

Teacher Attitudes to Quality Assurance and Evaluation (QAE) in Scotland and England

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The *Briefing* reports results of a survey of teachers in Scotland and England which asked them about their experiences of quality assurance and evaluation (QAE) practices such as inspection, performance measurement, evaluation and review, and the impact on their work and morale. The survey was part of a larger international study of QAE in Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Scotland and England investigating the ways in which education is being 'governed by numbers'. This *Briefing* focuses on Scotland and England, and on differences and similarities in teachers' attitudes to QAE within the two systems.

- ▶ Teachers and headteachers in Scotland and England were asked questions about how they defined quality in education, and to give their views on how internal (eg teacher assessments) and external (eg inspection) processes contributed to enhanced quality;
- ▶ Teachers believe that quality has improved but that respect for the profession has declined: teachers are contributing to that improvement but not gaining status or acknowledgement of their efforts from pupils, parents or policy-makers;
- ▶ Teachers in Scotland and England are more positive about QAE processes over which they have some degree of control, rather than those that are top-down;
- ▶ Teachers in both systems are hostile to the publication of results as league tables and to the ranking of schools: they believe this may distort pedagogic practice;
- ▶ Teachers in both systems are in broad agreement about QAE processes and their effects but teachers in Scotland highlight the importance of self-regulation and feel less regulated 'from above' than do their English colleagues;
- ▶ It is clear from the wider international study that support for self-evaluation and hostility to top-down regulation is reflected across all the countries in the study.

Introduction: the survey

The *Briefing* reports the results for Scotland and England of a five country survey of teachers. It asked comparable questions about core aspects of quality assurance and evaluation (QAE) practices in Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Scotland and England. We focus here on the survey results for Scotland and England. It should be noted that response rates were very low, only 5% in England, and 13% in Scotland with a higher response from headteachers (12%) than teachers (5%). However given the absence of data on this issue, especially in Scotland, we felt that it was useful to disseminate these findings, which do reflect the views of 934 teachers and headteachers in England and Scotland.

England and Scotland compared

Before we look at the detailed comparative data, we must note the extent to which, at the level of principle, there is fairly strong agreement between Scottish and English teachers about the costs and benefits of QAE systems. For example, over 80% of teachers in both countries agree that ‘in general, evaluation is beneficial to teaching’ and that evaluation by schools ‘can be used to address some real problems’. Over 70% are of the view that ‘QAE (had) increased awareness about quality in the school’. Similar proportions also agree that assessment data could help ‘to evaluate my teaching’ although the majority see ‘too much assessment as harmful to pupils’ motivation’. Less than half the teachers in both systems, however, think QAE has ‘inspired the development of better teaching’ and, when asked for their overall judgement only a third think that ‘QAE had resulted in more gains than losses’.

It is also important to remember that the development and operation of QAE differs across the two systems. In particular, regulation is more extensive in England than in Scotland. England has standardised testing (SATs) at each of the key stages, publishes school performance tables and encourages the use of performance data to drive accountability, especially through Ofsted inspections. QAE practices in Scotland are, in some respects, notably different. National assessments are timed at the discretion of the teacher, results are not published and there has been a greater commitment, at the policy level, to the development of self-evaluation alongside inspection by Her Majesty’s Inspectors of Education (HMIe).

Teachers in both systems were asked a series of questions about what aspects of QAE ‘influence’ their teaching. Interestingly, in both countries the aspects of QAE internal to the school that structure their practice are similar: analysis or tracking of pupils’ progress, targets set by the school, teacher self-evaluation, and school self-evaluation are reported by around two

thirds of both groups (see Figure 1a). Teachers in England are more influenced by performance indicators and data than those in Scotland (72% compared with 54%).

The notable differences, however, relate to those aspects of QAE which are external to the school (see Figure 1b). While similar proportions are influenced by inspection (around two thirds in both cases), English teachers are more influenced than their Scottish counterparts by national testing of attainment (75% compared with 59%), the publication of school performance data (44% compared with 22%) and school comparisons and benchmarking (40% compared with 22%).

