

Knowledge and policy in education in Scotland: a changing relationship

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The eight country comparative project 'Knowledge and Policy in the Health and Education Sectors in Europe' contained a specific country study on education policy in Scotland. This Briefing reports on findings about the changing relationship between knowledge and policy in education in Scotland and on the developments in the kinds of knowledge used in policy-making, drawing on the examples of Integrated Children's Services and the New Inspection Model for Schools.

- ▶ Across the eight countries in the study, data and information – knowledge or 'evidence' – is increasingly becoming a policy instrument in its own right.
- ▶ However policy is not necessarily evidence-based, rather 'evidence' is invoked as a justification for selected policy directions.
- ▶ These forms of knowledge involve new policy actors (agencies, experts) and are flexible, applicable in different contexts, auditable, moving easily within and across national systems; they emphasise knowledge that seeks to provide solutions to shared 'problems' of governing.
- ▶ In Scotland there is a shift from centralist, hierarchical education policy making to one where knowledge and evidence are increasingly generated across the system, involving new policy actors and requiring established ones to work in new ways.
- ▶ The research identified changes in the way government in Scotland understands knowledge and its role in policy making; it has moved beyond its traditional role where knowledge is limited to the initial stage of problem definition to play a more active role in *forming* policy.

Introduction

The key aim of the project ‘Knowledge and Policy in the Health and Education Sectors in Europe’ (Knowandpol) was to understand better the nature of the relationship between knowledge and policy in these two sectors, given the growth of interest in ‘evidence-based policy’ that had arisen in many of the countries involved in the study. The project contained a specific country study on Scotland, along with comparative studies of the effects of transnational policy instruments, for example the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) on Scotland, France, Belgium, Portugal, Hungary and Romania.

Before looking in more detail at some of the key findings and issues that arose in relation to Scotland, we first introduce some of the overarching findings of the Knowandpol project.

Knowandpol – the key findings

Across the countries in the study, we found that data and information ie knowledge, was increasingly becoming a policy instrument in its own right; so that policy was made with more and more reference to the available evidence, and more resources were devoted to collecting data and to its analysis. This did not mean, however, that policy was evidence-based or evidence driven, more that ‘evidence’ was invoked as part of the discourse around policy making, and as a justification for selected policy directions.

As part of these developments we identified the increasing importance of ‘Knowledge-based regulation tools’ (KBRTs) like PISA in both international and national policy-making. These tools were based on specific kinds of knowledge: data that travel across systems and between sectors, and that carry information on what can be easily measured. In addition, we identified a trend towards placing these KBRTs increasingly in the hands of non-governmental actors (experts, and specialist agencies). In making sense of these developments, we drew on Jacobsen’s (2006) ideas that governing in general is in the process of development from regulative activity (formal laws but also ‘soft’ rules like standardisation) to

what he calls ‘inquisitive activity’ (for example auditing and ranking) and then to ‘meditative’ activity (comparing and sharing ideas) (Jacobsson 2006). This shift has considerable implications for the role of knowledge and for the organisation of governing – we call this a shift to ‘post bureaucracy’ (see Table 1).

Bureaucracy	Post-bureaucracy
Government Command and control	Governing Consulting, learning, outsourcing, evaluating, coordinating, supporting ...

Post-bureaucratic policy making contrasts with previous bureaucratic forms in that it is polycentric and works inter and trans-nationally and within the national and sub-national. It involves a greater diversity of actors, who are more interdependent. There is also more involvement of non-formal actors (consumers, specialist interest groups). Action is developed through shared knowledge that promotes reflection and discussion to generate new ideas and also changes understanding of problems and relations.

The co-production of knowledge means that it is more diverse, and that the legitimacy of both scientific knowledge and of knowledge based on practice – ‘know-how’ – is more accepted. However, within this framework of expanded types of knowledge, there is a strong emphasis on knowledge to solve problems and on knowledge forms that are flexible, that seem to be applicable everywhere, that are auditable and that move easily within and across national systems. We now move to the findings from research on the changing relationship between knowledge and policy in education in Scotland from 2006 onwards, with attention to the impact of the changing political contexts during the lifetime of the project.

The evolution of knowledge and policy in education in Scotland

The main focus here is on how the production and organisation of knowledge for policy

evolved during this period. We describe these changes and consider how they may best be understood and what they tell us about policy making in education in Scotland since 2006.

The initial stage of the project mapped the increasingly significant role of knowledge in the education policy landscape of Scotland. We found evidence of a transition from the establishment of a Scottish Parliament in 1999, accelerating with the Scottish National Party (SNP) minority government in May 2007, and continuing up to and after the election of 2010.

