

Re-Shaping the Policy Landscape in Scottish Education, 2016-20: The Limitations of Structural Reform

Walter Humes

University of Stirling

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the establishment and operation of a number of new bodies – variously called councils, boards, collaboratives, groups, forums and panels – concerned with the development of Scottish education. What were the intentions behind their creation during the period 2016-20? Do they amount to a significant reshaping of the policy community, making it more open and democratic, and representing a genuine re-distribution of power, or are they more concerned with public presentation and political positioning? The paper is based mainly, but not exclusively, on publicly available minutes and related papers produced by the various bodies. These allow for an analysis of their composition and remits, as well as an examination of the substantive issues they have considered. The discussion also takes account of earlier descriptions of the character of the policy community, as well as hopes that the creation of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 would lead to greater transparency and accountability in political decision-making. It is argued that, while the new bodies provide opportunities for some previously marginalised voices to be heard, they demonstrate the continuing potency of familiar forms of bureaucratic management and professional protectionism. The paper also indicates a number of areas where further research would deepen understanding of the politics of Scottish education.

KEYWORDS: *governance, policy community, networking, empowerment, structural reform, institutional culture*

INTRODUCTION

Policy is not made in the electoral arena or in the gladiatorial confrontations of Parliament, but in the netherworld of committees, civil servants, professions and interest groups. (Marsh & Rhodes, 1992: Abstract).

Since 2016 the governance structure of Scottish education has been subject to significant change, designed to support the reforming agenda of the National Improvement Framework (Scottish Government, 2016). This has involved the creation of a number of new bodies, with representatives from a wide range of stakeholders, some well-established, others relative newcomers. The present

paper seeks to give an overview of the new governance landscape and to consider what it means for the policy-making process. It begins with a brief description of the political context, followed by an account of earlier interpretations of policy making in Scottish education, which provide conceptual reference points for more recent developments. Thereafter, the sources and methodology of the paper are explained, prior to the major part of the study, which focuses on the aims, remits and membership of the new bodies. Finally, there is a critical discussion of the significance of the re-configured policy landscape, with a particular focus on the relative importance of structural, intellectual and cultural aspects of reform.

Those who seek to explain, or simply understand, the changing nature of governance in Scottish education face a particular challenge. The field is now so heavily populated with national organisations, professional bodies and interest groups, not to mention their sub-structures of committees, that the use of potentially confusing acronyms has become widespread (see Primrose, 2019). The normal practice is to give the full name of each organisation at first mention, with the acronym in brackets, and thereafter to use the short version. In the present paper, this pattern is followed for the most part, but sometimes the full name will be repeated in places where that is considered helpful to the reader.

THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

Education has been high on the policy agenda throughout the post-devolution period in Scotland, with all the main political parties agreeing that a successful educational system is an essential requirement if the nation is to fulfil its ambitions for the future. A source of concern, however, has been a growing body of evidence suggesting that, in a number of areas, levels of performance have been disappointing. Full consideration of this evidence is beyond the scope of this paper, but some of the key points should be mentioned briefly. The flagship policy of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), covering the age range 3-18, first set out in 2004 and formally introduced from 2010 onwards, has had a chequered history, with questions raised about its conceptual coherence, its communication to teachers, its excessive bureaucracy and its assessment arrangements (see, e.g., Gillies, 2006; Reeves, 2008; Priestley & Humes, 2010; Priestley & Biesta, 2013; Bryce, 2018). Furthermore, Scotland's record in successive studies of pupil performance in reading, mathematics and science, carried out under the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), has shown a disappointing downward trend compared with other countries (including other parts of the UK). A particular worry, given Scotland's reputation for equality of opportunity, has been the 'attainment gap' between pupils from 'advantaged' and 'disadvantaged' backgrounds (Sosu & Ellis, 2014; Sosu, 2018).

It is important to note that these concerns have taken place against an international background which shows that many countries are grappling with similar challenges and that certain common themes are evident in their responses. One is a stated desire to develop educational policies on the basis of evidence rather than ideology (see, e.g., Bridges *et al*, 2009; Lingard, 2013), in the belief that the study of education can be regarded as a 'scientific' discipline. A second theme is the conviction that well-funded school improvement programmes, with clear targets and robust systems of accountability, will achieve the desired

outcomes: one example is the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED506112>). And a third theme is the perception that reform of the curriculum will help to drive necessary changes and stimulate professional development within the teaching force (see Priestley *et al*, in press). What is clear from these responses, applied in different contexts, is that educational problems are highly complex in character and often resistant to the kind of rational planning models favoured by politicians and officials.

The Scottish Government has sought to address its particular problems in several ways. In 2015 the Scottish Attainment Challenge was launched and provided funding for pupils in areas of Scotland with the highest rates of deprivation. Coverage was extended and resources increased through the Pupil Equity Fund announced in 2017. A National Improvement Framework was published in 2016, subject to annual review, with the twin aims of raising achievement for all and addressing poverty-related disadvantage (McIlroy, 2018). An International Council of Education Advisers was appointed in 2016, producing an initial report in 2017 and a formal report with recommendations the following year (ICEA, 2018). In 2019 a 'refreshed' narrative, reinforcing the key messages of Curriculum for Excellence, was produced (<https://scotlandscurriculum.scot/>), following advice in a report from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2015). A commitment to an independent review of CfE was given in the same year, after a successful motion in the Scottish Parliament by opposition political parties.

These various developments indicate that the Scottish Government certainly cannot be accused of inactivity in seeking to address the challenges facing education. Central to its analysis has been a belief that effective leadership and good governance are key elements in any improvement strategy. Accordingly, in 2017 it brought forward proposals to reform existing governance structures, with the aim of reducing bureaucracy, devolving decision-making to schools and teachers, while encouraging 'collaboration' and 'partnership' (Scottish Government, 2017a). The role of individual local authorities was to be reduced and six Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) were to be created, designed to enable the sharing of expertise and 'best practice'. There was strong resistance to some of the proposals, led by the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE), the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES). Headteachers were concerned that they might find themselves with more responsibility but without a corresponding increase in real power. Local authorities argued that the proposals involved an attack on democracy, weakening the link between publicly elected bodies and the running of schools. It was also pointed out that there seemed to be a tension between the stated aim of devolving more decision-making to local levels and the enhanced position of Education Scotland, a centralised executive agency of government, whose remit includes the work of the Inspectorate and of the Scottish College for Educational Leadership.

