

Conclusion

This report demonstrates the value of constructively sharing the collective knowledge and expertise of stakeholders in UK education research. Devolution has provided the UK with a home-based comparative method, and we have used this to celebrate successes, illuminate issues and explore solutions.

SFRE brought policy makers, practitioners, researchers, mediators, funders and many others into a structured conversation. This showed, tantalisingly, the potential which is available if only it could be unlocked in more sustained processes of engagement. Specific recommendations have been made, including one related to the vulnerability of what we believe is the most foundational and enabling part of our knowledge development and mobilisation system. Establishment of a UK Education Information Service would significantly improve public access to knowledge about education and thus open up opportunities for distributed innovation across national systems. Although there would be some modest cost in this, it can be seen as a condition for successful decentralisation. A supply of clean water is taken for granted as underpinning public health – and a basic supply of knowledge, understanding and evidence about education is just as essential for a modern, efficient democracy.

However, perhaps the most important output from SFRE is the conceptualisation of ‘knowledge development and mobilisation’ itself. By teasing out the key elements of such a system, we have tried to both clarify these and present them as an interdependent whole for review, debate, evaluation – and thus, improvement.

We hope and expect that discussions within each country will continue and that provision at national and UK levels will evolve further as new initiatives emerge to unlock our collective potential. In the short to medium term, financial pressures are likely to be very significant. For this reason, we have tried to suggest possibilities for consolidation, to celebrate much existing provision and to emphasise ways of adding value to what the UK and its four countries already have.

SFRE can be seen as a spin-off from the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (2000-09), the UK’s largest previous research investment, which was funded by HEFCE and UK governments and managed by ESRC. Drawing on TLRP’s networks and goodwill, together with the crucial support of ESRC, DCSF, CfBT and BERA, made SFRE possible. If the dialogue is to be maintained, or if a further cycle of SFRE deliberation is to be initiated in a few years time, then development of a new or renewed consortium will be necessary.