

BERA Presidential Address 2013

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Educational Research – what’s to be done?

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Preamble

It is a great honour to be taking up this role and I am very grateful to the membership of BERA for your support.

I want to start by paying tribute to the fantastic work done over the past two years by Mary James. I am very reassured that she will continue to work in support of my efforts – as she put it in Research Intelligence – riding shotgun over the next year as Vice-President!

And also I offer sincere thanks to Nick Johnson, Farzana Rahman and Mark Donoghue who over recent years have created the BERA office and turned it into a thoroughly professional operation – the organisation has been transformed over the past few years and this enables us to think increasingly strategically about our role as the leading learned society for educational research in the UK.

Finally to all members of BERA Council, BERA committee members and SIG convenors who each take their responsibilities very seriously and of course carry them out entirely voluntarily. It is their passion and commitment for high quality educational research that sustains and develops the association.

Two years ago, in her Presidential address, Mary James offered six ‘C concepts’, which if achieved, could all give rise to growing Confidence in educational research in Britain:

- Consolidation
- Co-ordination
- Collaboration
- Cumulation
- Communication
- Conversation

Through her leadership over the past two years great progress has been made in achieving all of them.

However Mary, you actually started your address with a seventh C – controversies – and I suspect that is a key aspect of what I will talk about today.

Introduction

Presidential addresses tend to be predominantly one of the following in nature: personal, political or discursive. Although drawing on the first of these, this is mostly about the

political, as you might guess from the title I have chosen – it has to be, such is the serious situation we find ourselves in

As we in BERA approach our fortieth anniversary, I thought you would be interested in this quotation:

The last forty years in the educational world have been characterised by an increasing readiness to apply the methods of research to the solution of educational problems – to base policy upon the results of investigations and to seek information about actual conditions and needs both in schools and in the adult community.

Well as you may have guessed I have misled you – this is not about the last forty years at all. It is actually taken from a 1946 publication by CM Fleming, called *Research and The Basic Curriculum*. I found it in this publication - *The Impact of Research on Policy and Practice in Education* - written in 1980 by two of our former Presidents, the late John Nisbet and Patricia Broadfoot. Could we actually apply Fleming's words to the last forty years or not?

(We should indeed note John Nisbet's death – he was the very first BERA President and he died not long after last year's conference. We have much to thank him for and it is hoped that we will be establishing a memorial award in his name, with the support of his family.)

I will be returning to this publication later when I come onto the topic of Impact, which of course has taken on a rather specific meaning in the last four or five years.

However, the main themes of this address are as follows:

- Society - The Long Revolution and the Short Counter-Revolution
- Education in Britain - Trust and educational professionals
- (Educational) Research - and contemporary democracy
- The Association - BERA - (almost) 40 years on

These themes will interconnect and overlap and be informed by temporal and spatial perspectives. History and Geography are important!

What's Going On?

When Raymond Williams wrote about *The Long Revolution* – the process through which decades of slow struggle for emancipation by working people in Britain was leading to the establishment of a well-educated democratic society - in his book published in 1960 - he was extremely prescient about society and education:

It is a question of whether we can grasp the real nature of our society, or whether we persist in social and educational patterns based on a limited ruling class, a middle professional class, a large operative class, cemented by forces that cannot be challenged and will not be changed. The privileges and barriers, of an inherited kind will, in any case go down. It is only a question of whether we replace them by the free play of the market, or by a public education designed to express and create the values of an educated democracy and a common culture. 176

However he might have been surprised by the speed of the counter-revolution which did indeed bring the free play of the market to bear. That quick counter-revolution gathered pace during the years of Thatcher and Reagan and was firmly established under Blair, Bush and Clinton and has been exacerbated by the financial crisis that emerged in 2008. And of course the free play of the market is not actually what we see – what we do see is a complex web of connections between the market and the state – with government seeking to create opportunities for private business to invest and gain from their investment in public provision.