The Scottish Government was forced to retreat on some of its proposals, abandoning a plan to introduce legislation and to replace the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) with an Education Workforce Council. But the RICs were put in place and a Headteachers' Charter drawn up (Scottish Government,

2019). What the episode revealed was a belief that structural reform would stimulate changes in professional practice which would lead to educational improvements. It also showed the capacity of some existing agencies (notably local authorities) to resist changes that they perceived as weakening their traditional role. Notably absent from both national government and local authority perspectives was the possibility that structural arrangements (whether existing or reformed) might not be the only, or the best, way of bringing about improved educational outcomes. It is against this background that an examination of the bodies considered below is relevant. First, however, it will be instructive to consider previous accounts of the policy-making process in Scottish education. These will serve as a reference point for more recent developments.

THE POLICY COMMUNITY IN SCOTTISH EDUCATION

In their magisterial study of policy making in Scottish education in the decades after the Second World War, McPherson and Raab (1988) offered this observation:

The making of Scottish educational policy has seen a striking continuity of relationships among a small group of educationists and officials. But there have also been changes in the size and composition of the group, in the nature and diversity of its beliefs, and in the interweaving of its governmental and non-governmental membership (p. 403).

The writers argued that the expansion of educational provision from the 1960s onwards, including the introduction of comprehensive education, the widening of access to certificate examinations and the related need for a revision of the curriculum, meant that the (then) Scottish Education Department (SED) could not administer the scale of changes required from within its own resources. SED officials and members of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) had to work in cooperation with experienced senior staff in schools, local authorities and colleges of education. The selection of these 'outsiders' was, however, carefully managed. McPherson and Raab suggested that, as well as having particular areas of expertise, those who were invited to join the enlarged policy community had to demonstrate qualities of 'deference' and 'trust'. In particular, they had to be respectful of the role and status of the Inspectorate, and to be willing to observe the bureaucratic conventions of discretion and confidentiality. Thus, although the system adapted to new circumstances, it did not amount to a redistribution of power. The newcomers were no doubt pleased to be invited to contribute to the reform and improvement of Scottish education, but were expected to conform to established ways of proceeding. McPherson and Raab (1988) concluded: 'The policy community was the community of individuals who mattered, and it was also the forum in which the interests of groups were represented, reconciled or rebuffed' (p. 433). Official accounts of this system claimed that it exemplified the principles of consultation, partnership and consensus, terms that were designed to give an assurance that democratic values were being observed. Critics argued that it created a self-serving leadership class who encouraged professional conformity and excluded alternative voices (see Humes, 1986).

By the end of the 20th century, the prospect of devolution provided an opportunity to reconsider how public policy in Scotland was initiated, developed and reviewed. When the operational principles for the Scottish Parliament were

being drawn up, a number of important values were asserted as essential characteristics:

[T]he Scottish Parliament should embody and reflect the sharing of power between the people of Scotland, the legislators and the Scottish Executive; the Scottish Executive should be accountable to the Scottish Parliament and the Parliament and Executive should be accountable to the people of Scotland; the Scottish Parliament should be accessible, open, responsive and develop procedures which make possible a participative approach to the development, consideration and scrutiny of policy and legislation (Scottish Office, 1998, p. 3).

The evidence on the extent of change post-devolution is mixed. Humes (2008, pp. 72-75) detected some signs of 'early promise' (evident in the national debate on Scottish education launched in 2002 and in the role of parliamentary committees), but also 'later retreat' to pre-devolution practices (evident in the absence of consultation in relation to Curriculum for Excellence).

Writing in 2015, Murphy and Raffe asserted that the policy community described by McPherson and Raab had 'changed little since the 1960s' (Murphy and Raffe, 2015: 146). They stated that the community's 'inner circle consists of senior inspectors and civil servants, senior office bearers in local councils, teachers' unions (particularly the EIS [Educational Institute of Scotland]), and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES)' (ibid: 146). They further claimed that this key group met frequently in formal and informal settings (sometimes wearing different hats) and that meetings were often 'preceded by phone calls, informal chats, and other back-door soundings' (ibid: 146). Another way of describing such interactions would be say that social networking has been an important element in the operations of the Scottish policy community. Rhodes (2008: 426) states that 'Policy networks are sets of formal institutional and informal linkages between governmental and other actors structured around shared if endlessly negotiated beliefs and interests in public policy making and implementation'. The importance of such networks in Scottish education was recognised by Raab (1992) in the pre-devolution period and, more recently, by Cairney (2013).

A further insight into the operations of policy networks is provided by Beck's detailed study of the structures put in place to take forward the ideas contained in the Donaldson Report on teacher education (Scottish Government, 2010). A National Partnership (NPG) was established, with senior representatives from key institutions in Scottish education. Beck observes that 'On the surface, the development of a partnership model was regarded as evidence of the government's commitment to collaborative and democratic policy making' (Beck, 2016: ii). However, her analysis of the documentation of the NPG and its sub-groups, together with semi-structured interviews with a number of participants, leads her to conclude that other factors were at work: 'divergent institutional interests, unequal power relations, strategic institutional positioning and a conservative network culture that favoured the participation of some actors over others' (ibid). The 'representative' status of some NPG members led them to attach more weight to their institutional loyalties than to the merits of the ideas that were being considered. This bureaucratic defensiveness could be interpreted as a form of anti-intellectualism, an inclination to suppress any doubts about the educational approach that was being adopted in favour of maintaining an 'approved' policy position.

SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

Documentary analysis of minutes, plans and related papers produced by the various agencies under review forms the central part of this study. The use of minutes and other official documents can be justified on several grounds. They are an important source of information about the deliberations of the bodies concerned. Moreover, they can be seen as evidence of public accountability since they are (in most, but not all, cases) freely available on the internet. At the same time, official minutes need to be subject to critical scrutiny. They cannot be regarded as a complete and unbiased source of what happens in meetings, not only because it is impossible to capture fully the tone and atmosphere of exchanges, but also because a process of selection is involved in what is committed to the public record. Official minutes are usually subject to approval by the chair before they are released to the wider membership of the committee. In this sense, they are an example of 'narrative privilege', that is the ability of powerful players to present a positive account of their own deliberations and actions. That is not to allege that official minutes are routinely distorted or biased, but it is to suggest that the conventions of minute writing within government – which involve the use of a detached, impersonal style – may fail to represent some aspects of what happens and imply a greater degree of objectivity than is justified.

