

Institution: University of Manchester
Unit of Assessment: 25 (Education)
Title of case study: Changing public policy and professional practice through researching equity within schools and education systems
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The research impacted on public policy, practitioners and professional services both nationally and regionally. Specifically, it influenced the setting up and design of the Greater Manchester Challenge (GMC) in 2008, with unfolding educational and professional impacts: (a) measurable improvements in the performance of Greater Manchester schools; (b) participants have continued to collaborate and build on GMC interventions and findings; and (c) the GMC led to a set of recommendations about school-to-school collaboration.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The impacts are based on research that took place in Manchester from 1997, with the first major publication in 2005. The key researchers (returned staff names in bold): Ainscow (1995-date); Chapman (2007-2012); Dyson (2003-date); Goldrick (2003-date); Howes (1999-date); Gunter (2004-date); Mongon (2008–date); Muijs (2005-2010); Raffo (1995-date); West (2000-date). The underpinning research is primarily located in the Disadvantage and Poverty (DP) Thematic Programme of Research (TPR), with support from the team in the Critical Education Policy and Leadership (CEPaL) Thematic Programme of Research (TPR) within the UoA25 submission.</p> <p>A number of studies (total income of £1.5m) developed and trialled a ‘learning through enquiry methodology’, including: a government funded evaluation of an initiative to transform secondary education in Nottingham (2003-2005) [2.1]; a project commissioned by Blackburn with Darwen LEA (1997-2001) [2.2]; an ESRC study <i>Understanding and Developing Inclusive Practices in Schools</i>, (2000-2003) (L139251001) [2.3]; a government funded leadership development project within <i>Excellence in Cities</i> (2000-2005) [2.4], and National College for School Leadership (NCSL) funded research on leadership and social inclusion (2006-2008) [2.5]. The ideas were further refined through the Calderdale Equity Research Network (2006-2011) [2.6]; and additional NCSL funded projects (e.g. networking for improvement in schools facing challenging circumstances 2005-2006, the impact of federations on student outcomes 2008-2011, and new models of school leadership, 2009-2010) [2.7]. This research demonstrated how: (a) collaboration between schools can strengthen the capacity of education systems to make more effective use of available expertise [3.1, 3.2, 3.4]; (b) under certain conditions, such approaches can bring about improvements in school performance, particularly in relation to learners from disadvantaged backgrounds [3.3]; (c) these approaches can be made more sustainable through the encouragement of local school leadership [3.3, 3.5]. As a result of this extensive research team contribution, Professor Mel Ainscow was invited by ministers to lead the GMC and this research was used to inform the design of the initiative. The GMC project took forward the research through a ‘learning through enquiry’ methodology, with interventions such as ‘school-to-school partnerships’, ‘teaching schools’, ‘system leaders’, and ‘families of schools’. The legacy of the GMC has continued both locally and nationally [3.3, 3.5].</p>
<p>3. References to the research</p> <p>The high quality of the research is evidenced by peer review of competitive grant applications, project steering groups, and dissemination in high quality journals. Output 3.5 has received an award from the Society for Educational Studies.</p> <p>Key outputs:</p> <p>[3.1] Ainscow, M. (2005) Developing inclusive education systems: what are the levers for change? <i>Journal of Educational Change</i> 6(2), 109-124. DOI: 10.1007/s10833-005-1298-4</p> <p>[3.2] Ainscow, M. (2010) Achieving excellence and equity: reflections on the development of practices in one local district over 10 years. <i>School Effectiveness and School Improvement</i>, 21 (1), 75-91. DOI:10.1080/09243450903569759</p> <p>[3.3] Ainscow, M. (2012) Moving knowledge around: strategies for fostering equity within educational systems. <i>Journal of Educational Change</i> 13(3), 289-310. DOI:10.1007/s10833-012-9182-5</p>

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Other relevant outputs:

[3.4] Ainscow, M. and Howes, A. (2007) Working together to improve urban secondary schools: a study of practice in one city. *School Leadership and Management* 27(3), 285–300. DOI:10.1080/13632430701379578

[3.5] Ainscow, M., Dyson, A., Goldrick, S. and West, M. (2012) *Developing Equitable Education Systems*. London: Routledge. (Available on request)

4. Details of the impact

Context: Prior to the GMC concerns had been raised and various strategies used to improve educational standards in the region, particularly amongst children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. The GMC was a three-year project, involving a partnership between ten local authorities and 1,150 schools, with an investment of £50 million, and as such it was a major political, financial and symbolic investment to improve urban education. The programme of research developed over time by Professor Ainscow and colleagues demonstrated the effectiveness of strategies that could be used within schools, networks of schools, and the larger school system to improve learning outcomes in areas of economic and social disadvantage.

