ESRC Research Project on *Education and Youth Transitions in England, Wales and Scotland, 1984-2002*

Working Paper 1

HOW DISTINCTIVE IS SCOTTISH EDUCATION? FIVE PERSPECTIVES ON DISTINCTIVENESS

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1. CONTEXT

How distinctive is Scottish education? The question is a matter of continuing and widespread interest, not least to Scots themselves: education is linked with national identity, and distinctive institutions and traditions of education have symbolised Scotland's identity as a nation within the United Kingdom. Scots have resented the laziness of comparative researchers, or statisticians constructing cross-national indicators, who assimilate Scottish education to a spurious 'UK' system. The distinctiveness of Scottish education, and the need for 'Scottish solutions to Scottish problems', provided a pragmatic case for administrative devolution long before the democratic case was embodied in the legislative devolution of 1999. The distinctiveness of Scottish education is also of interest to students, parents and other stakeholders who need to know how their engagement with education may be affected when they move across the Scottish border. And its interest to researchers is reflected in a burgeoning academic and policy literature, notably the magnificent 115-chapter volume on *Scottish Education* whose second edition was published in 2003 (Bryce and Humes 2003).

Currently, of course, the question is not only how far Scottish education is distinctive but whether it is becoming more or less distinctive compared with education elsewhere and especially the other countries of the UK. Are the UK's education systems diverging or converging? Some theories of globalisation point to a general process of convergence, as a result of the functional imperatives of a competitive global economy, or of the policy transfer and shared policy discourses promoted by global institutions. Other theories suggest that education systems may keep their distinctiveness or even diverge, reflecting the enhanced role of education in sustaining national and regional identities, and the status of education as

one of the remaining areas where national governments retain substantial autonomy. Within Great Britain, legislative devolution in 1999 may lead to further divergence, continuing a process encouraged by measures of administrative devolution over the previous decades. On the other hand, Scottish and Welsh elites no longer need to make their systems different in order to legitimise their own power, and devolution may stimulate mutual learning, and perhaps policy borrowing, between the countries of the UK.

These questions raise underlying questions of concept and method: what does it mean for an education and training system to be more, or less, distinctive? and how do we go about measuring divergence and convergence? In this paper I describe five perspectives on the question of distinctiveness, each of which incorporates a different concept of education system and different criteria of distinctiveness. These perspectives and concepts are often implicit, but they may yield different conclusions on the distinctiveness of Scottish education. They focus respectively on:

- the shaping myth, values and traditions of the education system.
- the 'societal logic' and the political economy of education
- policy discourse and strategy
- the 'administrative system' of education – its institutions, formal curricula, regulatory arrangements, etc
- the social relations, processes and outcomes of education.

The paper reviews some of the literature within each perspective, with particular reference to education and training for 14-19 year olds. Together with a companion paper by Jenny Ozga, this paper forms part of the conceptual and theoretical groundwork for the ESRC project on *Education and Youth Transitions in England, Wales and Scotland 1984-2002*, which began earlier in 2003. The project builds on the earlier *Home Internationals Project* by adding a time dimension. It will analyse cohort survey data in order to compare changes to the three British education and training systems and assess the extent of convergence or divergence between them. It will also evaluate contrasting theoretical frameworks for understanding educational change in the context of globalisation.

2. FIVE PERSPECTIVES ON SCOTTISH DISTINCTIVENESS

(1) Shaping Myth, Values, Tradition

In one of their own contributions to *Scottish Education* Humes and Bryce (1999, 2003) discuss the distinctiveness of Scottish education primarily in terms of its underpinning values and tradition, while acknowledging that these may legitimise rather than shape current arrangements. Several contributors to Holmes' (2000) volume on education in the *Compendium of Scottish Ethnology* similarly focus on values and traditions. They draw on a range of earlier writers, including Davie (1961) on the 'democratic intellect' and McPherson and colleagues on the 'Scottish myth' (Gray McPherson and Raffe 1983, McPherson and Raab 1988). Myth is defined as 'a story that people tell about themselves ... for two purposes. These purposes are, first, to explain the world and, second, to celebrate identity and to

