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Quality assurance and evaluation (QAE) in Scotland: promoting self-evaluation within and beyond the country¹

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This article looks at policy for quality assurance and evaluation in Scotland, its history and more recent developments, and in particular, at the emphasis on school self-evaluation. It examines the history of the concept, its constituent elements and the role of the Inspectorate in establishing it. Further, the article discusses the Scottish self-evaluation model as a means of promoting the country's distinctive identity in education within a European frame. It discusses the role of the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates as a major forum for the transmission of ideas about self-evaluation that illuminates the role of networks in promoting Europeanisation.

Keywords: European education space; Inspectorate; quality assurance; Scotland; school improvement; self-evaluation

Introduction

This article looks at policy for quality assurance and evaluation (QAE) in Scotland and in particular the emphasis on school self-evaluation. It traces its history, including the role of the Inspectorate in promoting and monitoring self-evaluation and reviews the key elements of the self-evaluation process. The article considers the contradictions of a governance system that promotes self-evaluation, while at the same time requires adherence to external benchmarks and indicators. It discusses recent policy shifts to overcome these difficulties, and offers some evidence of the search for ways of rebuilding trust and releasing energy within frameworks that require accountability.

The second sub-theme of the article is the use by a small, peripheral system like Scotland of its school self-evaluation model as a means of promoting its distinctive identity in education within a European frame. Europeanisation offers opportunities for the circulation of approaches to self-evaluation that promote Scotland's activities and that connect its policy-makers — perhaps especially its Inspectorate — to wider networks. The article discusses the role of the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates (SICI) as a major forum for the transmission of ideas about self-evaluation that illuminates the role of networks in spreading and promoting 'big' policies (Ball 1998).

The article builds on findings from two complementary research projects at the Centre for Education Sociology. The first, 'Fabricating Quality in European Education'

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(FABQ), is a comparative study that explores QAE as a form of governance of education. The research includes a review of policy literature and interviews with policy-makers in national and local government contexts in England and Scotland, and also in the European policy community. ‘How do schools in Scotland measure their own performance?’ is the second research project; it is carried out as part of the Applied Educational Research Scheme (AERS). It includes a review of QAE in Scotland, and interviews and case studies in six schools across Scotland. It focuses on the processes and impacts of QAE within schools.

QAE in Scotland: the effect of UK-wide policy pressures

Scotland is a relatively small nation within the UK: it has a population of just five million people compared with 50 million in its neighbour England. Although Scotland has been part of the UK for the last 300 years, and is subject to strong policy influences from UK political parties, the Scottish education system has been allowed to develop separately, and provides an important part of the Scottish national identity. Since 1999, there has been a new Scottish parliament, providing scope for further divergence of education policy as a result of different priorities and ideologies north and south of the border (Arnott 2007; Raffe 2005).

Within Scotland there is a tradition of strong central direction on school policy. Scotland has a fairly homogenous school system in which 96% of Scottish children are educated in non-selective state schools (including many established to cater for those who choose a Roman Catholic education) all of which are administered by local education authorities. Primary schooling starts at age five, and pupils transfer to secondary schools at age 12. Although compulsory education ends at age 16, the vast majority of pupils now remain at school to age 18. All schools provide a general education, and there is very little vocational education provision until the post-16 stages. There is a Scottish system of National Qualifications providing a unified system of qualifications for all students from age 15/16 onwards.

The introduction of QAE in Scottish education demonstrates both the impact of strong UK-wide policy pressures, and the ways such policies have been either resisted or adapted so that they are not as assessment-driven or market-oriented as those introduced in England. The initial introduction of quality assurance in Scottish education started in the 1980s, influenced by UK-wide policy pressure to improve the quality of public services. Influenced by the ‘new right’ ideology, which consists of an amalgam of neo-liberalist and neo-conservative philosophies (Levitas 1986; Quicke 1989), public service reform focused on outputs, value for money, improved staff performance, ‘customer’ satisfaction and the introduction of market mechanisms to provide choice for the user. Public service reform throughout the UK gained momentum following the publication of the *Citizens’ charter* (Treasury 1991) which aimed to develop a more business-like approach in the public services. Competition was extolled as the best guarantee of quality and value for money, with managers having to account for their performance against quality targets. The use of quasi-market mechanisms, decentralised management, an emphasis on improved service quality and an insistence that more attention be paid to ‘customer’ requirements – formed the basis of what became known as the *new public management* (Pollit 1990).

