



University of Dundee

Education: The State of the Discipline

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Education

The State of the Discipline

A systematic scoping review of the literature on the structures & processes that influence research activities in the UK

SEPTEMBER 2021

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ABOUT BERA

The British Educational Research Association (BERA) is the leading authority on educational research in the UK, supporting and representing the community of scholars, practitioners and everyone engaged in and with educational research both nationally and internationally. BERA is a membership association and learned society committed to advancing research quality, building research capacity and fostering research engagement. We aim to inform the development of policy and practice by promoting the best quality evidence produced by educational research.

Our vision is for educational research to have a profound and positive influence on society. We support this by promoting and sustaining the work of educational researchers. Our membership, which is more than 2,500 strong, includes educational researchers, practitioners and doctoral students from the UK and around the globe.

Founded in 1974, BERA has since expanded into an internationally renowned association. We strive to be inclusive of the diversity of education research and scholarship, and welcome members from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds, theoretical orientations, methodological approaches, sectoral interests and institutional affiliations. We encourage the development of productive relationships with other associations within and beyond the UK.

We run a major international conference each year alongside a diverse and engaging series of events, and publish high quality research in our peer-reviewed journals, reports, book series and the groundbreaking BERA Blog. We recognise excellence through our awards and fellowships, provide grants for research, support the career development of our members, and nurture an active peer community organised around networks, forums and special interest groups.

BERA is a registered charity (no. 1150237) and is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales (company no. 08284220). We are governed by an elected council and managed by a small office team based in London.

EDUCATION: THE STATE OF THE DISCIPLINE

This project aims to provide a clear, comprehensive account of the state of education as an academic discipline in universities; as a field of practice; and as a significant and central element of social and political policy in the four nations of the UK.

Reports from each stage of the initiative will equip stakeholders in every part of the sector with the most objective and powerful information on which to base their advocacy for, and their efforts to grow the size, influence and impact of, education. It will also be key to informing decision-making processes within BERA.

Two elements are central to the initiative:

- the definition of education as an academic discipline that shares characteristics with many other disciplines, including those that have been established for much longer in universities worldwide
- the intersections between education and practice (including in teacher education and training), which in recent work has been articulated as 'close-to-practice-research'.

Contents

Summary	5
The search & results	5
Formal structures & Processes	5
Informal structures & processes	6
Recommendations	7
<hr/>	
1. Introduction	9
1.1 Overview & approach	9
1.2 Conceptualising education as a discipline	10
1.3 Defining structures & processes in the field of education research	11
1.4 Aims & objectives of the review	12
1.5 Structure of this report	12
<hr/>	
2. Methodology	13
2.1 Scoping & search term development	13
2.2 Searching for studies	14
2.3 Screening studies	14
2.4 Data extraction	15
2.5 Data analysis & synthesis	17
<hr/>	
3. Findings & discussion	18
3.1 What type, kind & quality of published research evidence is relevant to understanding the structures and processes that influence research activities in the UK?	18
3.2 What are the main themes in published research evidence relevant to understanding the structures & processes that influence education research activities in UK HEIs?	23
<hr/>	
4. Conclusions	37
4.1 Overall reflections of the types of research found & quality of the studies	37
4.2 Overall reflections on formal & informal structures & processes	37
4.3 Overall reflections on the narrative of education research, & change over time	39
4.4 Limitations	40
4.5 Recommendations	40
<hr/>	
Appendix: Articles included in the review	49

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Summary

The aim of this systematic scoping review is to understand the structures and processes that influence education research activities in the UK. It provides insights into the academic debates on education research in universities, and addresses the effects of neoliberal reform, marketisation and competition on higher education (HE) and the identities and experiences of academics.

We conducted a systematic scoping review that spanned three decades (1990–2020) and sought to understand the formal and informal structures and processes that influenced education research as a discipline in HE in the UK. This study – the first review of the literature on this topic at this scale – complements previous mapping activities commissioned by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (see Oancea, 2010; Whitty et al, 2012; Oancea & Mills, 2015). A separate, peer-reviewed article based on this research has also been published in *Review of Education* (Stentiford et al., 2021).

THE SEARCH & RESULTS

The research team searched six relevant databases and screened 4,186 published works. The report was ultimately informed by 114 standard peer-reviewed journal articles, 21 BERA presidential addresses (peer-reviewed by the editors of the *British Educational Research Journal*, in which these addresses were published) and one doctoral thesis.

Of the 114 articles, 62 per cent (n=71) were narrative papers and 38 per cent (n=43) were empirical. The empirical papers were mainly small-scale qualitative studies, such as interview-based studies with fewer than 40 participants. All studies focused on one or more of the nations of the UK, and/or on the UK as a whole: most focused on England, with a dearth of studies focusing on Northern Ireland (n=2), Scotland (n=13) and Wales (n=4). Only six papers included some sort of explicit comparative element (for example, comparing England and Scotland).

In our analysis of the selected papers we considered the structures and processes – both formal and informal – that influence education research activities in UK universities.

FORMAL STRUCTURES & PROCESSES

Six main themes emerged from the papers with regards to formal structures and processes.

Table A

The six identified themes that pertain to formal structures and processes, with brief definitions

Themes* related to formal structures/ processes	Definition (what this theme captures)
Cultures of performativity & accountability	The implications of the audit and competitive culture(s) in HE.
Research impact agenda	The effects of the impact agenda in HE, mainly as represented by RAE/REF.
Research funding regime	The impact of funding agendas and requirements for the content and type of education research
Debates about the quality & purpose of education research	A series of arguments and counterarguments within the academic community concerning the perceived quality of education research.
The 'what works' agenda	The perceived high value of structured approaches (often influenced by natural sciences) in education research.
Professional bodies	How professional bodies (e.g., BERA, SERA) are guiding/shaping the work of education researchers.

*Note: these are themes rather than mutually exclusive categories, so some overlap between them is to be expected.

HE cultures of performativity & accountability

Many texts discussed aspects of what was seen as an advancing agenda of performativity and accountability in HE and the discipline of education, reflected in a growth in audit cultures. This agenda includes:

- an increasing emphasis on ratings and rankings (such as national and international league tables)
- a culture of competition between universities, departments of education and individual researchers

- an increasing focus on impact
- pressures related to the national audit exercises such as the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and its successor, the Research Excellence Framework (REF).

The impact agenda

In a number of texts, the RAE and REF were understood as strongly driving behaviour in education departments. Some papers suggested that departments were learning how to ‘play the game’ and ‘reverse engineer’ in order to achieve the best individual or departmental results. It was noted that more prestigious universities were more likely to be able to mobilise the capitals necessary to engage in this game-playing. However, a small number of texts mentioned positive aspects of these developments, such as greater recognition for applied research that can lead to impact.

Research funding regime

In many cases, funders were perceived as powerful and as determining the content of research – projects put out to tender, for example. Funders and UK governments were also seen as increasingly championing evidence-based practice. It was perceived that these were factors in the gradual marginalisation of certain perspectives and methodologies, such as narrative research, arts-based research and ethnographies. One of the main concerns for education academics appeared to be the unwritten requirement to generate research income based on broader research agendas, at the expense of personal interests and ethics.

Debates about the quality & purpose of education research

Another structural tension related to a series of arguments and counterarguments within the academic community concerning the perceived quality of education research. These ‘heated debates’ emerged strongly in the mid-to-late 1990s and centred on the relationship between research, policy and practice. These debates might be understood as reflecting different perceptions of the purposes of education research.

The ‘what works’ agenda

A number of texts in the review critically examined issues of evidence-based practice and the ‘what works’ agenda – particularly the perceived high value placed on randomised controlled trials (RCTs) and the growing emphasis on systematic reviews. This trend was described as reflecting shifting government agendas, and can in turn be related to an understanding of the state as determining, producing and consuming research.

Professional bodies

Another formal structure emerging from the texts that was seen to be shaping the work of education researchers was the professional bodies, such as BERA and the Scottish Educational Research Association (SERA). There was also critical discussion of the wider professional and ethical frameworks and values that education researchers need to uphold in order to maintain trust and integrity in the profession (for example, the BERA ethical guidelines, 2018).

