



The Accumulation, Mediation, Application and Impact of Education Research Knowledge

Report of the third SFRE meeting
17th and 18th March, Edinburgh

April 2010

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Acknowledgements

The third SFRE meeting was the last one in the initial cycle of the Forum. It will be followed by a validation meeting, to discuss the draft of the final report, in May 2010, and by dissemination events in Summer 2010, in all four countries of the UK.

SFRE would like to thank all those who have contributed to the success of the third Forum. This includes all the members of the planning group from the constituent countries who have had significant input in driving this initiative forward in their countries. It also includes all those who offered thought-provoking case-study and discussion presentations at the third Forum event. The group facilitators and rapporteurs played a crucial role in enabling discussion and capturing key points to include in this report and we are very grateful to them for taking up these roles. Thanks are due to all participants to the third Forum, for their excellent contributions to the discussions during, and for feedback after, the event.

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Jeremy Hoad

Chief Executive, BERA

April 2010

Forum III: Executive Summary

ACCUMULATION

1. Knowledge accumulation was recognised as having a vital role to play in any knowledge management system. However, a distinction between the accumulation and interpretation of knowledge was felt to be significant, and to enable the role of theorised synthesis to be acknowledged.
2. UK infrastructure for knowledge accumulation is very diverse in terms of libraries, electronic resources, databases/ indexes and repositories, though there are also some core resources.
3. Interpretive syntheses of cumulative knowledge, when critical, rigorous, fit-for-purpose and appropriately theorised, have the potential to improve the effectiveness through which policy-makers are informed and practitioners empowered.
4. There is at present considerable variation in terms of infrastructure for accumulation and interpretation between countries and sectors and also from topic to topic.
5. Despite the potential of new technologies, users face significant barriers in accessing evidence in education because of limited access to some resources, variable quality assurance and fragmentation of sources.

MEDIATION

6. Effective research mediation was perceived by many SFRE participants as not only being an attribute of a good research environment but also as indicator of a well-functioning evidence-informed democracy.
7. Contributing to the interpretation and application of research findings was seen as being part of the contemporary role of professional researchers. However, the need for media and communication specialists to support dissemination and impact processes was confirmed. It was noted that this requires good understanding of the relevant epistemic, methodological and political constraints as well as practical media and communication skills.
8. At present, there are inadequate incentives, training, and infrastructures for research mediation, with variable reward structures in different sectors and professional communities.
9. In terms of outputs, discussions at the forum highlighted the importance of tailoring writing styles and presentation formats to the full range of audiences. Capacity for cost-effective production of such outputs is limited, but rapidly changing technologies create many opportunities for innovation.
10. In terms of processes, it was agreed that mediation should encourage both the supply of, and demand for, relevant and credible evidence, as well as the interplay between the two. Expectations of user engagement, co-production and dialogue between stakeholders at all research stages were seen as significant advances on simple 'knowledge transfer'. However, despite this attractive rationale, the capacity and commitment of researchers, practitioners and policy-makers remains limited at present.

IMPACT

11. Impact is not a clear-cut concept. At both system and individual levels, research evidence does not simply compel to action but is filtered through judgments about aims and values, and balanced against other forms of evidence and incentives to action.
12. At present, systemic institutional development to use research is embryonic and the role of 'champions' in the use of evidence from practitioner, policy-maker and researcher communities remains vital in achieving impact.
13. Strategies for educational research impact in the UK should aim to promote potential impact, to support current use of evidence in practice, and to create enabling conditions for further engagement with research evidence among practitioners and other relevant constituencies. The measurement of actual impact for research assessment purposes should be secondary to this.
14. Ultimately, existent resources, findings and understanding are interpreted and integrated into the personal knowledge structures of researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners alike. Impact at this level is relational and purposive.

ACCUMULATION, MEDIATION AND IMPACT IN THE DIFFERENT SECTORS AND COUNTRIES

15. There are significant differences in the contemporary accumulation, mediation and impact of research knowledge in the early years and primary sectors, in secondary education and in post-compulsory education. These reflect not only the availability of different types of evidence, but the histories of stakeholder positions and interaction between them.
16. Common themes to all sectoral discussions included the importance of strategically sustaining practitioner engagement with research, of recognising the importance of local contexts, of strengthening mutual respect among sectors and of identifying opportunities for cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral networking and sharing of information.
17. Opportunities for cost-effective collaboration in relation to knowledge accumulation and interpretation are considerable between the four countries of the UK, with mediation and application demanding more local provision for particular audiences. UK-wide bodies such as ESRC, BEI and NFER could have a distinct role to play in sharing research findings, facilitating and pooling resources, and promoting partnerships.

Introduction

Aims of SFRE ¹

The UK Strategic Forum for Research in Education (SFRE) aspires to support multiple stakeholders in all four countries and many educational sectors in reflecting on education research. Underpinning this endeavour is a sustained contemporary demand for high quality evidence about education from government, public services and businesses. This represents a new commitment to the production and use of research (in all its forms) to build understanding of educational issues and to enhance the quality and effectiveness of policy and practice. To achieve the latter, it is argued, we need a secure flow of relevant, high quality research outputs and coordinated mechanisms for knowledge accumulation, transformation and engagement so that impact is maximised.

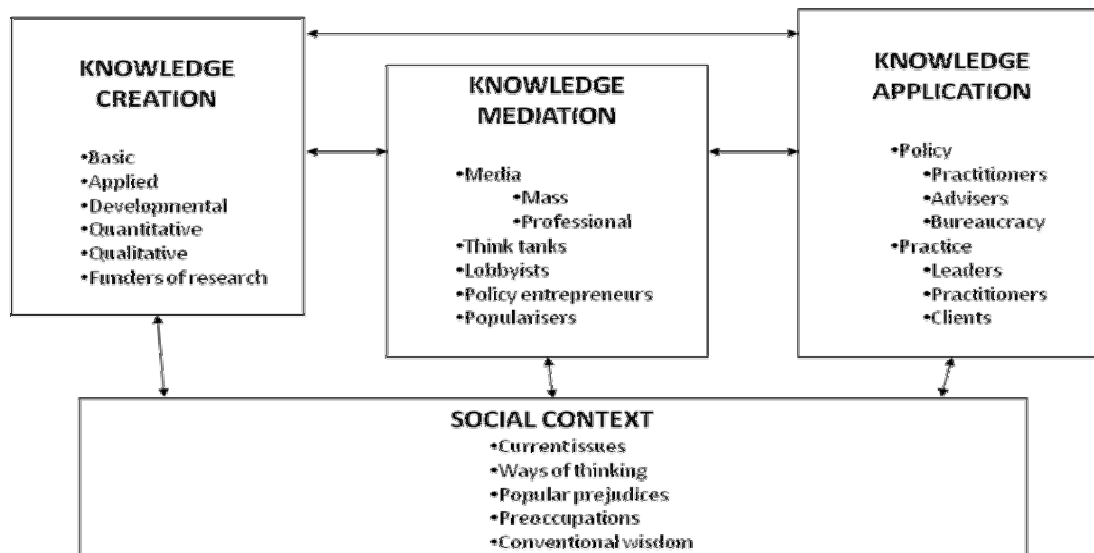
The SFRE aims:

- In the light of international good practice, to maintain an overview of the UK system and national sub-systems for the production of new knowledge in education and for its transformation, dissemination and use as a whole.
- To facilitate networking for the exchange of information and the sharing of good practice concerning the organisation, production and use of educational research within the UK.
- To make recommendations for processes and infrastructure needed to address the long-term sustainability, development and improvement of educational research within the UK, including the identification of research priorities and of particular initiatives and investments to address such concerns.

There have been some impressive developments in UK education research in recent years, but we are a long way from being able to achieve these aims.

From the outset, the activity of the SFRE has been underpinned by a framework of questions, originally drawing on a model of a 'knowledge continuum cycle' (Levin, 2004). Figure 1 is an adaptation of this model in a European Commission Staff Working Document.

Figure 1: A knowledge continuum



Source: (EC, 2007: 6; Levin, 2004: 8)

¹ This section adapts the introductory texts to the reports on SFRE I and SFRE II (Pollard, 2008, Tough 2009).

Here, knowledge creation, mediation and application are seen as an integrated, interdependent cycle of activity, in a continuing articulation with cultural, social, political and economic contexts.

Internationally, this idealised representation has been echoed by the gradual development of a template for reviewing education research infrastructures in different countries by OECD CERI. This was a product of international experts engaged in 'Country Assessments' from 2000-06. Its formalisation began with the Danish review in 2004 and was taken forward in work in Switzerland during 2006. In its most recent manifestation (Pollard, 2007) it probes national provision through twenty questions, organised in six sections:

- Contextual issues
- Strategic awareness
- Basic research
- Applied research
- Development and professional enquiry
- Generic issues.

For the purposes of the UK SFRE a simpler framework was necessary, to suit a sequence of discussion in three fora over two years. The SFRE framework, while inspired by the EC and OECD documents, is the product of discussions across a range of UK constituencies with interest in education research. The challenges considered by the SFRE can thus be represented in the following ways:

Forum I

- **Context:** What are the contextual circumstances of each country and its aspirations for educational development? What is the nature of existing educational R&D provision and the major contemporary challenges to it?
- **Quality:** What quality assurance and accountability procedures are in place for educational research and development?
- **Capacity:** Is there adequate capacity building to sustain complementary forms of educational research and development?

Forum II

- **Basic research:** Is there appropriate provision and incentivisation for the production of high quality and innovative basic research?
- **Applied research:** Is there appropriate provision and incentivisation for the production of high quality and innovative applied research?
- **Developmental research:** Is there appropriate provision and incentivisation for the production of high quality and innovative developmental research, evaluation and practitioner enquiry?
- **Interdisciplinarity:** Given growing awareness of the interconnectedness of education and other fields, how is interdisciplinary research supported?
- **Priorities:** How are researchers, policymakers, practitioners and other appropriate stakeholders engaged in the identification, development, application and evaluation of national priorities for applied research and for development?

Forum III

- **Knowledge accumulation:** What provision is there for knowledge accumulation and review and for appropriate linkage to UK and international networks, centres and activities?
- **Knowledge mediation:** What provision is there for appropriate co-production, transformation and dissemination of research findings to stakeholders, including the

- **Knowledge application and impact:** Is there an impact strategy for educational R&D in each relevant educational sector, with clear understandings of what counts as basic and applied research and of what counts as forms of development by practitioners and others – and the funding streams and organisational infrastructures to support these activities?

Forum I

Forum I took place in Harrogate in October 2008. This Forum considered the questions outlined above regarding context, quality and capacity in the constituent countries. Discussions took place within country groups so that the specific context of education research in each country could be explored. These discussions were supported by country stimulus reports which were prepared in advance and offered initial analysis of the state of play in relation to quality and capacity issues in education research in each country (these reports are available to download on the SFRE website: <http://www.sfre.ac.uk/publications/forum-1/stimulus-reports/>). Discussions at the first Forum noted that while there were varied levels of provision for research production and application in different countries, there was a particularly strong common challenge around effective research dissemination and mediation. There are also obstacles in terms of the historical structure of teacher education departments in HEIs and consequential challenges in the contemporary direction of travel towards more interdisciplinary work.

The complex issue of quality in education research was tackled at Forum I in professional groups – i.e. policymakers, practitioners and researchers and in sector groups (compulsory and post-compulsory). The discussions on quality and what criteria should be used in assessing quality confirmed that, whilst there were many issues in common, particular priorities in relation to these issues were maintained by different stakeholder groups. These tensions were explored and it was obvious that, although a number of generic concerns (e.g. about theoretical and methodological robustness, or about engagement and communication) were shared across a number of contexts, no single set of criteria could be identified². Rather, it was necessary to recognise that different types of research had particular purposes and aims – with consequential variations in determinants of quality.

The final theme for Forum I was capacity. The overall level and distribution of researchers meant that there were concerns regarding capacity for research production in some key areas. Northern Ireland and Wales have particular issues around critical mass in some areas due to their smaller size. The effects of funding allocation mechanism are also felt very acutely. A key capacity challenge touched upon in Forum I was the capacity of researchers to effectively disseminate and frame their work for users (policymakers and practitioners) and the capacity of users to engage with research and the research process at a deeper level. An issue relating to both capacity and quality was that there appeared to be a growing disconnection between those involved primarily with teacher education and those undertaking education research – at both individual and institutional levels. More details of the discussions and events of the first Forum are in the report from this event (Pollard, 2008) which is available to download, alongside presentation slides, stimulus reports, and supplementary papers, on the SFRE website (see: <http://www.sfre.ac.uk/forum-1/>).

² A project to document in more detail such variations in views on research quality in education was subsequently commissioned by TLRP from Alis Oancea. For the outcome, see TLRP Research Briefing No 80 at: <http://www.tlrp.org/pub/research.html>.

In the period of time from Forum I to Forum II, the outcomes of the fifth round of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE 2008) and corresponding funding allocations were announced. In their review of *research quality*, the Sub-Panel for Education concluded that: ‘the *quality of research* activity reported in the submissions was high and significantly improved from 2001’ (RAE, 2009). They stated: ‘it is clear that the best departments can compete on equal terms with the strongest departments anywhere in the world’. There was also growth in the range of institutions attracting quality-related funding in education, with 41 institutions achieving new funding. These outcomes suggest that the field has been significantly strengthened since 2001.