All methodologies involve choices. In the present study, an 'outsider' perspective was adopted to avoid being drawn into the 'assumptive worlds' of those under scrutiny (Humes, 1997). However, this was balanced by a small number of informal conversations (n=10) with people who have had varying degrees of involvement with the bodies under scrutiny. All those approached agreed to take part. Four of the conversations took place by telephone, the other six were face-to-face meetings. The contexts of the face-to-face meetings varied: two were in the institutions where the respondents worked, the others in informal settings. Some of the participants were senior people within well-established organisations, while others were relative newcomers, less experienced at contributing in policy arenas. The aim was to elicit a range of perspectives. The conversations were confidential exchanges, which guaranteed anonymity and gave assurance that no direct statements would be quoted. This arrangement was aimed at encouraging a greater degree of frankness than might have been the case if formal interviews leading to agreed transcripts had been undertaken. Some of those consulted occupy sensitive positions in Scottish education and might have felt constrained if they were liable to be named. This decision was reinforced by the present writer's views on the limitations of elite interviews using 'approved' protocols, which often produce rather bland accounts of institutional practices (Walford, 1994; Humes, 2010). The main focus, however, was not on individual members of the policy community but on what the new bodies reveal about the bureaucratic structures of Scottish education, the networks that sustain them and the cultural values they represent. Where reference is made to insights gained from the informal conversations, the sources will simply be referred to as respondents. Their contribution to the study is seen most clearly in the discussion section.

GOVERNANCE REFORM

This section offers an account of the main components of the new governance structure in Scottish education. Some have formal responsibilities for carrying out agreed policies and for reporting to government, while others (those listed under 'Other Bodies') are simply arenas for discussion and an opportunity for particular groups to communicate their views to policy makers.

Scottish Education Council

According to the Scottish Government, the Scottish Education Council (SEC), which held its first meeting in November 2017, 'is the key forum for oversight and improvement in education in Scotland, as defined by the National Improvement Framework' (<https://www.gov.scot/groups/scottish-education-council/>). It is expected to work collaboratively with other agencies 'to ensure that there is a system-wide focus on improvement'. The SEC is intended to be 'a forum for frank and open discussion' and its members are required to 'provide leadership and advice to Ministers'. Towards this end, the council brings together 'the main decision makers and key influencers' within Scottish education, 'with a strong focus on excellence and equity for all'. In developing its strategy, the council is expected to take into account the advice offered by other agencies, including the International Council of Education Advisers (ICEA), the Curriculum and Assessment Board (CAB) and the Strategic Board for Teacher Education (SBTE). The SEC is chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, currently John Swinney. The other full members consist of the Lead Officers of the six Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs), all of whom are senior officers in local authorities with responsibility for the provision of educational services; the Chief Executives of Education Scotland (ES), the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS); the President of the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES); the General Secretaries of School Leaders Scotland (SLS) and of the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS); two other local authority representatives (one a chief executive, the other a councillor and COSLA spokesperson); the Chair of the National Parent Forum of Scotland; and the Chair of the Scottish Council of Deans of Education. Also in attendance, are a variable number of civil servants and representatives of young people. The composition of the SEC is generally consistent with the conventional pattern of recruitment to the policy community. Members are appointed in a personal capacity, not as representatives of the organisations in which they are employed. As will be shown below, the distinction between 'personal' and 'representative' status became somewhat problematic.

This heavy weighting in favour of traditional players might be defended on the grounds that the SEC has a focus on the delivery of strategic objectives, aimed at ensuring the successful achievement of priorities and desired outcomes, as set out in the National Improvement Framework. Most of the members are well placed, at national or local level, to advance that agenda. Not to include them in such a significant body would, it can be argued, amount to wilful disregard of expertise. In any case, 'political' factors always come into play in such appointments, ensuring that the status of those who will be critical in effecting change, is recognised.

Early meetings did show a desire to bring cohesion to the various strands of education policy, through effective planning, good communication and clear lines of accountability. The Lead Officers of the RICS were expected to give regular updates on developments in their localities, with an emphasis on progress and impact. At the September 2018 meeting there was a presentation by members of the International Council of Educational Advisers (ICEA) to coincide with its first formal report. This made a number of recommendations about how to take the improvement agenda forward. The extent to which they have been acted upon is considered in the final section.

Over time, the tone of meetings seems to have become less focused and more aspirational. Well-intentioned statements about what ‘needs’ to be done and optimistic claims about ‘a positive direction of travel’ feature in several minutes. There was also a realisation that one of the Scottish Government’s major objectives – reducing the poverty-related attainment gap – was not something that could be achieved solely by a brisk managerial style: ‘tackling poverty requires long-term strategies’ (SEC Minutes: May 2019). Gradually, apologies for non-attendance by members increased, though the presence of civil servants and young people remained high. A stance taken by the RIC Lead Officers (not reported in the minutes, but confirmed by respondents) may explain the reduced engagement. At the start, RIC leads were expected to attend pre-meetings with Scottish Government officials, apparently in an attempt to ensure that the formal meeting proceeded smoothly without embarrassing issues surfacing unexpectedly. Some of the RIC leads felt that they were being steered away from ‘frank and open discussion’ towards an approved government line. They decided to withdraw from the pre-meetings, causing a degree of turbulence in the management of consent.

A key question about the effectiveness of the SEC concerns its relationship to the two bodies which sit below it. These deal with specific aspects of policy, curriculum and teacher education, which are intended to inform the broader strategic role of the SEC. What can be learned from the deliberations of these bodies?

Curriculum and Assessment Board

The Curriculum and Assessment Board (CAB) was established in 2017 ‘to improve curriculum and assessment policy in Scotland’ (<https://www.gov.scot/groups/curriculum-and-assessment-board/>). It replaced an earlier body, the Curriculum for Excellence Management Board, and was conceived as a forum for discussion about ‘what is working in the curriculum and where improvement is required’ and as a source of ‘advice and guidance to Scottish Ministers’.