INFORMAL STRUCTURES & PROCESSES

We identified six main themes with regards to informal structures and processes.

Table B

The six identified themes that pertain to informal structures and processes, with definitions

Themes* related to informal structures/ processes	Definition (what this theme captures)
Academic pressures	The impact of pressurised HE environments on the working lives and wellbeing of academics.
Career stages (that is, early-, mid-, later-career academics)	The different conditions and experiences of academics at different career stages.
Second-career researchers	The experiences of second-career professionals who joined universities with minimal research experience or doctoral-level qualifications – a phenomenon that is relatively common within the discipline of education.
Non-traditional academics	Experiences of non-traditional academics, including working-class, disabled, LGBTQ+, women and BAME academics.
Departmental cultures	The effects of departmental cultures on research (including leadership infrastructure, mentorship and research time).
Affective issues	Affective issues experienced by education researchers (e.g. dealing with rejection and issues of confidence).

*Note: these are themes rather than mutually exclusive categories, so some overlap between them is to be expected.

Academic pressures

A large number of texts discussed the academic pressures and time demands that education academics reported as having an increasingly negative impact on their work lives and wellbeing. These pressures included the need to balance teaching alongside research and the stress of heavy workloads. Pressures also related to the need to produce a high quantity of high-quality publications.

Career stages

Particular concerns were raised in a number of texts around the heavy teaching loads given to early-career researchers (including second-career professionals such as former teachers; see below), who might therefore have less time to develop strong research profiles. Lack of job security often made these pressures particularly acute for those on temporary contracts.

Second-career researchers

Texts also focused on second-career professionals who joined universities with minimal research experience or doctoral-level qualifications – a phenomenon seen as relatively common within the discipline of education. It was noted that second-career professionals are often employed in universities that are teaching-led, and/or in which high teaching loads impact on staff's time for research and limit their opportunities to gain research training. Issues were also identified in relation to the integration of staff – who might come to the profession via very different entry routes – into a cohesive academic community.

Non-traditional academics

We found relatively few studies exploring the experiences and identities of women academics and working-class academics in education, and found only one paper that considered the experiences of academics from ethnic minority backgrounds. None of the studies included in our review investigated the experiences of disabled and/or LGBTQ+ staff.

Departmental cultures

Overall, academics' wellbeing and job satisfaction were seen to depend on departmental cultures. Good leadership was identified as important in a number of texts, especially where leaders acted as role models and provided a rich environment for research – that is, one that includes good infrastructure, mentorship, and the assignation of research time in academics' workload.

Affective issues

A small number of texts discussed the difficulties that education academics can encounter in dealing with personal criticisms from other academics, including when sending out papers and research proposals for peer review, or when research is published and enters the public domain. In these texts, academics were discussed as having an emotional and personal investment in their approaches and ideas, with criticisms therefore keenly felt.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Our review of the literature indicated a distinct lack of robust, large-scale studies probing the structures and processes that govern education research across all four UK nations. To address this, we recommend that BERA conduct a large-scale survey of education researchers in the UK, informed by the findings of this review, that pays particular attention to the following issues and areas. This should be a longitudinal survey, repeated at regular intervals (such as every 10 years) in order to capture potential change.
 - a. The different structures and processes that influence research activities within different types of institutions, such as Russell Group and post-1992 universities.
 - b. Differences between the sociopolitical, cultural, economic and religious contexts of the different UK nations, and how these impact on academics and research. Current insights are skewed towards England.
 - c. The nature and extent of the pressures and strains on academic life caused by 'neoliberal' and performance agendas in the UK HE sector.
 - d. How academics balance externally imposed funding priorities and research targets with their own research interests and values.
 - e. The experiences of and pressures on academics:
 - at different career stages
 - who have entered the profession following a teaching career in schools and/or colleges
 - who are employed on fixed-term and temporary contracts.
 - f. The experiences of academics perceived to be non-traditional and/or who are currently underrepresented in academia (including but not limited to women, ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ academics, those with disabilities,

and working-class academics) – especially in light of the Black Lives Matter and decolonisation movements that are currently having an impact within the HE sector. Issues of belonging, inclusion/exclusion, career prospects, and whether all academics have opportunities to pursue their personal research agendas should be explored.

- g.** Staff mental health and wellbeing, particularly in light of the changes brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, and in terms of workload and the balance between teaching and research.
- 2.** In addition, BERA should consider a special issue of one of their journals (perhaps the *British Educational Research Journal*) that focuses on the structures and processes governing education research in the four UK nations, and their impact on education research activities.
- 3.** Greater attention should be paid to research that listens to the voices of all stakeholders, such as education researchers, journal editors, funding body representatives and senior leaders in HE institutions. In the short term, this could be addressed through multi-stakeholder symposia organised through BERA special interest groups. This might lead to more effective communication between those responsible for particular structures and processes and those whose professional lives are affected by them.

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1. Introduction

1.1 OVERVIEW & APPROACH

Over the past two decades BERA has commissioned a number of mapping activities with a view to monitoring the state and health of education research¹ in the UK. This strand of BERA's work aligns with the organisation's core aims of fostering research engagement, building research capacity and advancing research quality in order to sustain a strong education research community (BERA, 2021). In one such mapping exercise, Oancea (2010) explored the impact of the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) on staff working in education departments in UK universities, through a survey and follow-up interviews with academics across 30 institutions. Two years later, a BERA working group chaired by Geoff Whitty was convened and commissioned jointly by BERA and the Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers to map the state of UK education research (Whitty et al., 2012).

Other reports charting the state of UK education research have been funded through sources such as the research councils and devolved UK governments. A report published by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (Mills et al., 2006), for example, drew attention to the ageing demographic of education researchers and attendant concerns about the sustainability and futurity of the discipline. Separate mapping exercises have been conducted to better understand education research activity in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Power and Taylor (2016), for example, conducted a survey of education researchers in Wales to better understand researcher experiences, needs and barriers. This formed part of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales-funded Welsh Institute for Social and Economic Research Data (WISERD) Education programme that was designed to enhance capacity-building in Wales. The UK Strategic Forum for Research in Education initiative (2008–2010) – funded by the ESRC, the Department for Children, Schools and Families, the Centre for British Teachers and BERA – also led to the production of a series

¹ We use the term 'education research' rather than 'educational research' throughout this report, in line with Whitty's (2006) definition of 'education research' as pertaining to research conducted both on and for education.

of overviews of practice and provision within each UK nation, such as Sally Brown's (2008) mapping of Scotland and Leitch's (2008) mapping of Northern Ireland. These reports provide useful 'snapshots' of the field of education research in the different UK nations at particular points in time.

The most recent BERA-funded mapping activity was conducted by Alis Oancea and David Mills (2015) as part of the BERA Observatory initiative. Oancea and Mills drew on published reports and reviews (including the Whitty et al., 2012 review), policy documents, datasets from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and Research Council UK, and information from institutional websites in order to develop a 'profile' of the discipline across the four nations. Data collated included:

- academic staff numbers in UK higher education institutions (HEIs) and their contract types
- regional distribution of staff
- staff backgrounds and nationalities
- postgraduate research student numbers
- research funding by source of income and historical type of institution
- regional distribution of substantive and methodological expertise
- education research professionals employed/working outside of HEIs.

Key findings from this mapping activity included the following.

- An increasing proportion of researchers – more than one-third of all academic staff in education – were aged 56 years or over in 2012/13.
- The use of teaching-only contracts was growing, particularly in Russell Group universities.
- The total number of academic staff in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland amounted to less than one-sixth of those in England.
- 'Old and ancient' universities attracted two-thirds of all research funding.
- Traditional HEI-based education research funding had decreased drastically, with funding from the UK government falling by 42 per cent between 2009 and 2013.

- Education research in the UK was a ‘fast changing’ field, with ‘third sector organisations, think-tanks and policy networks’ increasingly funding, producing and consuming education research (2015, p. 2).