express values' (Gray *et al*. 1983, p.39). Elements of the Scottish myth include egalitarianism, meritocracy, support for generous public provision, and the belief that education is 'a potent force in the lives of individuals and groups'. One of its totemic figures is the 'lad o' pairts', the young man of humble background who is able to rise through this democratic system. Anderson (1998, p.215) writes of 'an ideal of "national" and public education, aimed at imposing cultural uniformity, which can be traced to the reformation, if not before, and which is ... a strong constituent of the Scottish tradition". Paterson (2000a) summarises the traditions of Scottish education in terms of four themes: social openness, the public character of the system, breadth, and passion for ideas. However with respect to each theme he describes two traditions, one of which celebrates, the other deplores.

The historian James Scotland describes Scottish education as shaped by pietism, poverty, militant democracy, academic bias, conservatism, authoritarianism, and economy. He summarises Scottish attitudes to education thus:

- education is, and always has been, of paramount importance in any community;
- every child should have the right to all the education of which he is capable;
- such education should be provided as economically and systematically as possible;
- the training of the intellect should take priority over all other facets of the pupil's personality;
- experiment is to be attempted only with the greatest caution; and
- the most important person in the school, no matter what the theorists say, is not the pupil but the (inadequately rewarded) teacher (Scotland 1969 pp.274-275).

Quoting this passage, Humes and Bryce (2003) suggest that despite widespread change since 1969 some of these items, perhaps the first three, would still receive widespread endorsement. Many would recognise aspects of the other three items in the current Scottish system.

The fourth item, the intellectualism of Scottish education, is mirrored by the lower valuation of vocational education and, in earlier versions, of scientific and technical education. This is most famously expressed in the words of Henry Craik, the first Secretary of the Scotch Education Department: 'we must not allow ourselves to be led astray by the technical instruction boom: with a nation as with an individual, it is moral energy and intellectual vigour which make it and bring all arts in their train. The Shorter Catechism has done more to make Scotland efficient in the world's work than mathematics and chemistry can ever do' (Anderson 1995, p.266). More recent writers interpret the Scottish tradition somewhat differently; in their view this tradition integrates general and vocational education rather than treat them as separate categories (eg Weir 1988, Harrison 1997). If so, the integration is less than complete. Scotland has a large sector of apprenticeship and other work-based training, but none of the 115 chapters of *Scottish Education* is devoted to work-based learning. This may reflect a view that 'training' does not belong in a book about 'education', in contrast with other national traditions which recognise work-based learning as an important site of general education. Indeed, the chapter headings of *Scottish Education* reflect a 'traditionally' Scottish view of education as something practised by teachers transmitting subject knowledge in formal institutions, and especially in schools.

To summarise: the Scottish tradition or myth values education that is general, broad, available to all, meritocratic, publicly provided, institution-based and academic. It can be conservative, it can encourage cultural uniformity, deference and passivity and it attaches little value to vocational education as a distinct form of learning. It is typically used, albeit implicitly, to contrast Scotland with England. This interpretation is contested: national traditions and myths are open to competing interpretations and this makes it difficult to use them as a basis for assessing national distinctiveness. For example the Scottish tradition has been identified with contrasting views of the relation of academic and vocational learning, as discussed above, and it has been used both to support comprehensive schooling and to resist it (McPherson and Raab 1988). Nevertheless myths, or at least attitudes and values, can be studied empirically. For example, surveys have demonstrated stronger commitment to collectivist values and to comprehensive education in Scotland compared with England, and studies of post-16 pathways reveal a lower status for vocational education (Raffe *et al.* 2001a).