CAB is a representative body in the sense that, unlike the SEC, its membership consists of spokespersons for a range of organisations within Scottish education. Most of these organisations are well-established features of the policy landscape with a strong record of involvement in policy discussions: Education Scotland; SQA; COSLA; ADES; SLS; EIS. The newly formed Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) are represented, as are a number of stakeholder bodies promoting particular interests, including the National Parent Forum of Scotland, the Scottish Council of Independent Schools and Early Years Scotland. Two

academics, who have written extensively about curriculum and assessment, are also members.

The first meeting of CAB took place in December, 2017, with quarterly meetings thereafter. Until 2019 Gayle Gorman, Chief Executive of Education Scotland and Fiona Robertson, Director of Learning in the Scottish Government, acted as co-chairs. In 2019 Fiona Robertson was appointed Chief Executive of the Scottish Qualifications Authority and ceased to be a co-chair. Her place was taken by Graeme Logan, the new Director of Learning at the Scottish Government. Meetings have been held in various venues in different parts of Scotland – e.g., primary and secondary schools, a further education college and a science centre. Agendas are normally constructed round discussion papers produced by either Education Scotland or the Scottish Government, with invitees from these organisations brought in to speak to particular items. Unsurprisingly, there has been a strong focus on curriculum and assessment, including updating the narrative of CfE and issues arising from concerns about National 4 and 5 qualifications. There has also been an explicit commitment to listening to the voices of young people at CAB meetings. At the second meeting, it was stated that ‘The Board should ensure that it not only listens to young people but also acts on their views’ (CAB Minutes, March, 2018). Later that year the Scottish Learner Panel was established (see under *Other Bodies* below).

The growing complexity of Scottish educational governance was recognised at the January 2019 meeting of CAB. In a discussion of the proposed work plan for the board, it was suggested that there was a need ‘to revisit the structure of education governance in Scotland, including how the Scottish Education Council and the Strategic Board for Teacher Education best interact with the CAB’ (CAB Minutes: January, 2019). The fact that a few senior people serve on more than one body (and that there is a strong civil service presence on all of them) should ease communication but, as will be seen, this issue has not been satisfactorily resolved.

The minutes show that CAB is action-oriented: one of its first tasks was to produce a ‘work plan’ and progress on decisions is monitored at subsequent meetings. The framework for its discussions and activities is, however, very much determined by current policy priorities. This is not surprising since the board is accountable to Scottish Ministers. In other words, the scope for the formulation and development of new ideas is constrained, partly by the inclination of most of CAB’s members to stick to their ‘representative’ status, defending existing territorial interests rather than taking a broader view of the system as a whole.

Strategic Board for Teacher Education

The Strategic Board for Teacher Education (SBTE) pre-dated the formation of the SEC, holding its first meeting in January 2016, but as the governance reforms were put in place, its position was defined as reporting to the SEC on all matters relating to teacher education. It was originally established to take forward the recommendations of the Donaldson report, *Teaching Scotland’s Future* (Scottish Government, 2010) and to act ‘as a centre-point for national discussion related to the standards in teaching and teacher education’ (<https://www.gov.scot/groups/strategic-board-for-teacher-education/>). Its remit

includes working in partnership with other agencies involved in teacher education (notably universities and local authorities), contributing to workforce planning to ensure an adequate supply of teachers, and promoting high-quality professional learning at all stages of a teacher's career, from initial qualification to training for headship. Short-life working groups have been set up to look at specific issues, such as the early phase career of newly registered teachers and encouraging greater diversity among the teaching workforce. Until May, 2019 the agenda and supporting papers relating the work of the SBTE were not publicly available on the Scottish Government website – only the minutes of meetings. One respondent suggested that early meetings were characterised by civil service concerns about confidentiality and that the change of policy on the release of papers was prompted by a growing number of Freedom of Information Requests.

SBTE meetings are chaired by a senior Scottish Government official and there is a strong representation of Scottish Government staff at all meetings. The membership includes representatives of the General Teaching Council for Scotland, Education Scotland, the Scottish Council of Deans of Education, the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, the Regional Improvement Collaboratives, and teachers' and head teachers' organisations (such as the EIS and SLS). Membership has been extended since 2016 to include representatives of Gaelic and Black and Minority Ethnic interests, as well as a current ITE student. Initial meetings were held in Scottish Government buildings but more recent meetings have been hosted in the premises of other organisations. The move towards rotating the venues of meetings brings the SBTE into line with the practice of SEC and CAB. This can be seen as a gesture intended to convey a message of openness and inclusiveness.

The dominant voices – as reflected in the minutes – are those of the Scottish Government, its executive agency, Education Scotland, and the independent professional body, the GTCS. Representatives of teachers' organisations certainly contribute, but they are more likely to be reactive rather than initiating. There is another aspect of dominance evident in the deliberations of SBTE – the recurring discourse employed by members. Among the terms that are invoked most frequently are professionalism, partnership and collaboration. Professionalism is treated as an unproblematic concept, with no recognition that there may be a tension between public service and ethical standards on the one hand, and territorial self-interest and a concern for enhanced status on the other (see Macdonald, 1994; Freidson, 2001). The appeal to partnership and collaboration is more straightforward: it involves acknowledging that an effective system of teacher education requires the combined efforts of central and local government, GTCS, the new RICs, and the senior management of individual schools. This last group is crucial in relation to the induction and mentoring of new teachers, as well as the arrangements for the placement of students in training. That perhaps explains why there is also a recurring motif relating to leadership and empowerment in the deliberations of SBTE. There is a recognition that the difficulty of recruiting applicants for some head teacher vacancies may be that the post has been seen as involving great responsibility but limited power. The hope is that the setting up of the RICs and the publication of the Headteachers' Charter may help to bring about change. The concept of empowerment is also seen to apply more generally

to all teachers. The minutes refer to the need to create ‘an empowering culture’ (SBTE Minutes: May, 2018) and ‘a system wide culture of teacher agency’ (SBTE Minutes: May, 2019). A question to be considered in the discussion section below is whether the new structures that have been created are likely to effect the cultural changes that are deemed desirable.