Since the publication of Oancea and Mills’ report six years ago, a number of changes have taken place in higher education (HE) policy and governance. One important change has been in relation to the Research Excellence Framework (REF, conducted in 2014 and 2021) – formerly the Research Selectivity Exercise (RSE, 1986, 1989) and the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE, 1992, 1996, 2001, 2008) – which requires that HEIs submit evidence of their profile of research activities and outcomes for discipline-based units of assessment (UoAs); this includes outputs, impact and environment statements. Submissions are judged through peer-review and given a star rating across four quality categories (4*, 3*, 2*, 1* or unclassified). The level of research funding awarded to HEIs is determined through this exercise. The REF submission procedure has been modified for 2021 in light of questions concerning the perceived fairness of previous criteria (Torrance, 2020), with a new requirement that *all* staff with a ‘significant responsibility for research’ (REF, 2019, p. 13) – rather than those selectively chosen by UoAs for inclusion – be entered for the REF. The number of outputs per academic has also changed, from four to between one and five, with UoAs needing to submit an average of 2.5 outputs per academic. It is anticipated that these changes will have an impact on the experience of education researchers working in education departments – although at this point it is unclear precisely what these impacts will be (Torrance, 2020).

Another significant change has been the introduction in 2015 of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), which might be seen as a paralleling of the REF but in relation to teaching. The TEF is currently voluntary and requires HEIs to demonstrate teaching ‘excellence’ in order to gain accreditation (a gold, silver or bronze award). It has been said to have the potential to reshape the nexus between teaching and research (Gunn, 2018).

However, a prominent strand of scholarship has emerged that takes a critical perspective on these assessment frameworks, arguing that the REF and TEF represent the further incursion of neoliberal governance into UK HE and the continued embedding of evaluation and accountability agendas into both university management and academic life (Naidoo, 2018; Canning, 2019).

Recent research indicates that such structural changes at the socio-political-economic and institutional levels have impacts upon academics’ work and professional identities on the local level. For example, studies by Cotton et al. (2017) and Wyse et al. (2018) suggest that REF requirements can influence education researchers’ perceptions of their opportunities for research and their sense of themselves as ‘valued’ academics. Similarly, Marques and Powell (2020) found that the increasing prioritisation of rankings and ratings by HE bodies and the media had a knock-on effect within UK schools of education: increasingly competitive cultures were, they wrote, becoming embedded in education departments, and managers were operating strategically in order to strengthen their departments’ REF submissions (by, for example, recruiting highly productive academics with strong research profiles).

However, at present there is a lack of review work that draws together the relevant research literature in the field and critically appraises the evidence-base – a lack which this systematic scoping review seeks to address.

It is important to highlight at the outset of this report that it does not take into account the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic that began in early 2020. This review was commissioned by BERA in May 2020, during the first ‘lockdown’ across all four UK nations, and was conducted between June 2020 and February 2021 – too early to capture published literature reporting on the possible impacts of the pandemic on education research and education researchers in HEIs. This report should, therefore, be understood as an account of education research activity in the UK *before* the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic became evident.

A separate, peer-reviewed article based on this research has been published in *Review of Education* (Stentiford et al., 2021).

1.2 CONCEPTUALISING EDUCATION AS A DISCIPLINE

In organisational terms, education as a discipline might be understood as a structural component within the HE system. Education is subject to how academic institutions seek to draw the ‘map of knowledge’ within their organisation, and the ‘operational distinctions’ that have been purposively conceived in an attempt to demarcate education as distinct from other disciplines (Becher & Trowler, 2001, p. 42). Furthermore, it is also shaped in response to government definitions and HE policy frameworks, such as the categorisations of disciplines used by the

Office for Students (OfS) and HESA for the purposes of funding and monitoring. Yet the discipline of education is also fashioned in and through wider historical understandings and the epistemological structures and cultures that have shaped its development over time (see for example McCulloch, 2002; Biesta, 2011). In this way, education might be understood as possessing certain characteristics that make it recognisable as a discipline – but with what counts as ‘education’ differing between universities, and the field itself being an entity that is fluid, dynamic and changeable (Grenfell & James, 2004; Trowler, 2014).

On entering HE, education academics become a member of their disciplinary community, and are socialised into certain ‘ways of being’ (Becher & Trowler, 2001, p. 48). Disciplinary communities have been conceptualised in various ways, but usually include aspects such as a shared set of values, attitudes, heritages, traditions, rituals, concepts, symbols, discourses and codes of practice (Becher & Trowler, 2001; McCulloch, 2002). Research is an integral part of academic life, and education academics are under pressure to ‘prove’ that they are valued members of the research community through external markers such as peer-reviewed publications and grants (Deem & Lucas, 2007). Whether an academic feels that they are ‘a part’ of their discipline is significant, yet we contend that professional identities are made possible in and through the assemblage of practices that constitute their disciplinary community. While there is some room for professional identities to be negotiated within this community, there are certain structures, processes and norms that govern this identity-work – with some academics more able to resist external pressures and renegotiate ‘successful’ identities than others (see for example Trowler, 2012).

Of course, not all education academics are necessarily located within departments or schools of education. Questions might be raised, for example, regarding where medical education researchers sit within university and disciplinary boundary lines. In REF terms, they are part of the education submission, as are those undertaking education research in life sciences, computing and so on. It might be the case that such researchers hold less distinct identities as education researchers and feel a closer affinity with another discipline. Education research is also undertaken by private institutions that are not universities, such as the National Foundation for Educational Research (though these

fall outside the scope of this project). In this review, we took an open stance and defined ‘education researcher(s)’ in line with the definitions adopted by the authors of the texts. In reality, however, these texts overwhelmingly focusing on researchers within schools of education.

1.3 DEFINING STRUCTURES & PROCESSES IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION RESEARCH

One common distinction made by organisational theorists when studying workplace organisations and the experiences of those working within them – including academics working in academic departments within universities – is between *formal* and *informal* structures and processes (Rank, 2008; Watson, 2003). This conceptual distinction has aided scholars in their attempts to capture the interplay between, on the one hand, the bureaucracy, rules and procedures that pattern action and provide a degree of predictability within an organisation (often prescribed by management) and, on the other, the human actors who take up roles within organisations and bring with them their own thoughts, feelings, interests and purposes.

It has been argued that the formal/informal distinction is overly simplistic and risks minimising focus on the internal and/or wider external patterns of inequality and conflict that lie outside of workplaces (Watson, 2003). While we are sympathetic to this critique, we adopt the formal/informal distinction in this review for two reasons.

1. We feel it has analytical purchase, as it makes clear a distinction between the activities, values, practices and identities that are ‘officially’ sanctioned and those that are ‘unofficial’ and might develop more organically.
2. It helps us to operationalise fuzzy and diffuse social phenomena and collect ‘data’ from the located literature, so that we can draw some sort of meaningful conclusions.

However, as an important caveat, we recognise the dialectical relationship that exists between formal and informal structures and processes, and understand both as influencing each other in a mutually constitutive way. We also recognise that HEIs are located within the wider order and structure of the social system, including established patterns of advantage and disadvantage (Bird, 2011).

1.4 AIMS & OBJECTIVES OF THE REVIEW

This report presents the findings of a systematic scoping review, of evidence published over a 31-year period (1990–2020), that sought to understand the formal and informal structures and processes that influence education research as a profession across the UK. Previous mapping activities have drawn solely on secondary data sources such as policy documents, datasets from HESA and information from institutional websites. Our review represents the first systematic mapping of the extant research literature. We were particularly concerned to identify relevant literature in a rigorous way, assessing its quality and deeply exploring the nature of the structures and processes identified. A systematic scoping review of this scale on this topic has not previously been attempted.

In this review, we adopt a comparative and longitudinal perspective to consider how the structures and processes influencing educational research activities might have changed over time between 1990 and 2020. This provides insights into which structures and processes might be particularly salient today, and why. We also highlight particularities relating to the four UK nations – England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

More specifically, this systematic scoping review addresses the following two research questions.

1. What type, kind and quality of published research evidence is relevant to understanding the structures and processes that influence research activities in the UK?
2. What are the main themes reported in published research evidence relevant to understanding the structures and processes (both formal and informal) that influence education research activities in UK HEIs?

