



## **SFRE Forum I**

### **Stimulus Report: England**

***October 2008***



# **Capacity and Quality in Education Research in England**

## **A Stimulus Report for SFRE Forum I**

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## **A. Preface and acknowledgements**

This report is intended to inform discussion at the first SFRE conference in October 2008. To do this it draws previous studies and debates about education research and its uses in England, the UK, the EC and OECD and discussion with witnesses. It is hoped that it will enable all parties to education research – researchers, policymakers and analysts, practitioners and managers – to develop some common understandings and work together to enhance the system as a whole.

The evidence for the report comes from two main sources: (a) discussions with ten informants covering research, policy, teacher education, practice and funding and (b) a selection of studies concerned with quality and capacity in education research. It is also influenced by the author's personal experience in post-16 practice and research management and in education-wide initiatives linking the research, policy and practice communities. Responsibility for the text lies entirely with the author. The information and insights of those consulted have been enormously helpful and are gratefully acknowledged.

Andrew Morris  
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## **B. Executive summary**

### ***Context of education research in England***

- A valuable stock of experience and studies of knowledge production and use has been built up in recent years in England, the UK and internationally, upon which a new strategic forum can draw.
- The range of providers and users of research in England is wide, embracing academic, government, independent and practice-based organisations; so are their precise needs.
- Key system –wide themes have been identified and analysed, including: funding, quality, priorities, capacity and impact.
- A number of initiatives have taken place in the past decade in response to the earlier analyses, including the creation of research centres and programmes, re-organisation in government research and the development of resources and networks by practice-facing agencies.
- Research in education as a social science and R&D for the improvement of teaching and learning are both important, though each may merit distinct consideration.

### ***Quality and accountability for education research in England***

- Quality assessment processes are organised in quite different ways in different parts of the knowledge management system.
- There is a need for greater plurality in the way the quality and utility of research are assessed; a framework has been developed to assist with this.
- There have been calls for changes in the profile of educational research towards:
  - more long-term and large-scale studies
  - more experimental and quantitative studies
- There are suggestions that overall quality has been improving through the major programmes and research centres and in the 2008 RAE

### ***Capacity building for education research in England***

- There have been several helpful studies on capacity building yielding useful definitions and typologies.
- Quantitative information about capacity is restricted to some aspects of the academic part of the overall knowledge management system.

- Education is one of the largest social science disciplines with increasing numbers of postgraduate students but an ageing demographic profile of researchers.
- Some research capacity is thinly spread over research institutions. Some argue for concentrating some skills and distributing others.
- Capacity for encouraging the use of research in practice is very limited but initiatives to encourage it are developing.
- A number of actions have been taken to encourage capacity-building, through programmes, centres, projects and government units, but no concerted strategy has developed across the communities.
- Some kind of overarching structure to promote and monitor a capacity building strategy has been suggested

## C. Main Report

### 1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to assist discussion in the new Strategic Forum for Research in Education. The virtue of a Forum – a means of bringing people together to talk - is to develop thinking across a plurality of communities; several studies have demonstrated just how many communities there are with a stake in educational research and its use. It is important for these to work together coherently, ultimately in the interests of the learner, whether at school or work, college or university, community centre or nursery.

Collaboration across research, practice and policymaking is important because the majority of the people who need to understand and use research are not themselves professionally active in it; equally those who are active in research need to understand the interests of the professionals who will make use of it. But collaboration is not easy; for it to be effective, insight into the conditions and motivations of other professionals is necessary. To achieve this on a large scale would be a major step forward; working together in fora and on projects is a starting point.

There is now quite a history of initiatives in this area, some in England, some in other countries and some at EU, OECD level, upon which SFRE can build. The 1990s saw several critical analyses of educational R&D systems, both in England and internationally; in England these gave rise to a National Educational Research Forum, an Educational Research Funders Forum, an evidence synthesis centre and a set of dedicated research centres, during the 2000s. At the international level the OECD analysed the condition across countries, organising conferences, country examinations and producing publications. Many of the issues raised by the analyses were also taken up by various public bodies and at conferences and seminars organised by BERA, TLRP, DfES and others.

