of Education. Then comes the final salvo, as teacher training allocations emerge from the (not quite defunct) Training and Development Agency. Despite the fact that Ofsted recently reported that nationally 'there were more outstanding initial teacher education courses delivered by higher education-led partnerships than by school-centred initial teacher training partnerships and employment-based routes' (Ofsted, November 2010), secondary training places allocated to higher education providers are cut, whilst Employment-based Initial Teacher Training (EBITT) numbers (for teachers trained entirely in school-centred courses) are maintained at their previous levels. Thus for this high quality institution, with a consistently excellent record of teaching and research, secondary ITET allocations were reduced by 19%, with student numbers in Art, Music, Religious Studies and Design/Technology dropping by between 30% and 50%.

### So why should this be of concern to BERA?

Since the early 1990s, leading Education faculties have been in the vanguard of movements to build strong teacher-education partnerships with schools and local education authorities which have fostered a well-developed range of school- and classroom-based research, focusing on schooling, curriculum and pedagogy. These partnerships have extended intellectually rigorous study of teaching to Postgraduate Professional Development (PPD) and Masters levels, and strengthened practice-based educational research, both for school leaders and for early career teachers. Much of this work has sought to develop more participatory models of learning and leadership for learning, whether by students or teachers, at classroom, school and systemic levels.

In these partnerships, the aim has been to stimulate serious epistemological debate about schooling, the curriculum and pedagogy, to enable the development of a vision which is not focused simply on the concerns of the present, acknowledging and perpetuating a closed system of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, but rather ensures that those newly entering the profession are open to innovation and adaptation which is *not* centrally prescribed. This gives opportunity, of course, for those working with beginning teachers – whether University lecturers or school colleagues – to develop a new form of professional identity, which depends not merely on existing knowledge, but on the capacity to generate new professional knowledge, and which constructs all of us as learners, as well as experts, and which generates research dialogue.

We have not always been successful. Indeed, the 2008 RAE highlighted the fact that research on teacher education was less strongly represented than in previous RAEs, and suggested that research in fields such as classroom learning and effective teaching in subject disciplines, assessment and pastoral care were under-represented in relation to their key importance to national education systems. We are still missing opportunities to reconnect our teaching

and our research, and to ensure that the rhetoric we engage in (developing a model of teacher education which is *not* functionalist and competency-based teacher training, and which challenges the current emphasis on compliance and instrumentalism) is actually represented in the reality of the courses we teach. We do not yet deliver all that we ought.

In one respect, then, the rhetoric of *The Importance of Teaching* is to be commended.

- Extensive classroom practice is already a key part of the current partnership provision, and gives trainees extensive opportunities to develop their practical teaching skills, under the guidance of experienced school mentors; indeed such has been so for at least the last twenty years!
- At the Faculty from which I write, we have consistently used our own resources to run an *Inspiring the Best* internship scheme, introducing Cambridge Maths, Science and Engineering undergraduates to classroom teaching in comprehensive schools. So we are delighted that the White Paper wishes to produce stronger incentives for the best graduates to come into teaching, especially in the shortage subjects.
- We have little quarrel with many of the priorities identified, and we have already existing research *and* teaching links with many of the countries identified as exemplifying international good practice. Specifically, we are supporting curriculum reform in Singapore, improving curriculum and teacher quality in Hong Kong, evaluating Charter Schools in the United States, developing school-university research partnerships with Finland.

But the implicit judgements set out in the White Paper about higher education-led partnerships are unreal and unsubstantiated. The notion that ITET partnerships led by HEIs do not focus sharply on classroom practice, do *not* teach key skills, such as teaching early reading and mathematics, managing behaviour and focusing on pupils' Special Educational Needs, and are deficient in school experience, shows an appalling ignorance of all that has been central to successful teacher training and reported so enthusiastically by successful government ministers and Ofsted Inspectors over the last two decades.

Crucially, however, it is the confusion over the role of research within the *The Importance of Teaching* which generates significant concern both amongst schools and HEIs. We look forward to the opportunity to explore in more detail with Mr Gove and his advisors the concept of University Training Schools. We are encouraged by the White Paper's references to Finland and Charter Schools in the United States, but it is a grave misconception to assume that current partnership models in the UK already do not embody these close links between classroom-based practice, teaching and academic research.

In our current partnership in Cambridge, for example, working with state primary and secondary schools, which are neither Teaching Schools nor University Training Schools, we have a vibrant model that roots the knowledge, skills and understanding of teachers in a strong research basis, both theoretical and applied. Researchers and teachers together bring about a critical understanding of the relationships between teaching, learning, curriculum and assessment at local, national and international level. We address the government agenda of making teaching "an evidence-based profession", whilst giving participants the opportunity to lay down the foundation for, and gain access to, career-long professional learning and future school leadership. We assume that Mr Gove is anxious to sustain and

support the further development of such high quality partnerships, rather than to destroy them, because they encapsulate his aim of identifying and developing synergies between practice and research.

We are not confident, however, and we are worried that what is proposed for the future funding and shape of initial teacher training will reduce the capacity and the motivation of leading universities to support and sustain high quality partnerships, thus undermining the essential relationships between research and practice that define educational research.

## Forthcoming BERA one-day conference

### Policy and Practice in Education: Implications for Black and Minority Ethnic Academics

The British Educational Research Association is pleased to announce a one-day conference for Black and Minority Ethnic early career researchers in education.

**Date:** May 25th 2011

**Time:** 10.00 - 17.00

**Venue:** Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, London, WC1H 0AL ([www.ioe.ac.uk](http://www.ioe.ac.uk))

#### Conference outline

##### Keynote presentation

Professor Ann Phoenix, Institute of Education, London

**Workshops** (run twice to enable delegates to benefit from different sessions)

- Researching 'race' and ethnicity: (Speaker TBC)
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## The Impact of the RAE - A Broader View?



**John Furlong,**  
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One of the most powerful aspects of being a researcher is that we experience it as a highly personal affair. But while this personal dimension is very important, in reality it presents only one side of the ‘truth’ about the shaping of educational research. Our study presents another very different side of that picture – it is about the shaping of educational research at an institutional and indeed at a personal level by the RAE.

One of the things we learned is that we cannot really understand the impact of the RAE without taking into account the changing nature of universities and the position of Education within them. The impact of the RAE is itself influenced by a range of different factors, for example: the marketisation of higher education that has come about as a consequence of globalisation and neo-liberalism; the development of new public management in our universities. And these changes have in turn had consequences for research identities – what it means to be an educational researcher today.

“One of the consequences of the growing power of globalisation has been that all universities now find themselves having to become neo-liberal institutions.”

### Marketisation of Higher Education

One of the consequences of the growing power of globalisation has been that all universities now find themselves having to become neo-liberal institutions. The rapid rise in student numbers combined with reduced government funding for teaching and research has encouraged all universities to become much more entrepreneurial in their search for resources; in that process of marketisation, ‘differentiation’ becomes central. And research has increasingly come to be privileged for its contribution to that differentiation process, building university ‘brands’ which enable them to compete in a range of different markets.

Our research confirmed that the ways in which Education’s RAE outturn was interpreted varied considerably between institutions depending on their institutional ‘vision’ or market position. Colleagues in Russell Group and 1994 Group universities reported very strong, centrally driven pressure on them with

tough decisions being made about who was entered and who was not – as one Director of Research put it, ‘There was blood on the carpet’. Although we are not aware that, as a result of the RAE, any university department of education was actually threatened with closure, there was talk in some institutions of ‘disinvestment’ in terms of future research capacity. As one respondent explained,

It’s all focused on the mission and deciding, and with scarce resources, where are you going to put your money? Where are you gonna make your mark?

The experience in the majority of ‘post 2000’ universities was very different; here even modest success was seen as a bonus. For example, in one new university there was evidence that the relatively modest success of the Education group had encouraged the institution as a whole to reconsider its strategic vision, to behave in the words of one respondent ‘like a proper university’.

What is clear from our evidence is how much the RAE and its outcomes are now bound up with the marketisation of higher education. Although such processes were more developed in some institutions than others, throughout our evidence we found examples of institutional positioning, institutional differentiation and internal jockeying for scarce resources.

### New Public Management

A second significant feature of the modern university is new public management (NPM). Marketisation and the growing emphasis on income generation has put strong pressures on institutions to change their approach to management. But to what extent did the 2008 RAE further develop and embed the principles of NPM?

One of the core principles of NPM is the move towards more explicit and measurable standards of performance, as against trust in professional standards

and professional expertise. And after 20 years of the RAE, our evidence showed that the RAE has indeed established its legitimacy as a form of accountability in research. Whatever other reservations our respondents had about the outcome of the 2008 RAE, they almost universally considered that the judgements of the panel were fair as far as their own institutions were concerned. The measurement of research performance via the RAE is now widely accepted as legitimate within the Education community.

But in helping to change management structures and processes, the RAE did more than that. For example, every one of the university departments we visited demonstrated that they were now seen by their universities as a separate 'player' in a competitive field – institutionally accountable for their own successes and failures. This was despite the fact that, in some institutions, what constituted the subject of 'Education' was immensely diverse. Another feature of NPM concerns the move towards more private sector methods of management, with increased differentiation of staff, separation of functions, and hierarchies of accountability. Such an approach is potentially very different from the 'flat' management structures based on individual autonomy and collegiality that have characterised universities in the past. Here we found a complex picture with some institutions having moved further down this route than others, although again there was a clear direction of travel.

NPM also implies more 'hands-on management' with senior managers wielding substantial discretionary power. In many of the institutions we visited, we learned of the centralised processes that had been developed in undertaking preparation for the RAE; it was a hierarchical process with colleagues required to offer up their work for scrutiny.