Between Forum I and II, the planning group members from each country kept the momentum. There have been exciting developments in each of the UK countries since the first Forum. For example, Northern Ireland has created the Northern Ireland Education Research Forum which consists of representatives from each of the HEIs in Northern Ireland (Queen’s University Belfast, University of Ulster, St Mary’s University College, Stranmillis University College, Open University), the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) and each of the government departments involved in education (DENI, DELNI). The purpose of this forum is to build a more strategic approach to research capacity issues and evidence-informed policy more generally. The Forum meet to discuss strategic issues and share knowledge and discuss opportunities and developments in education (see: <http://www.sfre.ac.uk/northern-ireland/>). In Wales provision has been made in the remit letter to HEFCW for continuation, in some form, of the Welsh Education Research Network (WERN) (WAG, 2009). A new centre has also been funded in Wales - the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD, see: <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/wiserd/index.html>) – which is coordinated from Cardiff University and involves a network of Welsh HEIs (Swansea, Bangor, Glamorgan, Aberystwyth, Cardiff). WISERD is an interdisciplinary social science research centre which has a focus on building capacity across Welsh institutions (the partner HEIs and beyond) and enabling more collaborative working across disciplines and institutions. In Scotland, consultation about education research is being facilitated through Scottish Government’s Analytical Services. It involves discussions with deans of education and with users of education research. The current situation in each country is described briefly in the concluding section of this report.

Forum II

Forum II provided a space to discuss the provision and incentivisation of different types of research in each country and in the UK as a whole. The discussions were informed by a conceptual framework distinguishing between different types of research (disciplinary, applied, development and evaluation, practitioner research and enquiry) and mapping them across different sectors and contexts. There was much debate during the event about the definitions of the different types of research identified in the framework. Participants recognised the value of such framework as a means of organising thoughts and discussions, but they also felt that there was often considerable overlap between ‘applied’, ‘evaluative and developmental’ and ‘practitioner’ research.

Ahead of the Forum short contributions were prepared from a number of disciplines which contribute to the education field. These outlined the contribution a particular discipline made to education research and to interdisciplinarity. Written contributions covered philosophy (Bridges, 2009), economics (Vignoles, 2009), sociology (Francis, 2009), social anthropology (Mills, 2009), history (Richardson, 2009), neuroscience (Goswami, 2009), and psychology (Lunt, 2009). This selection of disciplines was intended to give a flavour of the wide variety of foundation disciplines upon which education research is based.

Planning group members from each of the UK countries also drafted reports which pulled together examples of applied, evaluative and developmental and practitioner research in their country and, to stimulate discussion, proposed areas for development/improvement. The disciplinary information was collated separately due to the international nature of this type of research. The disciplinary statements and country mappings are available to download on the SFRE website (see: <http://www.sfre.ac.uk/publications/forum-ii-publications/input-documents-for-forum-ii/>). Notes from each discussion group are available on the SFRE website (see: <http://www.sfre.ac.uk/forum-2/>). Tom Schuller (NIACE, formerly OECD CERI) participated in the event as an external reviewer of the proceedings and John Selby (HEFCE) closed the event with his thoughts and observations (see: <http://www.sfre.ac.uk/forum-2/>).

Forum III

The third SFRE meeting, in Edinburgh, adopted a very participative format, consisting of cycles of questions, case studies, group discussions, and reflective commentaries on each of the topics addressed: accumulation, mediation, and impact of education research knowledge.

The first day of the Forum encouraged participants to take stock of the issues addressed in the SFRE meetings and reports so far (summarised by Andrew Pollard, Helen Perkins and Lorna Hamilton), and, then, to focus on developments in each of the four countries (outlined by Richard Bartholomew, John Anderson, John Ireland, Chris Owen, and Sally Power) and UK-wide (in particular, the impact of the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise, analysed by Alis Oancea – Oancea et al, 2010). These sessions were followed by in-depth discussion of the three main topics of accumulation, mediation and impact, following the structure described above. Presentation slides and notes on plenary sessions, including case studies, are available from, the SFRE website, at <http://www.sfre.ac.uk/forum-3/>.

The second day of the Forum continued these discussions and also provided opportunities for sector- and country-level debate, and for identifying key messages that cut across different contexts. Each group discussion benefited from the input of a pre-designated facilitator and also from the summarising work of a rapporteur. Rapporteurs' notes are also available from the SFRE website (at <http://www.sfre.ac.uk/forum-3/>) and have been incorporated in the present report.

The following questions structured the discussions at Forum III:

What provision is there for knowledge accumulation and review, and for appropriate linkage to UK and international networks, centres and activities?

- In what ways is the accumulation of a body of education research knowledge important to different constituencies? For what purposes?
- How is the accumulation of education research knowledge currently being promoted? What are the challenges being faced by knowledge accumulation processes and initiatives in education research?
- How can co-ordination and communication among the different existent strategies be improved? How could we get more value from them in different country and sector contexts?
- How are the countries' research and development work linked to appropriate international networks, centres and activities focussing on research knowledge accumulation?

What provision is there for appropriate co-production, transformation and dissemination of research findings to stakeholders, including the general public and democratic process – and how effective is this?

- Why is mediation of research important, to whom, for what purposes?
- How is the mediation of education research knowledge currently being promoted? What are the challenges being faced by knowledge mediation processes and initiatives in education research?
- How can co-ordination and communication among the different existent strategies be improved? How could we get more value from them in different country and sector contexts?
- How are the countries' research and development work linked to appropriate international networks, centres and activities focussed on research knowledge mediation?

Is there a strategy for educational R&D impact in each relevant educational sector - with clear understanding of what counts as basic and applied research and of forms of development by practitioners and others – and the funding streams and organisational infrastructures to support these activities?

- Why is the impact of education research important, to whom, for what purposes?
- How is the impact of education research knowledge currently being promoted? What are the challenges being faced by processes and initiatives aimed at increasing the impact of education research?
- How can co-ordination and communication among the different existent strategies be improved? How could we get more value from them in different country and sector contexts?
- How are the countries' research and development work linked to appropriate international networks, centres and activities focussed on research knowledge impact?

For your specific sector, what are the key messages from SFRE III about how sectorally focused knowledge is accumulated, mediated and applied to achieve impact?

- Are people, relationships, processes, institutions and systems in place within your sector to achieve this?
- Can you identify particular examples of good practice in terms of accumulation, mediation and application?
- In relation to your sector, are there any particular issues concerning accumulation, mediation or application which should have particular priority for attention?
- What recommendations should the final SFRE report put forward?

For your country, what are the key messages from SFRE III about how knowledge about educational policy and practice is accumulated, mediated and applied to achieve impact?

- What particular initiatives should be highlighted from each country concerning knowledge accumulation, mediation and impact?
- Are people, relationships, processes, institutions and systems in place within your country to achieve this?
- Can you identify particular examples of good practice in terms of accumulation, mediation and application?
- In your country, are there any particular issues concerning accumulation, mediation or application which should have particular priority for attention?
- What recommendations should the final SFRE report put forward?

The event itself brought together 70 researchers, practitioners, research mediators, and policymakers from each of the constituent countries and across compulsory and post-compulsory

sectors. There were significant numbers of participants who had attended the first and/or the second Forum in order to offer continuity, but also people who had not been involved in SFRE previously, in order to inject new perspectives to the event and to spread awareness of the initiative. Care was taken to ensure representation of all the countries, range of institutions/organisations, and sectors. Private and not-for-profit organisations were also invited, as these organisations play a significant role in education research in the UK – particularly in the areas of mediation, application and impact of research.

Structure of the Report

This report follows the structure of the event – looking at each topic in turn and compiling the presentations and notes produced by the speakers, facilitators and rapporteurs who participated in the event. A full list of participants is appended to this report; individual presentations and notes are also available from the SFRE website, at <http://www.sfre.ac.uk/forum-3/>. The report is deliberately descriptive and attempts have been made to enable as many voices as possible to be heard in the text. More integrated conclusions drawing on all three SFRE report will be made public soon, as part of the final SFRE report to be launched in July 2010 at the Royal Society of Arts, and subsequently in Belfast, Cardiff, and Edinburgh.

The Accumulation of Education Research Knowledge

Key questions

What provision is there for knowledge accumulation and review, and for appropriate linkage to UK and international networks, centres and activities?

- In what ways is the accumulation of a body of education research knowledge important to different constituencies? For what purposes?
- How is the accumulation of education research knowledge currently being promoted? What are the challenges being faced by knowledge accumulation processes and initiatives in education research?
- How can co-ordination and communication among the different existent strategies be improved? How could we get more value from them in different country and sector contexts?
- How are the countries' research and development work linked to appropriate international networks, centres and activities focussing on research knowledge accumulation?

Synopsis

The discussion around the **accumulation** of education research knowledge at SFRE III explored what accumulation might mean at different points and to different stakeholders involved in the research process.

The discussions covered in detail practical issues about **infrastructure**, in terms of libraries, electronic resources, databases/ indexes, and repositories. Participants reviewed existing provision and noted that, despite many recent initiatives showing progress and despite the advantages brought about by increased use of new technologies, there are still barriers to integrated accumulation, for example in terms of access, fragmentation, and quality assurance. One short-term measure to counteract fragmentary, increasingly confusing, and overlapping provision would be to join forces in generating critical guides to resources available.

Participants also discussed recent and current efforts to integrate systematically, and make available, existent research evidence on topics of relevance to practice and policy. It was noted that, provided that such **systematic syntheses of knowledge** are critical, rigorous, and fit for purpose, then they can be embedded in exchanges that would empower educators in developing their practice. Syntheses can also point out gaps and uncertainties in existent research, substantively, theoretically, and methodologically. An excessive focus on narrow interpretations of "what works" might obscure substantive gaps, while unthinking preoccupation with short deadlines might move attention away from theoretical and methodological accumulation. Thus, accumulation of research concerns not only the synopsis of findings and availability of outputs, but also the cumulative character of the research process itself. In addition, developments in infrastructure and substantive and methodological cumulativeness vary from sector to sector and also from topic to topic.

Ultimately, existent resources and information are **interpreted and integrated into personal knowledge structures** of researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners alike. These structures are local, personal, diffuse, and only loosely networked. Knowledge accumulation at this level is relational: what we want to know something *for* alters our understanding as we integrate information into personal knowledge structures.

Case studies

Three brief plenary presentations addressed different facets of what accumulation might mean in relation to education research knowledge.

Building adequate infrastructure. First, from a librarian's perspective, Stephen Pickles (Institute of Education Library Services, London) distinguished between the accumulation of knowledge in individuals and organisations and that in libraries and databases (at the infrastructure level). He cautioned against possible interpretation of the term "accumulation" as implying inert sedimentation; even in the case of infrastructure, such as library collections, accumulation is an active process requiring appropriate policies, systematic procedures, commitment to development, creativity, and evidently time and financial resources. In order to increase discoverability and use of resources, librarians and managers of web resources act as informed, creative "hunter-gatherers" who add value to collections via bibliographic descriptions, classification, and indexing. These comments were illustrated with two examples: the collection of the Institute of Education, London, and library – the largest library specialised in education in the country, <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/services/303.html>; and the British Education Index – <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/bei/>. Both collections aim to cover the whole field of education in as much depth as possible, although there are many obstacles to this aim, including obstacles related to facilitation of wide access.

Integrating information into personal knowledge structures. Second, from a researcher's perspective, Steve Higgins (University of Durham) reflected on the accumulation of specialised knowledge on a particular topic (thinking in education and developing thinking in classrooms – see e.g. the Thinking Together project, <http://thinkingtogether.educ.cam.ac.uk/>; the TLRP Sustainable Thinking Classrooms project – <http://www.tlrp.org/proj/phase11/phase2g.html>). He noted the distinctive, and not always convergent, channels and processes through which knowledge crystallises and develops in different contexts (educational policy, practice, academic research, employers). Translating between these contexts and discourses may be problematic. In each of these contexts, interest for a topic may stimulate the search for different types of evidence, from policy instruments, through pragmatic considerations and practical deliberation, through meta-reviews and other syntheses of empirical research, and to a range of educational, theoretical and philosophical perspectives. Much of the knowledge so "accumulated" is in fact local, personal knowledge, interpreting in different ways practical experience, pragmatic considerations of demand, and the shifting landscape of conceptual and theoretical perspectives from a range of relevant disciplines. Such knowledge is diffuse and loosely networked, emerging through the interaction of practice and academic development. Thus, knowledge accumulation is relational: what we want to know something *for* alters our understanding as we integrate information into personal knowledge structures. This situation poses important challenges to current efforts to improve research synthesis and translation.

Systematically connecting, assessing and exchanging evidence to empower educators in their practice. Finally, Bette Chambers (Institute for Effective Education, University of York) described the practices of the Institute for Effective Education in systematically supporting research knowledge of evidence-based education. These activities include the development of new programmes (e.g. Tech Team Maths – http://www.york.ac.uk/iee/research/t_tech_team_maths.htm), evaluation of promising programmes (e.g. Together 4 All – http://www.york.ac.uk/iee/research/t_together_4_all.htm), systematic reviews (e.g. on early years), dissemination of education research, influencing policy, and forming partnerships. Evidence is not something to be dryly packaged and delivered, but it ought to form part of an exchange, through which educators are empowered to use

evidence in improving their practice. To this aim, the Coalition for Evidence-Based Education had begun to engage with service providers to promote the creation of an education evidence service. Other promising initiatives in this field, across the range of stakeholder organisations, included evidence syntheses (e.g. the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre - <http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/>; the Best Evidence Encyclopaedia UK - <http://www.bestevidence.org.uk/>); knowledge transfer activities (e.g. the Teacher Training Resource Bank - <http://www.ttrb.ac.uk/>; the Educational Evidence Portal - <http://www.eep.ac.uk/dnn2>); exemplary studies of what works (e.g. Fife Peer Learning Study - <http://www.fifepeerlearning.org/furtherdetails.html>); and efforts towards increased collaboration and connectivity, such as the SFRE.

Group discussions

Group 1

Rapporteur: Sean Hanan (Ofsted)

Facilitator: Ian Menter (University of Glasgow)

The group discussion ranged across three key themes about the accumulation of research evidence: the difficulties; the aspirations; and possible new approaches to address the issue.