Writers on the Scottish myth or tradition do not, of course, necessarily accept it as an accurate description of Scottish education. However they agree that the myth is not merely an external representation of Scottish education; it helps to shape Scottish education because participants in the system are in different ways influenced by it. Writers who place a strong emphasis on the shaping power of tradition tend to attribute a correspondingly small influence to British-wide influences or to the parallel nature of developments in England and Wales (see, for example, Paterson 2003). Within Britain, the Scottish tradition contrasts with (for example) the liberal tradition of English education portrayed by Green (1990). However the comparison with Green's analysis is instructive in two ways. In the first place, to many overseas observers Scotland shares much of the liberal tradition ascribed by Green to England (eg OECD 1999). Second, there is (to my knowledge) no comparative study of the history or tradition of Scottish education in the spirit of Green's comparison of England with France and the United States. It is therefore possible that writers on the Scottish tradition or myth exaggerate the extent to which it makes Scottish education distinctive: for example, equality and access are themes in the educational myths of many countries, not just that of Scotland.

(2) Societal logic and the political economy of education

The second perspective draws on the traditions of societal analysis and political economy. Societal analysis stresses the interdependence of education with other societal institutions such as the labour market, economy and family structure. It was pioneered by Maurice, Sellier and Silvestre (1986), who developed their ideas through an analysis of French and German workplaces which they characterised as organisational and qualificational spaces respectively. The societal approach has since had a strong influence on academic and policy-oriented comparisons of education and training. It has been used to warn against crude borrowing of other countries' policies or institutions, such as German apprenticeships, on the grounds that the societal contexts are too different. By implication, it suggests that an education system is distinctive because it is interdependent with other distinctive societal institutions. For example, Britain's relatively low levels of participation at 16-18 years are

attributed to the low (or polarised) skill demands of the British labour market, together with family structure and youth cultures (Raffe 1992).

In Britain the societal approach has had most influence on the study of post-compulsory education and training, the transition from education to work, education and economic performance, and the political economy of education. Writers influenced by this approach use system concepts such as 'skill acquisition system' or 'skill diffusion system' to analyse the political economy of education (Brown, Green and Lauder 2001), or 'transition system' to analyse the institutional arrangements for education-work transitions (Smyth *et al*., 2001, Raffe 2003). One of the most influential examples has been Finegold and Soskice's (1988, p.21) analysis of Britain as

> *trapped in a low-skills equilibrium, in which the majority of enterprises staffed by poorly trained managers and workers produce low quality goods and services. The term 'equilibrium' is used connote a self-reinforcing network of societal and state institutions which interact to stifle the demand for improvements in skill levels. This set of political-economic institutions will be shown to include the organisation of industry, firms and the work process, the industrial relations system, financial markets, the state and political structure, as well as the operation of the [education and training] system.*

The debate has since moved on (see Lloyd and Payne 2002), but a continuing theme is the need for policy to address the demand for skills as well as the supply of skills (PIU 2001, Keep 2002).

There has been relatively little analysis of Scottish distinctiveness from the societal perspective. There are at least two reasons for this. In the first place, the societal approach has tended to treat societal boundaries as unproblematic. Rooted in the analysis of large metropolitan countries such as France and Germany, it pays less attention to smaller countries, to interdependencies between education systems or to regional or local variation within systems. For this reason it has been applied less to smaller, dependent systems such as Scotland. Second, much of the research within this tradition – and especially what I term the 'political economy' of education – focuses on features of the societal context such as the economy and the labour market where the differences between Scotland and the rest of Britain are relatively small. It thus highlights the distinctiveness of the *British* societal context. Many analyses emphasise the role of the state, for example in choosing between alternative skills strategies (Brown *et al.* 2001), but under the 1999 devolution the Scottish state does not control many of the key policy areas, such as economic, social and employment policy, which are emphasised. The societal approach may therefore provide an argument for the limitations to Scottish distinctiveness (Raffe *et al.* 1999).

Nevertheless a few studies in this tradition have taken Scotland as their unit of analysis (eg the analyses of transition systems: Smyth *et al.* 2001). Moreover, the societal approach has similarities with analyses which emphasise the role of civil society in shaping Scottish education (Paterson 1994). And there are many ways in which Scottish education has been moulded by its social environment. For example, high levels of poverty and social disadvantage have encouraged the development of a relatively short and accessible secondary-education pathway to higher education (Gray *et al.* 1983). Other influences are

shared with the rest of the UK, notably the cultural tradition of early transitions to adulthood which have shaped the level and the mode of participation beyond 16. And political devolution has increased the need for a vigorous political economy of Scottish education and training. Political economy perspectives have been influential on recent Scottish policy – notably on the Parliament's recent inquiry into Lifelong Learning and the subsequent Executive strategy – even if much of the relevant knowledge base is not specific to Scotland (Scottish Parliament 2002, Scottish Executive 2003a). Felstead (2002) reports a much faster growth in skill demands in Scotland than in the rest of the UK during the 1990s. If this trend is confirmed and continues into the current decade, the implications for a distinctive education and training system are profound.