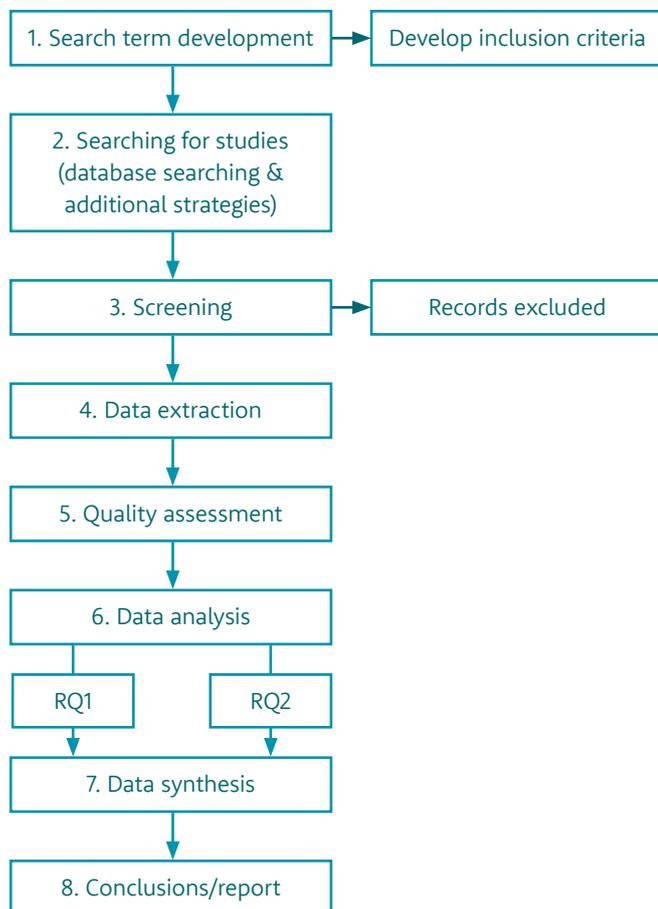
1.5 STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

In the next section we outline our systematic scoping review methodology, including details of the procedures used to identify, locate, appraise and synthesise the literature. This is followed by a presentation and discussion of the findings, organised by the two research questions above. We end with a concluding section that draws together key threads from this review and outlines recommendations for future research.

2. Methodology

We conducted a systematic scoping review informed by the approaches outlined by Askey and O'Malley (2005) and Levac et al. (2010). Our aim was to provide coverage of the breadth of studies available, the types and nature of the studies, and to identify gaps in the existing literature.

Figure 2.1
Methodological approach, based on steps from the University of York's guidance for systematic reviews



Source: Adapted from CRD, 2009

2.1 SCOPING & SEARCH TERM DEVELOPMENT

Following a preliminary search of the topic area, a comprehensive search strategy was developed, which involved scanning the titles and abstracts of known relevant articles for possible key terms and collaborative discussion among the research team.

Table 2.1
Search terms and databases

BEI, ERIC, ERC (via EBSCO)	AEI, IBSS (via ProQuest)	Web of Science
“UK”	“UK”	“UK”
“United Kingdom”	“United Kingdom”	“United Kingdom”
England	England	England
English	English	English
“Northern Ireland”	“Northern Ireland”	“Northern Ireland”
“Northern Irish”	“Northern Irish”	“Northern Irish”
Scot*	Scot*	Scot*
Wales	Wales	Wales
Welsh	Welsh	Welsh
Brit*	Brit*	Brit*
“Education* research*”	“Education* research*”	“Education* research*”
“Research* education*”	“Research* education*”	“Research* education*”
“Teacher* research*”	“Teacher* research*”	“Teacher* research*”
“Research* education”	“Research in education”	“Research in education”
	“Research on education”	“Research on education”
	“Research for education”	“Research for education”
	“Research and education”	“Research and education”
“Capacity Build*”	“Capacity Build*”	“Capacity Build*”
“Build* Capacity”	“Build* Capacity”	“Build* Capacity”
“Practitioner* Research*”	“Practitioner* Research*”	“Practitioner* Research*”

Table 2.1 lists the search terms used in this review, which were grouped according to two key constructs:

1. geographical terms (shaded in blue)
2. education research terms (shaded in green).

In response to preliminary search results, and in discussion with the BERA steering group convened for the project of which this research is part, we sought to expand the search with an additional focus on capacity-building and practitioner research. The additional search terms at the bottom of table 2.1 were cross-referenced with the geographical terms and the limiter “education*”.

2.2 SEARCHING FOR STUDIES

The search terms were input into the following electronic databases in June and November 2020: British Education Index (BEI); Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC); Education Research Complete (ERC); Australian Education Index (AEI); International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS); and Web of Science. We wanted to include key education databases and more generic databases in order to maximise the scope of the search. Terms were cross-searched in title and abstract fields.

A number of additional search strategies were also undertaken.

2.2.1 Forwards & backwards citation chasing

The reference lists of all included texts were scanned, and possibly relevant texts were title/abstract and full text screened (backwards chasing). The titles of included texts were input into Google Scholar and all citing literature was screened for relevance (forwards chasing).

2.2.2 Hand/targeted searching

Key journals, selected in consultation with the BERA steering group, were hand-searched. In an attempt to ensure that relevant literature pertaining to all four UK nations was sufficiently captured, the following journals were hand-searched: *Wales Journal of Education*; *Welsh Journal of Education*; *Education in the North*; *Scottish Educational Review*; and *Irish Educational Studies*. All volumes and editions dating back to 1990, or as far back as was available online, were checked. We also searched the websites of the following organisations: BERA, the Scottish Educational Research Association (SERA), the Higher Education Funding Council for England, HESA, the OfS (England), and Advance HE.

‘Freehand’ search terms were also manually input into selected databases (ERC, ERIC, BEI and Google Scholar). We were particularly keen to capture literature on informal structures and processes (such as those to do with researcher identities and backgrounds). This included combinations of phrases

such as “women in academia”, “female academic*”, “BAME academic*”, “disab* academic*”, “early career researcher*”, “mid career research*”, “late* stage research*” and “education*”. We also hand-searched the publication lists of key academics who appeared frequently in our list of articles for inclusion, such as Alis Oancea, Stephen Gorard, Chris Holligan, Jean Murray, Rosemary Deem and John Furlong.

2.2.3 Doctoral theses

We searched for unpublished doctoral theses via ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global. The search terms listed in table 2.1 were input into the database in January 2021.

EndNote X9 software was used to manage references throughout the review. Search results were exported into EndNote and duplicates were removed before screening commenced.

2.3 SCREENING STUDIES

We used the SPIDER (sample, phenomenon of interest, design, evaluation, research type) tool in order to establish inclusion criteria to inform the review’s study selection (Cooke et al., 2012). See table 2.2 for a detailed list of inclusion criteria.

An initial sample of 50 records from the June 2020 search were piloted among four reviewers (L. S., G. K., S. B.-C., J. S. R.)² in order to agree on screening decisions, and eligibility criteria were refined in response to this pilot stage. The titles and abstracts of records retrieved through searching were then screened for relevance independently by S. B.-C. and J. S. R., who classified each paper as potentially ‘include’ or ‘exclude’ according to the pre-specified eligibility criteria. Full text copies of potentially relevant texts were then obtained by J. S. and S. B.-C.. Another pilot stage was conducted among the four reviewers (G. K., L. S., J. S. R., S. B.-C.) using 15 per cent of the full text records, and eligibility criteria were further refined. Any disagreements between reviewers after piloting were resolved by discussion, with involvement of a third reviewer where necessary. All retrieved full texts were then assessed for inclusion by at least two reviewers independently

² This report’s authors are referred to in the text by their initials: Christopher Boyle (C. B.); Lauren Stentiford (L. S.); George Koutsouris (G. K.); Divya Jindal-Snape (D. J.-S.); Simon Benham-Clarke (S. B.-C.); Javiera Salazar Rivera (J. S. R.).

(a combination of S. B.-C., J. S. R., L. S. and G. K.), with the involvement of a third reviewer from the team where disagreements occurred.

The number of studies identified, included and excluded at each stage of the review have been reported using a Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flow diagram (Moher et al., 2009), together with reasons for exclusion at the full-text stage (see figure 2.2).