Competition among schools had earlier been encouraged through legislation giving parents the statutory right to request places in schools outside their designated catchment areas (Education (Scotland) Act 1981). It was argued that competition

would improve school performance by forcing ineffective schools to improve, or else face closure through the loss of pupils and resources. Popularity was equated with quality (McPherson 1989). The consumerist philosophy was further developed by the publication of examination results under the provisions of the Education (Schools) Act of 1992, which provided parents with information on the performance of different schools (and were also used by newspapers to create 'League Tables').

Throughout Britain there was resistance from the teaching organisations to policies which were believed to undermine the autonomy of teaching professionals. In Scotland, the policies were also widely seen as a threat to the distinctive Scottish education system from a Conservative government that was perceived as not having democratic legitimacy (Arnott 2007). On one aspect of Conservative policy – national testing of pupils in primary schools – the opposition of parents and the policy community in Scotland was mobilised to the extent that the government had to withdraw its policy (Paterson 1997).

Despite the change from Conservative to Labour government in 1997, education policy in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK continued to reflect an emphasis on quality assurance and a belief that competition and setting standards would enhance quality and ensure accountability. The principles of performance management became central to the 'new managerialism' (Fairley and Paterson 1995). Performance management involved managers in monitoring performance in relation to targets and redefining targets in the light of experience, and this kind of thinking became influential in education (as it has across the public sector).

Thus, QAE has become an important feature of educational policy and practice. QAE processes in Scotland are a little different to those in England. Whereas England introduced a National Curriculum with National Testing and a strong focus on hard performance indicators, these approaches were successfully resisted in Scotland (Jones 2003). Similarly, competition between schools was not promoted as strongly in Scotland (Adler 1997; Croxford and Raffe 2007). Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) in Scotland have a less confrontational approach than their counterparts in Ofsted. In contrast, an important feature of the Scottish approach to QAE has been greater emphasis on self-evaluation by schools.

Developing self-evaluation: the influence of the Inspectorate

School self-evaluation is the approach to quality assurance that has been strongly promoted by HMI in Scotland. The Inspectorate is a major influence on the formulation of education policy, and the leading instigator of quality assurance procedures in education. In the 1980s, the Inspectorate set up a Management of Education Resources Unit (MERU), which later became the Audit Unit, to promote good management and achieve value for money in education. It started publishing papers and initiatives, many of which were based on the body of research identifying characteristics of effective schools in an attempt to encourage secondary schools to evaluate their own practice and performance (MacBeath and Mortimore 2001). In 1990/91, as part of the policy of promoting parental choice of schools the Audit Unit began publishing annually an *Information for parents* series – reports giving the details of schools' attainment data (examination results for secondary schools and 5–14 attainment levels for primary schools); school costs; attendance and absence rates and, for secondary schools, school-leaver destinations. (These reports formed the basis of school League Tables and were discontinued in 2003.)

In 1991, HMI Audit Unit began advocating the use of Development Planning, with the publication of *The role of school development plans in managing school effectiveness* (Scottish Office Education Department (SOED) 1991a). This document was accompanied by the distribution to secondary schools of what was described as a staff development package, *Using examination results in school self-evaluation: Relative ratings and national comparison factors* (SOED 1991b) together with 'Standard Tables' – a package of statistical information about examination performance per school. The Standard Tables were subsequently issued each year and compared performance by subject departments within a school (Relative Ratings), and school departmental performance with national figures (National Comparison Factors) (Cowie, Taylor and Croxford 2007).

