Education Policy and Education Research in Wales: Changing Relationships?

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I have been interested for some fifteen years now in the ways in which education research and education policy relate to each other. The relationship has been so central to so much of my work over that period that I thought it would be worthwhile to reflect both on what has been and, more importantly, on what might be in the future. The experience to which I am referring is of six types:

1. As an academic I have co-directed government-funded evaluations of policy in the areas of curriculum and of testing,[1] and published in books (for example, Daugherty, 1995) and academic journals (for example, Daugherty, 1997; 2000).
2. As an academic with an interest in policy I was a member from the outset of two of the government's new education quangos that were established by the 1988 Education Act and subsequently served as chair of one of them.[2]
3. My interest in the research/policy relationship has led to membership (1998–2000) of the National Educational Research Forum (NERF) in England and to chairing the Steering Committee for the *Review of Educational Research Capacity in Wales* (Furlong and White, 2002).
4. As a specialist in assessment I am a member of a group of like-minded academics, the Assessment Reform Group[3], whose *raison d'être* is to bring research evidence to bear on policy development.
5. I am currently engaged in research into policy decisions on the school curriculum in the schools of Wales in the period when the Education Reform Bill that was to become the 1988 Act was being drafted (see, for example, Daugherty and Elfed-Owens, 2003).
6. I was asked by the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning in June 2003 to chair a group to review the available evidence on the assessment

and testing arrangements for 11- and 14-year-olds in schools in Wales and bring forward policy recommendations

This experience of education policy relates in part to Wales only but also, to a significant extent, to England. As a member in the late 1980s of the School Examinations and Assessment Council (SEAC), an England and Wales body, I had what was for me a first fascinating insight into the many currents and counter-currents at work in policy development and implementation in England. The number of currents, and the number of partially hidden agencies seeking to stir and to direct them, appeared to be far greater and more complex than were the equivalent flows into and out of the Curriculum Council for Wales (CCW) on which I was also serving. Since that time Wales has diverged from England in terms of both policy processes and the research/policy relationship. For example, a former minister has said recently that 'there are probably less people involved in shaping government policy today than there were 10 years ago when we were in opposition (John Denham, *Guardian,* 9/6/03). Whatever the truth of that statement as applied to England it has certainly not been the case in Wales that shaping policy now involves fewer people than a decade ago.

I shall refer to each of the above aspects of my experience in attempting to make sense of the research/policy relationships in Wales that are the focus of the article. However, there is one important preliminary point, not always clearly enough acknowledged, that I should like to make at the start. The relationship between research and policy is not and never has been in my experience a matter of two distinct communities of people – academic researchers, usually based in higher education, and 'policy-makers' in government – attempting to establish lines of communication across a great divide that separates us fundamentally in terms of values, priorities, timescales and the associated discourse about policy. I am far from being alone amongst those who, while claiming expertise based on my work as an academic, have had some role in the complicated and messy business of 'policy-making'. If we are to develop a better understanding of the many ways in which research and policy can interface then we must not fall into the trap of seeing 'policy-making' as something that takes place entirely within the corridors of government far away from universities where academics are concerned only to write for each other in the rarefied world of academia.

Evidence, policy and the relationship between them

This brings me to the need to clarify what we mean when we talk about 'evidence-informed' or 'evidence-based' policy. Let us take the question of 'evidence' before turning to 'policy'. It is immediately apparent that, even if we take only the everyday use of the terms, 'evidence' and 'research' are not coterminous. There is a much wider range of evidence that anyone engaged in policy development and implementation will want to take into account than is encompassed by the term 'research', even when that term is loosely interpreted.

One classification of types of research that I have found helpful is that developed by McIntyre and McIntyre (2000) in their report to the ESRC ahead of the setting up of its current Teaching & Learning Research Programme (TLRP). They suggest there is:

1. Research aimed at applying knowledge from social science disciplines to policies and practices for teaching and learning.
2. Educational research aimed at achieving improved understanding of teaching and learning practices, processes and contexts.
3. Research designed to provide direct evidence of effective approaches to teaching and learning.
4. Practitioner research, and especially schools as research and learning institutions.

If nothing else, this reminds us that research is not only, though some would like it to be, about 'what works'. It also reminds us that much research of relevance to understanding learning and education takes place in academic fields other than education.