The issue is difficult because different research is on different trajectories and is based on different perspectives. The priorities for policy-makers, academics and practitioners will be different. It is complex and should not be over-simplified, particularly by references to 'best' research. It is also difficult because effective interactions between academics and practitioners are required in areas such as 'thinking skills'.

The aspiration is to be able to access all forms of research, including 'grey' literature, which can add significantly to the body of research knowledge. There have been missed opportunities following devolution. The OECD has the potential to add value via comparative studies and by gathering knowledge across countries. The key may be to develop existing knowledge rather than accumulating more knowledge. There is also a need to recognise the economic constraints around open access, particularly during a period of Government spending cuts.

There is plenty of data but not enough knowledge and there needs to be more strategic thinking and less creative 'buzz'. We need to use technology more effectively in knowledge management.

Group 2

Rapporteur: Karen Kerr (Learning and Teaching Scotland)

Facilitator: Ruth Leitch (Queen's University Belfast)

This group's discussion focused on issues related to knowledge accumulation and the use of knowledge to bring about change. Knowledge accumulation was seen not just as a process of passive accumulation, but as an active process where the context in which knowledge is used is considered. Thus, there is a need to understand how the whole education system becomes self-improving and what the role of evidence/knowledge is in a self-sustaining system.

The following points about knowledge accumulation were discussed:

- Knowledge should only be invested in once, and this has implications for attitudes to sharing and the availability of systems to support sharing.

- It was acknowledged that there are gaps in the knowledge being accumulated. For example, gaps were identified in knowledge for those children and young people outside mainstream education and in vocational education.
- There are concerns about what is defined as research. For example, school inspection reports, school self-evaluation reports and practitioner work are valuable sources of evidence but they are not always fully utilised.
- It was suggested that the ‘what works’ debate is misleading as we should also focus on ‘how’ and ‘why’ it works, as well as, researching what doesn’t work.
- Problems related to sharing knowledge were raised. For example, problems collaborating with others due to physical distances were raised and the difficulties of making sense of ‘patchy’ published academic work.
- It was also recognised that a huge body of knowledge has been accumulated but there is little evidence that it is being used.

It was suggested that the reason research is not used may be due to why it is done in the first place. For example, university researchers may do research to promote their own careers.

The current school system fails 30% of learners and it was suggested that we should be focussing research on the learner and what makes schools better for learners. While it was acknowledged that we do know a lot about underachievement we have not done a good job of bringing this together in a coherent way. It was agreed that the area of underachievement was an example of an area where there is a good body of knowledge but where that knowledge has not been seen to have a significant impact on practice.

Group 3

Rapporteur: Karen Whitby (CfTB Education Trust)

Facilitator: Pamela Munn (BERA)

There are a range of databases in existence via which people can access published research. These databases are distinguishable by the audience that they are targeted at, e.g. BEI is most suited to an academic audience and the TTRB is most suited to a practitioner audience, however it should be noted that although these databases may produce different outputs they are all supported by the same underlying data. These distinctions are currently being mapped by eep. There is no single access point for published research in the way there is, for example via scie in the social care sector.

Likewise, there is no single point of access that ensures that research is a cumulative activity – i.e. that the wheel is not constantly reinvented. Methodologically, one way in which to ensure that research is adding to the body of knowledge is via a thorough literature review, which should be recognised by both researchers and funders prior to research being commissioned. Beyond this, there are a series of good practice examples of knowledge accumulation at different levels across the UK, for example the DCSF Research Centres (England), the Funders Forum (UK), CERUK (UK), the TLRP / WERN project (Wales) and LARIA (local authority level in England). However there are fewer examples when looking cross-sector or cross-nationally, where international research is predominantly searched, collated and published in English. There is often a notion that research from another country, or another sector, is not applicable to the current context and this predicated the replication rather than the accumulation of research.

Group 4

Rapporteur: Phil Sheffield (British Education Index)

Facilitator: Judy Sebba (University of Sussex)

Various reasons were given for the importance of accumulation: to maintain informed professions; to ensure efficient employment of resources by building on existing accumulations and services rather than inventing new ones; to ensure strong relationships between stakeholders; to be aware of evidence so as to confirm or question propositions. While the need for cumulative strategies and accumulations was acknowledged, there was also recognition that there would be different reasons for creating them and different perspectives on them.

The relationships between stakeholders in the accumulated knowledge were important, as were relationships between users of the accumulated knowledge and the collections within which the knowledge accumulated. 'Users' were acquirers of information from accumulations but also suppliers of content or feedback to accumulations. Means should be established to facilitate users' involvement in the creation and development of accumulations and to facilitate users' capacity to interact effectively with them, enacting knowledge exchange. Initial teacher education and continuing professional development could play a part in developing such capacity. There is also a challenge to make resources freely available to all, including practitioners who rarely have access to electronic libraries, but a tension exists between this and publication for (different forms of) profit.

There were concerns about the number, diversity, and relative accessibility of accumulations that existed, and about the clarity of the integrity, purpose, focus, provenance and intended audience of the accumulations. Regarding content, decisions about what information is included in accumulations are accumulation-specific, not neutral and affected by what is 'public'. There appeared to be potential benefits in the closer association of the accumulations, though this might bring with it a need to formalise, or invest in, such an association, and there might be too many accumulations to afford such investment. The nature of formal and informal publishing sometimes determined how widely information could be shared by accumulations with different levels of accessibility.

Some of these concerns could be addressed through a critical, neutral guide to the information landscape, maintained by a stakeholder like the SFRE, BERA or UCET, and addressing issues like content, selection criteria, provenance, and intended audience.

Accumulations that were explicitly referred to during the discussion were as follows, alphabetically:

British Education Index (demonstrator database at

http://www.leeds.ac.uk/bei/COLN/COLN_default.html)

Educational Evidence Portal (<http://www.eep.ac.uk>)

EPPI Centre Evidence Library (<http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms//Default.aspx?tabid=56>)

GLOW (<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/glowscotland/index.asp>)

Institute of Education Library Catalogue (<http://ioe.sirsidynix.net.uk/uhtbin/webcat>)

Teacher Training Resource Bank (<http://www.ttrb.ac.uk>)

Discussants

Ralph Catts (University of Stirling) reflected on *access to accumulated research knowledge for practitioners*. He noted two types of barriers to practitioners' (in particular, teachers') direct access to research: preparation and cost. First, he argued that both initial teacher education and CPD

currently play only a limited role in facilitating teachers' direct access to research, due to insufficient emphasis on the skills necessary to systematically search, assess, store, and draw upon prior research. For example, many CPD activities, despite being "enquiry-driven", tended to make little use of prior research. Second, access to many of the more comprehensive academic research databases tends to be based on subscriptions, which may be institutional subscriptions for many higher education staff, but not so for teachers. Thus practitioners would need to invest considerable time and money in securing access to databases, even without necessarily having had a chance to assess their usefulness for their work. Admittedly, they could draw upon free databases, such as BEI and HEI repositories, but access to full text papers may not always be possible in these databases.

David Gough (EPPICentre, Institute of Education, London) picked up another thread of the discussions, which addressed not the organisation and availability of research outputs in different types of collections, but the **plurality of approaches to synthesising research knowledge** (the "meta" level). In his view, "knowledge synthesis" is a wide concept encompassing a range of strategies aimed at critically integrating contributions to knowledge from all perspectives on research, on all research question, arrived at with any methods of primary research, and using any methods of systematic review. The main criterion for good research synthesis is that it is fit for purpose; the aim of such efforts is not to achieve an ultimately convergent, all-encompassing, ever growing view of the world, but to generate a plurality of partly overlapping meta-level (rather than individual study-level) syntheses of "all we know" with relevance to a particular perspective or question. There are many challenges and various drivers of research agendas in the field of knowledge synthesis. Particular challenges include infrastructure, capacity, funding (including funding for practitioner-driven reviews), the language for methods and tools; and quality and relevance appraisal.

The Mediation of Education Research Knowledge

Key questions

What provision is there for appropriate co-production, transformation and dissemination of research findings to stakeholders, including the general public and democratic process – and how effective is this?

- Why is mediation of research important, to whom, for what purposes?
- How is the mediation of education research knowledge currently being promoted? What are the challenges being faced by knowledge mediation processes and initiatives in education research?
- How can co-ordination and communication among the different existent strategies be improved? How could we get more value from them in different country and sector contexts?
- How are the countries' research and development work linked to appropriate international networks, centres and activities focussed on research knowledge mediation?

Synopsis

Good research mediation was perceived by many participants as not only an attribute of a good research environment in higher education, but also as indicator of a well-functioning “evidence-informed democracy”. Mediators link the many overlapping communities with an interest in education research, including HE, practitioner, government, and other researchers, practitioners, think tanks, media, professional bodies, civil servants, politicians, third sector organisations, inspectors, local government officers, and so on. The agreement was that, although professional, specialised mediators had an increasingly important role to play, mediation of publicly-funded education research ought also to be a legitimate, and appropriately resourced, incentivised, and evaluated, component of academic work. Many at the meeting described it as a “moral responsibility” to research participants, beneficiaries, and the tax-paying public at large.

Mediation concerns both outputs and processes. In terms of **outputs**, discussions at the forum highlighted the importance of tailoring writing styles and presentation formats to the full range of audiences. In terms of **processes**, it was pointed out that good mediation ought to tend to both the supply of, and the demand for, relevant, accessible and credible evidence, as well as to the interplay between the two. “Transferring a package” is not the most appropriate metaphor to capture the complex process of mobilising knowledge and knowledge co-producers in ways that are illuminating, empowering, and transformative. It is not only outputs and end-or-project dissemination that need to be tailored to the diversity of contexts and audiences, but also the strategies involved in establishing contextualised, multi-voiced interaction with all relevant communities throughout the research process. “Transformative partnerships” can bring together experiences and understandings from different sectors, in mutually beneficial ways. Constructive dialogue, from the early stages of a project, between researchers and commissioners of research can enable the development of appropriate communication strategies. Evaluating these strategies is an important element of knowledge management but despite growing recognition of its importance, current provision for such evaluation is patchy.

Fragmented, un-coordinated provision for research mediation was one of the **current challenges** for future development in this field discussed at the Forum. Other challenges identified included the

issue of capacity for mediation, and of the different set of skills required by this activity; the patchy knowledge about what should count as effective mediation; the difficulties in mediating different types of research, with particular relevance for practitioner research; the barriers to cross-sectoral communication, including the limited transferability of findings; and finding the optimum balance between investing in the mediation of individual studies and in the mediation of research syntheses.

The persistence of these challenges had partly to do with inadequate incentives, training, and infrastructure for research mediation, and with different reward structures in different sectors and professional communities. However, many of these issues were accounted for in terms of a number of **enduring tensions** underpinning research mediation efforts. Such tensions included, for example, that between relevance and fitness for purpose, on the one side, and academic integrity and research independence, on the other. Despite being apparently incompatible, these sets of values can be brought together, but this is a different kind of mediation process than that involved in disseminating accessible outputs or in establishing networks. Similarly, addressing tensions between accessibility and misrepresentation, or between conclusiveness/ clarity and trivialising findings, is also a task for thoughtful research mediators with good understanding of the epistemic, political, and practical constraints operating in each of the communities concerned.

Case studies

Transformative partnerships through mutual learning. Richard Williams (Rathbone) spoke, from the perspective of a voluntary sector organisation, about the reasons underpinning its deliberate search for research partners, including those based in higher education. *Establishing connections between research communities and voluntary sector organisations*, such as Rathbone, can facilitate the important process (which is also a moral imperative) of giving voice to disadvantaged young people in ways that give leverage in policy and political communities, too. Drawing on a recent partnership with the Nuffield 14-19 Review of Education and Training, he noted how, through being part of a research process, the experiences of disadvantaged young people who participated in the Engaging Youth Enquiry had been placed in a wider reflective community. Further, Richard Williams commented on the *importance of mediating between different understandings of professional practice in different sectors*. There is a role for researchers and for research mediators in understanding the extent to which assumptions and findings from one type of environment (such as schools) are amenable to being transferred or adapted to another (such as detached youth work). Many of the staff working with organisations such as Rathbone— given the complexities of their work and the fact that they are constantly grappling with questions about what works now in this environment for these young people - are also practitioner researchers, although in an informal way. We need to find ways of formalising the links between these practitioners and the wider research community. Successful mediation needs to come from both directions (voluntary organisation and researchers) and to enable both to benefit and learn from the partnership. At the same time, successful mediation has important political and personal aspects that should not be played down in discussions about the future of education research.

Writing for different audiences. Demitri Coryton is the editor of “Education Journal”, a professional magazine set up 15 years ago “to bring research from researchers to practitioners” in an accessible way. In his contribution to SFRE III, he raised the issue of the *different skills* that are involved in writing for an academic audience and writing for other audiences. This issue had been an important challenge in establishing “Education Journal” as a channel for research mediation. Journalistic accounts of research may be attractive to wider audiences, but they tend to be very selective and often leave out of focus findings and aspects of research that are fundamental to the study, or synthesis of studies, being reported. Conversely, academic writers who can successfully communicate research to other researchers may not find it easy to be equally successful in communicating it succinctly and in timely fashion to other audiences. Time pressures on academics’

work compound the problem. People who straddle the two sets of skills and are able to invest the necessary time in writing for practitioners are very few. Nonetheless, the research community should not be relying exclusively on journalists as the medium to select and present research to wider audiences. Writing for practitioners ought to be part of the everyday role of researchers, and policy-makers and institutions ought to support this activity as a legitimate component of academic work.

Effective communication supported by constructive dialogue with commissioners of research.