2.4 DATA EXTRACTION

A data extraction form was developed specifically for this review, guided by the full-text screening stage. The data extraction form was pilot tested on several studies included in the review, and refined in discussion with all six team members. Data extracted included: first author name; date; journal; geographical focus; methodology; and relevant findings regarding the formal and informal structures and processes influencing education research activities. Data was extracted from included texts by S. B.-C., J. S. R. and L. S., and double-checked by another reviewer.

Table 2.2
Inclusion criteria

Sample	Texts must report on the activity of education researchers working in HE. This includes teacher/practitioner educator researchers employed by, and working in, HEIs (i.e. not employed by schools and further education colleges).	
Phenomenon of interest	Texts must report on the structures/processes influencing education research activities. These structures/processes might be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. formal, e.g. government and/or institutional authority structures, policies and procedures, financial resources 2. informal, e.g. individuals' beliefs, assumptions, norms, values, attitudes, perceptions (see Prell et al., 2010). The focus of the texts must pertain to the UK context.	
Design	Any study design/method (including any supporting theoretical framework), e.g., interview, questionnaire, observation, intervention trial, process evaluation, secondary data analysis, policy analysis, discussion/opinion/conceptual piece, etc. Studies may or may not have participants.	
Evaluation	Outcome measures will depend on the purpose/methods used in each text, but might include statistics or performance indicators, or participants' views, experiences, or beliefs.	
Research type	<p>Included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods research • peer-reviewed journal articles* • doctoral theses • BERA presidential addresses • research published between 1990 and 2020. 	<p>Excluded:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • editorials and replies** • books, book chapters and book reviews*** • research reports**** • texts published in languages other than English.

*We were unable to place inter-library loans for a small number of journal articles (n=13) for screening due to Covid-19 restrictions (see below).

**We excluded these texts as we assessed a sample of 15 that we located through database searching and found that such texts were usually short (2–4 pages) and did not contain sufficient information to analyse for the purpose of this review.

***Following the Covid-19 pandemic and in accordance with lockdown restrictions introduced in the UK in Spring 2020, we were prohibited from visiting libraries in person or placing Inter-library loans for electronic or paper copies of books that could be shared among the research team. We therefore had to take the decision to exclude books and book chapters from the search.

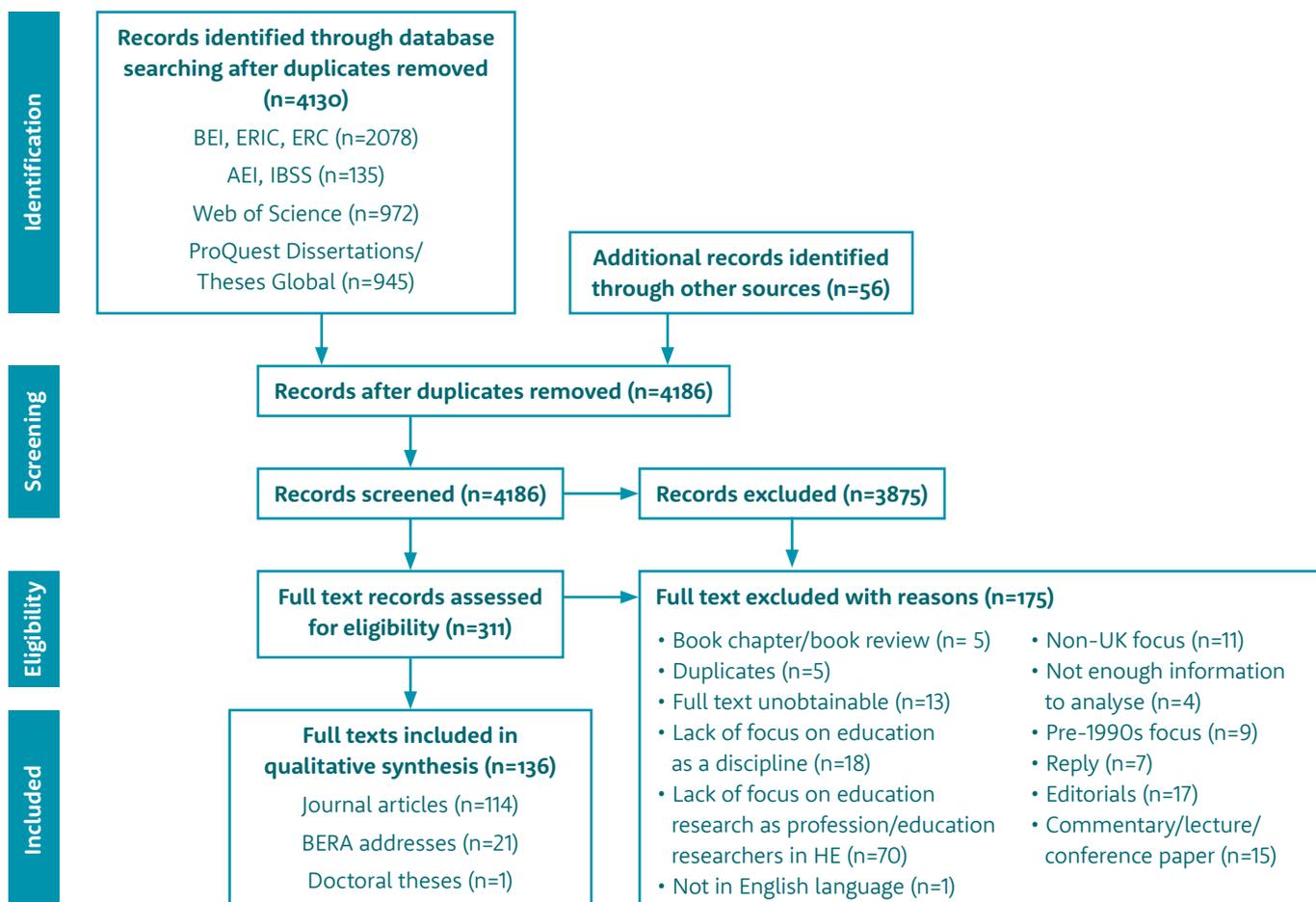
****We discovered that the authors of many relevant research reports had subsequently published at least one peer-reviewed journal article arising from the same research (for example, Leitch, 2009; Daugherty & Davies, 2011). We were keen to avoid duplicating findings from reports and articles in the analysis, so made the decision to exclude reports from our analysis but discuss them in the introductory section for the purpose of 'scene setting'.

Table 2.3
Quality assessment results, by reviewer (R) and paper type

Type	R1 decision	R2 decision	Third reviewer required	Total papers accepted unanimously
Narrative (n=75; 65.8%)	Include (n=64; 85.3%)	Include (n=70; 93.3%)	n=15 (20%)	60 (80%)
	Unsure (n=11; 14.7%)	Unsure (n=5; 6.7%)		
Empirical (n=39; 34.2%)	Include (n=38; 97.4%)	Include (n=37; 94.9%)	n=3 (7.7%)	36 (92.3%)
	Unsure (n=1; 2.6%)	Unsure (n=2; 5.1%)		
Overall:				96 (84.2%)

Of the 114 papers, it was agreed unanimously by two reviewers that 96 (84.2 per cent) met the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) criteria as applied (that is, they met over three-quarters of the criteria on each checklist) and therefore were notional ‘includes’. The papers were split into two categories: narrative and empirical (see section 3.1.1). As is shown in table 2.3, there was more disagreement between the two reviewers on the inclusion of narrative papers (20 per cent of the total) than on empirical papers (7.7 per cent). Where such disagreement arose a third reviewer was consulted. All 114 papers were confirmed as meeting the criteria, but this was a difficult task as ultimately exclusion/inclusion decisions were the informed judgements of this report’s authors – see section 3.1.1 for further discussion. It is interesting to note that across the final sample of papers, those classed as narrative met the criteria less conclusively than the empirical papers.