Williams' chapter on education in the Long Revolution shows, through an historical analysis, how the struggle between various social forces in Britain were leading to the gradual emergence of an education system that might be inclusive and transformative, underpinning the broad process of democratisation.

- Old humanists with their emphasis on culture
- Public educators with their emphasis on politics
- Industrial trainers with their emphasis on the economy

These strands are still there in the discourse around education today in spite of the radical restructuring that has taken place and the typology remain extremely helpful in analysing the ideological positioning of politicians. Let's take an example:

I agree with your clear recommendation that we should define the aims of the curriculum. We need to set ambitious goals for our progress as a nation. And we need clear expectations for each subject. **I expect those aims to embody our sense of ambition, a love of education for its own sake, respect for the best that has been thought and written, appreciation of human creativity and a determination to democratise knowledge by ensuring that as many children as possible can lay claim to a rich intellectual inheritance.**

(emphasis added) Letter from Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove to Tim Oates, chair of expert group on the national curriculum in England responding to the report from the expert panel on the National Curriculum

In terms of Williams' categories, what is missing here is the industrial trainer ideology, but we have both the old humanist and the public educator writ large.

However in spite of Mr Gove's apparent neglect of the economic imperatives that had been so dominant in the minds of James Callaghan, Kenneth Baker, Tony Blair – to name a few - the impacts of neoliberalism and globalisation on education across the UK have been many and various. Indeed one of the key insights in the UK arises from internal 'home international' comparisons, the similarities and differences across the four nations are very revealing of the influence of 'embedded contexts' on these 'travelling policies'. The notion of 'glocalisation' (Lingard and Rizvi, 2010) is well exemplified in the divergences of policy in the UK and demonstrates the power of national culture and tradition on education policy. It is clear that the counter-revolution has taken a much stronger hold in England than in other parts of the UK.

The power of these perspectives emerged for me when I moved to work in Scotland in 2001 – more of this later. As I have argued before there is indeed something very peculiar about the English case – not just that the performative agenda has been adopted much more fully here (I refrain from saying whole-heartedly, because there has been considerable resistance), but also that there is an apparent deep reluctance in England - in spite of the

all-party concern here to keep the Kingdom United - to learn from what is happening in the other parts of the UK.

Pasi Sahlberg in his impressive book *Finnish Lessons* has described the GERM – the Global Education Reform Movement - and suggests it has five particular characteristics

- Standardization
- Increased focus on core subjects
- Prescribed curriculum
- Transfer of models from the corporate world
- High-stakes accountability policies

(Sahlberg, 2011 99-106)

It becomes clear in Sahlberg's book that Finland's success is built against a very different background from that in England or even the wider UK, which is a much more stratified society with institutions of privilege for the privileged.

In *The Spirit Level*, Wilkinson and Pickett famously demonstrated that the gap between rich and poor has increased substantially in the UK – as well as the US - since 1975. But they have also showed how across a wide range of social provision, including health and education, greater quality is associated with greater equality and *vice versa*. And the geographer Danny Dorling in a scathing attack on the continuing use of nineteenth century thinking about human ability and intellectual capacity to justify educational inequalities suggests that the global mechanisms such as the PISA developed by the OECD offer a continuing rationale for this backward thinking that undermines attempts to open up learning for all. (See Dorling's chapter on education in *Injustice* or his recent article in the Guardian.)

The power of numbers in the governance of education across the world is increasingly apparent, whether we look locally at the 'tyranny of testing' in one country (Mansell) or at international competition in the knowledge economy (Ozga et al).

Contemporary Education in the UK

The UK may be thought of as having four major education systems, one for each jurisdiction. These systems may be seen to cover the public provision of education from the early years through to higher education. This simple assertion is something that is perhaps taken for granted by many parents and students across the four nations. Indeed in the three smaller nations one can see some evidence of attempts to bring coherence to all of this provision – even if often unsuccessfully. However in England there are some real difficulties in seeing educational provision as 'a system'. There is not only the continuing problematic of a parallel private system that caters mainly for the wealthy and is extremely effective at reproducing the social hierarchy that permeates English society – as shown almost week in week out by stories about my own and other elite universities continuing to favour the private sector (in spite of efforts to counter this claim).