Simon Gallacher (National Foundation for Educational Research) described NFER's "research canon" as doing work that has impact and that demonstrates to those who fund it what works and has value for money. Part of this process has to do with "packaging" outcomes in appropriate language and format. Plain English, to-the-point writing can convey important and complex messages to policy-makers and practitioners more effectively than lengthy and impenetrable prose. It is important to focus on what people would like to take away from research: conclusive outcomes and suggested direction of travel. It is also important to engage in constructive dialogue with commissioners, from the early stages of a project, about their needs and expectations from the project outputs, and about the communication strategy that needs to be put in place. Fitness for purpose is important, and is compatible with preserving the independence of research.

Group discussions

Group 1

Rapporteur: Zoe Fowler (Research Consultant)

Facilitator: Pamela Munn (BERA)

The group shared a strong sense of moral purpose in relation to educational research: it was agreed that mediation of research is important because all research is for something.

Initially, discussions focused upon research outputs. Outputs need to be tailored to the needs and preferences of the intended audience. While the main focus remained upon print, alternative media are also available and might be better capitalised by research teams.

A range of technical issues were discussed linked to the writing of outputs and the utilisation of different forms of media. The group agreed on the importance of writing in different genres and, in particular, explicitly suiting different styles of writing to different audiences. Discussions explored what might constitute 'quality writing': specifically, the group challenged traditional hierarchical value systems which privilege academic styles of writing over 'plain' English. Related to the difference in valuing between different styles of writing, there was an awareness that the pressures of the RAE and the privileging of academic styles of writing within HE mean that it is not always in the researcher's best interests to write for practitioner journals or other non-academic outputs. There is a pressing need to change the structures which shape the interests and priorities of individual researchers.

Journalists and researchers have different skills and they are acculturated in different styles of writing. Similarly, different media demand different skill sets. Training and support are needed to enable people to become better writers and to become more effective at dealing with the media. For example, one group member explored the demands of a live phone-in discussion on radio. BERA had provided a good practice guide on writing and dissemination, but the group did not know if this remained available. This was seen as a potentially useful tool.

The discussion then moved outwards, focusing upon the larger processes of knowledge mediation. The group identified examples of good practice including:

- TLRP: their work on dissemination and impact was seen to represent excellence in this area. Examples were given of a journalist working with the research team.
- BERA Insights: reviews of research relating to current issues.
- Mutually beneficial relationships between researchers and stakeholders, for example the Rathbone Trust's association with Oxford University and the NUT's association with Cambridge University. These examples were linked to the increased 'credibility' that associations and relationships provide to research findings.
- Cambridge Primary Review: illustrating the importance and effectiveness of marketing dissemination.

These examples clarified how dissemination and relationship-building need to be developed throughout the project, it should not be a 'bolt-on' at the end of the research. Significant attention needs to be given to this area: for example, the research team need to strategise, embed and appropriately cost dissemination. However, dissemination can be an expensive area. The group discussed examples of 'follow-on' funding from some funding bodies to support dissemination of findings.

Part of the discussion addressed potential conflicts which might emerge in responding to stakeholders' wants: while this could be seen as tailoring the research to the interests and needs of the stakeholder, it could also be seen as creating bias or a particular slant on research findings. The focus was primarily upon policy audiences, but there was also a realisation that researchers are not always good at '*getting the research back to the people we have researched*'.

A key part of mediation was seen to be identifying the mediators. Examples were given including:

- DCSF: a discussion on the processes of scanning and identifying the relevance of recent research. This was seen to constitute a system of knowledge brokerage.
- TTRB: writing commentaries on research done by other people.

However, the more people who get involved, the less control that the research team have over the research. Caution was expressed over the possibilities of partial or inaccurate representations of research.

There was a lack of clarity and awareness over networks and the extents of mediation both within the national and international context. Examples were given where researchers were not even aware of their work being accessed on-line in other countries. It was felt that learned societies have an important role in negotiating the bureaucratic administration which presents obstacles to the development of international networks.

Group 2

Rapporteur: Fiona Hyland (ESCalate - Subject Centre for Education)

Facilitator: Judy Sebba (University of Sussex)

(combined notes)

Main points discussed by the group:

1. Educational researchers can play a vital role in mediating research to a variety of audiences and this can be best done when stakeholders and users are involved from the conception of the research to its completion.

2. It was acknowledged that different styles of writing are necessary for different audiences. Whilst an academic style of writing might be suitable for an academic journal, a 'plain English' version should ideally also be available.
3. Academics can and should act as mediators of research but some may value support such as media training and a workload allocation for mediation activities.
4. Researchers who keep in regular contact with key stakeholders and journalists are more likely to see their research turned into policy and practice.
5. Mediation activities should be evaluated to determine their impact.

Why is mediation important?

In the words of one participant 'we are an applied social science so if we're not going out and sharing what we're finding with everybody in the community well frankly we're not earning our money'. The words *duty* and *responsibility* were used at various points during the session in relation to researchers' mediation activities. There are a whole range of mediators who are working to communicate and summarise research to a variety of audiences e.g. funders, DCSF, teacher educators, parents, practitioners, subject centres etc. Several within the group expressed how vital it is that the mediation process should be ongoing and start right at the beginning of research, not at the end. One effective strategy of the TLRP was to produce reports aimed at different *audiences* meeting each of their needs e.g. research briefings for policy makers, reports for practitioners etc.

Mediation for policy makers can be seen as making research available for policy makers in a way they can readily consume. Although there is a lot of emphasis on senior policy makers it is important to remember the junior policy makers - it can be helpful to consider that policy makers are not a homogenous group.

The role of an academic style of writing vs 'plain English' in mediation

Time was spent discussing how important language is when trying to communicate research to users. The group felt that academic styles of writing can sometimes be labour intensive for readers, saying in three paragraphs what could be said in one. Does some research risk being disregarded if it cannot be quickly digested by users? On the other hand, caution was expressed in the group against over-simplifying language when the subject matter is intrinsically complex; are there times when writing can be justifiably challenging for the reader?

In academia, staff are rewarded, via career development, when they publish in peer-reviewed journals which are perceived as expecting quite formulaic academic writing styles. But perhaps we should challenge academics to make their points more simply?

One participant observed that if you first read a newspaper article then read the original paper you can really see the differences – journalists try to headline, summarise and 'fix' whereas researchers try to engage with intellectual complexity and details. Another described 'taxi text' where on journeys to their next meeting policy makers sometimes need concise bullet points of research that can be easily read. One participant felt that there could not be either/or recommendations for writing – different styles are needed depending on the audience.

Does mediation need to be done by professional mediators or can researchers take on this role?

It was questioned within the group if education researchers could learn to become effective mediators? Participants felt that researchers could learn to communicate more effectively and that by communicating with stakeholders from the start of the research they could improve their mediation skills as they found a common language whilst remaining true to the evidence and conceptually clear. Media training was also mentioned as useful to help with this process.

The role of politics and power in mediation of research

There was discussion around the need to recognise that politics can influence the use of knowledge and that the reward cultures are different in higher education institutions, research organisations, government and schools. An understanding of research mediation requires education researchers to comprehend the decision-making processes of policy makers.

Relationships with journalists and stakeholders

Although one person commented that journalists are supposed to contact institutions' press officers in the first instance, another participant reported they had been contacted directly. As described in the Mediation Case Studies presented earlier in the day, members of the group discussed the powerful consequences of research personnel forming long-term professional relationships with key mediators and policy makers in terms of getting research noticed and transformed into practice.

Evaluating effective mediation

One participant kicked off this discussion by asking whether we know what effective communication is. Is it the number of downloads of a particular web-document or should we be looking deeper at the long-term impacts of research despite the complexities of the multiple factors that play a role in any educational change? How do education researchers feel about letting others (sometimes non-researchers) mediate their research?

In response to this, picking up the earlier point of 'taxi driver text' for policy makers one participant was alarmed that decisions were being made on the basis of a few bullet points – what did this say about the democratic process? Perhaps some findings were being ignored because of the pressures of 'short-termism' in political circles?

To conclude, the discussions were wide-ranging with some topics examined in particular depth. Many of the points were illustrated with personal examples and whilst there was debate there was also a great deal of consensus with recommendations suggested in the summary given at the start of these notes.

Group 3

Rapporteur: Lucy Emerson (National Children's Bureau)

Facilitator: Ruth Leitch (Queen's University Belfast)

Mediation – should be a 2 way process – but is it?

Classroom practitioner point of view: have never seen teachers able to set their own CPD priorities – teachers should have opportunity to be part of the dialogue – but priorities for CPD are being set by the government.

What is being mediated?

Should all research be mediated?

Yes, there are teachers getting professional development bursaries, but the findings tend not to get disseminated. Are the research findings from teacher-led research 'fit for purpose' for mediation? May be very important at a personal level but is there any peer review – should the findings be mediated?

What is / is not good research?

What does/does not get mediated and why?

Sometimes good research is found lying inert and unused and there is scope for mediation. Experience of the research associate programme – this involves collaborative research with school leaders. The findings are very widely read – although the research is of varying quality. School leaders use this research – it changes practice

Mediation planned at the start or the finish?

- In some cases the 'headlines' are written before the research is commissioned. Colleagues in the communications team have already made a plan.
- For some organisations there is a need for very quick turnaround from commissioning research to getting the headlines: 2-3 months as opposed to 2-3 years. Important features are speed, accessibility and reliability.
- Need to plan dissemination from the start of research design.

What form should mediation take?

- There is variety in how research can be mediated depending on type of research and reason and origin of research: policy-makers, voluntary sector have specific purposes for asking research questions, for the local practitioner it is about them supporting the leader – it is a real issue to resolve
- *Synthesised* research can be taken to a staff meeting and discussed.
- The mediation of research needs to strike a balance between usability and depth (it should not be patronising).
- Some research is not publishable in a journal – but it can have impact in other ways
- Research mediated in newspapers can be misleading /inaccurate / hard to verify
- Turning research findings into a game/activity/postcard – open to criticism of trivialising research findings – but these techniques can also help embed research findings in leadership development
- Visual and artistic forms of dissemination that do not require words
- DVDs produced from a drama project, glossy commentaries with full colour and written in a different style – bringing people together on a contemporary issue
- DCSF produce 'research news' bulletin
- TDA does 'research bite-size'

Who are the mediators?

- When teachers carry out action research in groups the academic is often the one who mediates the research findings into a journal.
- Benefits of collaboration in dissemination and mediation – especially between sectors
- Mediation is a skilled job: researchers need to work at this skill to achieve it
- Sometimes mediation happens through collaboration between institutions

Who is the audience for mediation?

- There are plural audiences.
- Notion of democratic evaluation.
- There is a duty to make research paid for from the public purse accessible to the tax payer.

Co-production – transformation – dissemination

- This process requires user engagement from the beginning – not a bolt on at the end. Through reciprocity in learning value is added to what is mediated.
- Research about young people – ethical responsibility to go back to young people to share findings – but this requires further work and is complex and skilful process but a wonderful experience.

Incentives to mediation

DFID now specify that 10% of funding for project should be spent on dissemination. Some research tenders include 5% extra funding for dissemination, however, researchers often choose not to bid for this.

Barriers to mediation

Research methods are usually based on researchers as observers for a fixed point/period of time – this is in contrast with ongoing reflective practice. The method is a problem for mediation.

Mediation and the media

- Academics dread contact from the media and don't want research being distorted
- Panos – organisation specialising in developing skills for journalists to talk to/engage with researchers

International dimension

- NCVET (National Centre for Vocational Educational Research in Australia) but research on their web-site and also compile abstracts of other research – good model of mediation
- Europe: UK tends to be mono-lingual so limits comparison to other English speaking countries such as Canada, US, Australia, NZ
- It is a skilled task to look at international data – since there are different educational systems in different countries - and compare countries and mediate that

Discussant

Sandra Nutley (Research Unit for Research Utilisation, University of Edinburgh) identified several metaphors commonly used in discussions about mediation – such as “bridging” or “jumping across” a gap, “finding one’s way through a maze”, opening “silos”, “hunting-gathering”, and so forth. Many of these metaphors (some of which were used in discussions at SFRE III, too), assume two communities to be reconnected via mediation work. However, in actual fact there are **more than “two worlds” involved** in these processes, including university researchers, research institutes, independent evaluators, government analysts, think tanks, media, professional bodies, advocacy groups, third sector organisations, inspectors, local government officers, civil servants, politicians, policy advisors, education practitioners, parents, etc. Research mediation links all of these groups.

Many researchers who do their own mediation work (they are “DYI mediators”), but increasingly other people/ bodies are playing important roles in this area. For example, the inspectorates and the government analysts increasingly see themselves in the role of “knowledge brokers”. For such work to be successful, be it “DYI” or specialised, several conditions need to be met. Drawing on research on mediation, Sandra Nutley outlined **six “lessons” for successful mediation** (see Nutley, 2010):

1. Improve the supply of relevant, accessible & credible evidence, but don't stop there. No matter how creative and effective, dissemination is not enough to ensure that research is received, echoed, and transposed into practice. In addition, much of the current emphasis in dissemination is national, despite the international character of many of the challenges addressed by research.
2. Shape – as well as respond to – the demand for evidence in policy and practice settings. Efforts to shape demand could, include, for example, working with advocacy groups, but improving the analytical skills of policy makers and practitioners.
3. Develop multifaceted strategies to address the interplay between supply & demand. We need to move away from ideas of ‘packaging’ knowledge and enabling knowledge transfer and recognise instead that mediation is a process and not an event (which comes with the transfer of a package). Good mediation involves more than good executive summaries, reports, or digests of research; it recognises the importance of context, of interaction with different types of knowledge, and of multi-voiced dialogue. Credible, trusted sources (e.g.

particular individuals and institutions), as well as champions of research in local contexts, are important in this process.