Furlong and White (2002), in their review of educational research in Wales, adopted the definition of educational research used in the Hillage report to the DfEE (Hillage et.al., 1998): 'that set of activities which involved the systematic collection and analysis of data with a view to producing valid knowledge about teaching, learning and the institutional frameworks within which they occur' (p. 7). Their analysis therefore included, at least in principle, research that is undertaken in higher education institution (HEI) departments other than schools of education and also that done by agencies outside higher education with research expertise, such as the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). It is unfortunate that information about such research activities was less readily accessible to Furlong and White than were details of the work being done in HEI schools of education in Wales.

All the research reviewed by Furlong and White, whether taking place inside or outside HEIs, was the province of people who view themselves as 'researchers'. What about those who are involved in the 'systematic collection and analysis of data' but who are not usually perceived as being 'researchers'? To take one notable example, since long before the great research/policy debate of the 1990s the government departments responsible for education in both Wales and England have routinely been taking account for policy purposes of the evidence supplied by that venerable institution, Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI). Is it not the case that officials, advisers and politicians are still likely to turn in part to HMI, and to those who carry out broadly equivalent functions in higher education, when making policy decisions? If we are to have a serious discussion about 'evidence-based policy' we need to look at what evidence can be made available at the right time and in the right form and of the right quality (however defined). The real debate is about what part 'evidence' can play in policy-making, with academic research potentially having a specific, though not exclusive role, in supplying evidence.

And what of the other side of the equation, 'policy'? Furlong and White took their lead from Selby Smith with his reference to the policy process as being:

> characterised by a number of stages [and] research of different types can potentially play a part at each stage. [Research can be used in] problem identification and agenda setting, [or] linked with the subsequent policy formulation stage. Research can also contribute at the evaluation phase, which provides opportunities for programme fine-tuning and adjustment and adjustment to changing circumstances. (p. 3)

In looking at the potential for research to contribute to the policy process, Furlong and White defined three stages, within each of which there was scope for more than one type of contribution:

- As part of policy planning
  - putting issues on the policy agenda
  - helping policy makers recognise their current and future information requirements
  - reviewing what is already known
- As part of policy development
  - piloting new initiatives
  - developing specialized policy instruments, e.g. new forms of assessment

- As part of evaluation
  - finding out what worked
  - linking past experience back to further policy planning

That framework for understanding how evidence can feed into policy is one that I find helpful though it may be that those who work day by day within the world of national policy-making (for that is the level at which most of this debate takes place) might prefer a different formulation. It would certainly be instructive for researchers if there were more occasions when those 'on the inside' of policy development, such as policy advisers, were to reflect on their experience (see, for example, Jones, 2002).

The policy environment in Wales in the 1990s

Before looking at the recent past (since the advent of democratic devolution in 1999) and at the future, I want to reflect on what happened in Wales during the 1990s. There are four themes that identify themselves out of that reflection each of which also has some relevance, I believe, to the future:

1. Setting the policy agenda within Wales.
2. Growing awareness of sources of evidence and advice outside government departments.
3. Trust between researchers and policy-makers.
4. Partnership in framing and interpreting research evidence.

To take the first of these, officials and advisers with policy responsibilities within the governmental system in Wales during the 1990s were increasingly taking responsibility for policies as they affected Wales (Daugherty, Phillips and Rees, 2000a). For example, in 1987 there existed in Wales only a regional committee of the London-based School Curriculum Development Committee (SCDC) and there was no equivalent body to advise the then Welsh Office on assessment matters. By 1997 a statutory agency (ACCAC)[4] was in place with responsibility for advising the Welsh Office upon, and guiding implementation of, curriculum and assessment policies. It was then embarking on, in parallel with but separately from its counterpart in England (SCAA),[5] a major review of the National Curriculum in the schools of Wales. This was occurring under a Conservative government that was hostile to the notion of political devolution but was at the same time, through the machinery of administrative devolution,

giving expression to a growing demand for education policy in Wales to reflect the distinctiveness of the Welsh context. On a broader front, Welsh Office officials, having found themselves in the unaccustomed role of policy development in relation to a National Curriculum in the late 1980s (Daugherty and Elfed-Owens, 2003), were, by the mid-1990s, drawing up policy statements such as *Building Excellent Schools Together* (WO, 1997) which, within a framework set in London, had a distinctively Welsh flavour to them.

To stress the growing tendency during that last phase of the era of 'administrative devolution' for the Welsh Office to take the lead, albeit within strictly defined limits dictated by London, in reviewing and defining education policy is not to diminish the significance of 1999 as the beginning of an era of 'democratic devolution'. I shall return to that later. But it does illustrate the oft-quoted words of a former Secretary of State for Wales that devolution should be understood as 'a process not an event' (Davies, 1999).

