

**Working Paper 3**

**NATIONAL POLICY BROKERING AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF  
THE EUROPEAN EDUCATION SPACE: THE CASES OF  
ENGLAND AND SCOTLAND**

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**Introduction**

The focus of this WP is on the relationship between national policy makers in the field of education and 'Europe'. The paper builds on a number of theoretical and empirical resources to discuss whether and to what extent the fabrication of a European Education Policy Space existing within and across national boundaries can be discerned in flows of data-and discussions about data-that stimulate and support constant comparison and that generate indicators which steer and shape education. The theoretical resources include ways of understanding changing governance -for example the apparent move towards 'soft' governance in networked forms (Lawn 2007) and their possible links to the growth of comparison and measurement through education data. In pursuing these ideas we are looking at the rise of Quality assurance and evaluation (QAE) mechanisms as providing the overarching rationale for data production in terms both of accountability and increased performance. We suggest that the massive growth in data production and use, and its new capacity to flow across Europe (and beyond) may illustrate a shift from its role as providing a 'state optic for governing' (Scott 1998) into the fabrication of European education as a legible, governable policy space.

In exploring and developing these ideas we are also drawing on a range of data from interviews with people who may be classified as 'policy brokers', that is people who are located in some sense at the interface between the national and the European and who 'translate' the meaning of national data into policy terms in the European arena and who also interpret European developments in the national space. We also draw on interviews with those who work within European organisations (the Commission, Eurostat, Eurydice) and who may be understood as contributing to the formation of a European Education Policy space through the collection and use of data.

## The complexity of 'Europe' and 'the national'

This presentation of the key intentions under-represents the degree of complexity with which we are attempting to work in the wider project within which this enquiry is based<sup>1</sup>. We are not painting a picture of national-transnational exchanges, in which policy brokers operate as frontier guards, and members of European organisations act as carriers of a European policy agenda. We need to stress that we understand Europe to be fluid and changing, and itself swept by international pressures, and that we further understand Europe to be simultaneously located in and produced by the global, the idea of the European and the national. In order to capture this constantly moving, liquid and undefined European education space, we start the analysis from a slightly more stable ground: its past.

The European Education Policy Space was not determined merely by the fairly stable geographical boundaries of a common market: as early as the 1960s, it became a shared project and a space of meaning, constructed around common cultural and educational values. Indeed, from the 1960s-1970s, the discourse of a common culture and shared histories was slowly being produced as a cluster of facts and myths about the European 'imagined community' rising from the ashes of a destructive Second World War. Education policy-making for the 'people's Europe' took the forms of cultural cooperation, student mobility, harmonization of qualification systems and vocational training (European Commission, 2006). It did not constitute a purely discursive construct, adding to the list of European myths. It was concretised and pursued through Community programmes, such as Comett and Erasmus, involving large numbers of people and travelling ideas (European Commission, 2006). Its impact was arguably limited in relation to the ways European education systems constructed their curricula and tools of governance; subsidiarity was the rule. However, regardless of its relatively limited effects, the project of a 'people's Europe' had a clear ambition: to create a distinct European identity and culture-and to use these resources to enable the governing of a shared cultural and political space.

This brief reminder of the foundational characteristics of Europeanisation is important in our work for two reasons: first, it helps to throw into relief the defining events that turned the European education space from a rather idealistic project of cultural cohesion to a much sharper competitive reality; and second, it enables us to understand how, when and why the discourses of quality assurance and evaluation entered this space and, with what impact. For example, our data reveals the many points of origin identified by national policy actors in relation to policy requirements that demand data collection-these may originate in Europe or from the wider world of OECD, Unesco or the World Bank. Indeed, for the most part, the source of pressures and requirements does not seem to be of great concern. Instead, policy actors focus on ensuring successful outcomes, on producing a 'world-best' education through the production and use of data: successful competition is the new language of high quality and standards. There are difficulties in identifying a distinctive European Education Policy Space, as policy actors interpret their brokering as a fusion of European and global influences that places pressure on systems to demonstrate success in terms of measurable

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<sup>1</sup> The project 'Fabricating Quality in European Education' is ESF funded and involves teams from Denmark, Finland, Sweden and the UK ( Scotland and England). Its main focus is on etc

outcomes. Such developments suggest that the 'Europe' of a collective project of shared trajectories, values and aspirations is less visible than in the past, and focuses attention on the kind of space of governance that the growth of data flows in Europe give rise to.