But there is a wider sense in which it is not clear at all that we do have a system. In a recent paper, Martin Lawn (a former BERA Academic Secretary) has argued that historically there has not been a system in England but rather perhaps several systems. The administration even of publicly provided education in England has been deeply fractured with many different stakeholders holding some major responsibilities. And the connections between school education and further and higher education are far from straightforward. Different

ministries are involved and of course especially since the introduction of fees, a completely different view of the economic relationship between the student and the provider, with HE increasingly seen as a commodity to be purchased rather than as a public entitlement.

Lawn goes on to suggest that even within the school sector we are currently seeing the continuing dismantling of any semblance of an actual open consistent and democratically accountable system. This process started under the Thatcher and Major governments (remember Brian Simon's analysis and predictions – *Bending the Rules* in 1988), took hold under New Labour and is rapidly accelerating under the Coalition.

Indeed this process is exemplified in the very phrase that has been adopted by the Secretary of State and his officers in the name of greater local autonomy and leadership – 'a school-led system'. This was the phrase that was the focus of an event at the National College earlier this year. Let us just pause and consider what it means – a school-led system. How many schools in England? Well according to the DfE we are talking about some 24328, of which about 22000 are state maintained or at least receive the bulk of their funding from the state. So this school-led system is led by more than 20000 institutions. Images of Hydra pale into insignificance! If this system is led at all it is actually led from the centre – local democracy has largely been taken out of the governance of education in England and Richard Pring has gone so far as to suggest that what we are seeing is actually the first genuine state schools in this country, that is schools governed by the Secretary of State. Stephen Ball has argued the almost exact opposite - that what we are seeing the demise a state education!

I have already alluded to the significance of data in the current governance of education. It is part of Martin Lawn's thesis that actually this virtual world of performance data is the closest thing to a system that we currently have within education in England. And of course this puts two other processes at the fore – the assessment 'system' and the inspection 'system' each of which, whatever their respective faults, are indeed claimed to have a universal and consistent set of measures at their core. It is these 'safeguards' that facilitate the view that we do have some kind of national system in England – and similar ideas apply elsewhere in the UK.

But there is also another tool that governments use to sustain the legitimacy of their interventions in education, which has become increasingly apparent in western societies over the past few years and that is the promotion of slogans and labels – brands even - that capture the public imagination. We are now having education branded.

The obvious US example is *No Child Left Behind*. In Scotland we have *Curriculum for Excellence*. And in England we have had *Sure Start* and *Every Child Matters*. And the current catchphrase is of course *Closing the Gap*. These are all phrases that you cannot argue with – they all aspire to improve education, especially for the most disadvantaged. And yet, they are all phrases – metaphors indeed - that have conceptual difficulties, if not flaws.

Of course it is not that these inequalities and relativities are not acknowledged in contemporary politics, rather they are the very essence of the discourse. Most notably we have the current rhetoric of 'Closing the Gap'. In various forms we have this in all parts of the UK. In Scotland there has been talk about the persistent underachievers. In England we have the notion that every school child should have the opportunity for the kind of education experienced by the most fortunate. (A fuller critique of this thinking is being offered later in this conference, in a paper I have co-authored with Liz Todd and Georgina Glenny, as part

of a symposium on Poverty and Teacher Education.). Let us just consider a rather long quotation that sets out this position persuasively.

Our schools should be engines of social mobility, helping children to overcome the accidents of birth and background to achieve much more than they may ever have imagined. But, at the moment, our schools system does not close gaps, it widens them.

Children from poorer homes start behind their wealthier contemporaries when they arrive at school and during their educational journey they fall further and further back.

The achievement gap between rich and poor widens at the beginning of primary school, gets worse by GCSE and is a yawning gulf by the time (far too few) sit A levels and apply to university.