The methodology of development planning was pushed further through Circular No. 1/94 (SOED 1994a, 1), which provided further guidelines for schools and education authorities 'in line with the objective of the Parents' Charter to improve quality and standards in Scottish Schools'. Education authorities were expected to make arrangements to support development planning in schools and ensure that each school produced an annual plan in accordance with advice contained in the guidelines. Updated advice on development planning focused on quality assurance, which was said to be dependent on 'systematic professional evaluation of the achievement of clearly defined aims by the school's own staff led by the headteacher' (SOED 1994b, 1). Development planning was described as an enabling mechanism through which change can be planned, introduced and consolidated, and a linkage was made between development planning and effectiveness by demonstrating how performance indicators may be used in self-evaluation.

The processes of self-evaluation and development planning were set out more explicitly by the Audit Unit publication, *How good is our school? Self-evaluation using performance indicators (HGIOS?)* (Scottish Office Education and Industry Department (SOEID) 1996). HGIOS? provided a set of performance indicators of what a good school should look like – overtly based on perceived characteristics of effective schools. HGIOS? replaced the earlier material on the use of indicators, and provided a comprehensive list of performance indicators, which were said to be based on good practice at school, local authority and national levels. Schools were encouraged to use the same performance indicators as those used by HMI in school inspections to identify, report and take action where required on strengths and weaknesses. A number of further publications provided supporting materials and case studies of self-evaluation, as the Inspectorate urged and cajoled schools to use their methodology.

However, in the political climate of the 1990s the reactions of schools and local authorities to all aspects of quality assurance were coloured by distrust of policies considered to be ideological impositions by the Conservative government. Thus, in many schools self-evaluation tended to be regarded as a charade (Cowie 2001). Following the change of government in 1997 there was more rhetoric about 'partnership' in policy documents, but also more pressure on schools to implement quality assurance procedures and meet performance targets.

In 1997, HMI set out its vision of working in partnership with local authorities and schools through the *Quality initiative in Scottish schools* (SOEID 1997). Each participating authority was expected to set a policy framework for quality assurance, engage in the analysis of the available evidence of school performance and work towards producing a report on standards and quality reflecting the context of the authority. At

school level, schools were expected to have development plans in place, show commitment to improvement through self-evaluation and work towards producing some form of school standards and quality report. The education authority was expected to support, moderate and validate these processes. Target setting across the key areas identified in *HGIOS?* was seen as an important element in the initiative. Responses of schools and local authorities to the initiative varied, and in 1999 an HMI report on the management of quality improvement in education authorities suggested that implementation of the QAE methodology was quite patchy (SOEID 1999).

Subsequently, senior HMI were influential in drafting the first education act of the new Scottish Parliament in 2000, and ensured that the QAE methodology became a set of legal responsibilities. The *Standards in Scotland's schools etc Act* set out statutory requirements for school improvement within an improvement framework encompassing a set of five National Priorities (Scottish Parliament 2000). A series of performance indicators were identified for each priority and local education authorities were expected to agree targets for achievement of these indicators with their schools.

The responsibilities of local authorities

Scotland's school system is described as 'a national system, locally administered' (Scottish Executive 1999). There are 32 local authorities with responsibility for providing school education in the areas they serve. The *Standards in Scotland's schools etc Act* 2000 placed on the local authorities the requirement to identify and take action to continuously improve performance in their schools, and gave the Inspectorate a new role in inspecting the education functions of the authorities. As a result of this law, the authorities have been placed under great pressure to implement the required quality assurance procedures by the threat of adverse inspections by HM Inspectors of Education (HMIE) (Cowie and Croxford 2006).

The quality improvement process now dominates the education agenda in local authorities. Their new responsibility to secure continuous improvement in their schools has led to the creation of a new professional group of Quality Improvement Officers (QIO) whose role is to 'challenge and support' schools for which they have responsibility. They scrutinise statistics on school performance, seek to ensure a robust self-evaluation structure within schools and identify areas that need to be addressed. They carry out a regular cycle of visits to schools to: assess the school's progress with its school development plan; discuss improvement issues with management and staff; and support the school's management in making improvements. At the start of the school session, the focus in secondary schools is on results in external examinations. Visits in the latter half of each session focus on issues for the school development plans for the following session and the QIO is required to scrutinise and approve development plans to ensure delivery of local and national priorities. Additionally, HMIE inspections of schools take up a large amount of the time of local authority staff, in helping schools to prepare for – and respond to – inspections.