Figure 2.2
PRISMA flow diagram depicting the number of texts located, screened and included/excluded at each stage



2.5 DATA ANALYSIS & SYNTHESIS

We used thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008) to combine the findings from the located studies and identify key themes emerging from the texts. We imported included full texts into NVivo 12 software and read each text several times to gain familiarity with the content, then L. S. coded each text line-by-line to draw out formal and informal structures and processes, using a combination of descriptive and in vivo coding (Saldaña, 2013). Analytic memos were also created and initial ideas recorded regarding the relationships between structures and processes, changes over time and variation by country. G. K. and L. S. then worked together with the codes and collapsed them into a smaller number of categories, and emergent themes were then identified (see tables A and B in the summary above). These themes were discussed with and agreed upon by C. B. and D. J.-S..

3. Findings & discussion

This section of the review is organised by our two research questions. Our inclusion criteria were met by 114 peer reviewed journal articles, 21 BERA presidential addresses and one doctoral thesis. We discuss each of these different data sources in turn, in relation to both research questions.

3.1 WHAT TYPE, KIND & QUALITY OF PUBLISHED RESEARCH EVIDENCE IS RELEVANT TO UNDERSTANDING THE STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES THAT INFLUENCE RESEARCH ACTIVITIES IN THE UK?

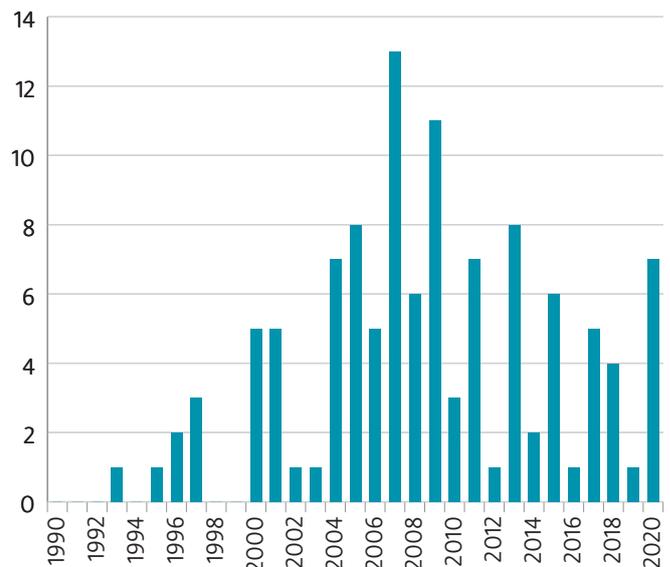
3.1.1 Peer-reviewed journal articles

We start with a descriptive overview of the peer-reviewed journal articles. A table of the attributes of and findings from these 114 articles is included in an appendix to this report.

Date of publication

Figure 3.1 presents an overview of the number of included papers by publication year, between 1990 and 2020. There is an interesting trend in the number of papers included by year of publication, suggesting a peak between 2004 and 2013 (with most papers in 2007, $n=13$). This corresponds to the period in which the *Research Assessment Exercise* (RAE), which last reported in 2008, was replaced by the *Research Excellence Framework* (REF) (first used in 2014 to assess the period 2008–2013), and perhaps indicates that this change generated some discussions around the nature and quality of education research. An alternative explanation is that there might have been issues with the implementation of the RAE that generated discussions in and around 2007, and which contributed to the formation of the redeveloped REF. Before and after this peak, however, interest in the nature of education research in the UK appears to be relatively stable.

Figure 3.1
Number of in-scope peer-reviewed articles ($n=114$), by year of publication



Geographical focus

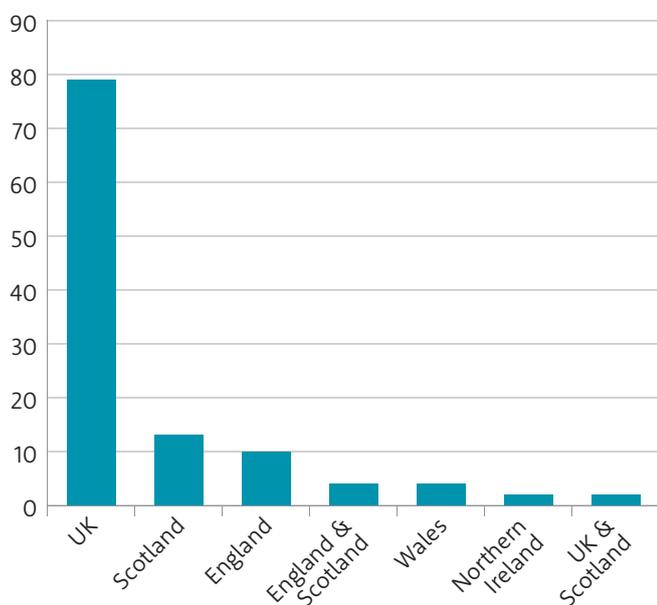
Most papers focused on the UK as a whole ($n=79$), followed by a sole focus on Scotland ($n=13$), England ($n=10$), Wales ($n=4$) and Northern Ireland ($n=2$). A small number of studies spanned England and Scotland ($n=6$) (see figure 3.2).

However, while 79 of the studies indicated that they were focusing on UK structures and processes, discussion in many seemed implicitly confined to the English context. The number of studies published explicitly and solely about nations other than England was low. This is an important issue, as the reviewed studies suggest that these nations are working in different political and educational contexts which are similar only in certain respects, such as UK-wide initiatives like the RAE/REF (see the discussion in chapter 4).

The reasons behind the variation in the number of papers by national focus might be explained on the basis of the relative number of HEIs (specifically those with a department or school of education) within each nation, and the number of staff in those departments (for instance, REF 2014 returns from Wales and Northern Ireland suggest fewer staff engaged in research). Alternatively, it could be that the framing

of the research questions for this systematic scoping review are more in-line with debates in some nations than in others.

Figure 3.2
Number of in-scope peer reviewed articles (n=114), by UK nation(s) of focus

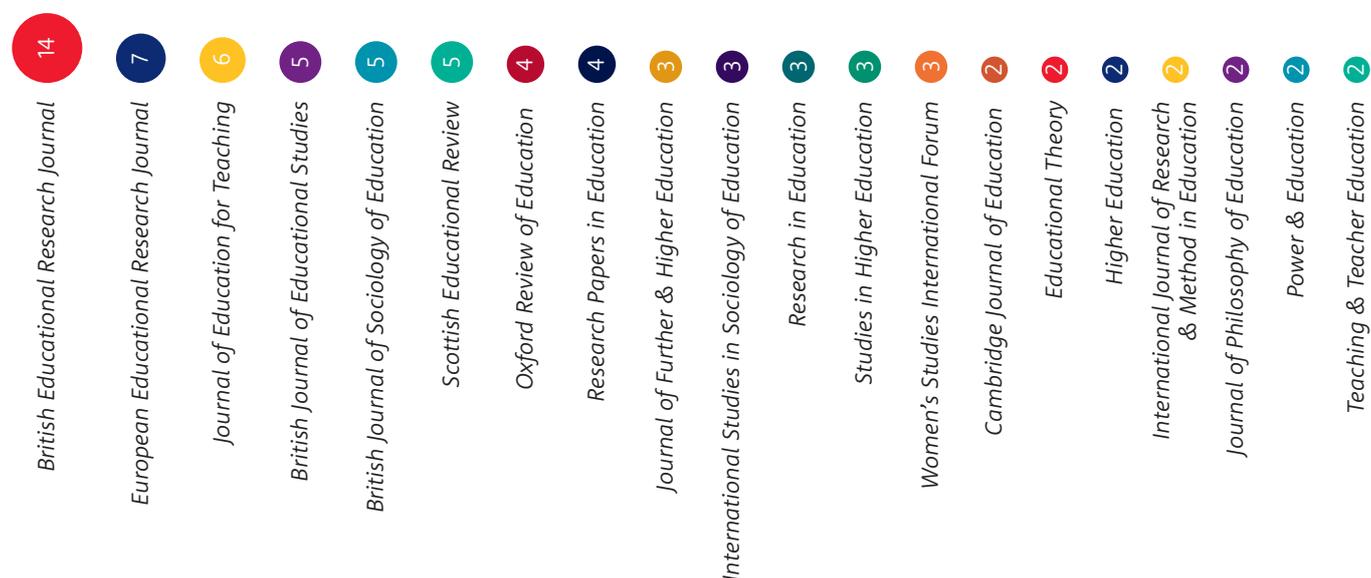


Journals in which papers were published

The 114 papers were published in a range of diverse journals (55 different journals), all with an educational focus. Thirty-five journals were represented by a single paper (see appendix). The most represented journal was the *British Educational Research Journal (BERJ)*, from which 14 papers were drawn; it was followed by the *European Educational Research Journal (EERJ)* (n=7), the *Journal of Education for Teaching* (n=6), the *Scottish Educational Review (SER)* (n=5), the *British Journal of Educational Studies* (n=5), the *British Journal of Sociology of Education* (n=5) and other journals presented in figure 3.3. Many of these journals (for instance, *Journal of Philosophy of Education*) have a strong theoretical focus, but some practice-oriented journals such as *Teacher Development* are also represented. It is also noteworthy that these are journals with an international readership, and that not all journals are UK-based (one article from the *Spanish Journal of Pedagogy* was included, for example).