4. Recognise the role of dedicated knowledge broker organisations/ networks. Knowledge brokerage not only includes the linkage and exchange of expertise (brokering the relationship between ‘creators’ and ‘users’), but may also be seen as knowledge management (facilitating the creation, diffusion and use of knowledge) and as capacity building (improving capacity to interpret and use evidence – and to produce more accessible analytical reports) (Nutley, 2010, drawing on Oldham and McLean, 1997).
5. Target multiple voices to increase opportunities for evidence to become part of policy discourse (“evidence-informed democracy”).
6. Evaluate strategies to improve evidence use, and learn from this. Evaluations of what strategies work, for whom and in what circumstances are rarely done systematically. More work is required in this field.

The Application and Impact of Education Research Knowledge

Key questions

Is there a strategy for educational R&D impact in each relevant educational sector - with clear understanding of what counts as basic and applied research and of forms of development by practitioners and others – and the funding streams and organisational infrastructures to support these activities?

- Why is the impact of education research important, to whom, for what purposes?
- How is the impact of education research knowledge currently being promoted? What are the challenges being faced by processes and initiatives aimed at increasing the impact of education research?
- How can co-ordination and communication among the different existent strategies be improved? How could we get more value from them in different country and sector contexts?
- How are the countries' research and development work linked to appropriate international networks, centres and activities focussed on research knowledge impact?

Synopsis

By and large, the rationale for investing in research mediation is to increase the likelihood of achieving impact. Predictably, discussions around impact at SFRE III overlapped with those about mediation. **Effective communication, the role of champions of research, and that of good leadership** in the use of evidence from practitioner and higher-education-led research were common themes in both sets of discussions. Some of the tensions identified above in relation to mediation also surfaced in relation to impact; in particular, the tension between shaping research interpretation to current policy issues, and maintaining academic integrity.

It is important to distinguish between forward-looking and backward-looking impact considerations. **Strategies for educational research impact** in the UK should aim to promote potential impact, to support current use of evidence in practice, and to create enabling conditions for further engagement with research evidence among practitioners and other relevant constituencies. Reporting and measuring accurately and consistently the actual impact achieved and its sustainability are distinct, unresolved issues for assessment policies and for evaluation research. Many of these impact-related activities are not, at the moment, adequately resourced.

Impact is not a clear-cut concept. At **system level**, participants suggested that impact could encompass, for example, changes in practice, changes in policy, institutional changes, as well as enhanced public debate and increased public awareness of important issues. Some of these areas could be defined as research application; others, as diffusion of knowledge; others, as challenging established ways of thinking and acting; yet others, as contributions to informed practical judgment. At **individual level**, in practice and policy, research evidence, however strong, rigorous, and effectively communicated, does not simply compel to action, but is filtered through judgments about aims and values, and balanced against other forms of evidence and incentives to action. Dialogue and partnership throughout the research process may enable shifts in the language used in public debates, and in the assumptions shaping the use of research evidence, which may have implications for both the individual and the systemic levels. Simply bringing people together in a genuine conversation may, however, be difficult, given the particular constraints within which each

community with an interest in education research operates. Therefore, initiatives such as the SFRE have an important role to play in establishing connections on which future developments may build.

Case studies

Animating specialist expertise for practitioners. Philippa Cordingley (Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education) noted that, although specialist expertise is crucial to solving practical problems, it is not directly available to teachers. Thus, there is an important role for dedicated organisations, such as CUREE, to play in promoting the impact on practice of education research knowledge - i.e., the use of research to enhance educational practice. Two levels of this activity can be discerned: individual practitioner level, and system level. In their engagement with research, *individual practitioners* need a range of research outputs, tools and resources, and entry points that enable collaborative, active learning and encourage the use of specialist expertise to explore beliefs, focus problem-solving efforts, and challenge thinking with new ideas. Examples of such tools, developed and managed with contribution from CUREE, for the support of individual engagement include “2.5 Min Research Bites” (www.standards.dcf.gov.uk/research), “Web Digests”, micro-enquiry tools based on “nuggets of evidence” (e.g. GTCE tasters), magazines, major research summaries, CPD tools and resources (e.g. <http://www.gtce.org.uk/teachers/rft/>), coaching programmes & structures (e.g. Training Schools, Lead Practitioners), and the work of the National Teacher Research Panel. *At system level*, promoting the use of research involves working at all levels, embedding the use of research in CPD in sustainable ways, and developing an infrastructure capable to support attending to the different research and evidence needs of practitioners. Appropriate infrastructure is required for efforts directed towards: ensuring that the issues of interest to practitioners are prioritised in research agendas; raising awareness about the range of useful research; securing understanding of core facts and issues; enabling practitioners to connect outputs and experiences; and encouraging and/or supporting practitioners in interpreting, testing and refining strategies from research in their own context. Examples of CUREE’s system-level activities include translating systematic reviews into a National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching (http://www.tda.gov.uk/upload/resources/pdf/m/mc_framework.pdf) and the development of a web-based “route map” of free resources for communicating with teachers about research (<http://www.curee-paccts.com/resources/route-map>).

Leadership on the use of evidence from practitioner- and higher-education led research, for the improvement of practice in the learning and skills sector. Sheila Kearney (Learning and Skills Improvement Service) outlined the research strategy of LSIS, as a case-study on the importance of sectoral leadership in promoting and enabling improvement of practice based on evidence from research. The three-pronged research strategy includes, first, efforts to *build and maintain an up-to-date sectoral evidence and knowledge base* that is driven by a forward looking perspective and policy intelligence and by reviews of evidence gaps and research priorities. Further activities are directed at *knowledge transfer/mediation*, both internally (e.g. internal standards for research and evaluation commissioning and management; “Inside Evidence” magazine) and externally (e.g. synthesising and sharing learning from LSIS research and programmes). Research Laboratories are a (currently small-scale) knowledge mediation and impact promotion initiative to support six providers in making use of, and replicating research from elsewhere to improve practice, as well as to conduct their own practice-based research (Kearney, 2010). Finally, these efforts are supported with initiatives aimed at *building sector capacity to use and conduct research* via learning and sharing within the sector, across sectors, and internationally. Examples of work include supporting workforce professionalism through practitioner-led research, e.g. through LSIS-Institute for Learning Research Development Fellowships; capacity building for research in the sector, including the provision of training and training toolkits; engaging with practitioners, e.g. via LSRN, NTRP; sponsoring/working with partners, e.g. TLRP, IfL; and the Excellence Gateway research area (<http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/>). Although systematic evaluations of ways of supporting

practitioner research are lacking, the experience of the LSIS-IfL Fellowships programme suggests a number of factors that may be associated with success. First, initiatives aimed at supporting practitioner research ought not to be overly prescriptive, but to flexibly adapt to the needs of practitioners. Second, the commitment of institutional management is important. Third, collaborative practitioner research should be supported in its contribution to joint practice development not only among the group of practitioner researchers but also back into their workplaces. And fourth, organisations with leadership roles in supporting the use of evidence should build an ongoing collection of examples of practitioner research that had had an impact on practitioners' organisations and sector.

Policy relevance with academic integrity. John Furlong (University of Oxford) reported on a project commissioned by the ESRC in collaboration with the Welsh Assembly Government and Welsh Educational Research Network (WERN), and designed to explore the implications of the findings from the TLRP for educational policy and practice in Wales. Coordinated by John Furlong, four teams of researchers from across Wales reviewed findings from the TLRP in relation to four key areas Welsh policy identified by the Welsh Assembly Government: the foundation phase; improving teaching for the 7-14 age range; social inclusion; and improving learning by taking account of learners' perspectives. In order to support research capacity development in Wales, each team included more and less experienced researchers from two HEIs. The outcome of the reviews was a series of posters and of accompanying briefing papers which were made widely available to policy makers and practitioners across Wales. In addition, two meetings brought together policy-makers and researchers to engage in conversation about interpreting research findings and linking them to the School Effectiveness Framework in Wales. Chris Owen (Welsh Assembly Government) commented that, although the funding available was small, the enthusiasm of the team members meant that the project succeeded in its aim to engage with policy-makers on their own parameters, whilst demonstrating the relevance and benefit of academic research. Several lessons to be drawn from the project, according to John Furlong, were:

- the crucial role of policy-based "champions" of research in enabling a conversation between researchers and policy-makers;
- the great deal of discipline that needs to be exercised when generating research-based outputs for a policy audience; working with professional copy-editors to reshape academic work for a different audience can help;
- the importance of going beyond "good writing" towards finding "hooks" to anchor research to current policy issues. Shaping the interpretation of research evidence to these issues, in order to enable its passage into policy decisions, must be done without compromising academic integrity. The Welsh project illustrated how the potential tension between policy relevance and academic integrity can be resolved.

Group discussions

Group 1

Rapporteur: Vivienne Baumfield (University of Glasgow)

Facilitator: Pamela Munn (BERA)

The need for teachers to have better access to research was recognised and it was thought that it would be better if this took the form of links to multiple sources of reliable evidence rather than summaries that sought to provide 'the answer' to a particular query. However, it was also felt that there might be too much information and that teachers' could feel swamped and unable to select what they needed to improve their practice. The solution may be to facilitate networks in which teachers could talk about topics that have been researched and consider how they may use the

evidence. It was suggested that teachers might prefer to have specific examples of the application of findings from research that they could test for themselves in their classrooms.

Networks would be preferable to anything imposed by policy makers as the question of ownership is vital and would tend to militate against setting up any overarching strategy for the dissemination of research evidence. There is a tension between providing guidance and assistance in distilling useful knowledge from research evidence and being too directive and disabling the professional judgement of teachers. It should be recognised that education is inevitably values based and so issues can never be resolved by simply citing a body of 'evidence'. It is also important to be cognisant of the barrier to acting upon findings from research when these are seen to be at odds with current political views. Although some people thought that these restrictions are not always as powerful as they are perceived to be and there is scope for action in classrooms. The idea of the 'road map' in the CUREE presentation was thought to be a useful as was the case study from Wales, which was seen as a good example of bringing researchers, policy makers and practitioners together to bring different perspectives to bear on common issues.

One of the problems affecting the impact of research on practice was the absence of a conduit for ideas from practitioners to policy makers to researchers. The commissioning of research should be linked to questions from practitioners and a 'bottom up' demand for knowledge encouraged. Schools could be supported in taking a more active role in engaging with evidence and making best use of such opportunities would improve the impact of research. The facilitation of a funders' forum in which teachers could inform the commissioning of research could assist in this process.

Group 2

Rapporteur: Maggie Farrar (National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services)

Facilitator: Ruth Leitch (Queen's University Belfast)

The discussion raised and debated the following questions:

1. What do we mean by impact?
2. What is our understanding of impact over time?
3. How can we increase the application of research to secure greater impact?
4. How far does the commissioning process influence the outcomes?
5. What can we learn from international research?

What do we mean by impact?

The group discussed the changes that we were looking for as a result of the application of research. How would we know if the research had had any impact? It was agreed that this will be different depending on the type of research being undertaken, particularly whether it was pure or applied research. The following areas of impact were proposed as legitimate and the question was posed – are these equally valuable? :

- Enhanced public debate
- Increased public awareness
- Change in policy
- Change in practice
- Institutional change

What is our understanding of impact over time?

The group discussed the current drive for immediate impact. It was agreed that the education system is resistant to change, and, therefore, without a focus on the longer term impact, secured through a focus on changing culture / raising awareness etc, even short term impact will not be sustainable. There was then a further discussion on the sustainability of impact and how far we should be taking account of this in the application of research findings. A debate on the impact of effective early years practice took place. It was agreed that it is difficult to defend investment in the

early years and the foundation stage when the impact may not be demonstrated until later in a child's life.

How can we increase the application of research to get greater impact?

The group agreed that this is an area where more effort is needed. Research committees for example, tend to stop at publication. It was pointed out that publication and dissemination is not the same as mediation and application. The group discussed who was responsible for ensuring greater usage and application of research findings. There was a general view that this takes time and money if it is to be done well, needs building in from the beginning of the research, requires a different skills set and is more likely to happen if users are engaged in the research. The role of brokers was recognised in their skills of bridging the academic and practitioner communities.

An example of research that had achieved greater applicability was the TLRP. This was because:

- There was a clear purpose to the research
- It was focused on practice
- There was some pre-judgement of the outcomes and therefore
- Stakeholders were engaged throughout

There was concern expressed about superficial change in practice as a result of research. This can lead to a 'tactical' response to the research which shows no understanding of underpinning theory and rationale. Some of the changes in practice as a result of the research into AfL were seen as of this more tactical type.

There was some discussion on the use of professional development days in schools and the need to use findings from research to underpin these days.

How far does the commissioning process influence the outcomes?

There was a general view that civil servants and policy makers understand the value of research but tend to use it in a mechanistic way. This was particularly the case for evaluation where a decision on whether or not to go ahead with the scale up of a pilot programme had often been taken prior to the evaluation report being submitted. In some cases the relationship with policy makers was described as 'conflictual' where the research team and the policy makers end up fighting over the evidence base. It was agreed that it is important to maintain the independence of research whilst having a mature debate with politicians and policy makers. A further observation was made that there is currently no consistency across government departments or agencies in how research is commissioned.

What can we learn from international research?

The OECD study into school leadership 'Improving School Leadership' was cited as a good example of research because it was much more open ended in how it was commissioned and sparked an international debate on the future of leadership and leadership development

Group 3

Rapporteur: Kenneth Greer (Fife Council)

Facilitator: Judy Sebba (University of Sussex)

If policy makers and other users of research are engaged from the start of the research process, it is more likely that there will be a measurable, sustained impact. Regular contact, both generic and specific (directed at problems to solve), between policy makers and researchers will assist in focusing the activity on sustainability and the development of a professional learning community. It also helps in defining and focusing the anticipated impact at the start of the research. One of the keys to effective, 'impactful' research is ensuring that the project is initiated, conceptualised and

owned by the user working with researchers. This will be facilitated by regular opportunities to report back on processes.