Looked at in this way, we can see that the governing project of a 'People's Europe' is slowly being turned to a project of individualisation-the production of a Europe of individuals, striving to accomplish the 2010 goals, indicators and benchmarks<sup>2</sup>. This project is made possible by the existence of networks through which data may flow, and through the capacity of technologies (software, data sharing systems, statistical techniques, statistical and analytical bureaux) to connect individual student performance to the national and transnational indicators of performance. Furthermore, we suggest that the use of these particular technologies of governing [le gales and xx]-irrespective of whether they take the form of performance data in England, evaluation in Finland or self-evaluation in Scotland-signals a shift from the attempted *fabrication* of Europe through shared narratives and projects to its *projection*. By this we mean a shift from the production of Europe through the recording and transmission of its existing characteristics and capacities to the moulding of the future through quality assurance and evaluation processes that shape and project the individual and the nation forward into lifelong engagement with Europe as the most competitive knowledge economy in the world.

The role of transnational organisations in constructing educational indicators (for example, the World Education Indicators Project developed by OECD in conjunction with UNESCO and partly funded by the World Bank) adds another layer of complexity to the picture. OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), a non-curriculum-based measure of comparative educational performance of students at the end of compulsory schooling in literacy, maths, science and problem solving, is dominant globally (at least in the Global North) as the key international comparative measure of the effectiveness of schooling systems. These data sets are heavily utilised by the EU and by its member nations, particularly as they relate to education in the nations which are both EU and OECD members, but there has also been alignment in approaches to measurement and category construction. Statistical categories have been aligned across the OECD, Eurostat and UNESCO and together work as a 'magistrature of influence' in helping to constitute Europe as a space of governance (Lawn and Lingard, 2001). While the OECD is still predominantly a think tank focussing on matters of economic policy, it appears to have become more of a policy actor in its own right in the context of globalization (Henry *et al.*, 2001, Rizvi and Lingard, 2006). In its role as policy actor, the OECD has apparently created a niche as a highly technically competent agency for the development of educational indicators and comparative educational performance measures. EU data collection then is intersected by OECD work, which in turn may contribute to possible emergence of a global education policy field (Lingard *et al.*, 2005). In the framing and use of data we can see at play here social-spatial networks of the national, international (between nations), trans-national (passing through nations) and global (Mann, 2000).

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<sup>2</sup> For more details about the 'Lisbon process', see FabQ Working Paper 1  
[www.ces.ed.ac.uk/PDF%20Files/FabQWP1.pdf](http://www.ces.ed.ac.uk/PDF%20Files/FabQWP1.pdf)

While these international and transnational network flows are significant, it is also important that they enter national spaces in different ways, and that different national systems receive and respond to these flows differently. The UK (and particularly England) might be characterised as a highly responsive 'bridge' or transmitter that links the European with the global [anglo-american?] discourse, especially in times of growing 'Euro-scepticism' about the future of an enlarged, 'multi-speed' Europe. As a consequence the idea of a Europe produced through QAE and performance data is not absent from the policy narratives of actors in Scotland and England; however it is almost impossible to separate this from their global reference points. In later sections we look at these policy narratives and highlight the differences and similarities between England and Scotland that emerge in them, but before doing that need to spend a few moments on the concepts that are key to understanding data as governance. Networks provide the conduits through which data flow, and also signal shifts from government to governance (refs) on which we draw. However for data to constitute governing we need to work with the key concepts of commensurability and cross-borders spaces of equivalence. The next section discusses the analytical purchase of these ideas and contextualises them within the European frame of reference.

## **The complexity of comparison and commensurability**

The emergence of Europe as a commensurable policy space has been constructed around particular data sets, including indicators and a range of performance measures in respect of education. In making our argument, we draw upon histories of statistics which demonstrate the political, technical and cognitive work necessary to the emergence of both the nation and national statistics and their imbrication in each other (Porter, 1995, Desrosieres, 1998). We are making an analogy about the significance of indicators and data to the construction of Europe as a legible, governable policy space in the context of globalization.