Interestingly, although the reviewed papers were published in 55 journals, the majority were published in journals aligned with education academic bodies (such as BERA) and university presses (such as those of Oxford and Cambridge). BERA seems to be leading these conversations, as 12 per cent (n=14) of the studies were published in *BERJ*, with the next highest number of studies published in the European Educational Research Association’s journal *EERJ* (6 per cent, n=7), and the SERA-aligned *SER* (4 per cent, n=5). Other studies were published in journals with a specific focus on teaching, philosophy and theory, sociology, further education and higher education.

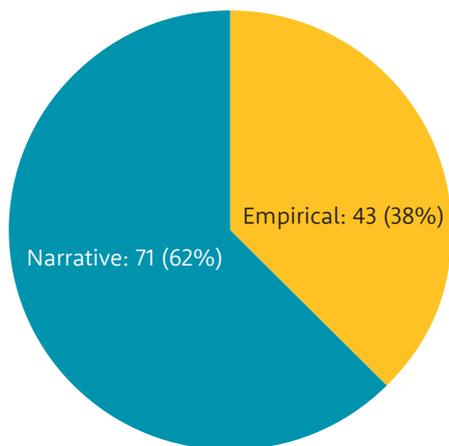
Figure 3.3
Journals represented in the review by more than one peer-reviewed article, by number of articles



Type & methodology of studies

Most of the papers were narrative pieces (n=71) covering a wide range of topics, from critiques of the ‘what works’ agenda (for example, Atkinson, 2000), to aspects of researcher identities (for example Lucas, 2007) (see figure 3.4). To distinguish between narrative and empirical studies, we used guidance on classifying research approaches, methodologies and methods in systematic reviews produced by the Joanna Briggs Institute (Godfrey & Harrison, 2015). We defined narrative texts as those in which the author(s) presented a perspective or opinion, discussed a project or reviewed literature in an unsystematic manner without a clearly specified methodology. We defined empirical texts as those for which primary and/or secondary data had been obtained by the author(s) and was analysed using an established data analysis technique (such as thematic analysis, discourse analysis or content analysis).

Figure 3.4
The number and proportion of narrative and empirical peer reviewed articles reviewed



Of the narrative papers, most (62 studies, or 87 per cent) were primarily opinion pieces, with the remainder categorised as mainly project discussions or reviews (seven studies) or as unsystematic literature reviews (two studies; see figure 3.5).

There was a dearth of empirical studies (n=43, 38 per cent), despite our review drawing from literature published over a 31-year period (during which time an average of 1.43 empirical studies per year were published). These 43 studies involved the collection of empirical data, including through questionnaires, interviews and documentary analysis; they largely used qualitative methods or secondary analysis. Figure 3.6 represents what we interpreted as being the primary method used in

each of the studies (that is, the method that, in the reviewers’ judgement, generated the data that was interrogated most substantially within each paper). Interviews were the most popular method used as a basis for core discussion (n=19), with different types of interviews specified including ‘semi-structured’ (presumably face-to-face), ‘telephone’ and ‘email’.

Figure 3.5
Methodologies/approaches most frequently used in narrative peer-reviewed articles (n=71)

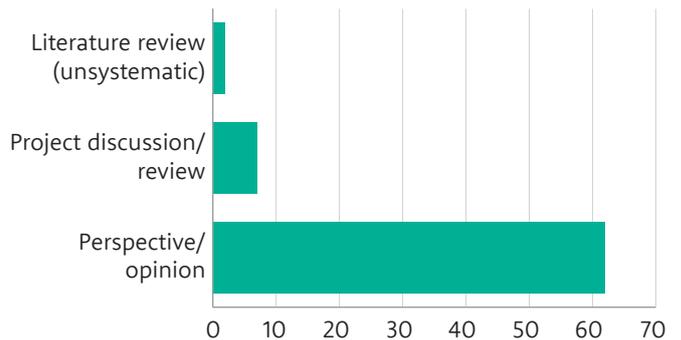


Figure 3.6
Methods most frequently used in empirical peer-reviewed articles (n=43)

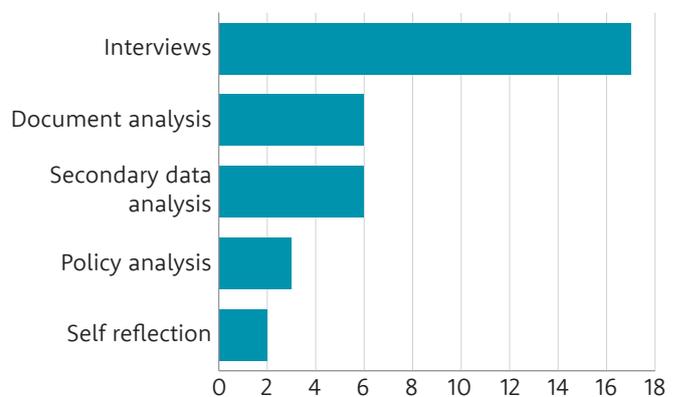


Table 3.1 shows a more detailed breakdown of the methods used in the 43 empirical papers, the sources of the data and the participants. Overall, 29 papers employed a single method and 14 employed multiple methods. The latter might have enabled the authors to build up more comprehensive datasets and triangulate methods. A rich variety of methods were used, including self-study, time logs and bibliometric analysis. Perhaps unsurprisingly, most of the studies conducted with human participants involved education academics working in HEIs (n=33 separate papers). Participants had different roles and occupied different levels of seniority in the HE system (research assistants, lecturers, senior lecturers, professors and so on). A small number of studies also contained in their sample senior HEI staff/managers (such as heads

of department and directors of research) (n=6) and/or education stakeholders (such as policymakers, education research journal editors and individuals from funding bodies) (n=4). These were all interview-based studies. Few studies appear to have been conducted with these latter two groups – although it must be acknowledged that a relatively low number of individuals occupy these positions in the first place.

Of the studies without human participants (that is, those that involved document analysis and secondary data analysis), stated sample sizes that ranged from one piece of policy (*A Research Strategy*

for Scottish Education, 2017, in Holligan, 2020), to 8,691 individual RAE returns to the education unit of assessment (in Gorard et al., 2004). In qualitative studies with human participants that stated a sample size, these ranged from one (for example, in Leitch’s 2018 autoethnographic ‘life history’ account of her career as an education academic), to 40 (in Deem & Lucas’s 2007 study in which they interviewed academics working in universities in England and Scotland). Questionnaire studies ranged in sample size from 28 participants (Murray & Male, 2005) to 521 participants (Gorard et al., 2004).

Table 3.1
Breakdown of methods used in empirical papers, sources of data, and participants

Data collection method(s)/source(s)* (with examples)	No. papers	Participants
Autoethnography	2	Professors of education: 2
Bibliometric analysis (published teacher education research articles)	1	
Collective memory work	1	Early career researchers: 1
Self-study/self-reflection	2	Lecturer/senior lecturer: 1 Professor of education: 1
Document analysis (REF impact case studies, education research projects funded by ESRC)	10	
Interviews (face-to-face, group, email)	24	Academics (lecturers, senior lecturers, professors): 22 Senior HEI staff/managers (heads of department, directors of research, those responsible for REF submissions): 6 Education stakeholders (e.g. policymakers, education research journal editors, individuals from funding bodies): 4
Policy analysis (national teacher training frameworks, education research strategies)	3	
Questionnaire	6	Education researchers: 5 Teacher educator researchers: 1
Video analysis (BBC news reports with education academic)	1	
Time logs	1	Teacher educator researchers
Secondary data analysis (Scottish government research contract funding data, data on REF submissions)	10	
Observation	1	Lecturers: 1

*Note: some studies used multiple data collection methods.