Personal contact is key to achieving impact – institutional contact can be lost when one person leaves – this can be avoided if there is an infrastructure in policy organisations (government departments, LAs, etc) to support the use of research, also implying that it is regarded to have real utility. At best, this infrastructure can provide mechanisms for regular exchange between policy makers and researchers.

Careful consideration needs to be given to the ways in which we communicate research purposes as well as its results, interim and final.

The culture of both policy-makers and the research community has changed but needs to develop further in order to develop different ways of increasing the use of research. We need a better understanding of the other factors (including economic imperatives) that influence policy making.

Teachers’ perspectives/voice is needed as well as that of learners. There also needs to be reflection on whether the teachers’ voice has been heard adequately. Further work is required in reflecting upon how to make use of the input of learners to research.

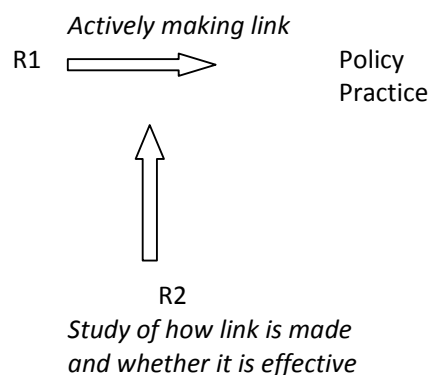
We need measures of impact so we can evaluate and recognise it. This, however, is difficult to plan. Policy-making also might usefully be more explicit in how policy is research-based. In particular, questions need to be framed about the impact of research in terms of changes to classroom practice.

Group 4

Rapporteur: Fiona Maclennan (Falkirk Council)

Facilitator: Ian Menter (University of Glasgow)

There was much discussion around the benefits of systematic against separate evaluations of research. **Process evaluation** was discussed around R1 and R2 studies. Here, R1 is the initial research which actively impacts on policy and practice, while R2 is a study of how this link is made and how effective it is. It was noted that research of engagement studies already exist and could perhaps be extended. This was seen as an important issue to pursue.



The idea of a **centre for research** led to discussion on the purpose of the centre, whether to mediate research or enable the link between policy and practice. While some participants thought it would be useful to have centres ‘researching whether research has an impact’, others felt that a teacher research panel had to be the starting point, before a research centre was considered.

Timing was seen as an issue in measuring CPD effectiveness. Short-term studies are evaluated at the time, but then move forward and develop over time. When evaluating over a longer term, it is difficult to control factors for comparison. While empirical evidence may not be forthcoming from this, comparative models are available to make use of evidence gathered.

Extent of involvement of practitioners was questioned. While most saw a need for researchers to have a degree of flexibility and compromise, the question of how far this might upset the integrity of the research was raised. Issues of power and vested interest were considered. It was suggested that teacher-researchers were necessary to point to the application of findings. Problems arise when research challenges peoples' prejudices and this presents the dilemma of whether to include vested interest groups and risk prejudice.

The **initial bid** was seen as important. Conventional projects tend to miss out on considering the impact up front. Planning and forethought are key to success, especially when various bodies are involved, with different purposes. In order to evaluate any CPD impact, it should be built in from the start, making it both effective and financially advantageous.

The group agreed on the need for a **relationship to continue between all stakeholders**, from the starting point where the question is framed, all the way through to the review stage. Reviews are driven by 'evidences' and the question of how far this should go was raised. In writing the review, 'hooks' should be provided to help people hear.

The **potential of personal energy and commitment to promote** and drive the question of research, against the current background of financial concerns, was mentioned.

Discussants

Kay Livingston (Learning and Teaching Scotland) cited Huberman's (1998) description of the "**micro-worlds**" of policy-makers and researchers, each with their constructs, conventions, routines, and practices. Despite inevitable tensions, these worlds are not mutually exclusive, nor do they inhabit completely distinct universes; they overlap and are part of the same, global, community. It is this shared space that enables the movement of knowledge across institutional boundaries. Research facilitators/ mediator have an important role in connecting these "worlds", in establishing and co-ordinating communication between them. This communication is at its most successful when taking the form of **ongoing dialogue**, running from the start of the research process to its end, and beyond (Livingston, 2010).

Jacque Nunn (Training and Development Agency for Schools) picked up four themes in discussions about impact at SFRE III, which are worth taking forward in, for example, further dialogue on the commissioning process. First, in terms of **resources**, there seemed to be agreement among participants that successful impact, application, and use activity needed adequate support. Facilitating the impact and use of research is one way of ensuring that government's investment in education research pays off. Value for money is not only an economic concern, but also a moral and political one. A second area of generic agreement among participants had been the critical role of **collaboration and (tactical and strategic) partnerships** in achieving impact. Third, in relation to processes of policy-making, participants had repeatedly pointed out the importance of well-conducted **evaluation**, not only post-factum, but also intermediate and process evaluation. Finally, discussions about impact at SFRE III had addressed several **levels**, from engaging key players at the local, regional, and national levels, to achieving impact through specialist interventions in an international context (for example, in post-emergency situations).

Accumulation, Mediation and Impact of Education Research Knowledge in Different Sectors

Key questions

For your specific sector, what are the key messages from SFRE III about how sectorally focused knowledge is accumulated, mediated and applied to achieve impact?

- Are people, relationships, processes, institutions and systems in place within your sector to achieve this?
- Can you identify particular examples of good practice in terms of accumulation, mediation and application?
- In relation to your sector, are there any particular issues concerning accumulation, mediation or application which should have particular priority for attention?
- What recommendations should the final SFRE report put forward?

Synopsis

The more general topics described above were also discussed in more contextualised manner in the sector-based groups.

Although sharing many issues related to accumulation, mediation and impact of research knowledge, the **primary and early years sectors** were seen as differing on the extent to which strong research evidence about good practice had been taken up in policy and practice in each of the two sectors. Currently, the early years sector was seen as drawing on a more coherent evidence base, which facilitated policy take-up; while the primary sector had a richer, but more fragmented, and insufficiently tapped by policy and practice, range of sources of evidence available. Both sectors had the advantage of being prioritised in policy debates at local, regional and national levels, as well as in discussions about the role of evidence in policy and practice. Their high visibility also entailed a degree of controversy and critique, as was the case currently in the primary sector. In both sectors, a need was identified for identifying a shared language and appropriate mechanisms for productive communication among all stakeholders; otherwise, the different stakeholders' continuous input into, and engagement with, research and research evidence would be hampered. Local authorities had a key role to play, particularly if they formed "constructive partnerships" with other agencies and with practitioners in the sector.

The **secondary sector** has a wealth of resources and sources of evidence available, although, as was the case with the primary sector, there is still a need for integration, streamlined access, and quality assurance. There is clear commitment in the sector to the principles of practitioner engagement in research, but the reality of current working environments is not always supportive of committed, sustained engagement. In addition, current arrangements for linking research with practice and policy in the sector need to consider more carefully the needs of other stakeholder groups, including young people and parents. Finally, it was felt that growing differences between secondary education systems in each country of the UK (e.g. on issues of curriculum, ITT, CPD, funding arrangements) had different implications for research agendas, gatekeeping (both in terms of the access of researchers to schools, and the access of schools to research), and opportunities for collaboration.

Great fragmentation of evidence available was also reported in the **post-compulsory sector**. Despite a shared focus on learning and learners, the sector was vastly complex and lacking stability, and these attributes were also reflected in agendas for commissioning research. Participants to SFRE III

suggested that strategic investment in research in this sector was necessary in order to increase the clarity and integration of the evidence available, develop shared ownership of research agendas, and ensure continuity of research focus despite the fast pace of structural, governance and administrative changes. A clear perception among the group was that post-compulsory education and training was a marginalised area of research in the UK; strategies for increasing the visibility of the field were to be sought. Perhaps more than in other sectors, it was argued that the mismatch between policy and implementation schedules, on the one side, and research and evaluation timetables, on the other, had negative implications for work conditions and practice in the post-compulsory sector. Finding ways to address this mismatch was an important component of any future strategy for knowledge integration and impact in the sector. In addition, given the great diversity of the sector, more inter- and multi-disciplinary approaches to research ought to be encouraged. Accumulation and use, it was argued, cut across disciplinary boundaries, and this fact should be taken into account in strategic decisions about knowledge management across the sector. Despite being seen as marginalised, the sector had a number of strengths in relation to knowledge management, on which future developments could build. These opportunities included a strong international dimension of research in many sub-fields of post-compulsory education and training, in particular in relation to vocational, higher, and adult education. National and international networks and resources in these fields offered examples of good practice in the areas of knowledge accumulation, mediation, and impact.

Common themes to all sectoral discussions included the importance of strategically sustaining practitioner engagement with research, of recognising the importance of local contexts, of strengthening mutual respect among sectors, and of identifying opportunities for cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral networking and sharing of information.

Group discussions

Primary and early years

Rapporteur: Donald Christie (University of Strathclyde)

Facilitator: Wendy Young (Estyn)

Key messages from SFRE III about how sectorally focused knowledge is accumulated, mediated and applied to achieve impact:

1. First point stressed by participants was that in the Primary and Early Years sector there is a strong willingness to engage with research. It was asserted that practitioners, policy makers and academics in this sector have an intrinsic interest in research. This appeared to be true across the four countries though there were potentially interesting different dynamics in each. For example, in Wales there was a willingness among stakeholders to get together, to listen to one another and to try to generate a shared voice on issues to do with early years and primary education, which at the same time acknowledged different contributions to the discussion.
2. Openness, willingness to engage in meaningful, action-oriented dialogue (not simply “navel-gazing”) was important. The conditions for this would include accessibility of research evidence (and practitioner perspectives), relevance of evidence, appropriate “hooks” (e.g. clear shared purposes) for discussion and genuine opportunities for collaborative dialogue. A key condition and necessary step in the process is gaining the language for productive communication.
3. Major policy initiatives such as curriculum reforms can provide an appropriate context for this kind of productive dialogue, as in the current restructuring and reform of the curriculum which is

going on in all four countries. In Scotland the Curriculum for Excellence (3-18) is intended to involve teachers as policy reform agents. Much debate and controversy in England associated with the research informed(?) Rose Review. Claims that the work of Alexander was research informed have been disputed and one view was that Alexander (deliberately?) provoked a defensive reaction and did not create constructive dialogue. Another view, however, was that the Rose Review would not have happened if it had not been for the work of Alexander.

4. For example, TLRP had made strenuous efforts to engage constructively with policy bodies, for example, with the Department for Children, Schools and Families, but in such organisations there was a major problem of constant staff change. Outcomes of such contacts can be very unpredictable and, on the one hand, there is a need to find a way to “grab attention” among policy makers, while on the other hand, ways need to be found to sustain engagement in order to work in an ongoing way with policy makers and other stakeholders.
5. The need to build trust and confidence among the practice community was also emphasised. A “safe place” for dialogue was needed to encourage practitioners to engage and the focus of this dialogue needs to focus on what matters ‘on the ground’.
6. The question of the appropriateness of a critical stance was discussed. For example, Robin Alexander’s position could be depicted as essentially that Government had simply got it wrong. This perhaps meant that his report was less likely to be taken on board by those concerned. However, the importance of a critical stance was stressed and the counter example of the Plowden Report was offered. Plowden, commissioned by the Government, was nevertheless highly critical of the prevailing policy and practice and proved to be extremely influential. While times have changed since the 1960s, it remains important for studies to be critical while at the same time for all stakeholders somehow to be engaged in the process.
7. Again it was emphasised that in the case of the early years and primary sector this engagement is possibly facilitated by the fact that this sector appears to be higher up the priority list at local, regional and national level.
8. The key importance of the local authorities was acknowledged as a key influence operating at the level of the individual school. Local authorities can function as a pathway or mediating channel in relation to the impact of research evidence. Again the primary sector arguably had closer links with local authorities, while scale of many secondary schools meant perhaps that they had the resources to allow them to feel less dependant upon their local authorities.
9. There seems to be evidence that local authorities within and across the four jurisdictions are adopting different policies, for example, in relation to children with additional support needs. Schools may find themselves ‘stuck’ with LA policies – good or bad. Indeed it was felt by one participant that local authorities can be an inhibiting factor in schools trying to implement innovative practice, in which case a move to more autonomy for schools would be welcome. However, the opposite view was also expressed, with positive examples cited of local authorities such as Fife and Northumberland which had developed strong facilitative partnerships with their schools in introducing evidence based innovations. It was concluded that the relationship between local authorities and schools was different across the different parts of the UK. The challenge for the Forum and for researchers was to find ways to help local authorities take a positive ‘self-actualising’ stance with respect to schools and other children’s services.
10. There was possibly more scope in the wider Children’s Services agenda for constructive partnerships involving local authorities, and key agencies as well as the varied ‘workforce’ which constitutes the practice community. In relation to issues to do with, for example, child

protection and family support, local authorities have a direct interest in 'standards' and there is thus more leverage in terms of the role of research and evidence. In this context local authorities may be seen as more 'research hungry'. With the positive influence of large scale studies such as EPPE, there is a good measure of agreement from research about what constitutes good practice, e.g. about the importance of staff expertise, in the early years, but this is perhaps lacking in the primary sector.