Over the same period, and presumably as a consequence of more responsibility for policy being located in Wales, the second of my themes – the outsourcing of policy evidence and advice – was increasingly to be seen. In the late 1980s the essentials of what was to become statutory in the 1988 National Curriculum were decided by a small group of officials and HMI working to the responsible ministers, notably Wyn Roberts, the then Minister of State. I have no direct information as to how Welsh officials developed the policy initiatives of the mid-1990s; it may or may not be the case that civil servants faced with high-profile policy decisions needed to draw on a wider range of evidence and advice. However, at the very least they had available to them, and were on some matters actually required to consult, the expertise and experience of the several non-departmental public bodies (or 'quangos') that were by then in existence, even if their trawl for evidence went no further than that.

In the evidence given by the chief executive of one of those quangos, ACCAC, to Furlong and White's review it was made clear that such organizations, smaller in scale than their English counterparts, needed to draw on all available expertise because they could not hope to have the expertise they needed within their own staff. The fact that ACCAC commissioned its review of the National Curriculum in Wales (Key Stages 1 to 3) from a team based in the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, and the Scottish Council for Research in Education while SCAA/QCA conducted its review of the National Curriculum in England largely 'in house' is an example of this opening out of the evidence base for policy review and development. That the review in Wales may have taken on a somewhat different character because it

was outsourced is a question to be contemplated by those concerned to ensure that ministers have available to them a range of sources of evidence and advice.

The fact that ACCAC was content to commission the gathering of evidence on which to base policy advice rather than to assemble the evidence itself relates also to the third of my themes – that of trust. Even where there is a firm contractual basis for the sourcing of evidence the relationship will not flourish if the agency seeking the evidence cannot trust the agency contracted to supply it to come up with the goods in a form that is appropriate to the policy context. My experience in this respect in the 1990s was largely positive in relation to Wales. For example, the evaluation of the first three years of Key Stage 2 National Curriculum testing was undertaken between 1994 and 1996 by a joint team from the University of Bath and the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. As co-director of that project I had no reason to believe initially that there would be any differences in the respect shown to us as researchers by the joint commissioning agencies – SCAA (for England) and ACAC (for Wales). As time went on and we researched a subject that was highly sensitive politically it became clear to us that the two agencies were responding differently to the evidence as it was emerging. By the time of our final reports to the two authorities the differences were stark. On the one hand, the project directors were asked to make a presentation in relation to Wales to the authority's (ACAC) members, an event that was followed by a constructive question-and-answer session. In contrast, in London some SCAA officials sought to manipulate the evidence to serve what they perceived to be desired political ends. An early draft of the final report was sent back by SCAA to the project team liberally annotated with comments in various hands, the comments ranging from helpful suggestions to 'rubbish!'

The policy environment in Wales since 1999

The election of a National Assembly for Wales (NAfW) in 1999 was undoubtedly a major event within the continuing process of devolution. It has changed the policy environment within Wales as well as the policy relationships between Wales and England. Several features of the new landscape are of significance for the ways in which evidence may be brought to bear in this new environment.

The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) has on several occasions committed itself to seeking out the best available evidence to inform its policies. In a major policy speech in December 2002 the First Minister Rhodri

Morgan, reviewed the 'clear, red water' that is now in evidence between the way things are being shaped in Wales and the directions being followed in Westminster for equivalent services (Morgan, 2002). He referred to a 'new pluralism' in policy-making in Wales as the Welsh Assembly Government seeks a broader engagement with civic society in Wales. That the commitment goes beyond rhetoric is illustrated by the establishment within the civil service of a cross-departmental policy unit, by overtures to higher education in Wales to make its research expertise available to government in Wales and by the stance taken on 'evidence-based policy' by the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, Jane Davidson, who has been in post since 2000. *The Learning Country* (NAfW, 2001) spelled out the broad character of the administration's 'vision' for education in Wales.

The minister has also carried through that general commitment into specific initiatives where research evidence has been assembled in relation to a current policy priority. The most notable of these, the Independent Investigation Group on Student Hardship and Funding in Wales, chaired by Professor Teresa Rees of Cardiff University, has been seen as a model of the quality of relevant evidence that a group of specialists, given time and resources, can feed into decisions on policy (Rees, 2002). It was the Rees Report that was chosen as the example from Wales of a fruitful relationship between research and policy at a colloquium on 'Educational policy and research across the UK' convened by the British Educational Research Association in Edinburgh in November 2003 (BERA, 2003).