A number of histories of statistics demonstrate the intimate and interwoven relationships between the development of state administrative structures, or what Bruno Latour (1987) calls a 'centre of calculation' – and the development of standardization, methodologies, technologies and related cognitive schemes of statistics and scientific thinking (Hacking, 1975, 1990, Porter, 1995, Desrosieres, 1998). The nation constituted as a 'space of equivalence' is necessary to the construction of statistics (Desrosieres, 1998), but also statistics and numbers which elide the local are equally important to the construction of the nation.

In parallel to the *internal* construction of the nation state in Europe through statistics and standards, nations also compared themselves *internationally*. The systems of schooling, for example, including buildings, texts and teachers, were created after study visits, special reports and communications with other countries. Comparison was made against the best. This was a question of judging progress by adopting recognized models from leading system elements elsewhere.

Today, comparison is a key element of the operation of multinational companies [sites of production, costs of resources etc]; it is managed by numerical data, which has increased in

velocity, scale and scope. Comparison for constant improvement against competition has come to be the standard by which public systems are judged, as the ideas of the private sector dominate the 'new' public. While states originally managed this process of comparison in a limited way, the flow of national data internationally has increased. Comparison is now cross border; it is both an abstract form of competition and an element of it; it is a proxy for other forms of rivalry. Comparison is highly visible as a tool of governing at all levels-at the level of the organization [to manage]; of the state [to govern]; indeed comparison events (such as ???) [or agencies-for example ???] may be used because of their visibility. The data have to cross borders 'well' [in a form that is unchallenged and clear] but not all data travels well [viz IEA<sup>3</sup>] if they cannot be used to govern. Thus in our framing of the issue of governing through data we see the co-dependence of commensurability and comparison as key in making data work as governing technologies. In working through our own interview data, then, we have focused on key questions or organising themes that include commensurability and comparison-as key technologies, along with networks as essential conduits and spaces of interaction/interrelationship. These technologies are operating in national spaces that are shaped by 'collective narratives' or traditions (including national systems and practices of data collection, national understandings of commensurability and appropriate comparison) but that are also energised by global data requirements and flows. We have therefore grouped our data in relation to these key ideas: networks, commensurability/comparison, traditions and globalisation.

### **(a) Networks and Communities**

The governance of the European education policy space appears from the data as being increasingly 'done' through building relations between people-groups/nations in networks/communities. The project of Europeanisation seems increasingly dependent upon the co-operation and joint resource mobilisation of national policy actors who sometimes lie outside governmental hierarchical control. Further, policy networks accommodate the blurring of state/civil society boundaries that is such a feature of current policy-making - perhaps especially in England- with the growth of cooperation or dispersed responsibilities among state and non-state agencies, and engagement of actors from the private and voluntary sectors in the delivery of services.

The term policy community (Rhodes) denotes a network with high levels of stability and continuity, longer-term agendas and interests beyond the sectoral or the issue-based. The term has stronger membership meanings than 'network', and –in Scotland-has acted to mark off a governing group with shared cultural norms (around meritocracy-see McPherson and Raab 1988). It connects to ideas of the 'collective narrative' in national systems (Popkewitz and Lindblad 1999, Ozga 2005).

From our interviews Europe appears as a network with a (reciprocal) agenda of improvement (Scotland):

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<sup>3</sup> IEA date: this refers to the International xx

Well, I think, to a certain extent, I mean that undoubtedly so because if you think about the Barcelona agreement and so on that that's not about an opt in or opt out, not [as *its*] signed by every EU country. And this commitment to, you know, the particular areas that were identified as areas for improvement. So we ... I mean I don't think it was any ... ever been a discussion as will we participate or not. I think the question would really be how can we best participate. What can we contribute? Or what do we give back? (MW)

Networks feature strongly in the self-presentation of the (Scottish) Inspectorate (HMIe) in Europe and beyond -is this a 'policy community' finding a role for Europe in the promotion of a small, peripheral country's agenda for improvement?