Regional Improvement Collaboratives

The formation of six Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) has been an important part of the Scottish Government’s drive to improve educational performance and, in particular, to close the poverty-related attainment gap between children from poor and affluent areas. Instead of 32 local authorities working autonomously, they are now required to collaborate, sharing expertise and examples of good practice, involving headteachers and schools in the development of plans tailored to their local circumstances, drawing on support from Education Scotland and making use of quantitative data and research evidence to inform decisions. The six RICs and the local authorities which they include are:

- Forth Valley and West Lothian Collaborative (Clackmannanshire, Falkirk, Stirling, West Lothian)
- Northern Alliance (Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Argyll and Bute, Western Isles, Highland, Moray, Orkney, Shetland)
- South East Improvement Collaborative (Edinburgh City, East Lothian, Fife, Midlothian, Scottish Borders)
- South West Collaborative (Dumfries and Galloway, East Ayrshire, North Ayrshire, South Ayrshire)
- Tayside Regional Improvement Collaborative (Angus, Dundee City, Perth and Kinross)
- West Partnership (East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Glasgow City, Inverclyde, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire, West Dunbartonshire)

RICs deserve much fuller analysis than can be attempted in this paper but some preliminary observations can be offered (see also <https://spice-spotlight.scot/2020/01/06/rics/>). They are partly a response to some of the criticisms contained in the 2015 OECD review of Scottish education. This called for

a strengthened ‘middle’ operating through networks and collaboratives among schools, and in and across local authorities. As the local authorities are integral to such a development, there needs to be complementary action to address the gaps between the high- and low- performing authorities (OECD, 2015: 10-11).

The report also called for less emphasis on system-wide leadership and more on ‘professional leadership focused directly on the nature of teaching, learning and the curriculum in schools’ (ibid: 21).

Setting up the RICs was a politically sensitive operation, partly because it was seen by some local politicians as trespassing on their territory and traditional statutory powers. The Scottish Government was, however, determined to press ahead and a Joint Strategic Group with representatives from central and local government reached agreement on the arrangements in late 2017 (COSLA, 2017).

The precise status of RICs did not fit easily into existing structures: were they to be regarded as ‘entities’ or as ‘virtual’ bodies? Sensitivities were also evident in relation to the time scale set by the Scottish Government for the production of improvement plans by each RIC, not least because no additional funding was made available in the first phase of the project. Despite these problems, all RICs kept to the proposed time scale, agreeing initial plans early in 2018, developed plans in September 2018, and updated plans covering the period 2019-22 in 2019. These can be accessed on the internet, with links contained in an interim review published in November 2018 (Scottish Government, 2018).

Although intended to grant more freedom to schools and communities, activities (or ‘workstreams’) undertaken by RICs are expected to be consistent with regional and national priorities. The most common aims set out in their improvement plans reflect this: raising standards of literacy and numeracy; closing the attainment gap; improving health and wellbeing; ensuring that more school leavers go on to positive destinations. Education Scotland has appointed Regional Advisers for every RIC and the extent of ‘school empowerment’ will be subject to assessment by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate (part of Education Scotland). There is thus the potential for tension between centralised control (perhaps presented as ‘advice’) and any local impulse to strike out in a markedly different direction. This was acknowledged in a statement in the interim report reviewing the first phase of the programme:

Most regional stakeholders thought that the approach by Scottish Government felt top-down, which was hard to reconcile with the local, bottom-up approach required for RICs (Scottish Government, 2018: iii).

Concerns were also expressed about the tone and language of communications from central government, with a perception that some civil servants had very fixed views about what was expected. One respondent to the review feared that RICs might turn out to be simply ‘another layer of bureaucracy’ when they should represent ‘a creative space, an experiment . . . a test bed for innovation’ (ibid: 36).

This last comment is borne out, to some extent, in the most recent set of improvement plans produced by the RICs. While they indicate that a great deal of work has been going on at local levels, some of it providing clear evidence of the commitment and enthusiasm of many professionals, they also show a familiar preoccupation with issues of structure and governance. The default position of Scottish education tends to be more concerned about hierarchies of power and lines of accountability than about the quality of ideas being promoted. It is too early to assess the impact of RICs in terms of school improvement. They will certainly be under pressure from politicians and senior staff within Education Scotland to provide evidence that their creation has been worthwhile.

Research: National Advisory Group and Academic Reference Group

The deliberations of the bodies described in previous sections often include reference to the importance of data and evidence on which to base educational strategies, and the phrase ‘evidence-informed policy’ is now widely invoked by politicians seeking to justify their decisions, not only in education but in many other fields (see Cairney, 2016). In 2017, *A Research Strategy for Scottish Education* was published (Scottish Government, 2017b). This had been preceded by criticism

from a number of sources that politicians and officials were reluctant to commission an independent evaluation of Curriculum for Excellence and were generally hostile to the research community, whose findings could sometimes be a source of embarrassment. Both pre- and post-devolution relations between politicians and researchers were often strained (see McPherson, 1984; Humes, 2007, 2013, 2019). The research strategy document was presented as a new beginning, an opportunity to support the National Improvement Framework through better training opportunities for researchers, effective commissioning and dissemination of evidence of 'what works', and enhancing understanding of the use of data among teachers. The phrase 'what works' suggested a rather narrow view of the nature and purpose of research, one that has been critiqued by Biesta (2010) and Colucci-Gray and Darling-McQuistan (2018). Nevertheless, the publication of the research strategy seemed to mark a welcome change of attitude.

Implementing the strategy has involved setting up two groups – a National Advisory Group (NAG) and an Academic Reference Group (ARG). The former is charged with developing the research strategy, while the latter has a subordinate role which allows members to comment on progress and make suggestions for future research. When it was first proposed, this arrangement was criticised by, among others, the Scottish Council of Deans of Education, on the grounds that the original membership of the NAG contained very few academic researchers and was dominated by representatives from Scottish Government, Education Scotland, SQA, ADES and GTCS. A submission from the Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE, 2017: para. 7) argued that 'while these organisations will undoubtedly have an interest in research output, to date they have not had an extensive track record in carrying out independent education research'. It recommended that there should be 'a single overarching group' containing both administrators and researchers. This suggestion was rejected by the Scottish Government, although one or two additional researchers were subsequently included in the NAG.