Alongside these developments has been a new phenomenon within the governmental systems of the UK, the subject committees of the National Assembly which not only scrutinize the actions of the executive but also have a remit for policy development. Their status as 'constitutional hybrids' was a result of a compromise reached during the latter stages of the passage of the Government of Wales Bill through the Westminster Parliament. 'The compromise attempted to combine the traditional scrutiny role of the Commons Select Committees with the perceived advantage of local government committees which were presumed to encapsulate the principles of inclusivity in policy development (Jones, 2001: 97). Over the first four years of the National Assembly the Committee took several approaches to gathering the evidence it needed for policy development. For the most part it chose the course of appointing on a short-term basis an adviser with expertise in the field in question. For example, its policy development in relation to early years education and to higher education adopted this model. In other cases it has used different approaches, for example, commissioning the Audit

Commission to gather data for its work on the supply of school places and drawing on an external advisory group for its project on the 'school of the future'.

Questions remain about this broadening of the base for initiating policy to include a cross-party standing committee of the Assembly (of which the minister is also a member). Whatever the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee may choose to recommend having reviewed the evidence, the adoption and carrying through of policy remains a matter for the Welsh Assembly Government. As Egan and James put it in the third of their reports on the work of that committee: 'Tensions that exist in the current constitutional settlement will . . . need to be resolved for truly radical and distinctive policies to be forged' (Egan and James, 2003: 113).

It is not the purpose of this article to seek to evaluate the effectiveness the policy processes that are still 'bedding down' as the Assembly adjusts to the new phenomenon from May 2003 of a Labour administration. However, at the risk of oversimplifying the changes that have occurred, it is possible to characterize the changing policy environment in Wales in terms of three broad phases:

1. Pre-1988. An expectation that policy would be initiated in London and, in certain respects, adapted for Wales by a small group of senior officials, perhaps also involving senior HMI (see, for an example, Daugherty and Elfed-Owens, 2003).
2. 1988–99. A frenzy of education policy development by the UK government with consequences for Wales that required a more active engagement with policy by Welsh officials (Daugherty, Phillips and Rees, 2000b). Fitz has referred to this period in the following terms: 'the arena of *national* policy-making and the formulation of legislation remains English-based and London-centred. The other territorial "home nations" (Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales), by and large, interpret and "recontextualise" centrally generated policy frameworks' (Fitz, 2000: 25).
3. 1999–present. An increased expectation of Wales-specific policy initiatives, implicit in the very existence of a devolved government in Cardiff but also explicitly championed by an administration that has sought to put some 'clear red water' between itself and London.

What are the implications of these changes for the role that research evidence can play in relation to policy? Writing in late 2001, Furlong and White concluded their review of education research in Wales by arguing for a national strategy for educational research in Wales. Their proposals covered both increasing capacity in Wales to *undertake* research and also increasing capacity in Wales to *utilize* research.

The capacity within Wales to undertake research is not the main focus of this article though it is clearly relevant to ask if, when there is a need for evidence to inform policy, the capacity is there to meet that need. Of course policy-makers are likely to look outside Wales for some of the expertise required. Research, whether carried out in higher education or in other agencies, is not and should not be an activity that is constrained by geographical boundaries. But it is also the case that, given the roots of any education system in the society it aims to serve, sensitivity to the context of education in Wales may well be important if that evidence is to be appropriately tuned to the prevailing social, political and economic circumstances of policy decisions. I would argue from my own experience of two major evaluation projects in the mid-1990s that policy-makers were better served by the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, collaborating with partners outside Wales than they would have been if they had commissioned that research from only one of the agencies involved. What we could offer in research expertise at an HEI in Wales was complemented and supplemented by the expertise available from the other agencies involved, in one case the University of Bath in England and in the other the Scottish Council for Research in Education, based in Edinburgh.

However, one worrying feature of the current research/policy relationship in Wales is that the indigenous capacity for education research in higher education is what Furlong and White tactfully described as 'not strong'. There are only about eighty staff in HEIs in Wales, some of them employed on a part-time basis, whose research in education was judged by the institutions employing them to be of sufficient quality for them to be listed in the institutional entries in the UK's Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) in 2001. Scrutiny of the 2001 RAE submissions from Wales[6] reveals that, of these eighty or so staff, only a minority are engaged in research that is potentially of direct relevance to the Assembly's education agenda as set out in *The Learning Country*.