It's probably a good example of the sort of working title of the group which is a Network.... As a result of that, you know, people coming together at a formal meeting but very often it's the spinoffs that arise from that ... I must say that we've been quite intrigued the way ideas seem to spread between different parts of it ... (EM)

Networks in Scotland use Europe as a vehicle for self-promotion, (and build connections to other networks) and use 'network' language of collective learning:

It's constant ... and likely to become more. And it seems to me having discussed it with colleagues at various meetings over in Europe, as more and more accession countries come in that a lot of the countries that are coming are actually seeking assistance and advice and support. And they see particularly the European network policy maker group as a vehicle for that (MW)

On the other hand, an (English) DfES informant stresses the importance of the national data and its reliability. In England, the learning appears to be rather internally-focused:

The PISA 2006 schools will be getting the data this month and NFER has been working on it, so we will obviously ask them how useful that has been. So I think that is the main way that this will be useful in quality assurance. I don't...at a national level, I can't say, well it can't be an independent benchmark of national performance. I mean you have to be very careful, we can use it alongside our national data but I wouldn't use it as a proxy for our national data. And I would say our national data is a far surer measure than any international study can ever be. (LB)

## **(b) Commensurability and Comparison**

As comparison has grown in visibility, related to governance, it has moved from being the responsibility of an 'internal' infrastructural agency, providing data for government, and into an 'internal/external' agency, collecting and disseminating data, related to national/trans national governing. Internationalization, in this case, Europeanization, knits agencies together in working practices and standardizing procedures cross border. Posts are invented – the 'International Comparisons Programmes Manager' [B p1]. Governing means turning data into action.

Cross border positioning becomes normed. Comparison as competition becomes normed as well; it can be 'shocking' [L p6] and a public event, an international event, when it fails as a

process-for example when Germany had unpredicted poor PISA rankings . Cross border comparison, in this heightened sense, has moved from an act of public government about which little was publicly known to public governing that is highly visible. The data and its management, cross border, is domesticated in an event – a moral panic, a crisis, a new policy.

At the same time, in England, data has to be bought and supplied with the use of advocates to make sure cross border comparison can continue with its same intensity. Data production is described as needing to be ‘incentivize[d]’ [B p9].

Comparison has become more intense since open coordination and Commission groups use the service more directly; it has a life of its own now.

*Since Lisbon we’ve found also that some of the working groups at Commission level have come to the Eurydice European Unit in Brussels and suggested that we have publications in the Network work programme that will feed into those working groups [O’D p5]*

So, the Eurydice Unit in England, for example, appears to have shifted from being a loosely-coupled general information agency into a focused data sharing enterprise, tightly connected into EU governing processes. They connect government departments at regional and national level across Europe.

### **(c) Collective narrative/Tradition**

The English and Scottish approaches appear as quite different in the project of the European Education Policy Space. In fact, if the UK has been characterised as EU’s ‘reluctant partner’, Scotland is arguably building on an identity between two unions, one in the UK and one in Europe (Dardanelli, 2005):

*... the subject was very much self-evaluation and I gave a presentation and talked about the Scottish context and the fact that we don’t collect [...] data at national level in the way that we would have done against 5-14 in our main approaches. And our English counterpart gave a presentation and talked about the PANDA system. And this incredible sort of complex ..... machine and they were able to tell by the age of 11 ½ how youngsters will perform when they are X, Y and Z. (MW- Scottish policy actor)*

English policy actors, when asked about their specific relations with the European Commission and other European organisations, refuted policy influence coming from that direction. In their project of benchmarking and measuring skills and competences, they found that OECD has more advanced tools and greater expertise:

*They are just not nearly so far ahead as the OECD in terms of the competencies that they also have for carrying our big studies. That is, the expertise that they have in the Commission is not there at all. I am finding very much relying on people from individual countries like myself who have seen how it is done and sort of come back to their table and advise them on, tell them what we need to be looking over...*

*We are probably ahead of other countries in terms of data used... Influence is almost going the other way (LB- English system actor)*

Policy actors in England share a sense of the advanced nature of data collection in that context:

*Because we have all this Key Stage Data and because it is longitudinal, we are practically, without boasting, we are probably the leading administration in the world as far as value-added measures and schooling are concerned (SL-English system actor).*

*We would see ourselves as something of an international trendsetter in this whole area of data generation and analysis (DB)*