Boyd and Norris (2006) argue that the new emphasis on quality improvement in local authorities has necessitated a reduction in their provision of curriculum development, advice and in-service training for teachers. This is characterised by the change in title and role of the former 'Advisory Service' to 'Quality Improvement Service'. This was a painful process for many former advisors, who now find themselves increasingly part of the inspection process, with their curriculum development and

training roles much reduced. The authors point out that these changes undermine current policies such as ‘A Curriculum for Excellence’ which seek to put teacher development at the heart of educational reform. Indeed, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in their recent review of Scottish education, emphasised the need for local authorities to undertake more curriculum innovation (OECD 2007, 17).

However, the freedom for innovation by local authorities is restricted by the Quality Improvement agenda. They now have a statutory obligation to produce and publish, annually, a ‘Statement of Improvement Objectives’, which must be set in respect of the national priorities with targets for achievement of the performance measures, and to publish an annual report on their success in meeting their improvement objectives. Authorities themselves are inspected by HMIE, with special regard to their own self-evaluation and the extent to which they support and challenge their schools. National Government has effectively maintained control of the measures of ‘success’ in improving schools, but devolved the responsibility for achieving them to Local Government (Cowie and Croxford 2006). It could be argued that this top-down approach creates pressures for conformity rather than innovation.

The process of self-evaluation by schools

Schools are required to evaluate their own performance each year using Quality Indicators² from *HGIOS?* and their performance on these indicators is externally judged on a regular basis through inspections of schools carried out by HMIE. The ‘Quality Indicators’ selected by HMIE effectively define what should be regarded as ‘Quality’ in education. Thus, the Inspectorate is able to define what is evaluated – and therefore what is valued in education.

The most recent version of *HGIOS?* (2007) provides 30 Quality Indicators under the following headings: key performance outcomes; impact on learners; impact on staff; impact on the community; delivery of education; policy development and planning; management and support of staff; partnership and resources; leadership capacity for improvement (HMIE 2007).

The self-evaluation procedure set out in *HGIOS?* requires schools to look at each aspect of provision and ask: *How are we doing? How do we know? What are we going to do now?* For each indicator, the school is expected to gather evidence in order to evaluate performance on a six-point scale from 1 (Unsatisfactory) to 6 (Excellent).

Quantitative data on attainment are an important part of the evidence that schools must use for self-evaluation. The Scottish Government provides each secondary school with a set of Standard Tables comparing the school’s examination results with the national picture – for example the percentage of pupils who achieved five or more awards at levels 3–6 of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework in the school is compared with the national figure and with ‘benchmark’ performance in comparator schools of similar socio-economic intake. When first produced in the 1990s, the Standard Tables were very dense sets of statistics. Explanatory notes were provided, and school management teams were expected to use these tables to evaluate their performance and develop targets for development plans. Initially, there was considerable reluctance to use these data for self-evaluation as few headteachers had quantitative skills, and many found the Standard Tables very difficult to use. However, over time the format of the tables has been improved by the inclusion of charts, there has been considerable training in their use, and considerable pressure on school managers

from HMIE and education authorities. Specialised consultancy firms have been set up to provide commentaries on how to interpret the data. In 2008, it appears that all senior managers in secondary schools, and QIO in local authorities, routinely use the Standard Tables and Charts to evaluate their school performance. Sadly, there is also evidence that some schools have become adept at manipulating performance data in order to provide an appearance of improvement. For example, schools may prevent students from attempting high-level courses if there is a risk that they may fail and depress the pass-rate. In addition, there are a number of high-profile performance indicators defined in terms of the percentage of each cohort achieving five or more awards at levels 3–6 of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework; schools will therefore identify marginal students who are likely to achieve just four awards and target them for additional support so they can achieve five awards (Cowie, Taylor, and Croxford 2007).