Common themes run throughout these initiatives: the low level of funding for educational research, skill shortages in key areas, the engagement of practitioners and fostering of effective communications. The problems have been analysed and actions taken in regard to some of these. In England the challenge now is to extract learning points from previous experience (both positive and negative) and to formulate fresh ideas about how the research, policy and practice communities can work together most effectively. This will not be not easy, especially as no overarching structure exists to exercise influence over all stakeholders. The task is to find practical steps that multiple stakeholders can sign up to, that both satisfy their short-term sectional interests and move the whole sector forward strategically, in the interest of learners. To help with this, this paper sketches some of the background and brings out points for consideration today.



## 2. The context of education research in England

### 2.1. Provision

Education research in England is carried out in a wide range of organisations, in varied ways, for varied purposes. The majority is undertaken by HEIs, both through grant funding for higher education research and through commissions. In the 2001 RAE exercise 68 HEIs made submissions for funding under education. Government departments organise research relating to education, either through commissions or in-house activity. These include the Departments of Work and Pensions, Health, Culture, Media and Sport and the Home Office as well as the foremost departments, DIUS and DCSF. Many of the government-linked agencies, responsible for specific functions in each of the sectors of education, also carry out or commission research. These include (for acronyms see end) QCA, TDA, QIA and CEL (currently merging into LSIS), NCSL, IfL, HEA and Becta amongst a host of others. A large number of other organisations in the voluntary, public and private sectors, such as NFER, IES, NIACE and GTCE, also carry out research, again through a mixture of commissioning and in-house work. The remit of these bodies across the countries of the UK varies. The complex mix of institutions undertaking research, and of bodies funding it, is not subject to overall coordination or planning and information about the scale of many parts of it is lacking. The issue of coherence across the many parts of the system itself became a key issue expressed in a number of reports during the 1990s. At the same time a rise in interest from organisations representing potential ‘users’ of research raised additional expectations of the system – for greater relevance and usefulness.

In 1995 an international report on educational research and development for the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation at the OECD (OECD, 1995) suggested the need for a move towards R&D ‘grounded in practice, involving staff and institutions...in a constant process of diagnosis, comparison and analysis...supported by experimentation and innovation’. It pointed to the limited demand from potential customers – schools/colleges and government and revealed systemic commonalities in reviews of several countries: fragmentation, both between the research, policy and practice communities and within them; irrelevance of research to policymakers and practitioners; and critical perceptions of utility, efficiency and quality.

In 1998 the DfEE commissioned a report, *Excellence in research in schools*, (Hillage, 1998) which reflected many of the issues set out in the earlier OECD study and recommended, the creation of a national educational research framework, a National Educational Research Forum for policymakers, practitioners and researchers, Policy Fora and a mechanism for funder collaboration. It also called for quality criteria in the RAE to be reinforced to emphasise cross-disciplinary research, methodological innovation and impact on practice. A National Educational Research Forum was duly set up in 1999, which identified five key themes - Priorities, Funding, Quality, Capacity and Impact - and brought groups together, across sectors and communities, to work on them. It

subsequently undertook collaborative activities and published working papers, but the problems of the fragmented communities tended to be reflected in its faltering progress, rather than resolved by it (Morris and Peckham, 2006).

Two key issues brought out in a number of studies are that education research projects are frequently on too small a scale and too short-lived. In response to this a new kind of UK-wide, large-scale research programme was created in 2000 by the ESRC to address pedagogic problems in authentic settings: the Teaching and Learning Research Programme. This represented a leap forward in tackling several of the problems identified in earlier reports. Larger sums of money were aggregated from multiple sources and longer timescales established. Objectives were set in supporting the improvement of practice and close links were encouraged with the potential users of research, in some cases involving participation by teachers in the research.

Around the same time two dedicated Research Centres, the Economics of Education and the Wider Benefits of Learning, were set up by the government education department and a Centre established within the EPPI-Centre for synthesising educational evidence. Later a National R&D Centre for adult literacy and numeracy was set up by DfES and other centres were supported at the Thomas Coram Research Unit and the Centre for Children and Family Research. Based mainly in HEIs, these represented a significant move by government to concentrate expertise, build capacity and tackle policy-related issues. A 2002 OECD examination of the English R&D system (OECD, 2002) commended these initiatives and recommended 'more research that simultaneously addresses issues of practice or policy and issues of fundamental knowledge' and efforts to reward such research through the RAE and journal editors.