Informal reports about the work of NAG suggest some useful discussions but a tendency to take a rather narrow instrumental view of research, with a preference for quantitative, statistical studies over those which might open up critical, contested territory. Research is expected to provide hard data and contain the potential to have a measurable impact. Educational studies which seek to address wider philosophical or sociological questions tend to be viewed with scepticism. With regard to the ARG, its meetings are led by members of the research team within the Learning Analysis Unit of the Scottish Government. Many of these are recent appointments and operate at a relatively low level within the civil service. This reinforces the impression that there is a degree of tokenism in the setting up of the ARG, which has no real power to shape the direction of research policy. Its views have to be 'considered' by the NAG but it clearly has no real power. This confirms the impression that, in Scottish education, political and bureaucratic values tend to carry more weight than intellectual analysis. Minutes of the two groups are not publicly available, but an aspirational document setting out 'Detailed Proposals' can be accessed on the internet (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/research-strategy-scottish-education/pages/2/>).

Other Bodies (Education Leaders' Forum; Teacher Panel; Learner Panel)

This section gives a brief description of three other bodies which have been added to the educational landscape, providing further arenas in which educational policies can be explained and debated. They have no formal powers but are intended to be a means of strengthening lines of communication between policy makers and stakeholders, allowing the latter to raise concerns and put forward proposals for consideration.

The Education Leaders' Forum (ELF) brings together representatives from across the education system to discuss current issues and share experiences. The terms of reference indicate a desire to:

- Develop a sense of common purpose and promote partnership working
- Improve understanding of the education strategic agenda
- Improve Scottish Government engagement with stakeholders
- Be a source of guidance and advice to Ministers (<https://www.gov.scot/groups/education-leaders-forum/>)

ELF also aims to strengthen networks across the education system and, towards this end, there are connections (through some common membership and shared documentation) to the SEC, CAB and SBTE. The potential attendance at any ELF meeting is huge, given that some 70 organisations and groups were listed as invitees when the formation of the forum was announced. This has led a few of the more established members of the policy community to question the value of the forum and some have ceased to attend.

Only two sets of minutes (and supporting papers) for the ELF were available at the time of writing. These cover meetings in 2018 and do not give a full list of those present. The meetings took place in schools, were chaired by the Deputy First Minister and involved contributions by school staff and pupils, as well as local authority personnel. The format was a mixture of workshop presentations, small group discussions and plenary sessions. The minutes for October 2018 indicate that among the issues raised were revised governance proposals and the review of the National Improvement Framework. In relation to the former, the Deputy First Minister made the case for an 'empowered', 'collaborative' system, giving more powers to schools through the Headteachers' Charter (Scottish Government, 2019). The minutes, presumably reflecting discussion, noted that 'Genuine headteacher empowerment would require real cultural change' (ELF Minutes, October 2018, p. 2). The relation between structural and cultural change will be re-visited in the discussion section below.

Teacher Panel

Between August 2016 and June 2019 thirteen meetings of the Teacher Panel (TP) took place (<https://www.gov.scot/groups/teacher-panel/>). The panel is seen as part of the Scottish Government's Education Delivery Plan (Scottish Government, 2016). Growing concerns among teachers about workload, resources, staffing and bureaucracy were perceived as an impediment to the aims of raising standards of achievement and reducing the poverty-related attainment gap. The panel can, therefore, be seen as an attempt to listen to the voices of teachers and to ensure their cooperation in promoting both excellence and equity. The remit of the panel

is 'to provide advice to the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills on whether proposed actions intended to reduce teacher workload are likely to prove practicable and successful' (TP Minute: August 2016).

Members of the panel were appointed as individuals in their own right, not as representatives of schools, local authorities or teachers' organisations. How were they chosen? They were 'nominated by Education Scotland or by the Scottish College for Educational Leadership'. This arrangement was consistent with pre-devolution forms of patronage managed by the inspectorate in appointments to national bodies. There is no reason to doubt that the first 18 people appointed to serve on the Teacher Panel were not experienced and capable members of the teaching profession. They came from different parts of Scotland, included primary and secondary teachers, men and women, of varying levels of seniority. But their invitation may also have been influenced by some judgement of whether they would cooperate in the usual socialisation process designed to ensure that they would play by the unstated rules of the game.

The issue of recruitment was revisited in a paper presented at the March 2019 meeting of the TP. It explained that some six of the original 18 members had dropped out for various reasons and that it was necessary to recruit newcomers. There was a desire to increase representation from unpromoted teachers and from the primary sector. It was also considered important to ensure that there was fair geographical representation from the new Regional Improvement Collaboratives. Towards this end, Education Scotland's Executive Team 'had used their professional knowledge and networks to identify seven individuals who would be appropriate for Teacher Panel membership' (TP minutes, Paper 12/03, March, 2019). The precise interpretation of 'appropriate' is left to the reader.

The topics covered in Teacher Panel meetings have been varied, including assessment and qualifications, staffing, provision for children with additional support needs, broad general education, evidence-based pedagogy, leadership and governance, initial teacher education, and parental engagement. The meetings have been structured around papers produced by Scottish Government officials. This will certainly have given panel members a useful insight into government priorities, but it can also be seen as a way of managing the discussion. The impression of control from the centre was reinforced at the meeting of March 2018 attended by the newly appointed Chief Inspector of Education and the Deputy Director of the Scottish Government's Learning Directorate. Just occasionally, hints of dissent can be detected, for example in relation to the SQA's handling of examination changes. But the general tone of TP minutes is consensual. The minute of September, 2017, for instance, makes repeated use of phrases such as 'It was agreed that' and 'The panel agreed that'. At no stage is there evidence of serious disquiet about the general direction of the government's education strategy. Indeed, calls by panel members for more positive messages about the achievements of Scottish education are to be found in several minutes.

Learner Panel

2018 was designated the Year of Young People and the Learner Panel LP) can be seen as one expression of official commitment to listen to their voices. The project was commissioned by the Scottish Government in October 2018 but four

organisations representing the interests of young people were jointly responsible for the form it took: Children in Scotland; the Scottish Youth Parliament; Young Scot; and the Children's Parliament. Some 45 youngsters from across Scotland, aged from 3 to 18 took part in a series of five workshops between October 2018 and February 2019. Care was taken to ensure balance in terms of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background and additional support needs. A report describing and evaluating the programme was published in 2019 ([https://syp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/YS_Scottish-Learner-Panel-Report- Designed.pdf](https://syp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/YS_Scottish-Learner-Panel-Report-Designed.pdf)). This states that 'The aim was to develop and pilot a model to shape school-level, local and national education policies, highlighting the key issues, challenges and opportunities in Scottish education'.