11. That said, examples were discussed of good practice in some local authorities, such as the initiative in Walsall concerned with children's preparation for primary in areas of high deprivation. The American 'Incredible Years' Program was also cited. What these initiatives shared was that they were highly structured and rather prescriptive, which may be seen as running against the grain of teachers and other practitioners being seen as having a high degree of professional autonomy and which might raise questions about the role of research and enquiry.
12. A problem was identified which was to do with the fact that many initiatives such as the above were highly specific in nature, very much situationally determined, with their outcomes measured in quite different ways all of which made it difficult for evidence to be 'joined up', aggregated or accumulated in ways that can usefully inform interested stakeholders.
13. The further example was discussed of parenting programmes which are to be 'kitemarked', with their effectiveness to be judged from evidence provided by those responsible for programmes against research-based criteria. This is to be a light touch assessment.
14. The group discussion turned in conclusion to the need for a strategic overview, acknowledging the difference between early years and primary. Notwithstanding the earlier point about the apparently stronger link between research and policy/practice in relation to early years provision, there was potentially a much wider range of sources of evidence available in relation to primary phase across the whole range of the curriculum than have been tapped hitherto. One thing that was needed was a better mechanism to enable practitioners to be involved and have a significant input into the research process, including, importantly, the commissioning of research. There were some signs of this happening, for example, in work connected with the development of the Foundation Stage in Wales and in the 'National' Teachers' Researcher Panel, but much more needs to be done in this regard.

Secondary

Group A

Rapporteur: Pamela Munn (BERA)

Facilitator: Anne Campbell (BERA)

Availability of resources

The group felt that there was a wealth of research related resources available relating to key issues in secondary education. These resources included individual research project findings, reviews/summaries of research, and national statistical collections on matters such as pupil attainment, attendance and exclusion. There were international comparisons of attainment through PISA and TIMMS. There were also overview reports of the state of secondary schooling produced by the Inspectorates in the four nations as well as OECD reports. There were doubts about whether interested parties would be aware of the range of resources available and there seemed to be no 'gateway or clearing house leading to a range of easily searchable and quality assured information.

Knowledge accumulation

Knowledge accumulation was seen as problematic especially in small-scale qualitative research and in action research studies. It was agreed that more could be done here in the shape of regular research reviews written in easily accessible language. Research Funders could help by having a more strategic view of the topics they wished to fund and they could also perhaps commission regular reviews of research findings on enduring issues in education which could then be updated for a particular policy context.

School effectiveness and school improvement research was identified as having been a major influence in secondary school policy and practice with its message that schools did make a difference to pupils' attainment although issues surrounding the valid and reliable measurement of this were perhaps less well understood.

Co-construction of knowledge: Research policy and practice

Teachers' knowledge and expertise were important ingredients in understanding secondary school practices. SFRE discussions had focussed on teachers who are willing and able to engage in research-based work and in school-university partnerships. Members of the group believed that there is a huge gap between the reality of the current teaching workforce's working environment and the aspirations for teachers to be involved in research.

The group heard of an Australian example of schools committing to a researcher in residence to help develop understanding of the school's practices. Such a development underlines the need for political will if teachers to become more actively engaged with research. Supporting informal networks and structures was seen as important too.

In general the group believed that there was the need for funding *over time* to help sustain teacher engagement with research. It was not a quick process and the time frame needed did not often coincide with policy cycles and imperatives. If there was a serious desire for teachers to become more actively engaged with research a range of ways of doing this over time would need to be found and a system put in place to generate ideas from the research, policy and practice communities in each of the four nations of how best to do this.

Group B

Rapporteur: David Jones (Council for Subject Associations)

Facilitator: Sue Davies (Trinity College Carmarthen/ BERA)

The brief introduction to the session considered the changing nature of the education landscape and the possibility that it would accelerate during the next eighteen months as a consequence of changes in policy as a result of the imminent general election.

Mention was made of recognising the importance of specialist contributions to CPD and colleague support, while there was a warning that secondary sector approaches to CPD were not appropriate to the primary sector. It was agreed that there was a need to build respect of primary sector pedagogic approaches within the secondary sector and vice-versa.

In the secondary sector there is currently momentum to adopt cluster-based approaches to CPD founded on evidence that teachers prefer it, and middle leadership surveys (National College) which suggest there is greater satisfaction with the outcomes. The cluster-based approach facilitates the sharing of contexts between colleagues, through a variety of providers, and across sectors. Concerns were raised about the capacity of HEI/school partnerships to provide sufficient mentoring, support and quality assurance if such an approach were adopted across the UK.

It was proposed that ‘action learning’ should be the focus of school-based research to discourage too great a reliance on more traditional research approaches. Action learning should include a recognised process for incorporating external research into internal and localised approaches. To avoid meaningless self-justification for research (by individuals) it will be necessary to establish reliable impact measurement. Research communities must recognise the scope of cluster-based approaches; listen to what schools are saying and take account of the possibilities offered through clusters that are virtual, regional, national or international; recognising the breadth of conceptual contexts offered. Cluster approaches to research provide an excellent opportunity to support a strong practitioner research base in schools through the Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL) scheme (England).

There was a recommendation for a review of the principles of professional learning, with a view to embedding research practice within teaching responsibilities in order to act as a catalyst to underpin career development.

It was suggested that the difficulties associated with supporting individualised research interests might be reduced by identifying fields of mutual interest for universities and school partners e.g. a focus on ‘critical thinking’ might be adopted across a region or within a partnership.

It was proposed that there was no requirement for ASTs to engage at a higher level with teacher practitioner research and a review of this situation could increase the prospects for school-based enquiry.

Competition and collaboration between researchers may be an area for scrutiny when considering subjects. It was suggested that collaboration should only be adopted as a valid approach when ‘to do a good job of research’ it was not possible to do it as an individual. Care must be taken by researchers to avoid supporting hierarchies of subjects and schools, as there are competitive forces in the curriculum that need to be neutralised.

The impact of devolution is reinforcing the differences between education systems and the result is that research is being pulled in different ways in each of the countries of the UK. There are differences in curriculum reform, ITT and CPD as a result.

HEIs are being pressed to produce internationally recognised research. Cuts in local authority funding mean that researchers cannot gain access to schools – this presents a dilemma for quality of the research that can be carried out and affects the range of opportunities to exert international influence.

Finally the group was reminded that in all the discussions no mention had been made of the needs of young people, parents, teachers and researchers and more should be made of these opportunities within the research arena.

Post-compulsory

Group A

Rapporteur: Zoe Fowler (Research Consultant)

Facilitator: Kathleen Collett (City and Guilds Skills Development)

The post-compulsory discussion group was very small and this was seen to be relevant to the sense that this area was marginalised within the overall education landscape.

The landscape of post-compulsory education was seen to be particularly complex: within the group there were initial questions asked about the boundaries of this group: does post-compulsory begin at 14, 16, or 19? What is the role of employers within this sector? And how is education 'separate' from the wider agendas of the 2020 Workforce, youth work, and other relevant issues? The complexities of this field were further aggravated by the mismatches of funding between DCSF and BIS, and the vast numbers of qualifications that are provided to different groups within the sector. The need to increase the visibility and clarity of post-compulsory education was a recurring theme throughout the discussions.

The size and range of post-compulsory education meant that the group were unable to comprehensively address the kinds of research available or how this might be utilised. The sector was seen to be fragmented. However, there was a sense of a common focus upon learning. Examples were given from Wales where the policy focus had shifted from the institution to the learner, which had created a 'porosity' of boundary between compulsory and post-compulsory education. Within England, LSIS provides a central structure, but many institutions exist 'around the edges' and these don't feed into LSIS. Concerns were expressed over the stability of LSIS at a time of massive funding cuts: at best, LSIS was seen to be 'crippled' by lack of funding, at worst there were worries that the organisation would cease to exist.

The complexity and lack of stability of this area of education had wide-reaching effects:

i) Funding of research.

There is a lack of clarity and ownership – the group were unable to answer the question 'who is leading and defining the big research questions for the post-compulsory sector?' Research tends to be funded through 'happenstance' rather than as part of an overall strategic view of the field. There is neither continuity nor accumulation in terms of areas of research. The group recommended that there needed to be a greater continuity and stability in research focus for a coherent system to evolve. But whose responsibility would this be?

Some group members felt that the HE sector needed to be more proactive and engaged: creating an 'information pull' rather than a 'passive push'. Researchers need to recognise that, although politicians work to a different chronology, they also have aspirations for society which researchers can 'tap' into.

Employers were seen to be critical of the available research, but failed to invest in this area. It is possible that if employers felt a greater ownership of the field that they might become more proactive. The group were not sure what kinds of research employers read, or how best to involve them.

ii) Impact and stability

Within the research process time is needed to build relationships with the post-compulsory sector, but the high turnover of key staff in policy and practice means that it is difficult to sustain or to build upon these relationships.

iii) Fitness for Purpose

The different chronologies of policy, research and practice mean that some stakeholders might want to implement research before it has been fully evaluated. An example from Wales illustrated these conflicts. This was seen to highlight the differences of fitness for purpose which different stakeholders might assume.

iv) Organisation and administration of research.

There was a shared frustration that there were many different databases that don't relate to one another. It was agreed that good administration is needed in this field to link things together. Currently, there was a shared sense that funding was not being used effectively: 'the wrong people are being asked to do potentially useful things'.

Discussions of good practice identified:

- LSIS. But, as noted above, a lack of funding provides major obstacles to the effectiveness of this organisation.
- City and Guilds. Examples were given of work with practitioners to develop sets of measures and to then pilot these as alternative Standards. This approach means that the research begins with the practitioner, and ongoing interactivity is promoted between practitioners and researchers.
- More Choices, More Chances. The Scottish NEET strategy is an action plan which provides opportunities to have research informing the policy agenda.
- In Wales, conferences have been held which have sought to bring together employers and other stakeholders within this sector.
- The Rathbone Trust was seen as an example of good practice of a well managed project which merged many different stakeholders, endured over time, and was provider-led.
- Farnborough Sixth Form College employs teachers to do research on a permanent basis, with costs recouped through CPD. This was seen as an example of good practice by a provider.

Recommendations:

- Greater communication and collaboration are needed across research, policy and practice to define the main research questions in this sector.
- Communication and collaboration would enable the identification of the parts of the system which have greatest stability and where, therefore, investment would be most effective.
- Continuity, communication, and strategic investment would contribute towards the building of a post-compulsory research culture. This would improve the visibility of this field.
- In summary, the post-compulsory field needs an overall structure, based on dialogue between funders, providers, and researchers, and which extends across the sector as a whole.

Group B

Rapporteur: Rob Mark (Queen's University Belfast)

Facilitator: Helen King (Higher Education Academy)

The key messages are as follows:

- The post-compulsory sector spans a very wide field of practice- from higher education to the further and training sectors and including the community and the voluntary sectors.
- Even within the higher education sector, it spans a wide field of practice and can include lifelong learning departments and specialist units for staff development, access and guidance.
- Research on post-compulsory education is also carried out in a wide range of units in the academy including traditional disciplines such as psychology, sociology and anthropology and economics as well as education and lifelong learning units.

- The diffuse nature of post-compulsory education has both strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand it brings to bear expertise from a wide variety of subject disciplines to the analysis of lifelong learning issues. On the other hand, it can lead to the development of research for which expertise is not clearly linked up and used creatively within the university.
- The sector group believes that interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary research requires to be further encouraged across disciplines
- Many different types of research exist including applied, developmental and evaluation and practitioner research and enquiry all of which should be encouraged.
- Research on post-compulsory education can also make an important contribution to regional development especially where local networks and groups flourish encouraging transfer of knowledge across sectors.
- The academy also needs its own educationally focussed research especially in the fields of learning and teaching in higher education. Research can also support the development of policies across the post-compulsory sector.
- The international dimension of research is strong with a number of international organisations e.g. UNESCO and European Association for the Education of Adults - www.eaea.org which are involved with accumulation, mediation and application of knowledge.
- There are some examples of networks which are developing a cross-sectoral approach and which focus on impact and mediation. e.g. at national level these include the Learning and Skills Research Network <http://www.lsrn.org.uk/> and the Universities Lifelong Learning Network <http://www.uall.ac.uk/> and at European level include bodies such as European university Continuing Education Network www.eucen.net and European Society for Research in the Education of Adults (ESREA) <http://www.esrea.org/?l=en>

Accumulation, Mediation and Impact of Education Research Knowledge in Different Countries of the UK

Key questions

For your country, what are the key messages from SFRE III about how knowledge about educational policy and practice is accumulated, mediated and applied to achieve impact?

- What particular initiatives should be highlighted from each country concerning knowledge accumulation, mediation and impact?
- Are people, relationships, processes, institutions and systems in place within your country to achieve this?
- Can you identify particular examples of good practice in terms of accumulation, mediation and application?
- In your country, are there any particular issues concerning accumulation, mediation or application which should have particular priority for attention?
- What recommendations should the final SFRE report put forward?

Synopsis

Opportunities for networking were seen by participants as varying not only among sectors, but also from one home country to another. Wales and Northern Ireland, with smaller communities of researchers, policy-makers and practitioners, offered in principle greater opportunities for collaboration and communication than the larger countries. However, the costs of knowledge accumulation and impact initiatives are not always proportional with the size of the communities involved. The smaller countries may find it more difficult to prioritise such initiatives. In addition, fragmentation of research evidence and of research mediation arrangements seemed to be a problem that affected, although not always for the same reasons and to the same extent, all of the countries. Thus, UK-wide bodies had a distinct role to play in sharing research findings, facilitating and pooling resources, and promoting partnerships.

More detailed accounts of the country-based discussions at SFRE III will be included in the final report on the work of the SFRE.

