

**Institution: The University of Edinburgh**

**Unit of Assessment: 25 Education**

**Title of case study 2: Informing the debate on educational reform and socio-economic inequality**

### 1. Summary of the impact

Research by the University of Edinburgh (1997 to 2006, but part of a continuing programme of work) on socio-economic inequalities in education and the impact of educational reform has had an impact on public policy debates, mainly in Scotland. The significance of the impact is seen in the raised profile of socio-economic inequalities in policy agendas and the extent to which it has informed the design of policy responses and influenced policy debates. It has played an important role in holding the public policy process to account, by providing the main independent evidence base on the actual and potential contribution of policy. Its reach has extended to include policy-makers and participants in public debates about education and, indirectly, pupils and students.

### 2. Underpinning research

The main research projects have used advanced statistical methods to analyse large and high-quality social surveys. They have also been embedded in a comparative framework with the rest of the UK and with systems outside the UK.

Key ESRC-funded projects, each evaluated as 'outstanding', are:

- *Education and Youth Transitions in England, Wales and Scotland 1984-2002* (2003-2006).
- *Education and Social Mobility in Scotland in the 20th Century* (2002-2005).
- *A 'Home International' Comparison of 14-19 Education and Training Systems in the UK* (1997-1999).

The continuing strength of the research programme is reflected in Edinburgh's leadership of the education and social stratification strand of the ESRC-funded Advanced Quantitative Methods Network (2009-), and in research funded by the Nuffield Foundation (2011-13) and the ESRC (2013-) on access to higher education.

The research leaders have been members and associates of the Centre for Educational Sociology: Linda Croxford, Cathy Howieson, Lindsay Paterson and David Raffe (all employed continuously at Edinburgh since 1993), Cristina Iannelli (continuously since 1999) and Teresa Tinklin (1998-2004). Some of the research has taken place jointly with distinguished researchers from outside the UK (e.g. Gamoran, Willms).

To explain the impact on policy debates, it is useful to group the findings of the research into two broad themes, each with several strands.

**Research which showed that educational policy may change the relationship between education and socio-economic inequalities.** Since the mid-1990s, University of Edinburgh research on comprehensive (non-selective) secondary schooling has concentrated on understanding the later phases of the comprehensive reform. The research found that changes to the curriculum in the middle-secondary years have widened access to breadth of study, mitigated gender and socio-economic inequalities of access, and led to a modest rise in attainment. The extent of social segregation among Scottish schools has been low compared to the rest of the UK, and this contributed to a reduction in inequality in compulsory schooling. Most socio-economic inequality in attainment has been *within* schools rather than *between* schools. Scotland's adherence to a traditional comprehensive model, compared with England's development of an educational quasi-market, has been associated with a slight relative reduction in social inequalities in attainment during the compulsory years of schooling, to age 16.

The research found consequential positive effects on transitions beyond compulsory schooling.

Rates of staying on in full-time education increased, aided latterly by Educational Maintenance Allowances. Socio-economic inequalities in post-compulsory education in Scotland have historically been wider than elsewhere in the UK but they have become narrower. The expansion of higher education reduced gender and socio-economic inequalities of participation, facilitated by the diversity associated with the large role of the colleges as providers of HE in Scotland.

These conclusions have been interpreted optimistically in public debate, as they have been considered to show that policy may be effective at reducing inequalities.

**Research which showed that educational policy is limited in the effect it can have on mitigating social inequality.** The research showed that the extent of social mobility did not change following the introduction of comprehensive secondary schooling. As in most developed countries, there was negligible change in rates of relative mobility. Changes in absolute rates were due to economic changes external to the education system, such as the growth of professional employment.

Likewise, the research found that, although students of low socio-economic status (SES) gained new opportunities through the expansion of higher education, it was high-SES students who took greatest advantage of the expansion, especially in the high-status older universities. The higher education system continues to be socially stratified. Thus, although educational expansion has widened access to advanced education, it has only marginally changed the terms of the competition between social groups.

The programme of research found broadly the same to be true at other levels of education. Attempts to raise the status of vocational education and to broaden access by providing more 'flexible' opportunities have had limited impact because they **do not change the connections between educational pathways and social selection**, and because the career aspirations of school leavers are **shaped more strongly by networks of family and friends (which are stratified socially) than by careers advisers**. Such conclusions on the limited effect of reforms draw upon and contribute to the parallel Centre for Educational Sociology research on qualifications-led reforms, the subject of another case study.