In primary schools, where there are no national examinations, it is more difficult to gather reliable quantitative evidence of performance. Currently, data are derived from 5–14 National Assessments that are carried out at the teacher's discretion when s/he believes a child has reached an appropriate level. There is considerable variation between teachers on National Assessments, and consequently they are generally condemned as unreliable evidence by those interviewed for the AERS research. Nevertheless, such is the pressure for 'hard' data to evaluate performance that data from National Assessments are widely used for this purpose and may give a misleading picture.

Each school must write a Standards and Quality report and a School Development Plan (sometimes referred to as a School Improvement Plan, thereby reflecting the improvement agenda). Schools are expected to give details of self-evaluation, recognise key strengths, identify levels of service to be maintained, and to identify development needs and set targets. The Report must therefore include developments that have taken place over the previous session and outline proposed developments for the forthcoming session. It must also include pupils' attainment data in the context of the school's attainment targets (which must be agreed with the education authority). The Plan is expected to draw from the National Priorities and from national initiatives as reflected in the education authority's priorities and Improvement Plan for education.

Over the years, self-evaluation seems to have become an accepted procedure – in some cases treated with cynical compliance, and in others with enthusiasm. Two interviews from the AERS school case studies illustrate differences in approach. The first is a headteacher who had been just a year in post, and reflected on problems that s/he was attempting to address:

What I inherited was a fairly autocratic system where the head teacher wrote the development plan ... and it appeared one day on the staff room table and that was the development plan. There was pretty little degree of ownership or understanding – it was just something that sat around for a while ... The other side of that was self evaluation. There were three meetings a year where the staff had taken all the Quality Indicators – and there are tens of them – and had this lovely pile of sheets and the PT staff were 'so where do you think we are? – one to four at that stage? or on the first one?' ... They all thought that was useless. (Headteacher interviewed in February 2007 as part of the AERS study)

On the other hand, the deputy headteacher of another AERS case study school described the benefits of a more systematic approach to self-evaluation:

I find it very time-consuming, because I'm responsible for the improvement plan, the HGIOS bit and lots of the offshoots that come from the results of that, like for example the authority review ... What it allows us to do I think, I hope holistically, is to look at if the school has any shortcomings, what are they? Where are the areas that we're not doing particularly well? ... What's the problem – is there something we can do about it? ... So although it's time-consuming it probably does give us quite a good set of tools to do future planning. (Deputy headteacher interviewed in March 2007 as part of the AERS study)

Contradictions of self-evaluation

At first sight, the term 'self-evaluation' might give the impression of a 'bottom-up' approach, and to suggest that teachers and school-management teams are reflective practitioners thinking about their own practice. However, the reality of the Scottish system of self-evaluation is that it is a 'top-down system' using prescribed indicators rather than self-chosen goals (Cowie, Taylor, and Croxford 2007). The system could be described as creating cultures of 'performativity' – that is 'a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation ... that employs judgements, comparisons displays as means of control, attrition and change. The performances – of individual subjects or organisations – serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of "quality"...' (Ball 2001, 143). The *HGIOS?* system of quality indicators encourages schools to construct 'fabrications' of their performance in order to give a good impression, rather than provide an authentic evaluation of issues where improvement is needed.

Some of the contradictions of self-evaluation emerged in interviews carried out as part of the FABQ project with policy-makers in HMIE and the Information and Analytical Services (IAS) of the Scottish Government. They wanted a *new vision of improvement* in which schools and teachers would be self-motivated in striving for excellence. Their views reflect HMIE's latest vision of school self-evaluation – *Journey to Excellence* (HMIE 2006, 2007) – which expects schools to ask themselves: *How good can we be? What is our capacity for improvement?* However, interviewees were unwilling to completely abandon the current prescriptive approach despite recognition that it limited the scope for schools to develop their own improvement agendas.

The current system of self-evaluation appears to be intended to change the culture and mindset of teachers. If teachers can be persuaded to internalise the goals of school improvement, and the vision of quality that is defined by the quality indicators, and adopt these as norms for self-review of practice, then the whole Scottish education system will be on *journey to excellence*. However, it is not clear whether the quality indicators prescribed in the Scottish system are genuinely adopted as the goals towards which schools and teachers now strive. After years of being pressured to comply with policies and targets imposed from above, reactions to yet another set of quality indicators and policy rhetoric may be characterised as mere compliance with the audit system, and greater emphasis on 'ticking boxes' than achieving educational objectives.