To summarise: the societal perspective and the branch of political economy which it has influenced present Scottish education as interacting with an economy whose skill demands are typically low or polarised, a lightly regulated labour market demanding flexibility and responsiveness, relatively high levels of poverty and social inequality, and family norms which favour early transitions to adulthood. However, it tends to represent these as characteristically British rather than Scottish features.

(3) Policy Discourse and Strategy

A third perspective on Scottish distinctiveness is that of policy discourse and strategy. Here I refer to two overlapping literatures: policy analyses of the challenges facing policy-makers and the possible strategies to meet them (eg Lasonen and Young 1998, OECD 2000, Green 2002); and the policy sociology which explores the origins of national policies, the often unstated assumptions which underlie them and the language used to articulate them (Ozga 1999, Nixon *et al.* 2002). There is considerable overlap between the analysis of policy discourse and the analysis of shaping values, traditions and myths, discussed above. However the frame of reference is significantly different. The analysis of myth and tradition emphasises the autonomy of Scottish policy-making and the extent to which Scottish agendas are framed by the values and priorities carried by that tradition (Paterson 2003). Many analyses of policy discourse, by contrast, emphasise how these stem from a wider UK and global agenda but are inflected and transformed in the specific cultural and institutional setting of Scottish policy-making. In this view, an important source of change is external: policies emerge from the interaction of 'travelling policy' agendas with national, institutions and processes (Alexiadou and Ozga 2002, Phillips 2003). For example, Jones' (2003) cultural analysis of post-war policy in the 'educational spaces' of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland argues that England provides the 'master-discourse of educational reform' within Britain (p.156). His discussion of the other three countries largely focuses on their differences from England: 'the central dynamic of educational change in post-war Britain, especially since 1979, has been English' (p.3).

In this perspective the dominant political currents of the past three decades – Thatcherism in the 1980s, and New Labour since 1997 – have been primarily English projects, and have been attenuated and transformed in other parts of the UK (Ozga 1999, Alexiadou and Ozga 2002, Nixon *et al.* 2002, Phillips 2003). To the extent that legislative devolution gives more power to indigenous policy processes, this may result in divergence. Much of the speculation about

the impact of devolution on divergence or convergence among the four education systems has focused on policy discourse and strategy (eg Scott 1998, Paterson 2000b).

Scotland has generally experienced weaker versions of the market-led philosophy and managerialist styles of governance promoted by Conservative and New Labour governments in England (Humes 1999). Scottish policies have been more supportive of comprehensive education and they have pursued a stronger model of 'unification' of post-16 education (Howieson *et al.* 1997, Phillips 2003). They have provided stronger support for teachers and for principles of professionalism. The Scottish policy discourse has been (somewhat) more outward-looking and European in perspective (Taylor 2002). It has focused more on the structural determinants of social exclusion and less on individual 'responsibilisation'; it has looked to civil society as much as to business and the economy for a remedy (Ozga 1999). When Leney and Coles (2001) explored alternative scenarios for the future of vocational education and training, their Scottish interviewees agreed that the key social and political players would probably seek to take Scotland towards a 'social partnership' scenario, while most English interviewees felt that this was off the agenda and saw the future in terms of a free market approach or an ad hoc, reactive series of policy measures. But Scotland's collectivism and partnership approach has its conservative edge. Scottish policy discourse has been more accepting of institutional structures and curricula: there has been little support, even among radicals, for ideas of de-schooling or for addressing perceived cultural biases in the content of the curriculum (Paterson 2003).