This injustice has inspired a grim fatalism in some, who believe that deprivation must be destiny. But for this Government the scale of this tragedy demands action. Urgent, focused, radical action.

Other regions and nations have succeeded in closing this gap and in raising attainment for all students at the same time. They have made opportunity more equal, democratised access to knowledge and placed an uncompromising emphasis on higher standards all at the same time. These regions and nations – from Alberta to Singapore, Finland¹ to Hong Kong, Harlem to South Korea – have been our inspiration.

(DfE 2010, 6-7)

This is from the Secretary of State's Foreword to the White Paper *The Importance of teaching*. Surely the obvious conclusion to draw from this analysis is to close the income gap between rich and poor. If there is a grim fatalism here it is the fatalism that ignores that possibility and places the entire responsibility on the schools. Of course, we do know that schools and teachers do have an impact on attainment and achievement but to ignore the root cause of educational inequality is, to put it politely, misleading.

There are at least two major problems with the Closing the Gap discourse. First, many initiatives that have sought to improve schooling have had the effect of either maintaining or even widening the gap because the initiative has had as much or more of a positive effect on the higher achievers as it has on the lower achievers. But secondly and more fundamentally, most of the initiatives have the simple error of addressing symptoms rather than causes. From the 1960s onwards, educational research has demonstrated consistently that educational achievement is closely associated with socio-economic patterns. This indeed is another Finnish lesson – as Wilkinson and Pickett show, Finnish society experiences far less of an income inequality gap than the UK and this is associated with a much smaller achievement gap, not only that but of course also much more consistently successful PISA results.

¹ It may be noted that Gove has stopped citing Finland, presumably since he realised that there is far less income inequality there, that teachers are respected and trained to master's level on entry and there is no inspection system or equivalent accountability measures (see Sahlberg, 2011).

The recent report from the National Children's Bureau as well as American/Indian research reported only last week in the journal *Science* all confirm the continuing direct impact of poverty on children's learning.

It is **Preventing the Gap** that should be our prime focus. And of course that is what many early years initiatives are seeking to do – to prevent that gap opening up before primary school. And that **is** critically important and such initiatives must be defended. But even when such work is successful the Gap will still emerge, that is unless we address the social and income inequalities as well as the learning environments.

Apart from early years initiatives, the most significant attempt in education to close the gap under this government is almost certainly the Pupil Premium. Where this is being used carefully it is certainly securing some improvements for some learners in school, but it will not eliminate the gap.

There is also a range of pedagogical initiatives that focus on the most vulnerable children – such as now being rolled out with the randomised controlled trial (RCT) style work being undertaken for the National College (NCTL), or being undertaken by various organisations and schools funded by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)/Sutton Trust – again these may have a very positive impact for the recipients of the interventions but they do not address the underlying causes.

At the same time as we observe these initiatives being undertaken we see growing reduction in welfare benefits – for example, where is the educational research into the impact of the bedroom tax on children? We have seen in a recent RSA report what the serious impact of moving school during a school year may be and we know that some children in the lowest income families are having to relocate because of this policy. Who is connecting that educational research with government welfare policy?

Similarly if we turn to higher education and consider the patterns of entry we begin to see the sometimes very perverse effects of a range of policies. The interaction of the new fees regime with the widening participation initiatives is continuing to cause difficulty, as Les Ebdon has bravely been pointing out.

In a small-scale research project in the City of Oxford, with Anne Edwards (former BERA President) and Patrick Alexander, we have been talking with some Year 9 secondary school pupils about their aspirations. These are young people growing up in a city where there are two of the most successful universities of their respective types on their doorstep – sometimes literally - and where their teachers are very keen to raise their ambitions. We are currently writing this up but among some of the insights revealed are these:

1. Some school students think the purpose of achieving good A Levels is to avoid the need to go to university. Good A Levels may lead straight to a good job; it's only if you get poor results at A Level that you may need to go to University in order to improve your job chances – but of course that is a much more expensive way to a job.
2. Making subject choices is a very functional task – what will you succeed at, what will lead to gainful employment? For many students there is no suggestion at all about passion for a subject. Likewise some teachers are tending to focus on exam results rather than on inspiring interest in the subject.