When it comes to the quality of research as judged by the peer review procedure of the RAE, only one of the HEIs in Wales was rated as

undertaking research of the highest quality; Cardiff was one of only two HEIs in the UK to be graded at this 5* level. The education research in three other University of Wales institutions – Aberystwyth, Bangor and Swansea – was rated at the 3a level, which is defined as 'national' excellence in over two-thirds of the research activity submitted with some evidence of 'international' excellence. The education research in the only other HEIs in Wales for which evidence was submitted – North East Wales Institute and Trinity College, Carmarthen – was rated at level 2.

In RAE terms education research in Wales is already weaker than research in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland but there is reason to be concerned that even this 'not strong' situation may be further eroded. First, it is being argued at national (UK) level that funding for research in all but the highest graded institutions should be cut to minimal levels in future. Thus, though it is arguable that the three HEIs in Wales that have been publishing research of at least 'national' excellence might have been able to serve some at least of the policy needs of the National Assembly, funding cuts on top of those that occurred during the 1990s, when there was a marked reduction in funding for initial teacher education and training, seem likely to inhibit their ability to do so. Second, the protection of research capacity has not been a high priority in the two HEIs, Aberystwyth and Swansea, where internal reorganization of schools of education is currently in progress. Whatever the Assembly may wish were happening in terms of research capacity those two institutions, which together contributed about 40 per cent of the staff entered from Wales to the Education Panel in the 2001 RAE, seem likely to be making a diminishing contribution to education research in Wales in the future.

To turn to the second set of recommendations put forward by Furlong and White (2002), increasing the capacity to *utilize* research, they characterized the situation they had reviewed as being 'inconsistent. Despite some excellent examples of good practice, too much of the education service remains a 'research-free zone' (Furlong and White, 2002: 39). It would be instructive to ask each of the organizations in Wales that has a role in education policy what use they are making of research and other forms of 'evidence' in the work they are doing in policy planning, policy development and policy evaluation. It might be even more enlightening to ask why, as is clearly often the case, they had not engaged in any systematic gathering of evidence for some at least of these purposes. Is it because the pressures on policy are such that there is neither the time available nor the resource allocated to enable them to gather and to weigh the relevant evidence when they make decisions? Could it be that they are not aware of where they can turn to access evidence that will be

of value to them? Or might it be that their attempts in the past to access such evidence have left them unimpressed with the relevance of the evidence that was supplied?

In crude supply-and-demand terms there is clearly an increasing *demand,* at least at the national level in Wales, for evidence to inform the many aspects of education policy that the National Assembly is seeking to define for itself. The main questions that have been discussed in this article have related to the capacity of researchers to *supply* the evidence that is required and the ways in which the interface between researcher and policy-maker can be facilitated. Furlong and White put forward several proposals for enhancing the capacity to utilize education research in Wales for the Assembly to consider. Though a group of researchers and research 'users' has been set up to advise the Assembly's training and education department it is too early to judge whether any significant steps are currently being taken that will spread good practice and reduce the perceived 'inconsistency' in the utilization of research and also diminish the number of 'research-free zones'. If these are thought to be desirable aims then responsibility for achieving them will need to be shared by the policy-making agencies in Wales at national and local level, the National Assembly itself and those who have the expertise to offer that may be of value.

For those involved in policy-making, it is a matter of building processes for accessing and reviewing evidence at each stage of the 'policy cycle'. For the National Assembly, it is not only a matter of presenting a model of good practice in respect of evidence-informed policy but also of making effective use of the levers it has available to it to ensure a healthy research environment within Wales. It has taken the policy initiatives referred to earlier that have been informed by research. It has established a research unit and made overtures to HEIs in Wales to encourage them to think about what they can offer as Wales develops in the new circumstances post–1999. But sceptics would also point that England has had a National Educational Research Forum (NERF) since 1998 that has subsequently published *A Research and Development Strategy for Education* (NERF, 2001) and Scotland acknowledged the need to support education research with an additional allocation of £2m in funding during 2002. Neither of these positive signals has been matched by a parallel initiative in Wales. While the range of examples of drawing on research evidence to inform policy within the Assembly's policy arrangements is impressive, is the National Assembly serious about developing a *system* of interaction between researchers and policy-makers that will enable all those involved in policy, initiation, development and evaluation to make use of relevant evidence as and when they require it?