Figure 1a: Perceived influence of internal aspects of QAE

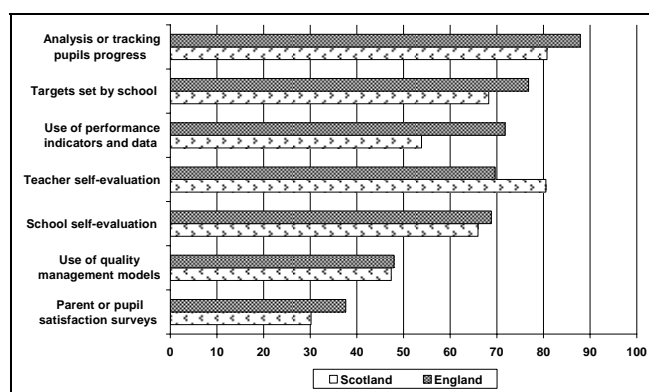
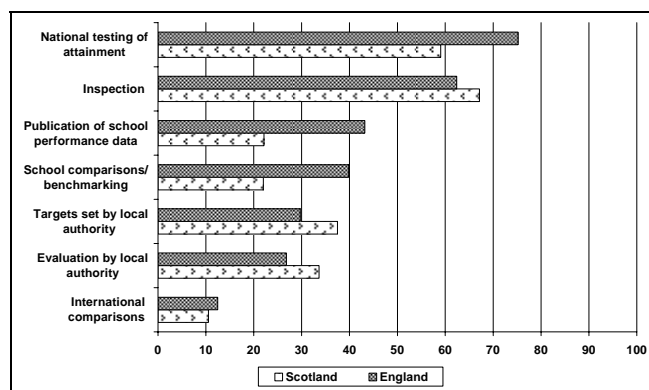


Figure 1b: Perceived influence of external aspects of QAE practices



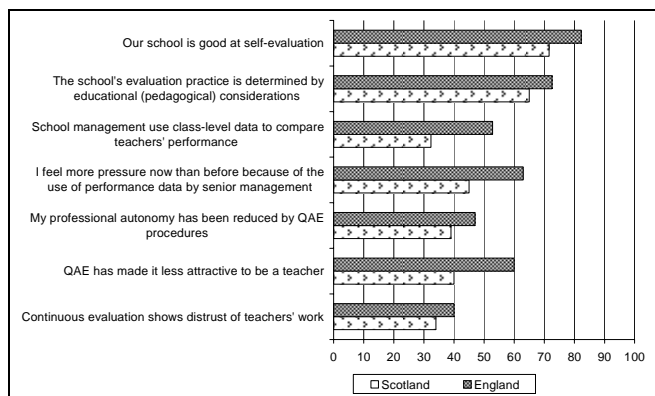
Substantial majorities of teachers in both England and Scotland believe that their school is ‘good at self-evaluation and that the school’s evaluation practice is ‘determined by educational (pedagogical) considerations’ (see Figure 2). But English teachers are much more likely to report that their ‘school management used class-level data to compare teachers’ performance’ and, probably as a consequence, that they ‘feel more pressure now than before’ because of the use of performance data by senior management. The extent to which external QAE practices affect teachers’ work underlines another difference between teachers in the two systems. Teachers in England are more inclined than teachers in Scotland to state that QAE has ‘reduced

their professional autonomy’, ‘made it less attractive to be a teacher’ and that ‘continuous evaluation showed distrust of teachers’ work’.

Publication and Competition

There are striking similarities between the two groups, nonetheless, when it comes to the consequences of publishing quality indicators and rankings of schools. Almost 90% of teachers in both systems warned that the ‘public ranking of schools leads to teaching to the test’ and reported that ‘there was a real danger that public ranking of schools might lead to manipulation of data. They also disagree that competition between schools is needed to drive (school) ‘improvement’ and disagree that it is ‘necessary to publish school-specific data to enable parents to exercise choice’: Scottish teachers hold these views more strongly than do their English counterparts.

Figure 2: Teachers’ Perceptions of the practice of QAE



Improving Quality?

So, when it comes to improving the quality of education, which aspects of QAE, in the teachers’ views, could make the largest contribution? Although the percentages differed a little, there was considerable uniformity in the responses to this question. They tend to endorse various forms of QAE over which they (and their schools) exercise considerable influence, such as self-evaluation, tracking pupils’ progress and setting targets for themselves (endorsed as ‘improving quality’ by two thirds or more in each system). They are almost uniformly sceptical about the benefits of publishing school performance data (only 5% in Scotland and 8% in England think this would ‘improve quality’). Table 1 shows the rank order of 14 aspects of QAE in the views of teachers in the two systems according to the extent to which they would ‘improve quality’.

It is clear that the rankings of the various forms of QAE by teachers in Scotland and England are very similar indeed; in every case the rankings are within a couple of places of each other. But Table 1, because it compares Scotland and England, conceals the extent to which there are differences of opinion *within* each

country. For example, in England nearly as many teachers (33%) think national testing ‘improves quality’ as think that it reduces it (30%). Similarly in Scotland, 25% think testing improves quality while 27% think the opposite.