3. Images of college and university – the young people's 'figured worlds' are much more strongly shaped by media images, especially soaps and films on TV, than by the institutions that lie on their doorsteps. These images are very often derived from the USA and actually turn out to be high schools rather than higher education.

And this is in spite of one of the most active widening participation programmes anywhere involving both universities and a host of other organisations, and in spite of school leaders and teachers who have very high aspirations for their students.

Educational research in the UK

But what has all this got to do with educational research? Well, I hope you begin to see a theme about the important contribution that educational research should be making in our society – one small example of my own at the end of that section - although it is clearly not always having that kind of influence at present, sometimes because it is not happening and sometimes because it is being ignored.

UCET – the Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers - and BERA have had two major joint initiatives over the last few years and I was proud to play a part in both of them, along with several other colleagues who are active in one or both organisations

One was to look at the impact of RAE 2008 and that certainly demonstrated some strange and unintended consequences of the introduction of such excessive performativity into educational research.

The other was to review current policies in relation to educational research across the UK – this was actually prompted by anxieties arising from the Coalition's 2010 White Paper *The Importance of Teaching*.

The working group was chaired by a former BERA President, Geoff Whitty, and led to a report published in early 2012. In brief, the study revealed major threats to educational research capacity across the UK. One of the particular concerns to emerge was about the possible impact of major reforms in teacher education policy and practice which, it was feared, could severely reduce research capacity in university departments of education. This story is probably very familiar to most BERA delegates but in essence it is about the drive to increase the school-basedness of teacher education particularly in England through a programme called School Direct. Indeed, in the light of this policy, we have already seen a number of higher education institutions reviewing their education departments and considering that nature and scale of their continuing commitment to this subject.

Among the recommendations to come out of this report there are two that I wish to mention here – one was to establish an ongoing 'Observatory' - designed to monitor these matters on a regular basis across the four nations of the UK, something BERA believes it has a moral obligation to undertake. Plans are afoot to establish this. The other recommendation was to carry out an investigation into the relationship between research and teacher education.

So an Inquiry into Research and Teacher Education has been established. It is being carried out as a joint venture between BERA and the RSA. It is important to stress that teacher education and educational research are not one and the same, but the simple truth is that across the UK, the capacity of university departments is generally – but not entirely – linked to the provision for initial teacher education. John Furlong's book, *Education – the Anatomy of a Discipline*, which he talked about here last year, is very much about this

theme. Indeed it is John, another former President, who is chairing the Inquiry's steering group.

This of course is another lesson where the home international comparison is extremely revealing – there are increasing divergences between teacher education in our four nations - and that is the theme of one of six papers that have been commissioned by the Inquiry. You can hear more about the inquiry and get a sense of the emerging findings that will soon be published, in a session tomorrow morning at 11am in Room 101. If you have not already done so I also urge you to read the most recent issue of *Research Intelligence* which has teacher education as its theme and includes a range of very stimulating articles on the topic.

The profession of teaching started to become a key political issue ever since the mid-70s and James Callaghan's famous Ruskin speech. This was followed later by Keith Joseph's White Paper of 1983 *Teaching Quality*, which in turn led to a succession of circulars, government bodies, standards and inspection regimes – together with pay and conditions reforms – which have led to the profession being subject to major transformation. And that is not to mention curriculum and assessment reform or the more recent overhaul of school funding and governance arrangements – all of which have had an impact on teachers. Again these processes have been most radical in England but have had their effects across the UK.

Two questions arise:

- what contribution have teachers made to these processes of reform?
- what part has educational research played?

Well, in answer to the first question and again by comparison with Finland, we see a regrettably low level of trust in teachers. The superheads, the knights and dames have been feted and many have provided inspiring leadership. But teachers' voices have not played a significant part in policy developments and too many members of the profession continue to feel undervalued.