Conclusion

Any review of the relationships between research and policy in Wales has to take account of the fact that, until recently, policy-making in Wales was clearly a small component in an England-and-Wales policy system that has been led by and controlled from London. This is reflected both in reviews of the health or otherwise of the role of education research in relation to policy (see, for example, Pring, 2000) and in the vigorous debates about that relationship that have characterized the last five years (see, for example, Edwards, 2000). Even in the evolving responsibility for policy that has, for example, seen the 2002 Education Act transfer responsibility for the National Curriculum in schools in Wales from London to Cardiff, the processes of policy development in Wales are still closely related to the processes in England. And, when the question is posed 'Does evidence matter?' (Halpern, 2003), the discussion of possible answers will be relevant to both Wales and England.

However, the particular form that policy initiation and development is now taking in Wales and the particular nature of the indigenous sources of evidence mean that Wales will need to establish its own ways of fostering the interfacing of policy with evidence. My experience of education research and of education policy in Wales leads me to highlight three main priorities to be attended to:

1. Facilitating the *routine interaction* between those who have policy responsibilities and those who have the capacity to supply relevant evidence. This means 'policy-makers' acquainting themselves with where researchers are coming from and what they may be able to offer. But it also means researchers becoming more familiar with the policy process than they have sometimes been in the past. As Humes and Bryce put it: 'Researchers have to learn to live with the confusions, ambiguities and value conflicts of the postmodern world as best they can: the notion of the intellectual as a detached enquirer after truth, operating outside the forces of power, has been shown to be a self-deceiving (and, in many cases, a self-serving) illusion' (Humes and Bryce, 2003: 185). The mechanisms for achieving such routine interaction are potentially many and varied and would merit further discussion. It is also worth noting in this context the warning that 'there can be a fine line between evidence-gathering and advocacy with a risk for researchers of spilling over into "arguing for the desirable" while ignoring political exigencies and thus damaging policy-makers' perception of research' (BERA, 2003: 9).

2. Extending the practice of *formally gathering evidence* at each stage of the policy cycle. Superficially this can be argued as a matter of exhorting political decision-makers to live up to their rhetoric about 'evidence-based policy'. But it is also about reflecting on the realities of evidence being brought to bear as and when it can make a difference to policy decisions. Can we find more than just the occasional examples of policy planning and development having benefited from the systematic gathering and deployment of evidence in an appropriate way and at an appropriate time? Should we not be evaluating how valuable, from each of several perspectives, such infusions of 'evidence' have proved to be? If we really believe in 'evidence-based policy' we should presumably be looking to research to enlighten us about the effectiveness of the mechanisms that purport to facilitate the contribution of research to policy-making.
3. Strengthening the *capacity of education research* in Wales to supply policy-makers with the evidence in a form that is of use to them. Unless the governmental system in Wales is willing to pay directly (rather than in-directly through the state funding of HEIs) for the research evidence it is seeking it is unlikely that a market in the supply of evidence for policy-making in education in Wales will develop beyond the limited commercial provision that is already in place. Yet research expertise in education in higher education in Wales is currently living off the fruits of past funding arrangements as a generation of specialists moves into retirement and its renewal is squeezed out by the combined impact of funding decisions relating to initial teacher education and training on the one hand and the Research Assessment Exercise on the other. If the contribution that Welsh HEIs could make to policy initiation, development and evaluation in the future is to be realized then a greater priority than hitherto will have to be given to supporting research into education in the reconfigured Welsh higher education system.

Whatever the prospects for the policy-making process in Wales, and for the role of research and other evidence in that process, it is already distinct from the situation in England. It is clear that there are now more points at which education policy is being initiated and developed in Wales than was the case in the 1980s. The challenge that remains is to ensure that the quality of education policies in Wales in the era that began in 1999 measures up to the aspirations of those who advocate 'evidence-based policy making'.

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Notes

[1] Evaluation of Key Stage 2 assessment in England and Wales (1994–6); Wales Curriculum Review (1997–8).

[2] School Examinations and Assessment Council 1988–91; Curriculum Council for Wales 1988–93, chair 1991–3.

[3] Information on the Assessment Reform Group's work can be found at *www.assessment-reform-group.org.uk*

[4] Awdurdod Cymwysterau, Cwricwlwm ac Asesu Cymru/Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales.

[5] While School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) in England undertook most of the data gathering for that review 'inhouse', Awdurdod Cymwysterau, Cwricwlwm ac Asesu Cymru (ACCAC) commissioned two project teams, one covering the 5 to 14 phase and the other 14 to 16, to supply the evidence base for its policy recommendations.

[6] Accessible at *www.hero.ac.uk/rae/submissions*. This paper was presented at a conference on 'Evidence-based policies and Indicator Systems', London, July 2003.

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