In summary, the Scottish political discourse is characterised by stronger support for comprehensive education, for an inclusive and unified arrangements for post-compulsory education, for public control and professional leadership of education, for stronger and more socially oriented policies for inclusion and for a social partnership approach. It is characterised by weaker support for market strategies and for 'managerialist' control of schools and colleges. In nearly all these instances, the main comparator is England.

Analysing distinctiveness at the level of policy discourse raises at least two issues. The first is that distinctive discourses may have little connection with policies as implemented or with the educational experiences of learners. The second is that it assumes that there is a specifically Scottish policy discourse. Some policies, such as the devolution of school management, vary locally, and policies and discourses may be local rather than national in character. Conversely, local inflections of global policy discourses may not map precisely on to the national level. Taylor (2002, p.213) argues that British-wide discourses have been sustained 'through the existence of epistemic communities operating at the British level', citing debates around the unification of post-16 education as an example (Finegold *et al.* 1990, NCE 1993). Another example is vocational education and training (VET), much of which remained the responsibility of UK government departments until 1994; Scotland was slow to develop a distinctive policy community or discourse of VET. It is difficult to assess national distinctiveness on the basis of policy discourses which are not clearly located in a particular geographical and political space.

(4) Administrative System

The last two perspectives draw on Rees and Istance's (1997) distinction between administrative systems and social relations of education, which we expanded in the *Home Internationals Project* (Croxford and Raffe 1999). Administrative systems refer to the more formal aspects of an education system: its institutions, curricula, arrangements for governance and regulation, and so on. Social relations, discussed in the following section, refer to the experiences and achievements of learners.

There is a long tradition in comparative educational research of classifying national systems in terms of their institutional forms and processes (Green 2002). Green, Wolf and Leney (1999) have shown how it is possible to study systematically the differences in national administrative systems and to measure convergence or divergence. Their study of comparative change in European education and training systems since 1984 drew upon cross-national time-series indicators and policy analyses and evaluations, supplemented by individual country analyses and consultant reports. Our comparison of the 'administrative systems' of education in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland identified similarities as well as differences:

> *All the UK systems have distinctively 'British' features: the broad institutional structure of schools and colleges; the structure, function and timing of certification; the scale, structure and functions of higher education; the role of school- and work-based provision within a 'mixed model' of post-compulsory provision (OECD, 1985); a general emphasis on flexibility and institutional responsiveness; a competence-based model of vocational education; a 'medium-participation' system with a tradition of early transition to adulthood; and so on. (Raffe* et al. *1999, p.17)*

The OECD's thematic review of the Transition from Initial Education to Working Life explored developments in England, Wales and Scotland. But the review panel felt able to refer to a 'British education system' when it concluded

> It is generally agreed that there are two principal sources of problems in the transition from school to work within the British education system:

- The academic orientation of mainstream education and, related to it
- The previous absence and today the relative weakness of a genuine system of initial vocational education. (OECD 1999, p.39)

But despite these shared 'British' features there are also ways in which the different systems, and especially Scotland, represent different types of education system. With respect to the education and training of 14-19 year olds, Scotland has: a more uniform and consistently comprehensive secondary school system, a broader and more 'general' curriculum, a more modular and more unified structure of courses and qualifications beyond 16, a larger HE system with a stronger component of sub-degree provision in FE, and more centralised arrangements for governance. The distinctive Scottish experience has informed debates elsewhere in the UK on comprehensive schooling, on post-16 policy and on higher education (Croxford 2001, Spours *et al.* 2000, NCIHE 1997). Some institutional features of Scottish education, such its modular vocational education, have provided exemplars or models for

policy debates in countries as diverse as New Zealand and Germany (Pilz 1999, Mikuta 2002, Ertl 2002).

The *Home Internationals Project* found a large number of 'variations upon common themes' – for example, variations in the functions of broadly comparable institutions such as FE colleges, or in the way that funding, regulation and quality assurance were organised within each system. While these differences might be relatively unimportant individually, their cumulative impact could be much greater, and constitute a qualitatively different organisation of the system in each country (Raffe *et al.* 1999).