But in answer to the second question, nor have we, the educational research community, been very successful in influencing policy.

And to tie the two questions together we have not been good at demonstrating the connection between a strong research underpinning and high quality teaching – indeed we could perhaps sometimes be accused of a complacent assumption that the two are intimately linked. That is what the BERA/RSA inquiry is investigating.

It's not that the work has not been undertaken – one could cite the Cambridge Primary Review, the work on *Professional Capital* by Hargreaves and Fullan or the work on teachers' lives by Christopher Day, as examples. All of these provide some powerful evidence of the importance of both respecting teachers and of providing them with a research underpinning for their work.

We did have a few years in the first decade of the century, when all four nations of the UK had a General Teaching Council and that had provided some hope for raising the esteem in which teachers are held but then the English one was abolished.

The very interesting exploration of the creation of a Royal College of Teaching – which you may remember Jon Coles spoke about at Conference last year - is an important and

potentially very valuable development, with which BERA intends to cooperate. These are developments which are important for education generally across the UK and for BERA especially.

But if research **capacity** is one issue then the **nature** of educational research is the second current major issue.

The UCET/BERA report from last year identified a significant pressure on resources and that is the point about capacity, but more recently we have seen a re-emergence of what was seen in the US as ‘the paradigm wars’. Mary James and I were present at Bethnal Green Academy earlier this year when Mr Gove proclaimed the importance of educational research over political ideology – yes, he did - and he stayed on to listen to the debate which ensued after he had launched Ben Goldacre’s report promoting Randomised Controlled Trials. As most of you will be well aware Goldacre is a medical researcher and also, like Mr Gove, a journalist. There is not time here to go into the specific difficulties with this report, both Mary and I have written about this elsewhere.

But the general move to this particular research paradigm was also indicated by the huge transfer of resources from the DfE to Sutton Trust which is in turn funding the Education Endowment Foundation to support RCT type research on a local level across the country. As I mentioned earlier, this lead is also being followed by the NCTL which is combining the CtG policy with the RCT policy in the shape of ‘rolling out’ across hundreds of schools, with Teaching Schools in the lead, a large scale trialling with ‘treatment’ and ‘control’ schools, a number of interventions designed to support the most vulnerable learners. Let’s be clear – this is really important work which for many reasons we must welcome, as I have indicated. Indeed, with colleagues in my own department at Oxford, we will be working with lead teachers in teaching schools across the country supporting them in their development and deployment of research skills and many children are likely to benefit.

So, this is not meant to be an attack on such initiatives but rather to say that to invest all or nearly all the resource into one particular approach to educational research is foolhardy and potentially dangerous. No doubt some of this work will lead to real improvement in educational experiences and outcomes for some of the most disadvantaged young people. And it is a real opportunity to get more teachers directly engaged in research activity and thus it is also the case that we could see the real emergence of teaching as a research-based profession, something that many here have long aspired to.

When BERA Officers recently met research staff in the DfE we were delighted to hear of the new commitment to ‘evidence-based teaching’. This enabled us to draw their attention to the long tradition of teacher as researcher in this country, or indeed the notion of teachers as knowledge creators. We referred them to the work of Lawrence Stenhouse which broke new ground in the 1970s, around the time of the establishment of BERA in fact and has been very influential on many BERA members. But evidence-based teaching or ‘teacher as researcher’ does not imply a one model fits all approach. RCTs may be an important part of the research repertoire but they are certainly not sufficient. We really do need research that can explore educational processes in depth as well as inputs and outputs. Some of us are old enough to remember when this lesson was learned in the 1970s. It would be a great shame if we were to abandon a full range of approaches in our work.

Next year will see the emergence of the REF results. Our colleagues on the education sub-panel who will be evaluating the submissions have the two incredibly difficult tasks of both ensuring consistency and fairness within the unit of assessment but also of ensuring fairness

for the treatment of education in comparison to the other 35 units of assessment – not easy as we know from the accounts offered by the chair of the education sub-panel in RAE 2008.