As these centrally-led initiatives were taking root, Higher Education Institutions were experiencing other changes. The effects of the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise were leading to increasing differentiation between institutions, as funding became concentrated in fewer institutions – a trend that may continue in the 2008 exercise.

More recently there have been important changes in the machinery of Government, splitting responsibility for research across two Departments: DIUS and DCSF. The DCSF Analysis and Evidence Strategy (DCSF, 2008a) was published in May 2008, outlining the Department's analytical priorities and how they align with the Children's Plan. It sets out how DCSF is attempting to build a long term evidence base and is working in partnership with other organisations and the devolved administrations. The DIUS equivalent is in preparation at the time of going to press. DCSF is planning to replace its five current research centres with up to three new ones (coverage not yet decided) aiming for a spring 2009 start. Meanwhile a new Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services has been set up for an initial three years by a consortium led by the National Children's Bureau. Bigger than the Research Centres, it will co-ordinate local, regional and national intelligence about what works (DCSF, 2008b).

If the late 1990s and early 2000s saw an explosion of interest in and analyses of education research, attention has increasingly turned in subsequent years to the problems of managing the knowledge in the interests of its growing range of users. There is pressure on government to use evidence more effectively in policy development and on practice-facing organisations in the design of their practical interventions. As a result a number of knowledge management initiatives have been set up. The QIA Excellence Gateway and TDA's Teacher Training Resource Bank select key resources about research and good practice and help users make sense of them; DCSF's Research Informed Practice website and GTCE Research of the Month provide digests of key research for practitioners and the Educational Evidence Portal helps people retrieve evidence easily from multiple sources.

In England the challenge now is to reflect on this rich experience and to find practical ways of linking the work of the various communities for mutual benefit.

## **2.2. Outstanding issues**

- Should the distinct requirements of (a) education research in the social sciences and (b) R&D for improvement of teaching and learning, be considered separately?
- What steps need to be taken to enable more funders to commission longer-lasting, larger-scale research programmes?
- Should efforts be made to drive up demand for research from the practice and policy communities? If so, how?
- Is there a case for better coordination between funders in the planning of research? If so, how should it be effected?



### **3. Quality and accountability for education research in England**

#### **3.1. Provision**

Debates and developments around quality and accountability will, by the very nature of the topics, be with us in perpetuity. In recent years, however, ideas about the scope of them have been developing and so too have some of the associated procedures. This section sets out some general considerations and looks at specific issues and recent developments.

##### **3.1.1. General considerations**

There have been a number of reports on the issue of quality. The 1998 DfEE report Excellence in Research on Schools (Hillage et al, 1998) offered a listing of aspects of quality:

- duplication and replication
- quality assurance
- peer review
- methodological rigour
- research skills

Subsequently the National Educational Research Forum set up a sub-group on quality which called for the educational research community to ‘recognise that educational research has a credibility problem with respect to quality’ (NERF, 2000b, p8) and for the user community to “show a capacity and a willingness to engage with researchers and to modify practice in the light of well –founded and persuasive research” (NERF, 2000b, p7). It went on to suggest that research should be ‘thoroughly and comprehensively located with relevant previous studies’ and that ‘educational research is particularly well suited to multi-method and multi-disciplinary studies’. It set out a typology of quality assurance mechanisms including:

- peer review
- the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)
- contract-specific requirements
- funding body requirements
- codes of practice of professional bodies.

More recent advances in relation to quality assessment have been made in a study for the ESRC (Furlong and Oancea, 2005) which clarified concepts and reviewed initiatives in order to develop an understanding of quality to assist the development of criteria for different types of applied and practice-based research. Their framework comprises four dimensions of quality: epistemic, technological, economic and capacity development/value for people; it also offers a number of sub-dimensions within each, such as trustworthiness, purposivity, plausibility and marketability. It would be interesting to know in what ways the framework is being applied by organisations or individuals.