Senior officials from a number of organisations, including Education Scotland, SQA and GTCS, attended panel meetings and the LP report sought to raise 'thinking points' for 'policy-makers, strategic leaders and Scottish Ministers'. Among the 'thinking points' were a call to 'Give learners a role in decision-making', mixed views on the value of pupil councils, support for more outdoor and individualised learning, the importance of good relationships with teachers, and the complexity of subject choice and learner pathways in the secondary school. Issues relating to mental health (including online abuse) and the need to address global warming also featured (a series of strikes by school pupils highlighting climate change took place in 2019). It was acknowledged that it was 'too early to reflect on the ultimate impact of the Panel's work' but there were some identifiable outcomes. The report was 'shared with Scottish Government civil service policy teams'. Two members of the panel attended a meeting of the Curriculum and Assessment Board and a 'Meet the Scottish Learner Panel' session, involving some 40 young people, took place at the 2019 Scottish Learning Festival.

DISCUSSION

The creation of a number of new arenas in Scottish education, in which a range of stakeholders can contribute to discussions about the direction of policy, may seem to suggest a shift from the centrally directed approaches of the past to a more open and collaborative style. Moreover, the inclusion of voices that have traditionally been under-represented in the councils of state – parents, students and classroom teachers – perhaps indicates a realisation on the part of government that public expectations of democratic processes have increased significantly. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, John Swinney, has been very visible in promoting the new governance structures and has seen them as a means of strengthening links with schools, teachers and learners.

But the changes that have been introduced have been managed in ways that have not significantly weakened the position of the players identified by McPherson and Raab (1988) as the key figures in the pre-devolution policy community (civil servants, inspectors, directors of education, senior officials in national bodies). They continue to outnumber the newcomers in the organisations that have been considered in this paper and their scope for networking using informal 'back channels' remains undiminished. It is also noteworthy that there is a hierarchy among the new bodies, evident in their varied remits and their executive or advisory

functions. Agendas are carefully controlled by government officials, and this has occasionally caused a degree of resentment.

Although the policy community as a whole has been expanded and diversified, there are major differences in the power and influence exercised by different players. There is a case for drawing a distinction between the 'inner' policy community (senior figures in Education Scotland, SQA, GTCS, ADES, SLS, EIS) and the 'wider' policy community (the smaller teachers' organisations, parental voices, some academics, teacher and learner panels, interest and pressure groups of various kinds). Members of the former are well networked and are able to gain access to senior government officials. Members of the latter are more fragmented and perhaps less skilled at negotiating in the corridors of power. Their inclusion in a number of the bodies referred to above will, however, give them an opportunity to improve their knowledge of the policy process.

What about the relative effectiveness of the new bodies? Among respondents, there was a clear view that the Scottish Education Council was not fulfilling the strategic role that had been envisaged. It was seen as a showcase rather than a source of innovative thinking. Several explanations were offered. Some saw the body as designed to promote a pre-existing government agenda, with the RICs expected to drive that agenda forward. But some of the RIC leads on the council were not comfortable with that expectation. They felt that, if regional perspectives were to be taken seriously, they needed to be allowed to develop bespoke responses to local circumstances. There was some resentment of the role of regional advisers appointed by Education Scotland, ostensibly to 'support' local efforts but sometimes perceived as having a more directive function. Moreover, as shown above, after a while those heading the RICs withdrew from the pre-meetings with civil servants, which they saw as an attempt to control discussion at the formal meetings. Their request that meeting agendas should be co-constructed rather than be framed mainly around papers drafted by Scottish Government and Education Scotland officials was resisted.

The relation between SEC and CAB and SBTE was also seen as problematic. SEC was meant to act as an overarching body, feeding policy advice to government, informed by the more detailed recommendations coming from CAB and SBTE on curriculum and teacher education respectively. But communication between the three groups seems to have been poor, despite some overlapping membership. It is true that papers were exchanged between them but the minutes show clearly that these were simply noted, not discussed. Both CAB and SBTE can, however, point to some achievements. The 'refreshed' CfE narrative was drafted by a sub-group of CAB, and SBTE can claim to have highlighted the importance of diversity within the teaching profession. Even so, respondents remained sceptical about whether the bodies were as effective as they might be. Part of the problem was perceived as an unwillingness by members to step aside from their 'representative' status to engage in a less constrained discussion of new possibilities. In other words, territorial defensiveness was a more powerful motivation than open-minded intellectual exploration. For the latter to occur, there would have to be greater willingness to engage with (not just pay lip service to) the perspectives of teachers, which are increasingly informed by various forms of practitioner enquiry, and the insights of academic researchers who can help to

strengthen the conceptual basis of policies. Galey-Horn *et al.* (2020) employ the term 'idea brokerage' to describe meaningful intellectual encounters between a range of stakeholders in education. At present in Scotland, there seems to be limited scope for this. The dominant ethos remains bureaucratic and managerial.

Several respondents commented on the heavy presence of Scottish Government officials at meetings. Some of these were senior civil servants with specific education remits, others part of a changing cast of bureaucrats whose precise function was sometimes unclear. Moreover, given that Education Scotland is an executive agency of government, subject to civil service rules, bureaucratic modes of thinking tended to prevail within the new governance bodies. The Scottish Government has put considerable faith in Education Scotland as the agency which can drive forward its reforming agenda. Some respondents questioned this, pointing out that it had an uneven history and that surveys of staff morale within the organisation had not been encouraging (<https://www.tes.com/news/staff-confidence-falls-inspection-and-curriculum-body>). It was felt that there was a real tension between its national scrutiny role and its stated ambition to 'empower' staff in schools. One respondent favoured separating off the inspectorate within Education Scotland (now called the Directorate of Scrutiny, a somewhat sinister Orwellian term) and breaking up the rest of the organisation into regional units. This is unlikely to happen, certainly in the short term, but it does indicate that ES has some way to go to inspire general confidence.