In all these ways, therefore, the RAE was significantly involved in the further embedding of the principles of new public management in our universities. Of course, the RAE was not the only factor that was driving change, but it was always part of the institutional mix, speeding up and legitimating change – demonstrating to senior university colleagues both the importance of research in their university's mission and the necessity of increased managerialism.

### Research Identities

But what have the consequences of these processes been for what it means to be a successful educational researcher today? We identified at least four different types of research identity – each influenced by the RAE. Firstly there were the 'research elite' – an increasingly mobile group of researchers who, because of the RAE, were able to command different contracts, different financial packages and different working conditions.

A second category was the career researchers, those who constructed their professional identities primarily through research, even though they were frequently on a short term contract. The expansion of research funding over the last RAE period meant that there was a growing number of this type of academic, in a wide range of institutions, often working on projects led by other, senior colleagues.

Then there were those who were not entered for the RAE, those whose professional identity was primarily concerned with teaching. In many institutions, as a direct result of the RAE the status of these staff, despite their importance in teaching and administration, had diminished.

But the largest group were those who had to maintain a profile as a teacher as well as a researcher – identities that, particularly in the

field of Education, are sometimes experienced as inimical. This is not only because of the pressure of teaching loads – particularly acute for those involved in initial teacher education – it is also because of the nature of knowledge. Teacher educators are surrounded by a 'discourse of relevance' – a discourse that is very different from that which underpins the majority of educational research. That is not to say that there are not some forms of education research that are themselves closely related to the world of practice but, here again, we learned of struggles to have this sort of research legitimated as relevant for the RAE.

“Teacher educators are surrounded by a ‘discourse of relevance’ – a discourse that is very different from that which underpins the majority of educational research.”

### Conclusion

Where does this leave us in understanding the impacts of the 2008 RAE in Education? It is clear that, over the course of the last two decades, the RAE has become part of the drive for the competitive marketisation of higher education; it has also served further to embed the principles of new public management. Increased levels of accountability, differentiation, hierarchal 'hands on' management processes, all of these were visible across the system as a whole, despite important differences at the local level.

Finally, we have learned how, often in subtle ways, the RAE is impacting on what it means to be an Education academic today. For the successful, how it encourages the development of research focused identity; how it marginalises other, more 'rounded' academic identities; how it fosters a certain approach to knowledge and how that is often experienced as existing in tension with the forms of knowledge that are dominant in teacher education.

Although none of these processes was actually started by the 2008 RAE, it is clear that the exercise was profoundly influential in furthering them. But perhaps one of the most important findings from our study was that the Education Panel was seen as having done its job properly; its judgements were seen as fair. That finding demonstrates just how far assessment and accountability are now internalised in our research community.

*Note:* A full version of this paper will appear in a special edition of *Power and Education* in 2011.

## Research Quality Assessment: The importance of the unintended consequences



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It was commendable for UCET and BERA to sponsor an investigation of the impacts of the 2008 RAE on departments of education (Oancea, 2010)<sup>1</sup>, not least because it is extremely important in any assessment initiative to examine not just the intended outcomes, but also the unintended consequences. This is especially the case when assessment is linked to hugely significant structures of rewards and punishments, because such systems are extremely powerful drivers of behaviour. Research quality assessment impacts on not only who gets funded to do research, but what research gets into the public domain and even what will count as research.

This being the case, we need to examine carefully the impacts on behaviour which different forms of research quality assessment have. Never mind the impact of research, what is the impact of different forms of research quality assessment?

The UCET/BERA Report observes at least some of the effects of the RAE and I will not elaborate on these here. But the same concerns about the possible unintended consequences of different modes of assessment have motivated my own rather sceptical participation on behalf of BERA on the EU Framework 7 European Educational Research Quality Indicators project (EERQI – see [www.eerqi.eu](http://www.eerqi.eu)) – a project aimed at developing new approaches to research quality assessment in Europe. EERQI has developed some interesting tools for searching educational texts in seven European languages and identifying certain bibliometric characteristics, but as we approach the final months of the project I remain sceptical that it has anything to contribute to research quality assessment (see Bridges 2009). The question is ‘what are the foreseeable or demonstrable unintended consequences of employing this mode of assessment, however innocent its intentions?’

### Intrinsic and extrinsic indicators

The EERQI project attaches significance to the distinction between what it refers to as intrinsic and extrinsic indicators of quality.

*Intrinsic* indicators (I would prefer to call them criteria) are integral to the quality of a research text. For example, *if* quality consists (among other things) in the coherence and consecutiveness of the argument, or in the validity of the methods employed, then evidence of coherence, consecutiveness or validity would be intrinsic indicators of the quality of

the writing. EERQI followed the RAE in recognising rigour, originality and significance as intrinsic indicators of research quality and added style and integrity.

Extrinsic indicators (e.g. place of publication) are those which do not inherently constitute elements of the quality of the piece, but which have a positive correlation with judgements based upon such elements. They predict (with a greater or lesser level of confidence) the quality which can independently be discerned in the text. EERQI has talked about this in terms of a ‘probabilistic’ relation with quality.

There are at least two interconnected reasons why this distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic indicators might matter.

First, the EERQI project is committed to developing assessment tools which contribute to the improvement of the quality of educational research, so it is important that we develop assessment tools which encourage behaviour that is focussed on intrinsic characteristics of quality, rather than related to it in only highly contingent circumstances (the extrinsic characteristics). It does nothing to improve quality if everyone seeks to get published in a small selection of journals identified as having a probabilistic relation with quality and it may even be damaging to the health of the subject. By contrast, if everyone seeks to demonstrate the validity of their research (because this is what is being assessed), this would be a behavioural effect which, by definition, we might welcome.

Secondly, there is the caution provided by ‘Goodhart’s Law’ (1983). In brief it predicts that when something shifts from being a measure to a target, then it ceases to be a measure. What start off as perhaps empirically grounded (extrinsic) indicators of quality rapidly become targets that people seek to achieve – and this distorts behaviour in a way which invalidates the original evidence of an association, or at least the grounds for believing that the extrinsic indicator has a probabilistic relationship with intrinsic features of quality.

### Short cuts to quality assessment?

EERQI’s research question is: are there external, in particular machine-discernible, features of a research text which serve as a reliable proxy for an assessment (e.g. through peer review) focussed on the internal indicators of quality? Can we in this way find some short cuts to research quality assessment?

### Place of publication: the international journal

One option, which has proved attractive to, for example, the French and Australian authorities (for the purpose of institutional quality assessment) and many universities (for the purposes of assessing the quality of an individual scholar's work) has been the use of 'publication in an international journal' as a proxy for quality. In France, the Agence de l'Évaluation de la Recherche et de l'Enseignement Supérieur (AERES), following strong criticism of the EU sponsored European Research Index for the Humanities, drew up a list of research journals in five categories, which it claims indicates differences in kind rather than a simple hierarchy. However, since it distinguishes between international, regional, national and local journals, nobody is very convinced by the argument that this is non-hierarchical.

The French hierarchy of journals is dominated by Francophone publications but for the most part across Europe quality becomes translated as international quality, which in turn gets operationalised as 'published in an English language international journal' – with distorting effects on academic life and behaviour.

To take one context: the University of Ghent is one of many that use the location of publication as an indicator of the quality of staff publications in appointments and promotion. It awards 12 times the credit for a publication in an international journal as it gives for publication in a journal published in Dutch or Flemish. Can this be right? Paul Smeyers and Bas Levering (2000) wrote about the distortions and injustices which result from the pressure on Dutch-speaking academics to publish in English. This pressure puts at risk national journals. It also makes it less likely that the published research will impact on, or be accessible to, people who rely on, or prefer, their native language.

### Citation indices

From a continental European point of view, citation indices carry similar problems, since all those available rest substantially on English language publications. From a UK point of view, this is less of a problem, though the arbitrariness of the selection of journals for inclusion in the indices and the variations between indices remain major limitations. HEFCE has given a well balanced consideration to the possibility of using citation as a basis of quality assessment in the next Research Excellence Framework, but concluded that none of the existing indices are sufficiently robust across the system for it to recommend quality assessment on this basis (HEFCE, 2009).

Again, we are faced with the problem which is attached to the use of any such extrinsic indicator of quality (if indeed it is an indicator of quality): that it encourages behaviour designed to maximise the impact on the extrinsic indicator, rather than maximising the quality of the research writing. Thus we already observe:

- publishers holding briefing meetings for journal editors to tell them how they can maximise the citation counts of papers published in their journal (it helps, for example, to publish all issues of your journal as early as possible in the year to give it the maximum opportunity to achieve citation);
- authors being encouraged to cite as frequently as possible articles published in the same journal (to improve the journal's impact factor and hence gain more credit for authors published in the journal);
- university research managers running staff workshops on how to get cited; and
- academics collaborating in so-called 'citation clubs' to promote each others' work.

Note that none of this activity is actually focussed on the improvement of the quality of the research – which is apparently a very roundabout and uncertain way of improving your citation count!

### Features of research texts

One of the other approaches being trialled by EERQI attempts to focus on machine-discernible features of research text. It is proposed to distinguish texts which feature e.g. a synopsis or abstract, references or a bibliography, and/or footnotes. Apart from the fact that there are overwhelming difficulties in relying on such indicators, even the presence of all these features would indicate little more than that the piece has the style of a research article. Such spurious indicators are hardly worth taking more seriously than Jim Dillon's (1986) piece which demonstrated conclusively a high correlation between quality, as judged independently, and the presence of a colon in the title of a paper.

### Quality assessment: in whose hands?

There is a significant political dimension to different approaches to research quality assessment. One always has to answer the question: 'whose power over the production of research is enhanced and whose is diminished by different approaches to research quality assessment?'. Crudely, the more emphasis is placed on peer review, the more control is left in the hands of the academic community; the more emphasis is placed on citation, the more power lies in the hands of major international publishing interests; the further one can move towards machine readable text and/or machine operable assessment tools, the more one offers research quality assessment into the hands of the bureaucrats. If I am right in arguing that quality assessment is a powerful driver of academic behaviour, then those who control the mode of assessment also control the pattern of academic behaviour.