### **3.1.2. Procedures**

The report Excellence in Research on Schools estimated that the Research Assessment Exercise applied to less than half of educational research, yet was the dominant influence on concepts of quality. The 2001 exercise expressed its intention to ‘support the equal consideration of basic, strategic and applied research and consideration of practical or practice-orientated research’ as a matter of principle, yet the 2001 Roberts report implied that this had not in fact happened (Furlong and Oancea, 2005, p5). It was also criticised for undervaluing technology transfer and collaborative research. A recent study of the outcomes of the 2001 exercise (Oancea, forthcoming) points to:

- danger of screening out pockets of expertise in lower rated departments
- missed opportunities to nurture democratic dialogue between research, practice and policymaking
- distinctions between the topics emphasised by higher-rated HEIs (pupils, governance and methods) and lower-rated ones (curriculum, teacher education and inset)

The results of the 2008 exercise are not known at the time of writing and analyses of them must be awaited. However informal indications are that the general quality of submissions has improved, the quantum of research funding attracted by HEIs (a measure recorded in the RAE) has increased and the number of researchers remains about the same as before. However, the efforts of the panel to welcome practice-orientated submissions may have been tempered by the tendency for universities to ‘play safe’ in a high stakes exercise.

The peer review process does not apply to all research outputs – one estimate put it at about two thirds of all educational research (Hillage et al, 1998). What of the remainder? There is no standard or necessary commonality across the QA procedures of the myriad organisations commissioning research, nor of the bodies undertaking it, outside the academic sector. It is likely that the incidence and strength of QA processes varies considerably and there may be an opportunity and perhaps willingness across organisations to discuss and share practices. Funders of research were called upon in the Excellence in Research on Schools report to develop generic quality standards based around fitness-for-purpose and for centres of research to develop QA processes to reflect these. Attempts to improve approaches to QA and other aspects of the research process through the Funders’

Forum foundered partly on the differences in motivation amongst funders. Some larger ones have well-developed processes and may be reluctant to alter them, whereas other smaller ones may be reluctant to embark on new processes for which they have neither the time nor resources. Perhaps it is time to reconsider whether a fresh attempt should be made to work on this issue, taking into account the difficulties encountered previously.

Another key element in the quality assurance process is the journal publication system. The process of submission with its attendant risks can be time consuming and detract from efforts by academics to focus on concerns of practice. Maintenance of the refereeing system puts pressure on peoples' voluntary time, particularly that of leading researchers in shortage areas. The hierarchy of prestige amongst journals may also lead to unintended consequences such as encouragement of single- rather than multi-disciplinary studies. Discussion amongst journal editors was stimulated by two workshops organised by NERF, at which proposals were put forward for establishing a relationship between editors, reviewers and authors prior to submission (NERF, 2000c).

### **3.1.3. Infrastructure**

It is clear from the foregoing section that national infrastructure for quality assurance and accountability only exists in patches. HEFCE and ESRC have developed sizeable and influential processes in relation to their relatively large budgets for academic research. Government departments also have processes for determining research priorities and assessing the quality of proposals and outputs, largely through the work of their analytical teams. The multitudinous bodies in the public, voluntary and private sectors each have independent and idiosyncratic means of making these judgments and accounting to their governing bodies and trustees. Journal editors also have diverse approaches to judging quality collectively their judgments are enormously influential through the effects of publication on RAE funding and individual reputations.

From the point of view of the potential user of research evidence, this heterogeneity fails to provide clear and manageable indications of quality. An average user will not have time to acquaint themselves with dozens of different quality standards and processes; they will perforce limit themselves to one or two known sources, even where they might wish for greater plurality.

### **3.2. Outstanding issues**

- The RAE is labour intensive but metrics may distort what is valued. Should we find a way to put quality at a distance from funding?
- Are 'expressions of excellence' a workable alternative to quality criteria?
- Can quality in all aspects be sustained over the large spread of HEI departments? Should specialist resources be concentrated and regional networking encouraged?