### 3. References to the research

Croxford, L. & Paterson, L. (2006) Trends in social class segregation between schools in England, Wales and Scotland since 1984. *Research Papers in Education* 21, 381-406.

[DOI: 10.1080/02671520600942388](https://doi.org/10.1080/02671520600942388).

Howieson, C. & Iannelli, C. (2008) The effects of low attainment on young people's outcomes at age 22-23 in Scotland. *British Educational Research Journal* 34, 269-90.

[DOI: 10.1080/01411920701532137](https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920701532137).

Iannelli, C. & Paterson, L. (2007) Education and social mobility in Scotland. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 25, 219-32. [DOI: 10.1016/j.rssm.2007.08.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rssm.2007.08.001).

Iannelli, C., Gamoran, A. & Paterson, L. (2011) Scottish higher education, 1987-2001: expansion through diversion. *Oxford Review of Education* 37: 6, 717-741. In REF 2 (Iannelli).

Raffe, D., Brannen, K., Fairgrieve, J. & Martin, C. (2001) Participation, inclusiveness, academic drift and parity of esteem: a comparison of post-compulsory education and training in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. *Oxford Review of Education* 27: 2, 173-203.

[DOI: 10.1080/03054980123186](https://doi.org/10.1080/03054980123186).

The quality of the research is evidenced by the status of the refereed publications, the sources of funding, the 'outstanding' grades awarded to the ESRC projects and the researchers' continued success in gaining funding (see section 2 above).

### 4. Details of the impact

The beneficiaries of the research have included policy-makers, participants in public debates on Scottish education, and indirectly pupils and students, mainly in Scotland. The research has:

- raised awareness of socio-economic inequalities as a policy issue, as evidenced by their

prominence in recent legislation [5.1] as well as in policy discussions by non-government bodies [5.2]

- influenced the design of policy interventions to promote equality and widen access, as evidenced by current policy emphases on the content and processes of learning within schools (rather than, say, on the allocation of pupils to schools), on expanding post-16 opportunities and on promoting higher education within colleges
- informed public debates, influencing critics as well as supporters of policy, on the basis of the Centre for Educational Sociology's reputation for rigorous and independent research, gained over several decades.

All three types of impact are exemplified by the contribution to the authoritative report by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on Scottish schooling, published in December 2007 and a central reference point for public debate on Scottish educational policy throughout the REF period [5.4]. The report has been widely cited in official documents and government statements, such as HMIE's (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education) influential 'stock-taking' overviews of Scottish education [5.5] and the government's rationale for Curriculum for Excellence, its major reform of the 3-18 curriculum [5.6].

The report was commissioned by the Scottish education minister to provide an outside perspective on the performance of Scottish schooling in the post-devolution era. Edinburgh researchers Munn, Raffe and Howieson were the only academic researchers invited to make presentations to the OECD Review Panel. Raffe subsequently sent three papers summarising Edinburgh's research on socio-economic inequalities in education to the panel's rapporteur, whose reply (from a Dublin hotel) described one paper as "a real gem" and commented: "I do really wonder why an 'outside' view of Scottish education is really necessary – as distinct from locking the authorities up in this hotel with your papers" [5.7].

Of the report's 20 references to independent (non-government) Scottish research, 17 were to work by the Edinburgh researchers named above [5.8]. Specific features of the research on which the OECD Review Panel drew – and which have characterised the Report's impact on policy debates since 2008 – were the explanations of the relative success of comprehensive schooling, the evidence relating to the relatively low levels of social segregation among schools, the reasons why social inequalities in attainment and progression remained large, and the importance of institutional legacies in constraining the scope for policy intervention. The impact of this review on subsequent policy and debate is thus in large measure an internationally endorsed impact of the research underpinning this present case study. The review was the channel through which the impact was achieved.

University of Edinburgh researchers have continued to engage throughout the REF period with the debates stimulated by the OECD Review. In January 2008 Raffe circulated a commentary on the review to all the national and local policy-makers and senior educationists who had attended the Review's launch conference. Paterson and Raffe were invited to discuss the review's findings by a number of organisations including the Scottish Government and the Scottish Qualifications Authority.