There is considerable scope for further research in these areas. The RICs, in particular, invite careful monitoring as they evolve. The emphasis on collaboration and partnership, and the co-existence of other initiatives (such as the appointment of Attainment Advisers for all 32 local authorities) may make it difficult to attribute any improvements specifically to RIC activities. This indicates the need for genuinely independent evaluation, as distinct from self-reporting. But, as the arrangements that were put in place to support the research strategy have shown, the government has been disinclined to allow too much scope to the academic community to investigate the results of its policies. University representation on some of the new bodies (notably the SBTE) has certainly improved, but one respondent reported that traditional members of the policy community were inclined to treat academic perspectives with indifference and, occasionally, hostility.

The RICs are worthy of attention for other reasons. They have the potential to bring about improvements but they have also been an interesting source of disturbance within the system as a whole. As noted above, initial reactions to their establishment, particularly from local authorities, were decidedly cool. Although they now receive funding from central government, they are not formal 'entities' with statutory powers. They rely on collaboration and partnership between staff in different local authorities. Informal reports suggest that within some RICs there has been a degree of tension, while in others joint working seems to be proceeding well. There have been some changes of leadership, a development which carries the risk of lack of continuity and loss of focus. Those heading the RICs remain local authority employees, which raises the question, 'To whom do they owe

their principal loyalty? – the bodies that pay their salaries or the Scottish Government seeking to promote a national agenda?

Another area inviting research investigation is the significance of personnel movements between the main agencies, especially between the Scottish Government, Education Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority and the General Teaching Council for Scotland. The staff involved are all able and experienced people but the pattern shows that, at the very top, the Scottish policy community in education is a relatively small world in which familiar faces move easily between key organisations. While this may have certain advantages, in terms of ensuring that senior figures understand how different parts of the system work, it may also make it difficult to conceive of alternatives to established practices and lead to a degree of complacent insularity. A detailed mapping exercise tracing the movement of staff between different agencies, and the ways in which this might enable, or constrain, policy thinking would be useful.

Underlying many of the changes has been a belief that structural reform is an effective mechanism in bringing about significant change. There are several grounds for questioning this belief. The new bodies have expanded and complicated the policy landscape to the point that it has become challenging to navigate a way round the system. But the bureaucratic conventions that have always characterised exchanges in the councils of state remain largely unaltered, giving an advantage to insiders skilled in networking. The use of government patronage ensures that dissident perspectives rarely disturb the process. Constructive ‘collaboration’ is the preferred way of reaching agreement. There is no awareness of the dangers of ‘groupthink’, whereby powerful players set and control the agenda, promoting forms of discourse that effectively close off alternative policy options. This can create an unhealthy anti-intellectual climate in which bureaucratic values stifle creative thinking (Humes, 2018). An example of this tendency was evident when a draft of the ‘refreshed’ CfE narrative was being considered by the Curriculum and Assessment Board: one comment was that ‘the narrative is perhaps too conceptual’ (CAB Minutes: March, 2019). Considering that a criticism of the original CfE reform was that it was under-conceptualised (Priestley & Humes, 2010), this is a rather disturbing judgement.

Some of the cautionary notes in the ICEA report appear to have been given insufficient attention by the Scottish Government. In particular, what the report says about the importance of cultural, not just structural, change, merits attention. It is true that the importance of changing cultures has featured in some of the meetings of the Scottish Education Council (see, e.g., SEC Minutes: March 2018) but it has not moved beyond well-intentioned rhetoric. The ICEA report notes that significant structural changes have been put in place but expresses concern about the over-emphasis on ‘the technical terminology of delivery, reform and implementation’ (ICEA, 2018: para. 90). It recommends instead a focus on ‘capacity building and deep cultural change’ (ibid: para. 48). Capacity building involves mobilisation of the potential of educators at all levels of the system through improved opportunities for professional learning. This is likely to produce a more ‘egalitarian culture’ rather than a ‘hierarchical culture’ which relies heavily on ‘bureaucratic, managed organisations’ (ibid: para. 106). The setting up of Regional Improvement Collaboratives may help to stimulate such a shift but, as has been

noted, they are led by senior figures from the traditional policy community, which may limit both their capacity and their inclination to adopt new styles of working. The people leading the RICs all serve on the Scottish Education Council, the majority of whose members are drawn from the usual professional and institutional sources. From where, it might be asked, is the impetus for real cultural change to come? Is it reasonable to expect those who have had a long-standing vested interest in maintaining the status quo, suddenly to adopt new ways of proceeding, especially if it might involve a reduction in their power?

In seeking to address concerns about Scottish education, the Cabinet Secretary has faced a difficult dilemma. Changing cultures is not something that can simply be willed. It is a process that involves winning the hearts and minds of a wide range of people over an extended period. But, for politicians, time is a precious commodity. They want to see evidence of progress quickly, certainly before the next election, so that they can claim that their interventions have been at least partially successful. The announcement of regular initiatives, including structural changes, is an important part of this process. At a time when presentation is regarded as vitally important in public life, the temptation to do something that is visible and interventionist, must be considerable. This is what the American political theorist, Murray Edelman, has called 'policy as spectacle' (Edelman, 1988). Effecting substantive change may require a different strategy, one which is more disruptive of the traditional policy community than simply rearranging the features of the existing landscape. That could involve questioning the prevailing orthodoxies of professionalism; challenging the dominant bureaucratic discourses of the civil service and public bodies; looking to other sources of ideas (e.g. independent 'think tanks') from those who have had long-standing access to decision-makers; and making it harder for well-established networks to maintain their privileged position. The difficulty is that politicians tend to be in office for a relatively short time, while the bureaucrats and professionals enjoy relative security of tenure. The latter can afford to play a long game, paying lip service to the approved discourse (e.g. 'empowerment'), quietly resisting proposals that are perceived as a serious threat to their power base, and hoping for better times to come.

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WEBSITES

- Curriculum and Assessment Board <https://www.gov.scot/groups/curriculum-and-assessment-board/>
- Education Leaders Forum <https://www.gov.scot/groups/education-leaders-forum/>
- International Council of Education Advisers <https://www.gov.scot/groups/international-council-of-education-advisers/>
- Scottish Education Council <https://www.gov.scot/groups/scottish-education-council/>
- Strategic Board for Teacher Education <https://www.gov.scot/groups/strategic-board-for-teacher-education/>
- Teacher Panel <https://www.gov.scot/groups/teacher-panel/>