However the Scottish actors frame their discussion of data use with European colleagues with wider references:

*I'm not convinced actually, in terms of the sort of performance data, I'm not ... at the moment I don't think that the group that we're actually talking about really is driven by performance data. It's looking at education in the round and aspects of education (MW).*

English and Scottish policy actors presented very different attitudes towards the European policy making space; the first maintained that ambiguity and fluidity in Europe are due to the lack of expertise and coordination, whereas the latter presented it under the positive light of an 'organic' space of policy learning and exchange:

*There are some indicators at a very early stage of development and we need to keep an eye on that one as well. There's not a lot of detail in these new indicators so we need the Commission to tell us a bit more. We do take part in working parties that address some of these but there's not much detail and communication at the moment, so we sort of preserve our position on a few things particularly, so that we don't increase burdens to a point that we don't achieve response rates on any of these things (SL- English policy actor).*

*A lot is done in a sort of an organic way in response to particular things. (EM-Scottish)*

English policy actors appear to maintain a safe distance from European education policy making. Although they do, as an English policy actor said 'keep an eye' on it, it 'doesn't drive our thinking'. they position themselves more in the global, rather than the European, field. In this sense, the English laissez faire political tradition is once more in tandem with their current policy approach: they control and lead change while at the same time having an ability to change their preferences readily in response to global changing circumstances and uncertainty.

#### **(d) Globalisation**

Finally, the influence of OECD and PISA in particular has been central in policy talk at both the national and the European level. There is no doubt that international tests of pupil ability

in core subjects, and the international rankings that these tests produce are very strong discourse that links high test performance to competitive economies:

*It is at the education level that all begins, that will be the determinant of a country's prosperity. If you get it right on that level, you'll get it right within the macroeconomic level. (LB)*

*But certainly the concern about world class competitiveness, having students that are fit for the world of work, making them able to do all the things that they have to do—that's a pressing need for this government and just about every other government in the developed world. (DB)*

However these English actors, while stressing the significance of international competitive performance in PISA and TIMSS as a benchmark for an internationally-competitive economy, also emphasised the ways in which test results informed consumers about how well their system was doing—judgements of quality made within the nation were based on rankings and tests that were international. PISA data also had diagnostic use—it helped identify problems with the system, but again in the English context its limitations by comparison with more detailed data that allowed comparison between institutions were stressed. In addition, there is a very strong awareness of the politics of international testing and the hierarchies it produces, but with a focus on the national:

*The government will clearly be held to account by the media if these results are up or down or whatever compared to the last time, and therefore that media pressure is quite significant in international terms. But I think that plays more to a domestic audience than it plays to any kind of international audience. (DB)*

In these ways, global data flows and uses are impacting on the national, but not in uniform ways, even within the UK. The policy actors from Scotland maintained a distance from PISA hierarchies, although they found PISA results 'reassuring' as indicating that 'our students are, on average reasonably pretty high performing anyway', but they singled out the usefulness of the contextual data that PISA produces:

*.....they were interesting, not for the league table aspect, which I think many of us would query, as whether it was very helpful at all. But because of some of the more qualitative stuff that was coming on the back of that. The interviews, the stuff about the management and governance of schools, the whole side of the ethos of schools. Issues about behaviour ....So it was not so much that the data in itself was particularly significant but [...] the data in connection with all these other things (EM)*

However while difference in response to global pressures of performance measurement is important, there is also evidence of the pervasive impact of such testing regimes, particularly in the non-OECD member states—where participating in PISA sets a modernisation agenda and enables countries to place themselves in a relationship with the 'best'. Here it was suggested (by an informant from England) that these countries:

*'might choose to see PISA as more relevant [than ?] for them or certainly in terms of the comparisons you can make. They don't necessarily want to be making comparisons with countries like them, they often want to be making comparisons with*

*the member countries and the economic part, how far they have got to go in order to catch up.... They come to PISA because they want to be compared with these leading countries'. (LB)*

## **Conclusions**

The conclusions to this piece will depend on whether it is about England, Scotland and Europe/global or whether it incorporates data and discussion from our partners in Sweden and Finland. (Denmark is not contributing to this part of the project).

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