The curriculum has been a frequent focus of discussions about the distinctiveness of Scottish education, if not to the extent that language and curriculum have been the focus of discussions about the distinctiveness of Welsh education (Jones 1997). Harrison (1997) analyses the 'Scottishness' of the curriculum in three ways: in terms of the amount of Scottish content, for example, the emphasis on Scottish literature and history; in terms of the nature of the curriculum, such as its child-centredness, breadth and integration of academic and vocational elements; and in terms of the processes used to produce and define it, which he represents as participatory and consensual. His article endorses and indeed celebrates Scottish distinctiveness, although he concludes that current arrangements do not live up to the ideal with respect to breadth or the academic/curriculum divide – a concept which he describes as imported from England. He echoes the Howie Report's criticisms of the narrowness and incoherence of the curriculum of upper secondary education (SOED 1992).

To summarise: the administrative system of Scottish education has several features which make it distinctive within the UK, including the organisation of schools, the curriculum and the qualifications system. In addition there are several small differences whose cumulative impact may be significant. But there are other respects in which Scottish institutions and structures are similar to the other parts of the UK. Whether the differences or the similarities are more important is a matter of judgement and, perhaps, of perspective; overseas commentators tend to be more aware of the similarities and Scottish commentators are more aware of the differences.

(5) Social Relations, Processes and Outcomes

The last of our perspectives concerns the social relations, processes and outcomes of education. In contrast with the administrative system, discussed above, this category includes the experiences, behaviours and outcomes of learners within the education system, including the experience of learning, the relationships among learners and between teachers and learners, patterns of participation and progression, and patterns of attainment including levels of gender, social class and other inequalities.

Numerous research studies have cast light on the subjective experiences of Scottish learners and on their relationships with each other and with those who teach them. However, the research casts much less light on whether these experiences help to make Scottish education distinctive. Although several studies have tried to capture the experience of learners at particular times in the history of Scottish education (Gow and McPherson 1980, Jamieson 2000), I know of none which attempts a systematic comparison between the experience of learners in Scotland and elsewhere, and which thus addresses the issue of distinctiveness.

There is, for example, no Scottish equivalent of the Anglo-German studies which collected qualitative as well as quantitative data on matched samples of young people progressing beyond compulsory education (Bynner and Roberts 1991, Evans and Heinz 1994). The ESRC's 16-19 Initiative presented some comparative data, but this was based on a single Scottish town (Kirkcaldy) and the more qualitative data-collection was confined to one country. (New projects in the ESRC's Teaching and Learning Programme will collect more comparative data for the post-compulsory age groups.)

In this section I therefore limit my discussion to three categories of outcomes – participation, attainment and equality – for which comparative data are available. However, even for these more measurable outcomes, the existing evidence is scarce. Many of the international indicators published by Eurostat, and all of those published by the OECD, are at an aggregate UK level. Even within the UK comparisons are often difficult because of the scarcity or non-comparability of data.

With an age participation index of more than 50% Scotland has higher participation in higher education than the rest of the UK or most other European countries (Scottish Executive 2003b). Participation at 16-18 years, while low by European standards, is widely believed to be higher than in the rest of the UK. However an analysis which takes account of institutional differences shows that although participation at 16 has often been higher in Scotland than elsewhere in the UK participation at 17 has often been lower. The differences in participation have fluctuated over the years and have been sensitive to the way in which age and participation are measured (Raffe, Croxford and Brannen 2001b). Labour Force Survey data show lower participation in training among employees in Scotland than elsewhere in the UK, and the Scottish uptake of Scottish Vocational Qualifications is below the UK uptake of National Vocational Qualifications (Canning 1998, Felstead 2002). These figures may reflect the fact that the Scottish workforce is already more highly qualified. However an analysis by Bamford and Schuller (1999), to explore the hypothesis that higher Scottish levels of initial education were balanced by lower levels of continuing education, found a much more complex pattern than this simple contrast.