These considerations warn of caution and circumspection in any kind of research quality assessment. It should always come with a warning: Research quality assessment can serious damage the health of the research community.

*Note:* An expanded version of this paper will be published in *Power and Education* in 2011.

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## Critical Mass of Education Research Groups

**Dr Ralph Kenna (top)**, University of Coventry  
**Professor Bertrand Berche**, University of Nancy, France



The notion of critical mass in research is one that has been around for a long time. It has been loosely described as some kind of threshold group size above which research standards significantly improve. The extended notion that benefit accrues through increasing scale lies behind calls for greater concentration of resources into a small number of research institutions. However, despite analyses of citation counts, no evidence for such a threshold has been found and critical mass has never been measured – until now.

In two recent publications (Kenna and Berche, 2010 a,b), a new mathematical model has been developed which explains how research quality depends on research-group structure and in particular on size. This model treats research groups as complex systems, in which interactions between individuals play crucial roles. It predicts that there are, in fact, two critical masses in research, the values of which are discipline dependent. The model shows that, as per the Matthew effect of cumulative advantage, research quality is, on average, linearly dependent on group size, but only up to a limit termed the “upper critical mass”. Beyond this limit, the dependency of quality on quantity reduces significantly, a phenomenon known as the Ringelmann effect. The upper critical mass is interpreted as the average maximum number of colleagues with whom a given individual in a research group can meaningfully interact. Once the group exceeds this size, it tends to fragment into sub-groups and research quality no longer improves significantly with increasing size.

There is also a “lower critical mass”, which more closely corresponds to the traditional notion, although it is not a threshold. This is the minimum size a team should achieve for it to be viable in the long term. The critical masses for a multitude of academic disciplines have been calculated through statistical analyses of RAE 2008. They reflect the nature of the subject area, being relatively low for solitary research disciplines and higher for collaborative ones. Indeed, for pure mathematics, where publications are frequently single-authored, the lower critical mass is less than or about 2, while for some branches of the computer sciences it is about 25. For education research the value is  $15 \pm 3$ . The upper critical masses are about twice these values.

Classifying teams smaller than the lower critical mass as “small”, teams bigger than the upper critical mass as “large”, and those in between as “medium”, the model further predicts that, to maximise overall

research strength in a given discipline, support for medium teams should be prioritised to help them attain the upper critical mass. On the other hand, small teams should strive to achieve lower-criticality.

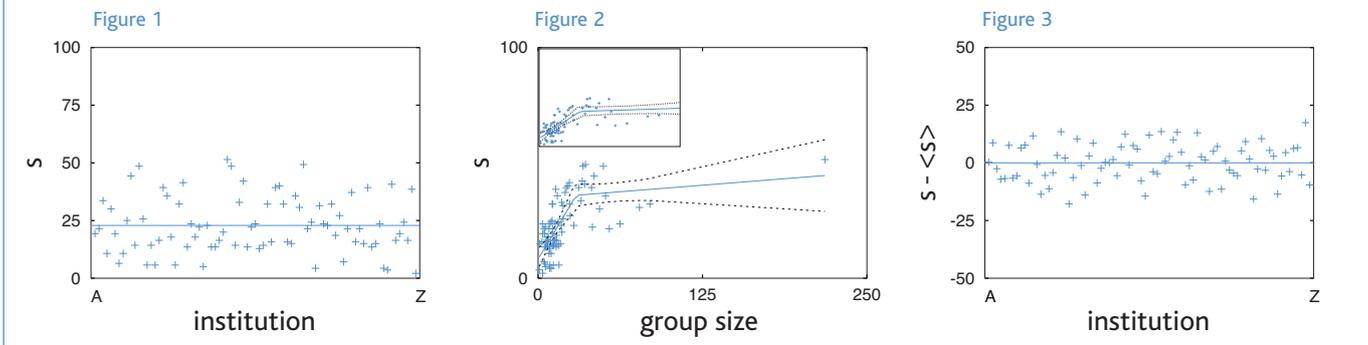
In education research at RAE 2008, there were 81 submissions equivalent to 1,696 full-time research staff. Groups ranged from 1 to 218 in size. RAE results take the form of a profile, with research classified as 4\*, 3\*, 2\*, 1\* or unclassified. The post-RAE funding formula used by HEFCE, which rewarded 4\* and 3\* research seven and three times more than 2\* research, can be used to measure quality.

“In education research at RAE 2008, there were 81 submissions equivalent to 1,696 full-time research staff. Groups ranged from 1 to 218 in size.”

Fig.1 contains a plot of the quality scores (denoted  $s$ ) for institutes which submitted in the Education unit of assessment (UOA), arranged alphabetically from Aberdeen on the left to York St John University on the right. While the theoretical maximum quality value is 100 (corresponding to all research being classified as 4\*), no group achieved such a score, with the maximum being about half this value. The solid line represents the average quality of the 81 research groups and a naive interpretation is that those lying above this line are performing well while those below it are underperforming. Indeed, Fig.1 forms the basis on which institutions are ranked post RAE. Such rankings are of enormous importance for universities’ publicity and marketing teams as they are eagerly scrutinised by students and other potential clients.

However, the naive interpretation based on Fig.1 is fundamentally flawed: it does not compare like with like because it does not take size into account. The

Research quality scores (denoted  $s$ ) in education, (1) plotted against an alphabetically arranged list of institutions (2) as a function of group size and (3) normalised to the size-dependent expectation values  $\langle s \rangle$ .



The state of UK research in education and some other areas given by proportions of groups classified as small, medium and large, and the percentage of researchers in such small, medium and large groups.

Discipline	Lower critical mass	Small groups		Medium groups		Large groups	
		Groups	Researchers	Groups	Researchers	Groups	Researchers
Education	15	59%	24%	20%	19%	21%	57%
Sociology	7	5%	1%	26%	12%	69%	87%
Politics	13	25%	10%	44%	36%	31%	54%
Business/management	24	41%	16%	37%	35%	22%	49%
Statistics	9	27%	11%	53%	50%	20%	39%

importance of quantity is evidenced in Fig.2, where quality scores are plotted against the size of research groups. The correlation between quality and quantity is obvious. The data are well described by a linear fit up to the upper critical mass of  $29 \pm 5$ , beyond which the quality levels plateau. The fit (also plotted) represents a kind of local average or expected quality value for groups of given size. The insert is a close-up of the region around the critical mass.

In the Education UOA, 59% of groups were under the lower critical mass (see table). These contained 24% of the discipline’s researchers. The average quality score for these small groups, most of whom belong to universities in the Million+ and University Alliance representation bodies for modern universities, was 16. All universities belonging to the GuildHE representation body for education-focused universities were also small in size. 20% of groups were medium-sized and, with an average quality score of 27, held 19% of the total number of researchers. The 21% of research groups classified as large contained 57% of the total number of researchers. Mostly these were Russell Group universities, with some belonging to the 1994 Group of research intensive universities. The average quality score for large groups was 37.

A superior interpretation of the results of RAE 2008 in the Education UOA is given in Fig.3. There the differences between actual and expected quality scores are plotted. The figure is on the same scale as Fig.1 to facilitate comparison. According to this interpretation, research groups above the line are performing better than the expectation for groups of their size and vice versa for groups below the line. The superiority of the model is illustrated by the tighter bunching of the data around the line in Fig.3 compared to Fig.1. Indeed, the range and standard deviation for Fig.3 are about 2/3 of the corresponding values for Fig.1.

So what lessons for the future can be drawn for research in education? Firstly, there is no threshold group size beyond which research quality significantly improves. On the contrary, there is a measurable upper critical mass, beyond which increase in size does not lead to increase in research quality. Secondly, having established that a community of researchers is greater than the sum of its parts, it is clear that facilitation of communication should form an important management policy in academia. For example, while modern managerial experiments such as distance working or “hotdesking” may be reasonably employed in certain industries, these would have a negative effect for researchers, for whom proximate location of individual office space to facilitate spontaneous two-way interaction is important. Finally, the education research sector in the UK is healthy with the majority of researchers belonging to large groups, where their scope for interaction is maximised. There is a large number of small groups, however, corresponding to about a quarter of workers, and these need to strive to achieve critical mass of 15 researchers. The best way to maximise the strength of the sector would be to grow the medium-sized groups to at least about 29 staff.

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## Road crashes and war-mongering: why the notion of 'impact' in research is wrong

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This article (based on a presentation given as part of the BERA 2010 Conference panel discussion) begins with some musings on why the concept of 'impact' in research may be mistaken and misleading – because *impact* is the wrong metaphor for the way people develop and refine the knowledge and values they bring with them into their professional decision-making. It goes on to give two examples of research with which I was involved and briefly to describe how they influenced developments in education policy and pedagogic practice in ways which were more subtle and diffuse than the notion of 'impact' allows us to propose.

I'm certainly not the first to question the 'impact of impact', as Professor Michael Fielding put it in his thought-provoking paper seven years ago (Fielding, 2003), in which he pondered this curious borrowing from Newtonian physics. 'Impact' is a useful term in mechanics; it describes 'a high force or shock applied over a short time period when two or more bodies collide'. Such collisions typically result in the deformation of one or both bodies or, even more likely, in fracture or rupture, and sooner or later in mechanical failure, which is why so much R & D in engineering is concerned with improving *resistance* to impact. 'Impact' is causally determined and therefore predictable and measurable. Human agency is involved only (if at all) in setting one or other of the bodies moving – after which you may think it would be wise to move yourself out of the way...