These tensions are to some extent reflected in the introduction to the latest version of *HGIOS?*, which asserts:

Self-evaluation is not a bureaucratic or mechanistic process. It is a reflective professional process through which schools get to know themselves well and identify the best way forward for their pupils. It is about change and improvement, whether gradual or

transformational, and is based on professional reflection, challenge and support. (HMIE 2007, 6)

Doubts about the realities of self-evaluation also emerged in interviews with a group of policy-makers in IAS. They suggested that new policies such as 'A Curriculum for Excellence' were prompting a 'bottom-up' push towards National Priorities, by *empowering teachers, engaging with individual children and their learning needs and success with relation to the individual child*. But, on the other hand, they recognised the need to accommodate a 'top-down' approach, based on the 2000 Standards in Scotland's Schools Act, which commits policy-makers to raising standards by setting National Priorities, taking into account performance indicators. One IAS member described this approach as tending to be *quite managerialist*, which although considered to be effective in many ways, did not focus beyond attainment and did not encourage a *deeper degree of local engagement or thinking about what improvement was*. Some of the interviewees both in HMIE and IAS pointed out that tensions between these approaches could be problematic.

The relationship of policy-makers or ministers and education authorities with teachers in particular is mentioned as a starting point, as they have a much clearer grasp of educational issues.

We know it's not about money, its not about targets, it has to be about ownership. And there is no way that Ministers – we've seen it before – spending review targets in old administrations say 'we shall raise attainment and national qualifications by x' – well how on earth are ministers going to achieve that? They don't teach children individually, so how are you going to make that happen? (IAS interview carried out as part of FABQ project – February 2007).

We turn now from the doubts and contradictions of self-evaluation in Scotland to the development of similar approaches in Europe.

The Standing International Conference of Inspectorates (SICI) and the concept of self-evaluation

The SICI serves as a forum for exchanging experience in relation to inspection systems and wider education issues across Europe. Initially founded as the 'Conference of School Inspectorates in Europe' by the OECD at the instigation of Netherlands in 1985, QAE has been of prime interest to the organisation right from the beginning:

Open borders in the European Union mean greater mobility among both teachers and pupils. Thus, school inspection needs to include quality assurance at home while, at the same time, opening up to other systems abroad. (SICI 1989)

Increasing internationalisation and mobility across Europe meant that the Conference could only continue to operate if members would meet a certain number of requirements. Therefore, in 1995, it was renamed SICI and founded as a legally based association in Breda, in the Netherlands. In the articles of its foundation, it stated the following aims: sharing experience; updating developments regarding education systems; finding ways to improve working methods; and establishing a basis for cooperation between the various school authorities. Although both bilateral and multilateral cooperation among inspectorates across Europe were taking place before

1995, according to SICI's chairman, in an interview given as part of the FabQ project, there was 'a need for creating a more permanent institution' with three main aims: to provide information about inspection systems; to foster professional development; and to collect comparative data.

Indeed, since 1995, SICI has been involved in a number of interesting studies and exchanges of expertise in inspectorates across Europe. This article focuses mainly on SICI work in relation to the concept of self-evaluation; we are interested in the role that such associations and networks of actors play in developing travelling policies and ideas around Europe.

In 1997, Douglas A. Osler, Her Majesty's Senior Chief Inspector and leader of the Scottish Inspectorate, was elected President of SICI; during his time, SICI grew substantially through the organisation of training workshops, the development of a descriptive study on the supervision and inspection of schools in Europe, the compiling of a critical analysis of school inspection in Europe and the instigation of mutual projects which were based on joint visits or joint inspections. Osler, in his speech at the International SICI Congress in Utrecht in 2000, speaking about 'the future of school inspectorates in the 21st century', stressed for the first time the need to focus on continuous improvement. According to him, 'it is not sufficient in terms of school inspection just to write a report – it is also necessary to supplement each and every evaluation with a proposal for improvement' (SICI 2000).