- Should there be a renewed approach, through a revised Funders' Forum, to improving and harmonising QA processes across funders?
- Is a framework setting out different features of quality for different purposes potentially useful? If so, in what ways can it be effectively applied?
- Would there be value in journal editors working together on generic quality issues, for example their relationship to peer reviewers and authors?

## **4. Capacity building for education research in England**

### **4.1. Provision**

#### **4.1.1. Definition and scope**

A foundation study for discussion of educational research capacity is the report by Donald and Anne McIntyre, commissioned during the planning stages of the TLRP (McIntyre and McIntyre, 1999). Although confined to the teaching and learning aspects of school/college education, it provides concepts and suggestions of more general value. It conceives of research capacity as ‘depending on appropriate and adequate expertise, motivation and opportunity’ and characterised the differing perspectives on the issue:

- government concern for research on effectiveness of teaching and learning, for more effective accumulation, communication and utilisation
- researchers’ concerns about quality, training, recruitment and funding
- practitioners’ concerns for engagement with research and partnership with university departments and specifically the inadequacy of research for further education.

Building on this, the Capacity Building sub-group of the National Educational Research Forum (NERF) described capacity as “the resources – material, human and intellectual – for doing and using research and the ways in which they are brought to bear” (NERF, 2000a) and set out the principles that research capacity:

- is needed throughout the system
- is about engaging with the whole research process
- is ultimately for the benefit of learners, families, communities, society

However neither NERF nor the Funders’ Forum was able to develop quantitative information about the capacities within the various parts of the system. To do so would have required action to count the numbers and types of research-related staff in government-linked agencies, private, charitable and independent organisations, schools, colleges and local authorities and to assess the nature and extent of tools and processes for engaging people with research (networks, portals etc). Such an exercise remains to be done

#### **4.1.2. Issues**

The most prominent problems of capacity, reported on a number of occasions are:

- The aging profile of education researchers

- The shortage in some skill areas, particularly in large scale-quantitative techniques

An important source of information on this, the UK-wide Demographic Review of UK Social Sciences (ESRC, 2005) does not separate out data for England only, but for the UK as a whole reports that:

- more than half of the staff in education research are aged 50 or over
- education research is unusual in that it often recruits senior teaching professionals

Other data from ESRC shows similarly that:

- 70 per cent of education researchers were aged over 45 in 2004 – more than any other social science discipline.
- Only 15 per cent of ESRC studentship applications were from the under 25s compared to 60 per cent in economics.

Interestingly, the number of PhDs awarded trebled between 1995 and 2001 from 170 to 565.

These data are not broken down by country within the UK and they relate particularly to HEI researchers. The state of research capacity in the other public sectors and in the voluntary and private sectors is not, as far as the author is aware, formally measured; to do so would be a major undertaking. However, there are anecdotal reports of recruitment problems that reflect the two main problems identified above.

A further problem reported by several informants was of the distribution of research capacity across institutions. In the case of HEIs, the number of education departments is relatively high, partly because of the requirements of teacher education. Some argue that some skills in short supply are too thinly spread and should be concentrated in fewer institutions. Others point to the need to keep research close to practice and training, in locations throughout the country.

In relation to government and linked agencies, it will be interesting to see what effect recent moves to locate agencies away from London (for example QIA, Becta, UK Commission for Employment and Skills, Office of National Statistics) will have on recruitment to research posts.

#### **4.1.3. Ways forward**

Analyses and discussions about ways forward have taken place in several fora – NERF, ESRC and TLRP, for example. The NERF capacity building sub-group (NERF, 2000a), comprising research, practice and policy-based stakeholders, called for:

- a coordinating body

- appraisal and monitoring of the state of capacity
- a foresight exercise on future needs
- dialogue between funders and proposers
- improved communications through secondments, partnerships and networks
- expansion of the range of funding sources to include schools/colleges, local authorities and other system-wide sources

In a key paper on capacity building, Dyson and Desforges (2002) set out a typology of capacity-building actions, covering: resource concentration, networking, communications infrastructure, user-researcher interaction, strategic leadership, training, career development, cultural change, increased resourcing. They called for the mobilisation of organisations around a three-fold agenda:

- expertise of professional researchers
- organisational infrastructure to maximise capacity
- enhancement of practitioners' and policymakers' capacity to use and produce research

At a subsequent Funders' Forum workshop attended by some twenty organisations, including DfES, ESRC, TLRP, HEFCE, TDA, NFER, NCSL, NIACE and GTCE (White, 2003) calls were made to scale up local initiatives, enhance brokerage between research, policy and practice and to expand training in quantitative methods especially for large datasets. Specific suggestions were put forward for:

- a major centre for easy access to sound evidence by all
- awaydays for policymakers
- standards to be established by funders for capacity building elements to be included in research commissions
- regional skill training centres to share training across institutions, identify incentives and encourage networking

The importance of differences in need and approach between the countries of the UK was highlighted.

Since then, important progress has been made in engaging practitioners and others in research, through the ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme, the NFER research engaged school, the National Teacher Research Panel and practitioner research schemes at LSDA, NRDC, CEL and elsewhere. Suggestions

have been made for improving the connection between policymaking and research by encouraging reciprocal secondments between the research community and government. These have been tried in several contexts on a small scale providing experience of what makes them effective. Another suggestion has been to develop further the apparatus of 'knowledge transfer' and its associated resources (such as CASE fellowships) in education.

The role of online support for capacity building is being tested through the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods and the TLRP capacity building resources. As an example, an online toolkit is being developed at the University of Bristol to support training in quantitative methods. It is being suggested that the effectiveness of online resources will depend on getting specific key groups to form nodes around which others will congregate - an approach has met with success in some other fields. The internet could help in other ways - by bringing together evidence from multiple sources and providing access to expertise and networks in specific areas.

In a key discussion paper, Andrew Pollard, director of the TLRP, has recently put forward a set of strategic proposals for capacity building, embracing a wide range of stakeholders (Pollard, 2008). Crucially he calls for a double-headed strategy:

1. enhancing outcomes through the improvement of practice
2. social scientific development of new knowledge and understanding

For the former he recognises the role of government agencies and other providers in supporting professional development through, for example, research training elements in teacher education programmes. For the second strand, he suggests that key HEIs might take responsibility for creating and sustaining capacity building infrastructure for the communities they serve through, for example, a network of UK-wide centres of excellence.

#### **4.1.4. Initiatives**

- *Expertise of professional researchers*

UK-wide schemes have played an important role in capacity building in England. Examples include:

- The ESRC National Centre for Research Methods – an ESRC network of research groups running methods-focussed training and events, facilitating access to training and developing e-resources in social science research methods.
- Increased ESRC support through studentships and fellowships, training and development throughout the academic life course and increased support for early career and new researchers

- The Teaching and Learning Research Programme, which offers support for individuals and groups to share knowledge, tools and practices and web-based guidance drawing on its network of expertise.
- Projects which build capacity by engaging less experienced researchers directly in project work with experts.

The Research Centres sponsored by the former DFES are concentrations of expertise around broad policy related themes such as the Wider Benefits of Learning and Children and Families. A recent study (DCSF, 2007) suggested that they contribute to capacity building by attracting researchers into the field; developing research skills within research teams and developing skill in applying research to policy issues.

A considerable range of initiatives has begun in recent years to address some of the problems raised in earlier analyses. Some of these are mentioned below for illustrative purposes, under the three ‘mobilisation’ themes suggested by Dyson and Desforges (2002).

- *Practitioner and policymaker capacity*

For policymakers the UK Government Social Research Unit (GSRU) promotes the use of evidence in strategy, policy and delivery in government and provides practical support and advice on research, recruitment, career development and training and runs professional development courses on social research methods.

For practitioners, the General Teaching Council for England runs a Teacher Learning Academy which offers public and professional recognition for teachers' learning, development and improvement work by providing support and guidance on the stages of a learning journey and a framework for evaluating and recognising the learning.

The Training and Development Agency for schools has developed standards for Excellent Teacher status which requires the ability to “research and evaluate innovative curricular practices and draw on research outcomes and other sources of external evidence to inform their own practice and that of colleagues”. Its innovative Teacher Training Resource Bank makes the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) professional knowledge base more easily accessible to teacher educator, trainees and NQTs alike.