### 'Impact'

How, why and when this term has come to be so universally used in the social sciences to mean practical value, policy significance and so forth would make an instructive dissertation (and possibly already has – in which case, do let me know!). For now, I'll just remark that 'impact' is one of the cluster of physical-mechanical metaphors we often find ourselves using when we talk about research as 'evidence': it goes along with 'the accumulation of data', 'amassing a body of evidence', 'building the

knowledge base'... It also fits into that other metaphorical world of aims, targets and strategies, the whole militaristic, adrenalin-producing linguistic.

Now that 'impact' is officially written into the funding protocols and assessment apparatus for educational research, one question I think we should be asking is, what is the *theory of mind* that lies behind the notion of 'impact' used in this way?

“‘Impact’ is one of the cluster of physical-mechanical metaphors we often find ourselves using when we talk about research as ‘evidence’.”

Are there other words we could use, alternative terms and metaphors? One word we might choose, often do use in fact, is 'influence': a more heterogeneous word than impact, its etymology is from the Latin *influer*, to flow into. Intriguingly, the early modern Italian word for influence, 'influenza', takes us back in time to a belief system in which distant events and processes in the cosmos at large flow into and affect events and processes in the microcosm of human bodies and souls – though in ways that remained unpredictable and ungovernable despite the best efforts of astrologers.

### 'Influence'

We might do well to recall what Carol Weiss wrote nearly twenty years ago:

It takes an extraordinary concatenation of circumstances for research to influence policy directly... [rather] research helps people reconsider issues, it helps them think differently, it helps them re-conceptualise what the problem is and how prevalent it is, it helps them discard some old assumptions, it punctures old myths (Weiss, 1991).

So, although 'influence' is also etymologically part of the physical metaphor – flow or action at a distance – it might still be a better word than 'impact' to describe the varied and unpredictable ways that research changes the way people think, how they understand, explore and reflect on their life-worlds. For instance, we talk about the influences that have helped shape the work of a poet or painter or film-maker, of a school of philosophy or a political movement; we find it fascinating to try to trace these influences, though we shy away from imagining that they could explain everything about the symphonies, the novels, the politics – even if we were able to identify all the likely 'flowings into' them of family, education, the work of other composers and writers, life events, illnesses... So, at the very least, using the term 'influence' would not *predispose* us to think in terms of predictability and measurability, let alone road crashes...

This word-play is just play, of course – though I am also completely serious about the power of words and metaphors. Words are ideas, and the idea of 'impact' in research is in danger of preventing us from exploring and understanding the human – that is, the social and psychological and political and economic – processes that we must understand in order to participate in, and intervene on, them. Metaphors have a bearing on how researchers approach the task of making their epistemic efforts known and felt in the world.

Perhaps we should be looking to the humanities at least as much as to Newtonian science to provide us with sufficiently nuanced discourses and analogies? A good novel can tell us a great deal of what we need to know about human agency, its power struggles and wiles and defeats and satisfactions. Novels are embedded theories of mind – human agency is always utterly implicated. So can we make room for what Nussbaum (2010) calls the 'narrative imagination' – the creation of doorways and mirrors, liminal imaginings, language that is both intelligent and sensuous, subtle and vivid; fuzzy logic? Silences, even...

Now to my two very brief examples: the first was a project designed and led by Professor Bridget Somekh (see Somekh and Saunders 2007) to investigate and strengthen e-learning in schools, using action research in a small number of case-study schools. The purpose of the project was to inform the policy advice being developed by the General Teaching Council England on teaching and learning. As the GTC's policy adviser for research, I convened a project Advisory Group of people from key national agencies – BECTA (British Educational Communications and Technology Agency), NCSL (National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services), QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority), TDA (Training and Development Agency for Schools – now scheduled for abolition or severe budget/operational reduction) – to try to secure, not impact, so much as a wider policy engagement with the ideas, processes and emerging discoveries of the work. So, for example, the project's working principles were taken up in BECTA's own research strategy and integrated into the NCSL's Senior Leaders and ICT programme. What was interesting here was that project 'dissemination' proceeded through seminars, draft working papers, face-to-face conversations and online discussions rather than through the performative production of a text, the 'final report'. What happened can be construed as a continual re-invention, rather than a closing-down, of the research, and the work subsequently came to have an unforeseen relevance in critically examining the then government's agenda for 'personalised learning'.

The second example comes from a project in which a small group of practitioners, led and facilitated by Dr Mark Rickinson, were

attempting to use the outcomes of an academic research review on the teaching of sustainable development to explore and improve their practice (see Rickinson et al. 2003 – one of the suite of 'user reviews' published by BERA). From my point of view, as well as noticing how much the teachers had to struggle not just with unfamiliar language, but with the inconclusiveness of some of the 'evidence', I also watched the researcher having to yield his expert and specialist ownership of the work in order to create the right kind of space for teachers to articulate and develop their rather different meanings out of it. All of us working with teachers know how intense, messy and demanding a process this is, and how it needs to be understood, again not in terms of impact, but as personal and professional *change* – and resourced accordingly. What is particularly remarkable is that the metaphors teachers have used to talk about the significance of research for their practice are absolutely not those of mere mechanics – for example: 'an island waiting to be discovered', 'a beehive pollinating the whole countryside', 'a beacon lighting up the landscape' (see Sharp et al. 2005).

To conclude: the kind of knowledge that is capable of influencing the way people think, is comfortable with real-life contingency and provisionality, and makes room for the contribution of the ethical and creative imagination as well as of rational cognition – that is, the kind of knowledge typically created by educational research – is not capturable in the mechanical discourse which currently prevails. Educational research needs to reclaim what Engeström (2007) has called its capacity to 'evoke and support human agency'.

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## A farewell to the Assessment Reform Group

*21 years of investigation, argument and influence*

Warwick Mansell, abridged by Sarah Dodd

It was a small group of academics, embarking on research projects for which they were not paid. But can members of the Assessment Reform Group lay claim to having had more influence on what has gone on in UK classrooms in recent years than almost any of their education research peers? Or are their achievements better seen in the context of a policy-making process which seems, in England at least, still to produce assessment reforms which can run contrary to some of the ideals of the group?

This is the intriguing debate around the ARG as it winds up after more than two decades operating at the often fiercely-contested meeting point of research, policy-making and classroom practice.

A 'farewell' event organised by the Cambridge Assessment Network at Downing College, Cambridge in June 2010 offered the ARG's friends and supporters plenty of opportunity to consider its history, influence and legacy, and the broader question of what makes for successful assessment reform.

### History

With the 1988 Education Reform Act promising a wholesale and at the time highly controversial reorganisation of state schooling, the British Educational Research Association (BERA) launched four 'task forces' of academics to investigate. One of these was the Assessment Policy Task Group (APTG).

John Elliott, president of BERA in 1989, later described the group's aims as: "To facilitate dialogue between educational researchers...civil servants and other policy makers on major issues of policy. To this end they were tasked to review the relevant research evidence and marshal it to inform the discussions."

The group's first major work was accordingly a review of existing research on assessment. This uncovered much evidence that assessment could act both as a force for good and as an inhibitor of learning and motivation, a tension that is widely seen to exist to this day.

Two influential seminars – one in Edinburgh and one in Bristol – followed in 1990 and then fed into the group's first big publication, in 1992: *Policy Issues in National Assessment*.

In 1992, the group had identified six main areas of work, one of which was to help parents and the public understand the issues the group was investigating around assessment. A book focusing on another aspect – moderation and how teacher assessment could be improved – called *Enhancing Quality in Assessment* was published in 1994.



Then the group embarked on another of the six areas: 'using assessment to support learning'. Aware of the amount of work likely to be needed, the group invited two academics who were then outsiders to the APTG – Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam of King's College, London – to investigate.

The pair's research synthesised results from 250 assessment studies to suggest that schools could improve their results by one GCSE grade per pupil per subject if they introduced formative assessment, now also known as Assessment for Learning. Gains were later demonstrated in a study in six schools in Medway and Oxfordshire. A publication, *Inside the Black Box*, and a host of spin-off documents, made it one of the most influential British education studies in recent decades, attracting worldwide interest.

In 1997, there was an organisational change as BERA decided it would replace its task groups with 'Special Interest Groups'. The idea was that these would discuss particular areas of research interest. However, the concept seemed ill-suited to the much more active nature of the group's work in commissioning and carrying out its own research, so the group broke away to become, from 1998, the Assessment Reform Group. This was to exist independently of BERA, funded by a small grant from the Nuffield Foundation.

Soon afterwards, the group produced a document called *Assessment for Learning (AfL)*, which took further the group's work on formative assessment. Then, in 2001–2, the group produced its definitive statement on AfL (see box), which has been widely quoted throughout the world.

### The 'iconic' definition of Assessment for Learning

Assessment for Learning is the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there.

Source: *Assessment for Learning: 10 principles*, ARG 2002.

Between 2002 and 2006, work carried out by the group led to the four publications: *Testing Motivation and Learning*; *Assessment and Learning*, edited by John Gardner; *The Role of Teachers in the Assessment of Learning*; and a book by Wynne Harlen, *Assessment of Learning*. Another Nuffield-funded project followed – Analysis and Review of Innovations in Assessment – which looked at how change in assessment was attempted in projects initiated by higher education and local authorities, leading to a book, *Developing Teacher Assessment*, published in 2010.



**Back (L-R):** Paul Newton, Richard Daugherty, Jo-Anne Baird, John Gardner.  
**Front (L-R):** Kathryn Ecclestone, Mary James, Gordon Stobart, Caroline Gipps, Patricia Broadfoot, Wynne Harlen, Paul Black.  
**ARG members not present are:** Judy Sebba, Dylan William, Louise Hayward.

These, however, were to prove to be among the group's last works. In March 2008 ARG members decided that, after 20 years, the time had come to 'retire'. A commentary booklet – *Assessment in Schools: Fit for Purpose?* – summing up the group's ideas for how policy makers should promote quality in assessment, followed in 2009.