The transition reflected 'double devolution' from the UK government to the Scottish Parliament and government, and, within Scotland, devolution of responsibility for provision to the Scottish Local Authorities, followed by increased autonomy and responsibility for schools, teachers and pupils within a framework of self-evaluation and improvement. That transition is not complete, as the legacy of central regulation remains influential. However a key development visible in the life of the project is a shift from education policy making in a centralist, hierarchical formation to one that is much more oriented towards networked forms. Networked forms are vertical, rather than hierarchical, and their organisation through shared interests and connections reflects the shift from government to governance represented in Table 1 (above). These networks often include different constituencies and new policy actors, or require established policy actors to work in new ways.

This shift has implications for the knowledge-policy relationship, as more networked forms of governance require more 'joined up' thinking about policy, thus increasing the importance of data and underlining the need in government for analytical and 'translation' capacity from evidence to policy ie the capacity to interpret complex data and connect that analysis to the shaping of responses to problems that, in turn, generate possible solutions. The direction of translation is not one way – it moves from the debate about the policy problem to influence the selection of evidence, as well as from the interpretation of evidence into guidance for policy. Evidence, along with learning from

evidence, becomes prominent reference points in policy-makers' discussions and justifications of what they are doing. Furthermore, knowledge derived from and related only to the Scottish context was increasingly considered insufficient as a basis for policy and in need of contextualisation with knowledge about the performance of other systems.

In terms of the types of knowledge drawn upon, we observed, in the first period of the research (2006-7), an increased reliance on – and search for – 'hard' knowledge to be translated into benchmarks and indicators. This was followed by more attention to and a search for ways of promoting learning from evidence that could be used and understood by actors in a range of different policy spaces – central government, schools, and local authorities. In the next sections, we offer two examples from the research case studies, the first on Integrated Children's Services (ICS) and the second on the New Inspection Model for schools.

Integrated Children's Services

ICS represents the reconfiguration of education as part of a wide spectrum of public, universal services that combine education with health, social work, criminal justice and policing, to meet the needs of children and young people. The attempted integration of these different knowledges or evidence bases, practical and professional expertise previously located in different government departments is the cornerstone of the ICS policy.

We investigated the development and implementation of ICS through (i) analysis of key policy texts; (ii) interviews with key actors both at the central and the local authority level; and (iii) in-depth case studies of ICS in four local authorities in Scotland. The ICS case shows how knowledge is becoming increasingly important in informing policy and policy learning, and also illustrates the importance of 'brokerage' among different services, so that they negotiate successfully with one another. There is also a need for skilful and informed 'translation' of knowledge across different professional groups. In particular, two dimensions of knowledge

were central to the ICS policy initiative: (a) integrated data; and (b) integrated professional knowledge co-produced by professionals in education, health and social work services.

Data management has an enhanced role to play in this strategy, as data are integrated into a more compatible and coherent core to combat insularity and fragmentation and to support collaboration and partnerships between the agencies involved. This example illustrates the importance of knowledge to policy, as knowledge is at the core of ICS since it is only through the integration of knowledge that the integration of policy can be achieved.

The New Inspection Model

The New Inspection Model (NIM) introduced by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) in 2008 was examined as representing a significant development of the regime of school self-evaluation in Scotland. The NIM assesses the following aspects of school quality: (i) improvements in performance; (ii) learners' experiences and the meeting of learning needs; and (iii) curriculum and improvement through self-evaluation. The research team analysed key policy texts including self-evaluation materials for schools and carried out interviews with teachers, headteachers and key policy actors.

The HMIE documents emphasise the key goal of fostering continuous dialogue with schools so that they may 'show that they know themselves inside out' (HMIE, 2010, p.2) and use this knowledge to plan for future improvement. Although data remain central, they are contextualized and given meaning through a narrative of the school's journey that outlines where it stands and where it is heading on its journey to excellence. NIM shifts the balance away from centralised inspection towards professional engagement with the school's teachers, parents and pupils. It is part of the

attempt by the Scottish Government to present a narrative of intelligence-led and reflexive governing, based on the self-monitoring and self-development that it 'teaches'.

Conclusions

Over the life of the Knowandpol project, the research team identified changes in the ways that government in Scotland understands knowledge and its role in policy-making. These changes suggest a new relation between governing and knowledge as expertise moves beyond the traditional task of policy informing, with knowledge or evidence only 'active' in policy in a context where policy directions have been decided on by politicians, and where the influence of knowledge or evidence is limited to the initial stages of problem definition. In the newer modes of policy-knowledge interaction that we observed, knowledge and evidence are much more distributed, and more actively engaged in policy *forming* in a more complex mode of distributed governing.

References

Jacobsson, B. (2006) Regulated Regulators: Global Trends of State regulation, in M.L.Djelic and K.Sahlin-Andersson (eds) **Transnational Governance**, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

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