A variety of networks and structures have also developed across the practice community to support engagement with research. Examples include the National Teacher Research Panel - an independent group of practising teachers who work to ensure that research in education takes account of the teacher perspective - and the Learning and Skills Research Network – which brings together people involved in producing and making use of research across the learning and skills sector and higher education.

At the same time, many individual projects have specifically engaged teachers in research activity.

- *Organisational infrastructure*

The study by Dyson and Desforges (2002, p14) also refers to infrastructural development through the establishment of research centres and networks, the development of HEFCE infrastructural funding practices, the establishment of inter-disciplinary units and the creation of incentives for non-education researchers to undertake education research. It is not easy to record progress comprehensively in these areas as there remains no structure for coordinating or measuring progress across the nation as a whole. Anecdotally, however, it would seem that the government funded research centres have enabled some limited progress to be made on interdisciplinary working and engagement of non-education researchers (though the future of these Centres is currently uncertain). At the UK level, ESRC fellowships and methodological support have increased and research capability and awareness within government has also developed as result of initiatives taken by the Cabinet Office and, latterly, the Treasury.

#### **4.2. Outstanding issues**

- Should capacity-building strategy be coordinated in some way? If so, how should this be managed?
- To what extent are shortages in quantitative skills being remedied through current actions such as online modular materials, projects that support expert-novice relationships, masters/doctoral programmes and training events?
- How can funders be persuaded to incorporate capacity-building measures in their commissions?
- Should funders be encouraged to commission more experimental, longitudinal and large-scale quantitative studies that build capacity in the process?
- Which approaches and funding sources should be used to support practitioner engagement in and with research?
- Should the capacity-building needs of R&D for the improvement of teaching and learning be considered separately from those of educational research in the social sciences?
- Is further analysis needed of the precise location of market failures in research skills? Is it, for example, in:
  - levels of funding for training and professional development
  - recruitment or retention practices
  - import - export across disciplines?

## 5. Conclusion

Key issues affecting research quality and capacity in England have been raised and analysed on several occasions in recent years. The issues affect the research community, the policy community and those engaged in running the education service on a day-to-day basis. Not surprisingly there are different perspectives on the issues and different senses of priority and pace. However, on many substantive issues, particularly in relation to the improvement of teaching and learning, there are enormous common interests. Policymakers wish to see a more highly educated population, practitioners and managers wish for better evidence and conceptualisations about what they do every day and researchers wish to contribute productively to the world around them. To make progress on the creation and application of sound knowledge, the communities have to look both inwards to improvements that can be made in their ways of working and also outwards to the manner of their collaboration with the other communities. Many ways forward for these lie with UK-wide initiatives and UK bodies. In England, given the huge diversity of organisations, separated by sector, by function, by size and region, a key issue is how to replicate the kind of informal networking more familiar in smaller countries. Efforts to tackle this problem in recent years have had limited success. The coming of the Strategic Forum provides not only an opportunity for each community to reflect on itself, but also to engage in dialogue with representative of the others. Uniquely, it will also enable ideas and experiences from all communities in the other countries of the UK to influence practices in England.



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## E. Glossary of Acronyms

Becta	British Educational Communications Technology Association
BERA	British Educational Research Association
CEL	Centre for Excellence in Leadership
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment (forerunner of DfES)
DfES	Department for Education and Skills (forerunner of DCSF and DIUS)
DIUS	Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
EPPI	Evidence for Policy and Practice, Information and Coordination Centre
GTCE	General Teaching Council for England
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEA	Higher Education Academy
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IES	Institute of Employment Studies
IfL	Institute for Learning
LSDA	Learning and Skills Development Agency
LSIS	Learning and Skills Improvement Service (replaces QIA and CEL)
NCSL	National College for School Leadership
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NERF	National Educational Research Forum
NIACE	National Institute for Adult and Community Learning
NRDC	National R&D Centre for adult literacy and numeracy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
QCA	Curriculum and Qualifications Authority
QIA	Quality Improvement Agency
RAE	Research Assessment Exercise
TDA	Training and Development Agency for schools
TLRP	Teaching and Learning Research Programme