Table 1: Extent to which various forms of QAE would ‘improve quality’

| Aspect of QAE | Scotland | England |
|--|--------------------|-------------------|
| Teacher self-evaluation | 1 st | 2 nd = |
| School self-evaluation | 2 nd | 2 nd = |
| Analysis/tracking pupils’ progress | 3 rd | 1 st |
| Targets set by school | 4 th | 4 th |
| Inspection | 5 th | 7 th |
| Management models | 6 th | 5 th |
| Parent or pupil satisfaction surveys | 7 th | 8 th |
| Use of PI and data | 8 th | 6 th |
| Evaluation by local authority | 9 th | 11 th |
| National testing | 10 th | 9 th |
| Targets set by local authority | 11 th = | 13 th |
| School comparisons/benchmarking | 11 th = | 10 th |
| International comparisons | 13 th | 12 th |
| Publication of school performance data | 14 th | 14 th |

In sum, it appears that in neither system are teachers expressing negative views about QAE in a blanket fashion. Teachers in both systems discriminate between QAE for internal, evidence-based practice and data for public ranking.

Conclusions

Our conclusions are tentative, given the low response rates to the survey, but we can offer some speculative comments on what these data suggest.

Firstly, we can say that England stands at one extreme in terms of the development of QAE practices. The QAE system there is heavily reliant on external regulation through inspection; it has encouraged greater use of performance data; redefined the role of local authorities and, rather more recently, started to shift towards school self-evaluation (or at least combining self-regulation with external regulation). Thus there has been a deliberate and long-term attempt to create a culture which is driven by QAE practices. In the process some aspects of schools’ approaches to QAE have become quite tightly regulated.

Scotland has a less sophisticated or extensive system in QAE terms, but shares with England an emphasis on the central role of inspection in QAE. However HMIe and Ofsted operate rather differently, which perhaps accounts for the fairly positive attitudes to inspection recorded by the teachers in Scotland. There is much greater emphasis in Scotland on school self-evaluation. At the same time, while there is a system of national testing, it is in a form that does not lend itself to facilitating crude comparisons of school performance. Furthermore the use of test data to track pupil

performance is much more low-key than in England. Publication of performance tables has also been discontinued in Scotland. In short, a series of checks and balances seems to be in place in Scotland, producing a particular construction of QAE that is less about regulation from above or outside and more about self-regulation. In contrast teachers in England felt heavily influenced by the combination of inspection, national testing, targets set by local authorities, school comparisons and the publication of data on school performance.

More analytically, we might compare the two systems in terms of 'hard' and 'soft' regulation. This perspective stresses the development of 'policy technologies' of 'soft' governance that encourage people to self-manage and self-regulate through processes and systems like QAE that encourage constant self-monitoring and surveillance (Croxford et al 2009). In this analysis, the important difference between the systems is that powerful but subtle forms of regulation may be being presented and experienced in Scotland as de-regulation, accompanied by a policy emphasis on enhanced professionalism. In other words teachers in England may be very aware that they are and have been regulated, while teachers in Scotland respond to 'soft' governance pressures by regulating themselves.

If we return to the wider comparative frame in which the study was located, it is clear that this division of responses between support for self-evaluation and hostility to regulation is reflected across all the countries in the study. This finding connects to concerns that increased bureaucracy leads to recruitment and retention problems in teaching: in some developed economies, teachers are leaving the profession prematurely, and this has also fuelled policy concerns that creative and inspirational teachers are not attracted to work regimes that may be over-regulated (OECD, 2009). One final piece of data from

our study, about respect for teachers, is of interest in this connection. Across England, Scotland, Denmark, Finland and Sweden, 74% of respondents to our survey felt that there was less respect for teaching than 20 years ago, while at the same time nearly half (47%) believed that the quality of education had improved in the same period. The issue of the balance between regulation and recognition in the work of teachers is thus a key policy topic in the international, as well as the UK context.

References

- OECD (2009) **Creating Effective Teaching and Learning Environments**, Paris: OECD.
- Croxford, L., Grek, S. and Shaik, F. (2009) Quality assurance and evaluation (QAE) in Scotland: promoting self-evaluation within and beyond the country, *Journal of Education Policy*, 24(2), pp.179–193.

About this study

The project on which this *Briefing* is based is funded by the European Science Foundation (ESF) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and runs from 2007-2009. There are two linked projects: the European comparative project called 'Fabricating Quality in European Education Systems' (FabQ) and the UK project that is nested within it: 'Governing by Numbers'. FabQ involves teams of researchers in Sweden, Finland and Denmark and the UK (England and Scotland).

For more information and working papers see www.ces.ed.ac.uk/research/FabQ/index.htm

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