Indeed, The 'Effective School Self-Evaluation' (ESSE) project was launched a year later. Funded by the European Commission (Socrates 6.1), it ran for two years (April 2001–March 2003) and had the following aims:

- Identify key indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of school self-evaluation;
- Develop a methodology for inspecting school self-evaluation;
- Identify the weaknesses of school self-evaluation across countries and regions;
- Produce an analysis of how self-evaluation and external evaluation can most effectively be combined; and
- Produce case studies of effective self-evaluation in practice.

Fourteen European countries and regions³ took part in the project which applied a range of methods, including a literature review, country studies, school visits, case studies of individual schools and a questionnaire survey. The combined use of these sources led to the development of a draft case study for each region. Case studies of specific schools involved visits in nine participating countries, reflecting a range of approaches and cultures of evaluation. Further, the questionnaire dealt with a series of issues such as the statutory position of self-evaluation in the different countries/regions; benchmarking; indicators, standards, criteria and conceptual frameworks to evaluate the quality of school self-evaluation; stakeholders in the school self-evaluation process; the role of the inspectorate; external inspection of the quality and effectiveness of the schools self-evaluation process; and other similar areas (European Commission-SICI 2001). Finally, the project built on work already done on school improvement and notably the work of MacBeath et al. (1999) in the European Socrates project 'Evaluating Quality in School Education'.

The ESSE project run from April 2001 to March 2002 by Bill Maxwell and from April 2002 to its completion by Chris Webb, both from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) in Scotland. According to SICI's chairman:

The interesting thing about self-evaluation, about the project, was that it was the first well-funded project that SICI had done. The others were all on a shoe-string. This had a secretariat, a very good project leader who was Scottish as well. ... It produced central ideas about what self-evaluation is about, it also produced a sort of checklist – what has to be in place in an education system for self-evaluation to *work*. ... it brought about a lot of thinking on self-evaluation in the countries that participated and there have been a number of smaller size workshops after that and bilateral cooperation for example between the Czechs and the Scots for instance.

The final project report provides the rationale behind self-evaluation and sets out a framework of quality indicators. It also gives guidelines for conducting evaluation visits, explores the balance between internal and external evaluation and contains country reports which set out the strengths in self-evaluation in the countries/regions that participated in the project.

ESSE has had a momentum not only in SICI work but more generally in self-evaluation in Europe. During the SICI ESSE workshop in Copenhagen in 2005, Chris Webb stated that the project took its starting point in the European Union's strategic target for 2010 to be the most competitive, dynamic and knowledge-based economy in the world. According to Webb, this target required a modernisation of the education systems in Europe; it called for inspections across Europe to play a role in encouraging transparency, quality evaluation and self-evaluation. Webb also stressed that 'school self-evaluation does not exist in a vacuum, but in a context where external support and benchmarks are important' (SICI 2005). The external support, for Webb, can be found in the form of statistical data for comparison, sets of quality standards and training in self-evaluation methods. Webb listed the features of schools with 'high capacity' as those which promote leadership, reflective and systematic self-evaluation and systematic tracking and evaluation of pupils' progress. Finally, the ESSE project manager stressed the need for balance between self-evaluation and external evaluation, 'to prevent schools ... resulting to self-delusion' (SICI 2005).

The Scottish contribution to the ESSE project was substantial. This is not only to be seen in the similarities of the recommendations of the final project report with quality indicators set in the 'How Good is Our School?' documentation, but crucially through the personal contacts and travelling of ideas and people from Scotland to the other participating countries and back. Describing in general the position of Scotland within the European education space and specifically in relation to the concept of self-evaluation, a Scottish policy actor from IAS, in an interview as part of the FabQ project, said:

Well, we feedback to people. We find a lot of the time we are ... this sounds slightly odd, but we're actually giving more than we're necessarily taking out. Partly because of the sort of area of work in which we are ... particularly with the accession nations that we're actually, in a sense, ahead of the game in Scotland ... we have, for instance, presented on what we do in Scotland. And that's caused considerable interest and they've come back to us and asked for more. ... on the entire self-evaluation system in Scotland. ... So how, you know, how inspection fits with evaluation. Some of these countries have inspectorates, some don't. So they're always interested in that relationship. (CP5S)