### What makes for effective influence on policy?

The Cambridge event in June 2010 was entitled 'Successful Assessment Reform', and, for one section, contributors were asked to reflect on why the group had had such an impact.

Anthony Tomei, of the Nuffield Foundation, said that part of its secret had been the make-up of the group itself, with several members serving for long periods, but with the group regularly welcoming newcomers. Mr Tomei also said that the foundation had not sought to monitor the group's output in quantitative terms, as has become commonplace in academia through, for example, the Research Assessment Exercise.

Richard Daugherty said the success of publications such as *Inside the Black Box* showed how research could lead to changes in classroom practice by building a response directly from the teaching profession, which then might provoke a reaction from policy makers, rather than always needing to convince policy makers first.

The group also appears to have benefited from what was often a very close relationship to the policy-making process. It made a point of engaging directly with policy makers, through invited seminars and by allowing people such as Judy Sebba, then of the Department for Education and Skills, and Gordon Stobart and Paul Newton – who both worked for the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority – to become members.

### Challenges facing assessment

Presentations by ARG members suggested that, despite the group's achievements, assessment in schools was often still far from unproblematic.

Paul Black said that the impact of Assessment for Learning had been "uneven", partly because of the difficulty many teachers feel in changing their practice from expecting a pupil quickly to produce the 'right answer' when questioned towards interactions which could facilitate deeper understanding.

In Mary James's view, the concern was that, in England especially, many of the problems identified by the early 1990s as facing

assessment persisted. "Is this an area where we are having great difficulties getting our message across? Someone is clearly going to have to grapple with these issues again," she said.

Paul Newton argued that recent examples, such as the hastily-convened attempt to pilot 'single level tests' as possible replacements for conventional national curriculum assessment from 2007, showed how policy makers may still not have worked out the correct timeframe for trialling innovations in assessment.

And for Jo-Anne Baird, there was a continuing need to build better relationships with policy makers. The previous government's immediate rejection in autumn 2009 of the Cambridge Primary Review's highly detailed findings on primary education, she said, might have been counter-productive to policy makers, who might have benefited from engaging more fully with it.

### Debate on the extent of the ARG's influence

The Cambridge event was convened mainly to mark the achievements of the APTG/ARG. However, there was some questioning of the extent to which policy-making, particularly in England, had changed as a result of the group's efforts.

Summing up, Tim Oates, Group Director of Assessment Research & Development for Cambridge Assessment, said there were reasons for "pessimism and optimism."

The "collective intellectual weight" of the ARG had, he said, helped it to build an important and continuing legacy: "a body of analysis and tangible influence on policy makers and the research community in the UK and beyond".

Tim Oates also said that the Labour government's use of the term 'Assessment for Learning' in England had highlighted some difficulties. The term had been "misappropriated" by policy makers for use in initiatives ranging from the 'Assessment for Learning' strategy itself to reforms such as single level testing and the Assessing Pupil Progress teacher assessment scheme which were not true AfL. Aside from the influence of Assessment for Learning in England, however, there remain many aspects of UK education which have been affected by ARG research.

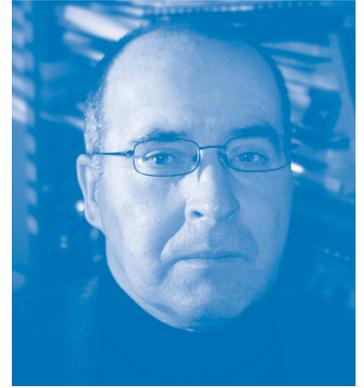
The international reach is probably summed up by the fact that three ARG members spoke at a conference in New Zealand in 2009 at which assessment experts from Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, continental Europe, Australia and New Zealand discussed Assessment for Learning.

There is little doubt, then, that the group's legacy is large. As a new set of assessment policies begins to form under a new government, there seemed consensus that the ARG's work will need to be taken forward by a new generation. Whoever takes up the baton will clearly have quite an act to follow.

The full text of this report, plus a complete listing of ARG publications, can be found on the Cambridge Assessment Network website: <http://www.canetwork.org.uk/arg/>.

## Simulacra and simulations: Research futures

Chris Holligan, University of the West of Scotland



### Shopping academia

*“Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact ...the America surrounding it is no longer real, but of the order of the hyper real” (Baudrillard, 1988, p.172).*

Baudrillard (1988, p.167) argues, like Foucault, that “the real is produced from miniaturized units, from matrices, memory banks and command models – with these it can be reproduced”. Some argue that research looms larger in our mass systems of higher education than it ever did in past eras, a claim which undoubtedly applies to hysteria regarding quantifiable individual output metrics. The RAE and its successor, the REF, are simulations of the real, the research object. That simulated object is constructed from government-devised audit cultures. It becomes an imaginary object re-packaged through a labyrinthine network of bureaucratic templates, then eulogized to seduce consumers. The use of audit’s metric devices to simulate a deeper culture of enquiry entails that aspects of that culture must feature as elements in the simulation. The reality named is self-referring. Like Disneyland, the RAE is presented for consumption as imaginary, in order to make us believe “that the rest is real” and “to feign to have what one hasn’t. One implies a presence, the other an absence” (Baudrillard, 1988).

“Our attitude of confident disdain towards the value of keeping things secret, whether because they are felt to be precious or for reasons of superstition, suggests a belief system which is intolerant of the other.”

The Browne Report (2010) means that funding will follow the deliberations of individual students about universities and courses which must ‘please’ or go under as businesses. Reputational management will intensify to capture their interest. To maintain market share, academic research may function to drive the practicalities of product development (modules), as well as being input to image and industry partnering.

Baudrillard’s ideas characterize the hyper-reality that will rapidly emerge in, and ‘become’, academia, the research future. The Browne Report funding ideologies may usher in a qualitatively different university entity: ‘new’ post-1992 universities whose culture is not strongly located in hallowed classical traditions of learning of the kind associated with ‘old’ universities may be advantaged. To survive in the Browne cash-nexus order, ‘old’ universities may have to become what Baudrillard calls Disneyland, a hyper-real of their received historical imaginary. As markets homogenize products, previously distinct providers will transmogrify, growing alike.

### The tyranny of transparency

Our everyday lives revolve around the taken-for-granted. Wittgenstein’s account of what he calls “forms of life” demonstrates the power of tradition in making us believe that the culturally contingent is an immutable fact of nature. It may take decades for academics to catch up with the transformations affecting their current working environment. Our attitude of confident disdain towards the value of keeping things secret, whether because they are felt to be precious or for reasons of superstition, suggests a belief system which is intolerant of the other. This pathological drive to know and communicate in publicly verifiable ways is now enshrined in what is demanded from the research work undertaken in contemporary academia, which is oriented less towards truth seeking, more towards the optimal efficiency of the post-industrial state. Seivers (2008) refers to corporate “reform” regimes bearing down upon academia as things manifesting psychotic anxieties and magic thinking, which challenge space for the life of the mind. Our assumptive universe is that the constant communicability of knowledge is a priority, an absolutely desirable normative condition. This transparency project will cause more deception as it tries to force creativity into a tick-box cosmology producing the one-dimensional man described by Herbert Marcuse.

The institutionally accorded identity of academics and their bureaucratic status will inevitably hinge around the extent and perceived quality of their published

CVs listing their journal output and other ‘esteem indicators’. Without technocratic exemplars making public biographical track record the modern academic is ‘dead wood’, and those whom many revere as brilliantly insightful in the past will no longer figure in this modernity by dint of limited or no publications. In the absence of publications, individual academics cease to exist, not having caused themselves to exist within the prescriptive universe of the official ontology by publishing (in the ‘right places’ and with appropriate volume). They are in every sense past their sell-by-date. The putative evaluation of university research ‘excellence’ through the mechanism of the forthcoming Research Evaluation Framework will lead, as do other national research audits, to hidden hegemonies of league table ranking. The term ‘research power’ occurs on the website of a Russell Group university department to characterize the ‘output’ of academic staff. That power will be enabling of income generation being a driver of simulations of the real.

The specific techniques deployed to assess and audit are justified by government departments on the grounds of transparency which is argued as being necessary for ensuring the putative fairness of funding allocations. These official auditing practices are high stakes; jobs and departments suffer if the rating achieved is deemed to be inadequate. This mode of surveillance found in advanced capitalist nation states may not identify scientific excellence nor, despite it being typically stated, facilitate the ideal pedagogic environment for student learning. We are all too familiar with the glib phrase ‘research-led’ teaching. Strathern (2000) argues that such a hubristic project of causing visibility in the apparent success of producing knowledge, through research activity exercises, manifests a tyrannous hegemony over its object. Moreover, what is in due course made visible may not be worth having anyway, hence the urgency of the need to foster a hyper-real of research, a type of commodity brand to refer back to what is absent.

If transparency mantras are failing to capture those meanings and social relations within the psychological architecture of organizations which are of genuinely immense value to students and colleagues, then surely we ought to be curing ourselves of this obsession with them. As material phenomena they have been known to destroy lives, damage personal wellbeing, and not least give rise to books and papers which may not be worth even picking up. As this damage is taking place, and yet the machinery of audit shows no sign of disappearing, it behooves us to better understand the possible alternative agendas behind the systemic machinations of audit culture. Following Baudrillard, research audit is used as a heuristic device to shape all aspects of post-industrial societies into a single template in order to facilitate the needs of the social orders upon whose life forms consumption is critical. Consumption is a self-justifying end contributing to build the greater efficiency of the contemporary industrial order. The latter will inevitably play an increasingly powerful function in shaping universities as market psychology and its values subsume the landscape of higher education. Future generations of academics may look in dismay at their ancestors wondering why they held particular values, a love of truth, learning and passion for intellectual engagement, such will be the depth of the change in the nature of the workforce employed in higher education.