In addition to specific channels such as the OECD Review, the research has achieved impact through a vigorous and wide-ranging programme of public engagement. Research results from the Centre for Educational Sociology are summarised in 4-page *Briefings* which are posted on the website and sent in hard copy to 500 policy-makers, practitioners and researchers; the *Briefings* landing page alone received 1405 hits during the REF period. Croxford led the research input to a report by the Educational Institute of Scotland (Scotland's largest teachers' union) on *Education and Poverty*, which was mailed to policy-makers, opinion leaders and the entire EIS membership (more than 80% of teachers in Scotland) in advance of the 2011 Scottish election [5.3].

Between 2008 and 2013 University of Edinburgh researchers presented research findings on socio-economic inequalities in Scottish education to meetings and events organised by the Institute for Public Policy Research, the Scottish Government, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC),

the Scottish Qualifications Authority, the Local Authorities Research and Intelligence Association, the Scottish Council of Independent Schools, the Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association, the Association of Educational Development and Improvement Professionals in Scotland, the Scottish Policy Innovation Forum, the Policy Expo at the Scottish Parliament, Holyrood Conferences, the National Assembly for Wales and the (UK) National Equalities Panel.

Engagement was further supported by the researchers' own participation in policy processes, such as Raffe's membership of the SFC's Access and Inclusion Committee and Paterson's leading role in the Royal Society of Edinburgh's influential Education Committee. Paterson's track record of research, especially on inequality and opportunity, has earned him the status of a leading public intellectual in Scottish education. All five parties represented in the Scottish Parliament in the 2007-11 session invited him to comment on their education policy; equality and widening access were prominent issues in all these discussions. Within the last year of the REF period alone, Paterson's work has been mentioned at least 17 times in national newspapers including the Times, Sunday Times, Scotsman and Herald, as well as in the educational press and several appearances on BBC1 Scotland, BBC2's Newsnight Scotland and BBC Radio Scotland. His most recent contribution to public debates, a discussion of the role of philanthropy in school education, was commissioned by the Scottish Government during the REF period and draws on the research described above [5.10].

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Sources to corroborate the impact are indicated in square brackets in the text. Web pages have been archived at <https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/REF2014REF3B/UoA+25>

[5.1] Scottish Parliament (2013) *Post 16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013 (asp 12)*. Edinburgh. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2013/12/enacted>

[5.2] Commission on School Reform report (2013) *By Diverse Means: improving Scottish education*. Edinburgh. <http://reformscotland.com/public/publications/bydiversemeans1.pdf>

[5.3] Educational Institute for Scotland report (2010) *Poverty and education: breaking down the barriers*, Edinburgh: EIS. <http://www.eis.org.uk/images/pdf/povertypaper2010web.pdf>

[5.4] OECD review (2007) *Quality and Equity of Schooling in Scotland*. Paris. DOI:10.1787/9789264041004-en

[5.5] HMIE report (2009) *Improving Scottish Education*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government. [http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/ise09\\_tcm4-712882.pdf](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/ise09_tcm4-712882.pdf)

[5.6] Education Scotland report, 'The case for change'. [www.educationscotland.gov.uk/thecurriculum/whatiscurriculumforexcellence/howwasthecurriculumdeveloped/caseforchange/index.asp](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/thecurriculum/whatiscurriculumforexcellence/howwasthecurriculumdeveloped/caseforchange/index.asp)

[5.7] Factual statement from OECD Review Panel rapporteur on the value of the research, 24 March 2007.

[5.8] This includes one report co-authored with other researchers. An additional three references were to work conducted by independent researchers but published by the Scottish Government, one of which was by University of Edinburgh researchers.

[5.9] Raffe, D. (2008) *As others see us: a commentary on the OECD review of the Quality and Equity of Schooling in Scotland*. Centre for Educational Sociology, University of Edinburgh. Subsequently published (minus the summary of 'key messages') in *Scottish Educational Review* 40, 1, 22-36, 2008. <http://www.scotedreview.org.uk/pdf/111.pdf>

[5.10] Paterson, L. (2013). *Outstanding students and philanthropic contributions in Scottish school education*. Occasional paper 98. Edinburgh: David Hume Institute. [http://www.davidhumeinstitute.com/images/stories/publications/HOP/HOP\\_98\\_Philanthropy.pdf](http://www.davidhumeinstitute.com/images/stories/publications/HOP/HOP_98_Philanthropy.pdf)