The PISA 2000 studies of reading, mathematics and science attainment at 15 years showed Scotland performing better than a majority of OECD countries, and at a very similar level to England and Northern Ireland (Scottish Executive 2002). This relative performance was better than in the earlier Third International Maths and Science Study (TIMSS), possibly reflecting the fact that PISA aimed to measure competences required in adult life while TIMSS tried to measure the specified outcomes of national curricula. Comparisons based on attainment measures such as ISCED are confounded by the failure to reach agreement on the classification of British secondary education qualifications. Within the UK, Scotland consistently shows higher numbers achieving qualifications equivalent to N/SVQ levels 2 and 3, (eg Croxford and Raffe 1999, Felstead 2002), and the qualification levels of the working population are higher (DfES 2002). Here again there are classification issues. To what extent does Scotland's superior performance at level 3 reflect the fact that three Highers are an easier target than two A levels?

The level and trend of gender differences in Scottish education are, broadly, similar to those elsewhere in the UK (Tinklin *et al.* 2001). There are insufficient data to judge whether other dimensions of inequality such as ethnicity or disability make Scottish education distinctive.

With respect to class inequalities in attainment, the main burden of earlier analyses was to challenge the assumption that the egalitarian myth described the current reality. Using data for the post-war period Gray *et al.* (1983) demonstrated that levels of social-class inequality in Scottish education had been stable over time and were similar to those in England. Müller and Karle's (1993) international study similarly found that patterns of inequality in England and Scotland were similar when set against the other countries studied. However analyses of more recent periods find a lower level of social inequality in secondary school attainment in Scotland than in England, a difference largely attributable to lower social segregation within Scotland's more uniform comprehensive system (Croxford 2001). Smith and Gorard's (2003) analyses of PISA data show Scottish schools to have a lower level of social segregation than all European Union countries except Luxembourg and Sweden, and considerably lower than England. The Garrick Report claimed that Scottish higher education was more successful in recruiting working-class students than its counterparts in the other parts of the UK (NCIHE 1997, Osborne 1999). Moreover, there is evidence of a decline, within Scotland, in class inequalities in attainment at 16 and in entry to higher education (Gamoran 1996, Tinklin and Raffe 1999, Paterson 2002). Since most evidence for the rest of the UK (and for most other countries) points to a constant level of inequality, it is possible that Scottish education is becoming more distinctive by succeeding in reducing inequalities where other countries have failed. However, we need further research on whether the Scottish difference is genuine and on whether it is sufficiently large to show up in broader-brush comparisons of inequalities in overall attainments.

To summarise: Scotland enjoys an internationally high level of participation in higher education but it shares the UK's low participation rate at 16-18 years. Qualification levels tend to be higher, but this may partly reflect the lack of equivalence of the respective levels. There is some evidence that social inequalities have declined slightly in Scotland while they have remained constant elsewhere in the UK. However there are inadequate comparative data on educational outcomes, and especially on the more subjective aspects of learners, to provide an adequate assessment of Scottish distinctiveness from this perspective.

3. DISCUSSION

I began this paper with the question: 'how distinctive is Scottish education?' The answer depends on how we conceptualise an education system and on our criteria of distinctiveness, in other words on the perspective from which we answer the question. Each of the five perspectives discussed above offers a different interpretation of the extent to which Scottish education is distinctive and of the things that make it so. The first perspective – which focuses on values, myths and traditions – tends to show greatest distinctiveness, and the second – which focuses on societal logic and the political economy of education – tends to show least distinctiveness (at least when this is defined in relation to the other UK systems). The ranking of the other three perspectives is less certain, but in the literature reviewed above analyses of policy discourses tend to show most distinctiveness and analyses of the social relations and outcomes of education show least distinctiveness, with administrative systems in between.

The point is not, of course, that the five perspectives yield different answers to the same question, but that they offer different interpretations of the question: they invoke different concepts of education system. And the perspectives are related, empirically and to some extent conceptually. A full analysis of distinctiveness should take account of all five perspectives and of the relationships between them.