Pathways to impact: following the approach outlined in REF3a, this case study illustrates primarily a constructivist change model, which produced technical evidence that was communicated to and used by local and national governments, and the profession. Consequently, design and development was in partnership with professionals and/or policymakers in ways that were intended to contribute directly to improvements within particular sites, whilst at the same time generating understandings that could be communicated and contribute to system wide development. A number of projects were funded by the UK government with team members in regular dialogue with civil servants and in occasional discussions with ministers. The production of written reports supported by meetings enabled the translation and transmission of the partnership process and outcomes to funding teams in the Department and/or National College, and importantly the connections between projects through building a cumulative evidence base could be made. This approach to research legibility enabled the government as ‘user’ to engage productively with the research and this impacted on decision-making. Professor Ainscow was invited by ministers to lead the GMC and support for this continued under the Coalition from 2010 until 2011.

The major investment in the GMC was directly focused on making interventions informed by the research undertaken by the team at Manchester. Projects involved local interventions [2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6] and the Nottingham project [2.1] was a city-wide initiative that focused on school-to-school collaboration and so helped to develop the ‘learning through enquiry’ approach adopted in the GMC. Dissemination through reports e.g. to the Department as funders [2.4, 2.5, 2.7], and talks at professional conferences has enabled this research to be accessible to decision-makers at national and local levels. Once the GMC was set up, pathways to impact were planned through research and development activities. These plans were developed and enacted through meetings where research evidence was examined, and new interventions were planned, monitored and evaluated. Recognition of the value of these approaches led to a decision by professionals to commit to and invest in the continued use of structured collaboration that have been sustained after the completion of the GMC. The effectiveness of the change model has been confirmed: “...in Greater Manchester, a great deal of effort was made to secure local buy-in and a willingness to collaborate across the whole area... this preliminary work generally paid off in terms of local commitment to the Challenge [5.12, p10]. The outcomes from the GMC have been disseminated and used to improve practice and have helped shape on-going national policy.

Reach and Significance: the research reached national government and importantly led to a major policy commitment and financial investment in the GMC, and the outcomes of the GMC have continued to influence national government policy, and regional professional collaborations and practices. This is presented in four inter-linked impacts:

Impact case study (REF3b)

Policy Impact 1: the decision to set up the GMC was informed by the ‘learning through enquiry’ approach to the generation and use of research undertaken at Manchester. Specifically, the Labour Government showed a commitment to evidence informed policy and practice, and witness statements show that decision-making in regard to the leadership and design of the GMC was influenced by the programme of research [5.1,5.2,5.3]. A government minister states “I was involved in the appointment of Professor Mel Ainscow as Chief Adviser for the Greater Manchester Challenge, a decision that was informed by the research findings and impact strategy of the team at the University of Manchester” [5.3], and a second minister states: “I worked closely with Professor Ainscow who took up the role of Chief Adviser. This led him to co-ordinate the development of our strategy for improving the performance of schools across the city region. This drew on extensive research that he and his colleagues had conducted at the University of Manchester regarding the improvement of urban schools” [5.2].

Educational impact: the research within the GMC led to overall improvements; for example, primary schools now outperform national averages on the tests taken by all children in England. In 2011, secondary schools in Greater Manchester improved faster in Key Stage 4 examinations than schools nationally, with the schools serving the most disadvantaged communities making three times more improvement than schools across the country. During the same period, the number of schools below the Government’s floor standard decreased more than it did in other areas of the country. In addition, the proportion of ‘good’ and ‘outstanding’ schools, as determined by the national inspection system, increased, despite the introduction of a more challenging framework [5.11]. To ensure the continued inter-relationship between research evidence and educational interventions after the GMC a Partnership Board was established, which includes University representation. An agency led by 25 outstanding headteachers, ‘By Schools for Schools’, is now responsible for managing these activities, and they are building on research evidence in order to develop a self-improving system. There is strong political support within the city region, and each of the ten authorities has redesigned its arrangements for supporting school improvement [5.4, 5.6]. For example, a Director of Children’s Services confirms that “from discussion with my colleagues across Greater Manchester I am aware that many continue to take into account Professor Ainscow and his team’s work” and “this has also led to the creation of a Partnership Board that continues to co-ordinate collaboration across Greater Manchester” [5.5].