Other Scottish policy actors were keen to express the unique contribution of Scotland to other European nations, often in juxtaposition to their English counterparts. Indeed, one could evidence an almost anxiety to distinguish Scottish policies from those in England:

I actually spoke recently at an event outside Rome. It was the Italian group ... And the subject was very much self-evaluation and I gave a presentation and talked about the Scottish context. ... 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 ¹/₂ how youngsters will perform when they are x, y and z. (CP6S)

Finally, apart from the informal contacts and exchanges, what emerged through the ESSE project was evidence of more formalised, contractual 'consultancy' work, through which Scotland has been spreading the 'self-evaluation' word around in Europe:

That was much more people, individual countries within that group [ESSE] being aware that Scotland was doing something they found quite interesting and productive and constructive. And they came to us and were interested. And therefore we've had this dialogue. (CP5S)

There is a lot of ... a lot of European links. And, for instance, and the visits to Scotland and the relationship will be of a number of different kinds. Some will be straightforward. A contract between us and, say, Malta and the Czech Republic to provide various services which involves staff development training. (CP6S)

To conclude, what we see, first, is the substantial influence and direction of a series of key policy actors from Scotland in the work of SICI since 1997; secondly, the levels of interest and the numbers of exchanges of best practice in relation to self-evaluation between Scotland and other European countries have been numerous and are continuing. The influence is not one-way; rather, Scotland, through the idea of self-evaluation, is to be seen as more open to European ideas and challenges than England. Despite all the contradictions and resistance experienced at the domestic front, the 'smart, successful' Scotland, with its distinctive education system, appears active in exporting ideas abroad.

Conclusion

A number of points can be made about the system of QAE in Scotland. Firstly, it is a resource for policy-makers in relation to their ability to point to distinctive Scottish practices and differences from a powerful neighbour – this need to mark off Scotland may gain in importance following the election of a nationalist government in May 2007. Of course, this is not to deny the importance of the self-evaluation model as a reflection of a distinctive ethos and idea – this is without doubt the view of the Inspectorate, and one that they promote within and beyond Scotland. At the same time, it is interesting to note that attempts to steer the system through self-evaluation have been hindered by both the rather heavy hand of managerialism and the historic expectation of strong central influence, that undercuts a lot of the discourse of a 'bottom-up' approach. This, in turn, creates a governance problem – the governance 'turn' is not unproblematic and is inserted into existing relations of ruling (Kohler-Koch and Eising 1999; Kooiman 1993). Thus, the harnessing of energies and commitment of the profession is inhibited by the perceived gap between policy rhetoric and its delivery and effects on professional practice. It will be interesting to explore the ways in which this dilemma is addressed.

Second, we can see that within the European education policy space, as in the wider arena and the emergent global education policy field there is considerable

sharing of ideas and approaches (Alexiadou and Jones 2001; Ozga and Lingard 2007; Taylor et al. 1997). A policy such as self-evaluation, developed in a small nation such as Scotland, can project a vision of the nation as distinctive and sophisticated abroad, that has benefits at home. In addition, the existence of key networks of expert policy brokers, such as SICI, enables the distribution of this approach far beyond the place of its original inception. Not only do they share a discourse of self-evaluation but also a set of common technologies, produced in national 'laboratory' and used elsewhere. In this way the European education space is being created; with travelling ideas, techniques and actors operating at the interface between the domestic and the international.

Notes

1. This article draws on research in progress on the ESRC-funded project 'Governing by Numbers: data and education governance in Scotland and England' RES--00-23-1385, which is part of the Eurocores 'Fabricating Quality in European Education' project of the European Science Foundation.
2. The 'Performance Indicators' used in the early versions of *HGIOS?* were renamed 'Quality Indicators' in revised versions in 2002 and 2007.
3. These were England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Austria, the Czech republic, Portugal, France, the French-speaking community of Belgium, Hesse, Saxony and Denmark – Denmark, although it does not have an inspection system, has a long tradition of quality assurance processes. Therefore, the focus in Denmark was on the role of the Danish national advisors.

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