### Simulacra and simulations

Culture, and that includes the culture of institutionalized academic research, is, Baudrillard argues, dominated by simulations. The formulaic communication of reputation and research league table

“Just as the ‘news’ is arguably manufactured by the media in order that it has a thing to narrate, so too, do providers construct their research environments to convey that news to consumers.”

status are exemplars of simulation. Objects and discourses have no foundational base, or firm origin out-with their simulation. For Baudrillard, “hyper-reality” is the new linguistic condition of society. Consumption is the chief basis of the modern social order. The advertising codes adopted to convey ‘research power’ will serve to differentiate providers into a series. As shoppers, students may become increasingly less curious about research undertaken by a university or person and more concerned about its semiological status across the ‘mall’. As consumers, the students after all seek to transfer the meaning status of that research to themselves in order to differentiate themselves positively from other individual consumers. They want their CV to be the best. Baudrillard (1988) extends his theory of commodity culture into a vision of a world where simulacra construct our perception of external reality. Those simulacra become reality itself, with the simulation undermining any contrast with the real. Nor is the simulation a fiction, as it presents the imaginary as the real and the real is absorbed within itself. This society Baudrillard calls “hyper-reality”, a world of self-referential signs, higher education’s imaginaries in the pages of tables setting out status in, for instance, the Times Higher Education magazine. Just as the ‘news’ is arguably manufactured by the media in order that it has a thing to narrate, so too, do providers construct their research environments to convey that news to consumers. If the existing hegemony attached to research status continues, then, with the passage of time, that hyper-reality may grow to become so deeply embedded in the institutional cultures of higher education that the mental life of the individual researcher may take on the psychotic aspects which Seivers’ (2008) dystopian framing of the university sets out. Given the transient nature of human life, such suffering, thankfully, will be merely temporary as subsequent generations will deliver research impact without giving it even a second thought. I obey therefore I am.

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## BERA MEETING OF MINDS FELLOWSHIP REPORT

# The Media and Racial Justice

**Nicola Rollock**, Institute of Education, London



Aware that the academy places importance not only on publishing widely but also on establishing a credible public profile, I applied for a BERA Meeting of Minds fellowship with the aim of increasing my familiarity with the media. I was interested in how news items are identified and what this might mean for my area of specialism, race equality. Specifically, I was interested in a) gaining familiarity with how an idea (or “pitch”) is conceived, how it develops and the style and format of broadcasts and interviews; b) identifying a range of ways to convey to a wider public beyond the academic community complex issues of race, racism, identity and whiteness; and finally, c) identifying a set of strategies to handle common, difficult or antagonistic questions about race.

The Fellowship included a programme of work with a mentor (Dr Robert Beckford, Warwick University) and a three-day visit to BBC Scotland working alongside their documentaries division, (with support from Marcus Ryder, Head of Current Affairs, BBC Scotland). This was complemented by my attendance at a media training event, part of the career development programme provided for Institute of Education staff, which took place during the course of the fellowship.

The activities I undertook during the Fellowship were varied and facilitated considerable insight into which items made the news and why they might appeal to a mainstream audience. During my time at BBC Scotland I worked with the Panorama team as they developed and edited the items for that night’s edition and later was able to watch it being broadcast live. I also observed Scotland’s equivalent of BBC Radio 4’s Today programme, *Good Morning Scotland*, as it was being aired. I came to understand that there are three key points which are central to developing any idea for a documentary or potential news item: the hook; case studies; and simplicity.

### 1 Hook

This is based on addressing a series of questions such as: *What is it that will draw the readers’ or audience’s attention? Who is the victim with whom we ought to have sympathy? Who is audience to whom we are appealing?*

### 2 Case studies, examples or killer facts

These help personalise the argument being made via the hook. It is important that the case studies or examples in question are not abstract; the audience must be able to relate to and understand the case studies.

### 3 Simplicity

The story should advance one simple concept that is easy to grasp. A series of complex ideas is less likely to gain the audience’s attention.

While I found this set of guidelines helpful, I was also troubled by them in terms of how I might use them with regard to race equality. First, racism is complex and it is precisely as a result of its complex subtlety that it often goes unnoticed. This seems to sit in direct

tension with the simplicity aspect of the guidelines. Second, to reduce racism to dichotomous notions of good/bad or victim/perpetrator, as the notion of case studies would suggest, oversimplifies and trivialises the ways in which racial power is enacted in society. In adhering to such guidelines, racism could only ever be understood in the type of extreme forms.

My discomfort about the media as a vehicle for conveying nuanced forms of racism was reinforced when I attended a Diversity meeting convened by one of the major television channels. There were a number of aspects to this meeting that appeared to contradict its primary objective to engage with and listen to the views of producers, directors and writers from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds. For example, attendees were requested at the start of the meeting to offer only constructive questions and comments rather than complaints to the Head of Programmes (HoP) who would be joining us later. This immediately set up a hierarchical set of boundaries and restrictions around a process during which open communication ought to have been central. When the HoP arrived he began by assuring us of his commitment to diversity, despite, he explained, being a white middle class male, and then proceeded to outline forthcoming funding allocations and the need to ensure that “diversity” was better evidenced across a range of television programmes. This seemed to take the form of a tick box exercise where programme A was said to “need a Black family”, programme B “needed a disabled person” with no actual consideration of whether this would be realistic in terms of the geographical filming location of the programme, its existing storyline and demographic, or indeed whether the inclusion of “diversity” figures was contributing to or challenging existing stereotypes. This proposed random casting of “diversity” actors seemed not to advance equality but instead mounted to actions that were reductive and tokenistic. In many ways such experiences, and there were many, left me with a greater unease than when I started the Fellowship about the potential of the media to convey academic findings about race equality.

Following a radio interview with the BBC to promote his documentary “God Bless Barack Obama”, Robert Beckford and I discussed how the interview might have been different, had the producer lacked a critical understanding of racial politics, or if the subject of the interview had been about racism. We agreed that the following would be necessary in such situations:

- 1 The ability to find a range of creative ways to express and reiterate the same message.
- 2 A clear understanding of the documentary’s audience.
- 3 Ways of making “race” interesting to a white mainstream audience. Robert Beckford suggested that it was important to include a general “line” to appeal to “middle England” that might pertain, for example, to religion or security.

While I can comprehend the importance of these guiding principles, there are similarities to those I mentioned earlier, which

# conference

also leave me uncomfortable. While incorporating a hook such as “security” provides a lens through which to discuss race, it also perversely marginalises race, obfuscating its prevalence in the daily experiences of many racially minoritised groups in ways that often, at least not in isolation, have little to do with issues of national security or religion.

The Meeting of Minds Fellowship has certainly allowed me the opportunity to spend time gaining a better understanding of which items make the news and demystified some of the behind-the-scenes aspects of what is involved when developing a programme. This was both interesting and very useful. However, I remain concerned both about the ways in which issues of “diversity” appear to be understood and consequently addressed, and about the overall method of determining newsworthiness in a way that increases genuine public understanding of race equality.

**Acknowledgements:** I am indebted to Gregg Beratan for his comments on an earlier version of this report. I would also like to thank Robert Beckford and Marcus Ryder for their time, energy and commitment throughout the course of this Fellowship. My thanks must also extend to the staff at BBC Scotland who so generously took time to explain their work to me and of course to BERA for the award of the Fellowship.

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## BERA 2011 Conference News



**Danny Durant**, Conference Committee Chair

BERA 2011 will be held at the Institute of Education, London (IoE) and will open with the ECR from 09.00 on Tuesday 6th September and end at 16.30 on Thursday 8th September 2011.

Since *RI 113* was published, I am delighted to announce that we have a third keynote presentation. Professor Simon Marginson (Professor of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne) has accepted our invitation to speak at BERA 2011. He will address the issue of the future of Higher Education in the UK and thus, in some respects, in the world as a whole, and specifically its public good remit. In the light of UK Government policy, this topic will be of considerable interest to most delegates. Therefore, one of our plenary panel sessions will be devoted to the future of Higher Education and this topic promises to provide a lively debate.

The other panel session will be based on the theme of Accountability (also the theme of Baroness Onora O'Neill's keynote presentation). However this session will not follow the usual Panel Session format. Instead we will only have two main speakers who, in shorter than usual presentations, will give a brief synopsis of their papers and the majority of the time will be allocated for debate. The audience will have the opportunity to read the papers before the session as they will be published on the conference website and, space permitting, in the Programme. Professor Stephen Gorard (University of Birmingham) has agreed to be part of the Panel.

Our Early Career Researcher (ECR) Conference will open with a presentation by Professor Mike Wallace entitled 'ESRC Support for

Researcher Development: What's in it for you?'. Professor Wallace is Professor of Public Management at Cardiff Business School.

As Chair of the Conference Committee, I am contacted, from time to time, by a student (usually) asking for a copy of a paper that was presented at a particular Conference. Typically the email is along the lines of:

*Hello,*

*I am currently studying for a [DEGREE], and was wondering if it was possible to get hold of [AUTHOR]'s paper presented at your conference in [YEAR], entitled [TITLE]. I can't find it online and would be very grateful if you help me.*

*Many thanks'*

I have to respond that we do not keep copies of papers presented at Conference, but that we do ask delegates to submit their paper to Education-line (<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/bei/index.html>) and point the student in that direction. However not many papers from our Conferences are being submitted and the results of this are a lack of history of our conferences and a literature search that is more difficult than it might be. BERA Council is considering what potential solutions there might be to the conundrum of creating and maintaining an archive of conference proceedings. I appreciate some of the complexity here with journal publishers and demands from institutions that papers are lodged locally. However, in the final analysis, it is an issue for individual authors and any suggestions from BERA members about conference proceedings will be welcome.