Very little of the literature reviewed above discusses change in distinctiveness. However, just as each perspective offers a view on the distinctiveness of Scottish education, so might four of them offer a view on divergence or convergence – on whether Scottish education is becoming more or less distinctive compared with other systems. The probable exception is the first perspective: the notion of change in traditions is problematic, although there is no doubt that interpretations of the Scottish educational tradition have changed over time. And just as the perspectives provide somewhat different answers to the question of distinctiveness, so might they provide different answers to the question of divergence or convergence. We may need to view change from all the perspectives in order to have a fuller view of the nature of change and of the processes which drive it. The perspectives identify different features of an education system as criteria of distinctiveness, but these features are causally connected. The most important causal relations may be represented by a model in which policy discourses influence administrative systems which in turn influence processes and outcomes, while values, myths and traditions, together with the societal logic, influence all three of these. The reality is undoubtedly more complex but this model is useful heuristically because it allows us to engage with different theories of change. For example, a 'political' model of globalisation would predict most convergence in policy discourse; it would predict less convergence in administrative systems or in processes and outcomes, because of the continuing influence of values, myths and traditions, and the societal logic. Some 'economic' models of globalisation (eg those which emphasise the functional imperatives of a competitive global economy) would predict most convergence in the outcomes of education. The impact of legislative devolution may be similarly theorised; a simple model would predict divergence in policy discourses within the UK, leading with a time lag to divergence in administrative systems, and after a further period to divergence in the processes and outcomes of education.

However, as noted above, there is not much literature analysing change in distinctiveness. With respect to the current literature, our framework of five perspectives helps us to identify at least three other gaps or weaknesses. First, most writers tend to discuss the distinctiveness of Scottish education primarily in terms of only one of the five perspectives. Even if they refer to issues that are prominent in other perspectives this is typically to exemplify or elaborate; few writers discuss Scottish distinctiveness systematically in terms of all five perspectives and of the relationships between them. One of the few examples of this approach is Paterson's (2003) history of Scottish education in the twentieth century, which embraces tradition, policy discourse, administrative systems and outcomes of education; there are few other such examples.

Second, there has been relatively little academic writing about Scottish distinctiveness from a societal perspective, and almost none in the tradition of political economy as described above. This is reflected, for example, in the way in which writers discuss Scottish education in relation to globalisation: most do so from a perspective on globalisation which emphasises

the interaction of global and local policy discourses, rather than from one which emphasises economic and social forces which shape education. It is also reflected in the absence of economics and related perspectives from Scottish education policy and research networks (Peters 2003). One reason for the neglect of political economy may be the relatively late devolution of responsibility for training to the Scottish Office. This retarded the development of the policy/research networks centred around vocational education and training which, south of the Border, provided a base for the political economy perspective. Another reason is the fact that a political economy (or societal) perspective typically focuses on the UK or Britain, rather than Scotland, as its unit of analysis. Neither reason is an acceptable *intellectual* justification for the neglect of political economy, and the probable consequence is that the distinctiveness of Scottish education is exaggerated in prevailing accounts.

Finally, an education system can only be distinctive in relation to other systems, but the comparative frame of reference tends to vary across the five perspectives. When Scottish distinctiveness is discussed in terms of tradition and myth the most frequent comparator is England, and it is usually implicit. When distinctiveness is discussed in terms of policy strategies and discourses the most frequent comparator is again England, but usually explicit. The societal approach, on the other hand, is more commonly used to contrast Scotland – or more often the whole of Britain or the UK – with overseas systems. The last two perspectives – administrative systems, and processes and outcomes – are used for both 'home' and 'overseas' comparisons, where the available data permit any comparison at all.

Indeed, relatively little of the writing on Scottish distinctiveness is based on systematic and explicit comparisons with other countries, whether England or anywhere else. Sometimes the comparisons are implicit and, as a result, insufficiently rigorous. In other cases – as in the analysis of social relations and outcomes – many established data sources lack comparability and it is difficult or costly to collect data (including qualitative data) on a comparable basis. There have been several comparative studies of policy discourses, but a surprising dearth of rigorous comparative studies of administrative systems, or of the subjective experiences of learners. Once again, the probable consequence is an exaggerated account of the distinctiveness of Scottish education. It is ironic that the internationalism which is often claimed as a distinctive feature of Scottish education is only rarely reflected in empirical research on distinctiveness.

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