And we have the new factor of 'Impact'. Impact templates are being completed around the country and Impact case studies have been prepared – which we anticipate will provide excellent evidence of how British educational research has influenced policy and practice. Indeed this should provide a good source of evidence for promoting awareness of why this community and its work are so important to the quality of educational provision for learners in all phases and contexts of education.

As I indicated earlier, this is not a new issue - Nisbet and Broadfoot wrote about the impact of educational research 33 year ago. And there was a great deal of work in the 90s and noughties considering the use of evidence and research in education (eg Sebba, Nutley et al), and that was certainly a key concern of the TLRP and of the SFRE, both of which have been significant influences on BERA strategy.

And BERA has itself consistently attempted to develop this agenda both through interacting with the policy and practitioner communities in various ways, but also explicitly through publications and events.

Just published on our website and available to conference delegates is the report '*Why Educational Research Matters*', originally developed to provide evidence for the Comprehensive Spending Review. And the new Insights that are being launched here demonstrate not only the strength of our research but also its broad range

- Steve Strand on ethnic minority achievement
- Jacky Lumby on disengaged young people
- Donna Cross on bullying
- Stephen Rogers on personalisation

If this list represents breadth it also shows the priority given in much research in Britain on social justice in education.

BERA

So moving towards a conclusion and focusing on our own organisation for the last few minutes.

As we approach our fortieth anniversary the message I want to leave ringing in your ears is this positive one.

We have much to celebrate about the quality, creativity and diversity of educational research. However this is no time to be complacent in our celebration. This is a time to use our celebration to raise much wider awareness of the important contribution that educational research makes in society. This will be a year, no, we will see at least two years, of raising the profile of British educational research. 2014 may be our anniversary (and the year of the vote on Scottish independence) but 2015 is likely to be the year of the next general election. Two years – using all the evidence we have available - for demonstrating to policymakers and politicians - that they do need high quality educational research to support the development of the world-class education system that the politicians like to talk about – and that research needs to be funded and needs to be founded on a commitment to

independence and critical thought. And the most powerful leverage on politicians will come through influencing the wider electorate – and in particular parents and students themselves.

But this is also the time for a new drive to recruit teachers and lecturers who are undertaking pedagogical or other educational research – in line with the DfE and NCTL initiatives that I have mentioned and the growing professional commitment to research-based approaches.

Education is far too important to be left in the hands of ideologically motivated and personally ambitious politicians. In Austria, a two thirds majority is required in parliament for any change in education legislation – while this can sometimes create inertia it also tends to prevent the worst excesses of ideologically driven politicians.

So capacity, quality and diversity in educational research - the development of theory is as important as the direct application of research to policy and practice.

Our broad church of educational researchers – universities, independent organisations, government departments, local government, teachers both individually and through their organisations including the unions, the GTCs in three parts of the UK and the proposed RCoT – all have a part to play.

BERA, through its SIGs, its journals, its international links, its events and conferences can provide a strong counter-balance to the politicisation of education through the careful presentation of independent and critical research that is both evaluative of current policies and practices but also aspires not only to lead to improvement but to generate fresh thinking and have a humanising influence.

There are real opportunities for extending the reach of BERA and for playing a significant part in ensuring that developments are well informed. We must continue to produce research of high quality that is recognised as such around the world. Yes, there will continue to be worries about the availability of resources for our endeavours and the way in which they are distributed, but we must play an active part in shaping educational thinking and educational policy and practice in our society.

We do need to influence the public perception of educational research. As an organisation we are likely to be issuing more public statements and organising more press and media outputs. There are of course risks involved – both external, as we saw in the case of the National Curriculum letter from academics earlier this year – and internal – we do have a broad membership also including many from overseas. It is not always going to be easy to judge the consensus view, especially when swift responses are needed..

But I do hope all of you will play your part and help in this active promotion of educational research as we enter our 40th anniversary year.

That, I suggest, is what is to be done.

Thanks for your attention.

(References to be added)