The IoE is located in the city centre of London. I'd like to remind delegates that, in a change from previous conferences, accommodation is not part of the conference registration process. A number of hotels that are within walking distance of the Institute of Education are listed on the conference website. London has a wide choice of accommodation ranging from economy hotels to deluxe five-star properties and there are many hotels to suit every budget and delegates should make their own accommodation arrangements. If you are new to London and wish to do some sightseeing, go to the Visit London website [www.visitlondon.com](http://www.visitlondon.com) for local tourist Information.

Members can keep up-to-date with our conference plans and the full programme for BERA2011 can be found on the conference website (<http://beraconference.co.uk/>)

## BERA 2011 Conference Debate: Accountability and the Value of School Effectiveness Research

One of the two plenary panels at BERA 2011 will consist of a debate around school effectiveness. The papers by Daniel Muijs and colleagues and by Stephen Gorard, included in this issue of *RI*, offer a taste of the forthcoming debate. The audience will have the opportunity to read fuller papers before the session as they will be published on the conference website and, space permitting, in the Conference Programme. Please check the conference website for details (<http://beraconference.co.uk/>). The article "Serious doubts about school effectiveness" by Stephen Gorard was originally published in the *British Educational Research Journal*, Volume 36, issue 5, pages 745 – 766, October 2010 by Routledge, Taylor & Francis. Please visit the BERJ website to download the full text.

The papers below represent the views of the authors and not those of *RI* or BERA.

## The Value of Educational Effectiveness Research – a Response to Recent Criticism

**L to R: Daniel Muijs** (University of Southampton), **Tony Kelly** (University of Southampton), **Pam Sammons** (University of Oxford), **David Reynolds** (University of Southampton) and **Chris Chapman** (University of Manchester)



School effectiveness research has been subject to various criticisms over the years. While some of these have been justified, others have conflated the 'science' with the use to which it is put by policy makers, or have made unjustified methodological claims against the field. The latest is Stephen Gorard's BERJ paper '*Serious doubts about school effectiveness*' (36:5, 745-66) to which we now feel compelled to reply.

We are saddened by the content and tone of some of the wilder allegations in what purports to be a scientific paper. The paper suggests that 'most people in England do not understand Contextual Value Added (CVA) but a high proportion of those who do stand to gain from its use' (p.757). This is an extraordinary way of presenting the application of professional expertise, and though it is an accusation that could be levelled against any policy-related academic specialism, for some reason it is only applied to the school effectiveness community. The paper also argues that 'academics are largely excluded from understanding and so criticising school effectiveness work' (p.759), but how can this be given the number of critiques of educational effectiveness research (EER) that have been published, including the present paper? If we have sought to exclude people, we have clearly been unsuccessful!

The problem with many of these critiques, of which the BERJ paper is a good example, is that they tend to rely on an outdated and limited appreciation of the field. As we see it, the paper has two fundamental flaws: it lacks a current and proper understanding of the field; and the analysis presented is flawed by some basic misinterpretations.

### Misunderstanding the field

'*Serious doubts about school effectiveness*' demonstrates a lack of understanding of the key issues associated with researching effectiveness, and a narrow and Anglo-centric confusion of a field of research with policy. A key contention of the paper is that EER focuses solely on pupil attainment and ignores other important educational goals. This is not the case. Over the last decade educational effectiveness researchers have studied a wide range of issues, including well-being and capability, self-concept, attitudes to school, mental health, physical health and problem behaviour. It is true that the majority of studies still focus on attainment, but this is not unreasonable as attainment remains a key outcome (and aim) of schooling because of its established relationship to pupils' future life chances, and it is the outcome most susceptible to school effects.

The paper also argues that school level variance is so small as to be dwarfed by error variance, but again this betrays a lack of familiarity with the field. Not only is the school effect practically (as well as statistically) significant, but decades of research have shown that it is related to a consistent set of factors influencing pupil outcomes. So to equate the school effect with error, as the paper does, is simply wrong. It ignores clear evidence that individual pupil background measures account for only a very small percentage of the total variance in pupil attainment. Taken together, the range of background factors (age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, free school meals eligibility etc.) typically accounts for only 11% (approx.) of the variance in mathematics attainment scores and 20% (approx.) of reading scores. The proportion of total variance in student attainment attributable to the school is larger than that attributable to pupil gender and similar to that attributable to FSM. In addition, the *cumulative* impact of school effects on educational outcomes and later life chances should not be underestimated.

The paper then criticises the whole EER field on the basis of one specific and fairly recent, but now redundant, UK government policy statistic; viz. CVA. This very ‘domestic’ perspective fails to reflect the international dimension of effectiveness research, most of which takes place outside the UK. In fact, even in England, when CVA was part of government policy, it was rarely used in EER, with researchers typically preferring to construct their own measures. So it is surprising that the bulk of the *BERJ* paper deals with the technical weaknesses of this single English policy measure, though even here serious mistakes and inaccuracies undermine the author’s argument.

### Misunderstanding measurement

The author claims his paper shows, ‘through consideration of initial and propagated error that school effectiveness results cannot be relied upon’ and that ‘by considering the residual difference between predicted and obtained scores’ educational effectiveness calculations can be shown to be ‘disproportionately made up of relative error’ (p.745). There are several mistakes in respect of this claim.

The paper correctly defines absolute measurement error as the difference between the actual and the measured, and Relative Error (RE) as the ratio of ‘error’ to ‘actual’ (or as an approximation, to ‘measured’). It considers the case of having two *actual* numbers  $X$  and  $Y$ , measured as  $x$  and  $y$ , with errors  $\epsilon_x$  and  $\epsilon_y$  respectively, so that when one attempts to calculate the *actual* difference  $X-Y$ , one gets the *measured* difference,  $x-y$ . The upper bound (U) is  $X-Y+(\epsilon_x+\epsilon_y)$  and the lower bound (L) is  $X-Y-(\epsilon_x+\epsilon_y)$ . The paper claims that calculating CVA suffers from a similar ‘propagation’ and gives the following example to illustrate the point [notation added]. Imagine a pupil with an actual attainment at Key Stage 4 ( $A_{KS4}$ ) of 100, with a predicted attainment ( $P_{KS4}$ ) of 99 and therefore a ‘measured’ CVA ( $M_{CVA}$ ) of +1. Proceeding on the assumption that a 10% error obtains throughout, the author infers that  $P_{KS4}$  therefore lies somewhere between 89.1 and 108.9 so that the actual CVA ( $A_{CVA}$ ) for the pupil lies between  $(110-89.1=20.9)$  and  $(90-108.9=18.9)$ , which the author regards as a relative error of 39.8.

The scale of the miscalculation is beguiling, but it is a mistake for several reasons. Firstly, it treats the predicted score ( $P_{KS4}$ ) as an *attempted* measurement, which it is not. RE cannot be applied to predictions in the way the paper suggests. Secondly, even if  $P_{KS4}$  were a measurement, 39.8 would still not represent the RE on  $M_{CVA}$ . It represents the absolute difference,  $|U-L| = 2(\epsilon_x+\epsilon_y)$ , between *two* error limits, not the difference between ‘an actual’ and ‘a measured’. Ironically, the paper’s claim (p.754) that the RE ‘in the calculated answer of +1 is a massive 3,980%’, is a better example of compounding an error than the example the author took to illustrate his thesis! He initially confuses a predicted score with a measured one, and then compounds the mistake by calculating the resulting RE as a (%) fraction of  $M_{CVA}$ , essentially using a nonsensical formula ( $[RE = 2(\epsilon_x+\epsilon_y)/(A-M)]$ ) to calculate his controversial ‘answer’. This is mischievous. Whether it is treating errors as measurements and calculating a ‘relative error of the errors’ using the wrong denominator, or treating the difference  $A-P$  as itself an error and using a random formula, it doesn’t make any sense. The more prosaic interpretation is that if  $M_{CVA}=1$ , and  $A_{KS4}=100$  has a potential error of 10%, and  $P_{KS4} = 99$  as before, then  $A_{CVA}$  can be as low as -9 or as high as +11, which represents the range for the RE ( $\pm 10\%$ ) at full confidence. Educational effectiveness is aware of this and has constantly and consistently advised policy makers and practitioners accordingly. If newspapers, politicians and recalcitrant academics ignore these codicils, it is hardly the fault of EER.

Of course we acknowledge that there are weaknesses in the measurement and conceptualisation of many studies, but this is primarily a technical problem with a technical solution. Measurement science is improving steadily, in particular through theoretical and practical approaches like Generalisability Theory and Item Response Theory (IRT). In the first instance, therefore, we need to develop our measures using appropriate modelling of error terms, as is possible with IRT and other latent variable models, and within EER multilevel models. In view of the author’s criticisms regarding the size of the school effect, it is particularly interesting to note that with the multilevel IRT model, *more* variance is explained at both pupil and school level, the effects of the predictors are *higher*, and variance at the school level as a percentage of total variance *increases* strongly. Therefore, while poor measurement is an important issue in all research, as a field we are making significant progress in addressing the issue.

### Conclusion

Clearly academics are right to point to weaknesses in educational research, but critics should not overstate the perceived inaccuracies. This is not to say that better measures are not desirable but that better measurement, more sophisticated techniques and a more nuanced appreciation are required. It is peculiar that the author frequently stresses the need for simplicity while there is strong evidence of the importance of clustering and the value of multilevel modelling. We doubt that researchers in other disciplines would seek to apply simple but limited techniques of analysis when sophisticated and more appropriate ones were available.