Professional impact: research within the GMC led to the movement of expertise through the ‘Teaching Schools’ strategy [5.11]. Analogous to teaching hospitals, these provided research-based professional development programmes focused on bringing about improvements in classroom practice. Between 2010 and 2011 over 1,000 teachers from across the city region took part in these programmes [5.11]. Importantly, there is strong evidence of mutual benefit in this approach - it had a positive impact on the quality of classroom practice and student learning in both the schools receiving support and within the teaching schools themselves [5.11]. A further professional impact has been on the attitudes and roles of headteachers, particularly those who lead successful schools, indeed a headteacher states “my personal experience is that there is a widespread awareness of Professor Ainscow and his team’s research across the education system where it impacts daily on the quality of classroom practice and student learning” [5.4]. Some 170 became formally designated as system leaders, supporting the improvement of other schools, particularly those facing challenging circumstances [5.4, 5.6]. For example, a headteacher states: “in developing these innovatory approaches, Professor Ainscow encouraged and supported us in using research in order to learn from these experiences and draw conclusions that could be used to strengthen our efforts. As a result, the Greater Manchester education system has developed an increased capacity to analyse contexts and mobilise available resources to support interventions in challenging circumstances” [5.4].

Policy Impact 2: the lessons from the use of research evidence to inform the setting up and development of the GMC have shaped thinking and discourse within national policymaking across the political divide. A Labour minister acknowledges the importance of “research-based professional development programmes focused on bring about improvements in classroom practice” and how “the lessons from Professor Ainscow and his team’s research were significant”. The minister goes on to say that “subsequently the ideas from the Greater Manchester Challenge

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have influenced national policy” [5.2]. This includes the Coalition government from 2010 [5.7], where many research informed strategies, e.g. ‘school-to-school partnerships’, ‘teaching schools’, ‘system leaders’ and ‘families of schools’, are mentioned in the 2010 White Paper [5.8]. On 11th June 2011 the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, gave a speech where he argued that, in order to address the issue of educational underperformance, particularly amongst disadvantaged groups of learners, there is a need to develop a ‘culture of collaboration’ – an idea influenced by the programme of research. With this in mind, he noted that it was good to see the development of more networks of schools and the expansion of teaching schools, and to see how efforts are being made to ‘embed the success of the Greater Manchester Challenge’ [5.9]. Echoing similar ideas, in a speech on 13th November 2012, the former Shadow Secretary of State, Stephen Twigg, also made reference to building on the progress in Greater Manchester, emphasising in particular the idea of ‘evidence-based collaboration’ [5.10], and a former Under-Secretary of State states: “many of the strategies used, such as school-to-school partnerships, teaching schools, system leaders and families of schools are now seen to be important to Labour’s future education policy” [5.1].

In summary, the research by Professor Ainscow and team has had reach and significance within and beyond Greater Manchester. The research ensured that the University of Manchester is recognised as a field leader in educational, school and systemic improvement and so led to Ainscow being appointed to lead the GMC. Furthermore, the GMC enabled the relation between ideas and action to be developed in ways that brought about measurable improvements and new ways of working amongst the region’s headteachers. The most important outcome, however, is the evidence that school-to-school partnerships can be a powerful means of fostering improvements in respect to schools serving disadvantaged communities. Most significantly, the GMC led to striking improvements in the performance of some 200 schools facing the most challenging circumstances. However, reach goes beyond these schools, as there is evidence that their progress helped to trigger improvement across the education system in England [5.11]. Significantly, too, it was found that such arrangements do have a positive impact on the learning of students in all of the participating schools [5.11]. This is an important finding in that it draws attention to a way of strengthening relatively low performing schools that can, at the same time, help to foster wider improvements across the system.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

All claims referenced in the text.

[5.1] Letter from MP and former Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools.

[5.2] Letter from Peer and former Minister of State for Children, Young People and Families.

[5.3] Letter from Peer and former Minister of State for Education.

[5.4] Letter from a Headteacher.

[5.5] Letter from a Director of Children’s Services.

[5.6] Corroboration from Headteachers

[5.7] Corroboration from the National College for Teaching and Leadership

[5.8] Evidence from the White Paper *The Importance of Teaching*, November 2010.

[5.9] Speech by Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education.

[5.10] Speech by Stephen Twigg, former Shadow Secretary of State for Education.

[5.11] Hutchings, M., Hollingworth, S., Mansaray, A., Rose, R. and Greenwood, C. (2012)

Research report DFE-RR215: Evaluation of the City Challenge programme. London: Department for Education.

[5.12] Hutchings, M. and Mansaray, A. (2013) *A review of the impact of the London Challenge (2003-8) and the City Challenge (2008-11)*. London: OfSTED.