Group discussions

United Kingdom

Rapporteur: James Noble-Rogers (UCET)

Facilitator: Andy Gibbs (ESRC)

The particular characteristics of education research in a UK context were identified as the scope to share information about the organisation, culture, funding and findings of research across the four countries and beyond (although care would have to be taken to make sure that in communicating with international audiences, 'England' was not used synonymously with 'UK'). The existence of UK wide organisations involved in education research also helped a UK perspective. These organisations included: BERA; UCET; BEI; NIACE; UUK; ESRC; HEA; and TLRP. The existence of such organisations (which themselves had both country-specific and pan-UK perspectives) did not however imply the existence of UK-wide systems or practices, and rhetoric about a cross UK approach did not always

match reality. There were instead a variety of organisational systems and practices, which themselves were inter-connected with any number of geographical, political, statutory and fiscal structures. Much research included generic elements of relevance to all parts of the UK, and that which relates to only the country concerned. Research capacity, and the capacity to absorb research opportunities, also varied. The smaller UK countries could be reliant on relatively small pockets of expertise and resources and be vulnerable to the impact of relatively minor staffing and funding changes.

The relationship between the UK education research community and the voluntary sector was identified as an area to be addressed. Research conducted by the voluntary sector was sometimes felt to be more accessible, timely and better marketed than that conducted by university-based researchers. It might however benefit from the academic rigour, methodology and robustness found in HEIs. The two sectors should learn more about what the other has to offer, work in partnership, build capacity and develop co-production relationships rather than compete (although partnership and competition could co-exist). Such partnerships could be facilitated by the aforementioned UK bodies and by those representing the voluntary sector.

The sharing of information within and across sectors was also identified as an issue. Information produced by the voluntary sector (e.g. that contained in 'grey-literature') was often both accessible and available, while that produced by HEIs could appear as overly formal and was not in any case available other than through journal subscriptions. Why, it was asked, should not publicly funded education research be freely available?

To conclude:

- UK wide bodies had a distinct role to play in sharing research findings, facilitating and pooling resources and promoting partnerships.
- Barriers between research users, funders and practitioners should be broken down.
- There should be more collaboration between sectors with an interest in conducting and using education research.
- Understanding of the needs, and contributions, of different sectors should be improved.
- Access to research findings (both quality-assured and non-quality assured) should be extended.

England

Facilitator: Richard Bartholomew (DCSF)

Rapporteur: Deborah Wilson (DCSF)

(Combined notes)

The key to improving impact and application of research is the development of networks and relationships. This is likely to be easier in the smaller countries of the UK (although we're aware it's not always possible), but England's size and geographical dispersion makes it difficult to generate or maintain links. As Government agencies are increasingly moving out of London this is exacerbating the problem. It is particularly hard for practitioners in Education to take part in networks. The National Teacher Research Panel has helped with this, but may need to be expanded or further supported in the future.

There is a need to develop more links between academics and policy makers, although the methods of contracting used by the main funders, and the often piecemeal or fragmented nature of contracting can act as a barrier to developing relationships. The development of Research Centres by DCSF, for example, can help to build knowledge in the areas they cover, and other contracting methods, such as call off contracts and registered providers may help. It is important to involve researchers at the policy appraisal stage, not just at the evaluation stage of policy development.

In addition, the voices of practitioners and parents are rarely heard. It may be possible to systematically analyse the research questions asked by teachers/parents and pupils and use this to inform our commissioning processes.

As well as putting energy and investment into primary research, we also need to make sure that there is more synthesis, mediation and application of research. As more accountability is devolved to local levels there is a need for a mechanism to gather and quality assure information. An evidence centre based on the NICE or SCIE model may have its uses, but although there may be support for something that collects evidence, there is likely to be less support for a body that provides guidance.

While it is important to improve the supply side for research, there should also be more emphasis on improving demand from the users, whether they are policy makers, parents or teachers. This means both the quality and quantity of demand for good research based evidence. This might include training for policy makers in line with Policy Skills in Government. There are some initiatives under way for policy makers, and some specialist groups (such as parents of children with SEN) are very good at gathering and using evidence. We need to encourage more of this.

Northern Ireland

Rapporteur: Jim Gleeson (University of Limerick)

Facilitator: Karen McCullough (DENI)

The relatively small size of Northern Ireland was seen as advantageous in the context of research policy and practice and many opportunities for research (including cross-sectoral work) were identified. It was felt that NI has been successful at accumulating different pieces of research and three separate repositories were identified. However NI suffers from fragmentation (e.g. three different Departments, multiple organisations) and connectivity problems and has not been successful at 'joining' up the findings of such studies. This led into a discussion around the potential of libraries and the importance of on-line access to research reports. It was felt that insufficient use is being made by teacher educators and others of teacher-based research, despite the growing amount of Post-Graduate activity. At the same time, some good examples of research-informed schools were noted.

There was agreement that changes at the NI Research Forum (NIERF) had resulted in a loss of momentum for research. Different group members identified possible solutions in terms of organisational structure and/or framework and/or workforce issues. It was agreed that research in NI should involve DENI and the work of the Curriculum Council (CCEA) and GTC (NI) as well as the universities and HEI's.

The need to lobby for greater support for research was identified in view of the perceived importance of evidence-based policy. Agencies that might be lobbied were identified including the Teaching Council (GTCNI), Teacher Unions, UCET (NI) and the Inspectorate (DENI).

Some key issues identified in the course of the discussion included:

- What are the characteristics of a country that uses its research well?
- Why not implement the successful Welsh audit strategy in NI?
- The importance of establishing one single repository so as to make existing research readily available to the various stakeholders
- The need for an independent overview research organisation/agency
- The vital importance of developing educational research discourse through bodies such as NIERF and ensuring that the continuation and development of this body is assured.
- The value of continuing to engage in learning conversations at fora such as BERA, SFRE as well as building on links with mainland Europe.

Scotland

Rapporteur: Audrey MacDougall (Scottish Government)

Facilitator: Lorna Hamilton (University of Edinburgh)

Relationships were identified as key to increasing the impact of research. In that context the size of Scotland was beneficial as many of the main actors were networked although bringing new people to the networks was more difficult. The importance of having people, relationships, institutions and processes in place for the accumulation, mediation and application of knowledge was emphasised.

In Scotland, the end of the Applied Educational Research Scheme (AERS) was considered and how its legacy has followed on through the networks supported by SERA. The role of SERA was felt to be to build practitioner, policy and international links. The extent to which a network such as SERA required funding to undertake this role was debated. Overall there appeared to be some lack of capacity in place, partially due to issues of scale. The issue of reducing funds in the future was not likely to help this.

The rising importance of synthesis was considered and the extent to which the models of TLRP and Wales could be utilised. There was some enthusiasm for the creation of a procedure for the synthesis of data by a group involving academics, policy makers and practitioners. This would help to ensure that all perspectives were taken into account and more nuanced approaches adopted.

The importance of research having a strategic focus given the current economic climate and the need to make the best use of resources was emphasised. Broader perspectives gained through multi-disciplinary working were also considered beneficial. There may be some tension between this sort of strategic focus and more localised practitioner-based work and there needs to be a clear set of drivers to create an inclusive community that cover all stakeholder interests.

Wales

Rapporteur: Debbie Tynen (WAG)

Facilitator: Chris Owen (WAG)

The need to strengthen education research capacity in Wales remains an issue of significant concern. Some pockets of research activity exist across HEIs - a number as a result of collaborative working achieved through the Welsh Education Research Network (WERN). This capacity however was described as 'fragile' and in need of continued support and encouragement. With the notable exception of Cardiff University, other HEIs appear to be struggling to reach a critical mass with regard to engaging in education research activity. It was acknowledged that all interested parties should commit to a continued discourse to drive this agenda forward whilst recognising that input from sources 'external' to Wales would help ensure an outward-looking approach that would benefit from learning from other nations.

Existing capacity is problematic and has clear implications in terms of the accumulation of knowledge specific to the Welsh context. Nonetheless it was felt that existing knowledge was not as accessible as it could be and was therefore not put to best use. However, a positive example of knowledge mediation was the review of the TLRP in Wales which was considered a great success in

terms of utilising existing knowledge, building capacity and encouraging collaboration between institutions. The review offered a unique opportunity for policy makers, researchers and practitioners to come together at a dissemination event to discuss research findings and how they may impact on policy and practice. The review has resulted in improved dialogue and has helped develop a shared understanding between policy makers, researchers and practitioners. It is hoped that dissemination activity planned for May 2010 will impact on practitioners and their practice.

The absence of a formal mechanism for practitioners to raise research questions, to collectively consider and debate research findings and to input to research activity was noted as an area that required consideration. Unlike England, Wales does not have a Teachers Research Panel or indeed any forum for practitioners to engage with the research and policy community on a national basis. Any further consideration of this issue would need to clarify the potential role, remit and constituency of such a group.

Conclusions and Forum Review

SFRE III closed with comments from Diane Hofkins (journalist) and Paul Hubbard (Higher Education Council for England).

Diane Hofkins reminded the audience that efforts to promote the accumulation, mediation and impact of education research knowledge were still fragmented and often under-funded, and that, in many cases, particularly when it comes to achieving impact, success was serendipitous. Of the three themes discussed at SFRE III, she argued that impact was overall the area of least **coherence** and progress. She then offered a number of examples of good practice in accumulation, mediation and impact of education research knowledge, drawn from the experience of the Teaching and Learning Research Programme.

Paul Hubbard also concentrated on **impact** as a priority for the next few years, particularly in the context of tighter budgets for academic research. Education research needs to approach the difficult period to come in a strategic way. To its advantage, perhaps even more than is the case with many other disciplines, the education research community has a long tradition of knowledge translation and engagement, including both conceptual and practical developments. Nonetheless, success in this area is still patchy, and further work is required, for example, in relation to informing policy, higher education policy in particular. The SFRE is an opportunity for increased coordination in the efforts of the education research community to engage in debates at national level about knowledge mobilisation and about research assessment.

Over the duration of its activity so far, SFRE has experimented with different types of reporting. The first report was a dialogue between several authors, who proposed analytical perspectives drawing on the debates at SFRE I in Harrogate. The second report was the product of one researcher's reflective record of issues raised and key messages from a very rich seam of discussions in Reading. This third report has allowed for a plurality of voices to be heard and aimed to be largely descriptive, in the attempt to capture as much detail as possible of the presentations and conversations held in Edinburgh. The final SFRE report will be more synoptic. It will reflect critically on the aims of the Forum and on the conceptual framework structuring its activity, and will draw out enduring issues and key messages, in system terms, emerging from its proceedings. The final report will be launched in England in July 2010, with subsequent, similar events in Belfast, Cardiff, and Edinburgh.

Participant List, SFRE III

John	Anderson	Education and Training Inspectorate, NI
Richard	Bartholomew	Department for Children, Schools and Families, England
Vivienne	Baumfield	University of Glasgow/ BERA Council
Lori	Beckett	Leeds Metropolitan University
Anne	Campbell	BERA
Ralph	Catts	University of Stirling
Bette	Chambers	Institute for Effective Education, York
Donald	Christie	University of Strathclyde/ BERA Council
Kathleen	Collett	City and Guilds Skills Development
Philippa	Cordingley	CUREE
Demitri	Coryton	Education Journal
Susan M.B.	Davies	Trinity College Carmarthen/ BERA Council
Ross	Deuchar	University of Strathclyde/ SERA
Lucy	Emerson	National Children's Bureau
Maggie	Farrar	National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services
Zoe	Fowler	Independent
Fiona	Fraser	Scottish Government
John	Furlong	University of Oxford
Simon	Gallacher	National Foundation for Educational Research
Andy	Gibbs	Economic and Social Research Council
Jim	Gleeson	University of Limerick
David	Gough	Institute of Education, London: SSRU and EPPI-Centre
Kenneth	Greer	Fife Council, Scotland
Lorna	Hamilton	University of Edinburgh/ SERA
Sean	Hanan	Ofsted
Steven	Higgins	Durham University
Jeremy	Hoad	BERA
Diane	Hofkins	Journalist
Paul	Hubbard	HEFCE
Fiona	Hyland	ESCalate - Subject Centre for Education
John	Ireland	Scottish Government
Colin	Isham	CUREE
David	Jones	Council for Subject Associations
Cath	Jones	University of Glamorgan
Sheila	Kearney	Learning and Skills Improvement Service
Karen	Kerr	Learning and Teaching Scotland
Helen	King	Higher Education Academy
Ruth	Leitch	Queen's University Belfast/ BERA Council
Kay	Livingston	Learning and Teaching Scotland
Audrey	MacDougall	Scottish Government
Fiona	Maclennan	Falkirk Council
Rob	Mark	Queen's University Belfast
Stella	Mascarenhas-Keyes	Department for Children, Schools and Families, England
Karen	McCullough	Department of Education, Northern Ireland
Ian	Menter	University of Glasgow/BERA Council/UCET
Ann	Millar	Scottish Funding Council

Alexandra	Morgan	Swansea University
Pamela	Munn	BERA/ University of Edinburgh
Jean	Murray	University of East London
James	Noble-Rogers	UCET
Jacquie	Nunn	Training and Development Agency for Schools
Sandra	Nutley	University of Edinburgh
Alis	Oancea	University of Oxford/SFRE Researcher/BERA Council
Chris	Owen	Welsh Assembly Government
Helen	Perkins	Society for Research into Higher Education
Stephen	Pickles	Institute of Education, London
Andrew	Pollard	Institute of Education, London/ BERA Council/ SFRE Chair
Sally	Power	Cardiff University/ BERA Council
Judy	Sebba	University of Sussex
Phil	Sheffield	British Education Index
Howard	Tanner	Swansea Metropolitan University
Sarah	Tough	Institute of Education, London
Debbie	Tynen	Welsh Assembly Government
Rob	Van Krieken	Scottish Qualifications Authority
Jean	Ware	Bangor University
Karen	Whitby	CfTB Education Trust
Richard	Williams	Rathbone
Deborah	Wilson	Department for Children, Schools and Families, England
Stephen	Witt	Department for Children, Schools and Families, England
Wendy	Young	Estyn

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