It is also unsettling to note how so many critics misunderstand the general field of EER. To ignore the strong emphasis given within it to the study of both school and classroom processes (which in turn relate to between- and within-school variation) in promoting better educational outcomes for pupils seems almost irrational as it has been a major strand of EER for many years. We respectfully suggest that critics study the many literature reviews on school and teacher effectiveness and the way they have informed both new approaches to school improvement and new theoretical models. We share the author’s concern in promoting reliable and valid research and measurement, and papers such as ‘*Serious doubts about school effectiveness*’ are useful in opening up discussion of some important issues, but we feel the paper does a disservice to such discussions in the way it uses the English CVA indicator as a stick to beat an entire international field of methodologically robust research which has produced scientific evidence of school effects in a wide range of contexts for more than three decades. We hope that as an academic community we can continue to develop, refine and discuss our methods in a constructive fashion, and contribute to a better understanding of the influences that shape pupil outcomes.

## References

We are happy to provide readers with a full bibliography for the findings cited in this article, which due to length restrictions we could not include. Please email

**D.Muijs@soton.ac.uk** or **A.Kelly@soton.ac.uk** for a fully referenced version, or contact any of the authors.



## Doubts about School Effectiveness Exacerbated – by attempted justification

Stephen Gorard, University of Birmingham

My paper was an argument based on real evidence, using CVA (Contextual Value Added) as an extended case study. The Muijs et al. response to my BERJ paper largely just restates claims for school effectiveness work. They do not, apparently, dispute the case study itself, except in one respect. I use an imaginary pupil with a predicted score of 99, an observed score of 100, and all measures having a 10% relative error (a very conservative estimate). This 10% initial error leads to a maximum relative error of many 1000% in the CVA residual. Muijs et al. dispute this, and say instead:

The more prosaic interpretation is that if  $M_{CVA}=1$ , and  $A_{KS4}=100$  has a potential error of 10%, and  $P_{KS4} = 99$  as before, then  $A_{CVA}$  can be as low as -9 or as high as +11, which represents the range for the RE ( $\pm 10\%$ ) at full confidence.

Apparently, they do not understand what a maximum relative error is, and therefore miss the enormity of the problem. The relative error is in proportion to the number in which the error occurs. So the full range for the calculated CVA in their example is 20 (from -9 to +11). This is 20 times, or 2,000% of, the CVA score of 1. I argue in my paper that the relative error range is actually 3,980%, because I allow the predicted score to be in error. The predicted score comes from a complex calculation done by the Department for Education based on a battery of real measures for each pupil, such as prior attainment, each containing substantial errors. Therefore any score predicted from them will also contain an error component. A 3,980% relative error range makes the CVA score meaningless for any practical purpose. But assume that only the observed score is in error by 10%. This approximately halves the propagated error range to 2,000%, but makes no practical difference. The CVA remains meaningless.

Any social science measurement with anything like 1000% relative error must not be used in practice, however distressing this may be to those with a vested interest in the school effectiveness industry. It does not matter exactly how many 1000% the error in the calculated CVA would be, for this can only ever be estimated. Perhaps Muijs et al. hope that the complexity of their 'added notation' will hinder the more general readership of *RI* sufficiently to convey the idea that a 1000+% relative error is somehow acceptable, in a calculation that influences real lives. Is this what they mean by a 'more nuanced interpretation'? They accuse me of conflating the science and its poor use, but they have never explained this huge scale of error to their users, if indeed they are truly aware of it themselves. Even in their response they try to convey the impression that an initial 10% error leads to an outcome error of similar magnitude – and so retain the illusion that their school effects are "practically (as well as statistically) significant".

My paper focused on CVA for good reasons. CVA was at time of writing a key part of how OFSTED and others judged the quality of schools in England – it mattered therefore in a way that other academic models of SE (school effectiveness) do not. And it was based on what was then termed PLASC/NPD (Pupil Level Annual Schools Census/National Pupil Database), a longitudinal database of all pupils in England of a quality that is almost certainly unsurpassed in the world. If missing data and errors in PLASC/NPD mean that the results of SE calculations cannot be relied upon, then this also means that other SE calculations, using different sources or from earlier decades, will be even worse. This is true, however complex the ensuing modelling is, because statistical complexity cannot undo the propagation of initial errors. But Muijs et al. do not even realise that statistical significance based on sampling theory does not apply to the population figures in PLASC/NPD. Can we trust them to use "more sophisticated techniques"? And do they really imagine that problems of data quality will be somehow less in the survey-based studies of "well-being and capability, self-concept, attitudes" etc. that they allude to?

**“Any social science measurement with anything like 1000% relative error must not be used in practice, however distressing this may be to those with a vested interest in the school effectiveness industry.”**

For Muijs et al. to call my case study "limited" and "domestic" is to suggest that the implications of error propagation in any calculation involving a predicted and observed score apply only to CVA and England. But the problem lies not in the precise choice of measures used, or steps in the calculation of CVA. Any real-life measure has error. And finding the difference between a predicted and observed score, as any form of VA calculation must do, adds the maximum error in each score while hugely reducing the size of the number in which the resulting error occurs. This is the key point. I challenge them to send me full disclosure of any equivalent data set used in SE, perhaps a dataset from a developing country, one used 20 years ago, or for measuring "well-being", and I will do a further case study to see if it propagates to a much lower relative error than CVA. I am prepared to wager now that it will not! ([s.gorard@bham.ac.uk](mailto:s.gorard@bham.ac.uk)).

## New Resource Available: RI Archive

BERA has produced an electronic archive of Research Intelligence comprising back issues in PDF format. The aim is to have a complete archive of all editions of *RI* from the 1970s to the present day. Thanks to Danny Durant's meticulous work, most of the files have already been produced and uploaded to the website. If you hold copies of the missing issues, or know where to find them, please contact BERA.

Danny Durant has also put together a useful historical outline of the evolution of *RI* since its inception in June 1976. The archive and the historical outline can be found on the BERA website <http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/ri/>.

## Call for contributions to *RI* 115

The next issue of *RI* (summer 2011) will focus on the **current state of education research in different sectors, settings, sub-fields and disciplines**. If you would like to contribute please contact [alis.oancea@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:alis.oancea@education.ox.ac.uk) with the subject line "*RI* 115". We are keen to hear from different education sectors and interest groups and from different sites for the generation and use of education research. The deadline for papers will be May 1st, 2011.

## Notes for contributors

### Disclaimer

In the interests of professional and academic dialogue, *RI* will occasionally publish articles that deal with controversial topics. Publication of any article by *RI* should not be seen as an endorsement by BERA or by the *RI* Editor of the views expressed, but as an attempt to promote academic freedom.

### Articles

Each issue of *RI* aims to capture a range of perspectives on a topic of current relevance to the wide range of sites for the generation and mobilisation of education research. We would like to receive articles relevant to the themes announced in the calls for contributions to each issue of *RI*. If you have some recently completed research that you feel is relevant to the theme and likely to be of interest to BERA members, please summarise it in approximately 1500 words and send it to the Editor.

### Opinion

Brief opinion pieces of relevance to the theme of each issue OR addressing other current critical issues affecting education research and its stakeholders are also welcome. Material should not exceed 700–800 words.

Members wishing to respond to an existing piece or to suggest topics for future issues of *RI* should contact the Editor.

### Mobilising research

We would like to receive brief pieces relevant to agencies or individuals who use educational research. We would particularly welcome contributions sharing news in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Material should not exceed 800 words and should be sent to the Editor.

We also encourage members to submit contributions discussing initiatives of strategic importance to education research from any sector of activity.

### SIGs, awards, initiatives

SIG convenors can use the medium of *RI* to update all BERA members of their activities or open up a particular issue for debate. Contributions should not exceed 800 words and be sent to the Editor.

BERA members who are recipients of BERA awards or are engaged in BERA-supported initiatives are invited to submit brief outlines of the work so supported (700–800 words).

In all types of submissions please avoid the use of footnotes and keep the number of references to a minimum. Please refer to articles in recent issues for examples of acceptable formats.

### Editor

The Editor encourages electronic submission of articles etc. Please send your contributions to Alis Oancea: [alis.oancea@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:alis.oancea@education.ox.ac.uk).

## Forthcoming conferences

Conference	Date	Place	Submission deadline
Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain Annual Conference	1 - 3 April 2011	New College, Oxford, UK	submission closed
AERA Annual Meeting	8 - 12 April 2011	New Orleans, Louisiana, USA	submission closed
International Association for Citizenship, Social and Economics Education Ninth International Conference	28 - 30 June 2011	Bath Spa University, UK	submission closed
BELMAS Annual International Conference 2011	8 - 10 July 2011	Wyboston Lakes Centre, nr Bedford, UK	submission closed
Journal of Vocational Education and Training 9th International Conference	8 - 10 July 2011	Worcester College Oxford, UK	submission closed
2nd Summer Institute in Qualitative Research: Putting Theory to Work	18 - 22 July 2011	Education and Social Research Institute, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK	Registration open: <a href="http://www.esri.mmu.ac.uk/siqr/about">www.esri.mmu.ac.uk/siqr/about</a>
AQR /Discourse, Power, Resistance 'Down Under' Conference: "Will The Real Evidence Please Stand Up: Politicising Qualitative Research"	23 - 25 August 2011	Rydges Tradewinds Hotel, 137 The Esplanade, Cairns, Australia	submission closed
European Science Education Research Association (ESERA)	5 - 9 September 2011	Lyon, France	submission closed
BERA 2011	6 - 8 September 2011	Institute of Education, London, UK	submission closed
ECER 2011	13-16 September 2011 (pre-conference 12-13 September)	Freie Universität Berlin, Germany	submission closed
AARE International Education Research Conference 2011	27 November - 1 December 2011	Hobart, Australia	8 May 2011

Note: please check associations' websites for changes in submission deadlines.

### BERA 2012 advance notice

The conference will be held at the University of Manchester from the 4th to the 6th of September 2012. Professor Zeus Leonardo (Associate Professor of Language and Literacy, Society and Culture at the University of Berkeley, California) has agreed to be a keynote speaker at BERA 2012.