Looking at lead authorship, 19 authors published more than one paper that was included in this review (n=52). Of these, 10 first authors wrote two papers each, six wrote three papers each, one author four and two authors five papers each. Apart from seven authors who published either all narrative papers (n=4; two narrative papers each by Sally Brown, Hodkinson, and Reay; three papers by Hammersley) or all empirical papers (n=3; two papers each by Hulme, and Marques; five empirical papers between 2011 and 2020 by Holligan), 12 authors published a mix of empirical and narrative papers. In some cases similar topics were explored through multiple papers: Furlong, for example, focused on the impact of RAE in both papers, and Oancea focused on performance and accountability in one narrative paper and in two empirical papers. However, in some other cases the focus was on multiple topics: for instance, Holligan's five empirical papers focused on departmental research cultures (n=2), research funding structures and constraints (n=1), researcher identities (n=1) and evidence-based policy and practice (n=1). Similarly, Gorard and colleagues focused, in two narrative papers, on the role of BERA and government influence respectively, and in an empirical paper surveyed education academics about methods they used in their research.

Judging quality

As noted in section 2.5, we sought to assess the quality of the located peer-reviewed journal articles that inform the core of our analysis, and of the 114 texts it was agreed unanimously by two reviewers that 96 (84.2 per cent) met the JBI criteria. There was unanimous agreement on 80 per cent of the narrative papers and 92.3 per cent of the empirical ones. With the input of a third reviewer, we agreed that none were notional 'excludes'. While this might suggest that the overall quality of the papers was relatively high, in practice we found the process of determining the quality of the located articles a difficult task.

In recent years, debates have taken place as to the appropriateness of performing quality assessment as part of qualitative reviews (Dixon-Woods et al., 2007; Toye et al., 2013; Carroll & Booth, 2015). It has been argued that the philosophical, epistemological and methodological diversity of qualitative studies prevents the meaningful appraisal of quality across studies as can be done when, for example, assessing 'fatal flaws' in RCTs (see Dixon-Woods et al., 2006). However, others argue that qualitative studies should be assessed in some way because they will potentially go on to inform the data synthesis and conclusions drawn, and so should be of a 'good' standard (Carroll et al., 2012). We

performed quality assessment in this review in order to raise potential issues with the texts – but in reality, we found it hard to make concrete decisions on questions such as whether the line of argument in a narrative text was 'logical' (see criterion 4 on the JBI's *Checklist for Text and Opinion*, 2020b). We therefore see our quality decisions as subjective interpretations that could not serve as a basis for inclusion and exclusion.

3.1.2 BERA presidential addresses

We also considered how education research was discussed in BERA presidential addresses (see table 3.2). All addresses (n=21) were published in the *British Educational Research Journal*, within a year of their original delivery at BERA's Annual Conference. In this report we only included addresses published after 1990, with the first being Elliott (delivered in 1989, published 1990) and the most recent one Wyse (delivered 2019, published 2020). All addresses are available on the BERA website.³

For analytical purposes, we identified a single central topic for each presidential address – though this was a difficult process in many cases as most presidential addresses examined a variety of topics. The most discussed topic was relationships with government/policymakers/policy (n=9), followed by criticisms of education research (n=3), impact/dissemination of education research (n=2) and research capacity building (n=2). Single presidential addresses explored issues of performativity and accountability; education research as a profession; problems recruiting staff and a shift towards contract researchers; researcher identities; and the relationship between research and practice (and close-to-practice research). These topics broadly align with those identified in the journal articles (see above). We discuss the BERA addresses further in section 3.3.5.

3.1.3 Doctoral thesis

We identified a single PhD thesis that met our inclusion criteria (Craig, 2012). It explored the role of publications in the work of academics in mathematics education in England. The author conducted nine semi-structured interviews with academics and conducted an 'exploratory social network analysis' using publication data from 'fourteen mathematics education research journals over a ten-year period' (Craig, 2012, p. iii), in order to consider patterns in researcher collaborations. We felt that the themes emanating from this thesis were well represented in the peer-reviewed literature, so did not include it in our analysis.

³ <https://www.bera.ac.uk/resources/all-publications/bera-presidential-addresses>

Table 3.2

BERA presidential addresses by address and publication dates, and main topic

Author name	Address date	Publication date	Main topic
Elliott	1989	1990	Performativity, accountability
Brown (Sally)	1990	1991	Relationships with government/policymakers/policy
Bassey	1991	1992	Relationships with government/policymakers/policy
Gipps	1992	1993	Relationships with government/policymakers/policy
Harlen	1993	1994	Relationships with government/policymakers/policy
Rudduck	1994	1995	Relationships with government/policymakers/policy
Murphy	1995	1996	Relationships with government/policymakers/policy
McIntyre	1996	1997	Education research as a profession
Brown (Margaret)	1997	1998	Problems recruiting staff and contract researchers
Lomax	1998	1999	Criticisms of education research
Mortimore	1999	2000	Criticisms of education research
Edwards	2001	2002	Researcher identities
Furlong	2003	2004	Criticisms of education research
Whitty	2006	2006	Relationships with government/policymakers/policy
Munn	2007	2008	Research capacity building
Gardner	2010	2011	Impact/dissemination of education research
James	2011	2012	Impact/dissemination of education research
Menter	2013	2014	Research capacity building
Moss	2015	2016	Relationships with government/policymakers/policy
McCulloch	2017	2018	Relationships with government/policymakers/policy
Wyse	2019	2020	Close-to-practice research

3.2 WHAT ARE THE MAIN THEMES IN PUBLISHED RESEARCH EVIDENCE RELEVANT TO UNDERSTANDING THE STRUCTURES & PROCESSES THAT INFLUENCE EDUCATION RESEARCH ACTIVITIES IN UK HEIS?

In this section we present the main themes relevant to understanding formal and informal structures and processes, with a focus on the peer reviewed journal articles identified (n=114). These articles and the 21 BERA presidential addresses were analysed separately in order to preserve the integrity of two data sources that are slightly different in purpose. We discuss the BERA addresses in depth in section 3.3.5, and also consider possible relationships between our findings from the 114 articles and 21 addresses.

3.2.1 Formal structures & processes affecting education research

This section examines the main formal structures believed to affect education research in the UK. We defined formal structures as structures and processes associated with educational policy, government agendas, government and/or institutional authority structures, and funding resources and priorities (see Prell et al., 2010). Of the 114 papers, only five did not appear to discuss any formal structures thus defined.

We identified the following six broad themes in relation to formal structures as discussed in those 109 papers:

- cultures of performativity and accountability
- funding regime
- impact agenda
- ‘what works’ agenda

- debates about the quality and purpose of education research
- professional bodies, values and ethics

Cultures of performativity & accountability

A number of articles (n= 27) discussed aspects of the growing agenda of performativity and accountability in HE and the field of education research which has led to an audit culture (Lawy & Armstrong, 2009). The impact of this culture has made itself felt in a number of different ways, including:

- the increasing importance placed on ratings and rankings (such as national and international league tables) and a culture of competition between universities, departments of education and individual researchers (see for example Marques & Powell, 2020)
- the growth of the impact agenda (for example, Papatsiba & Cohen, 2020)
- the pressures of the research assessment exercises (for example, O’Connell, 2019).

With regards to this culture, Oancea (2007) notes that accountability is seen as a way to achieve objectivity, consensus and legitimacy in the field of research – and its ascendancy is perhaps not surprising given that the government is a key funder of HE education research and wants to ensure that funds allocated offer value.

Among the most discussed accountability tools are the research assessment exercises (the RAE and latterly REF). The RAE was instituted in 1992, and a number of authors have noted that education as a discipline did not perform well in it, with little improvement in metrics in the years before the REF was introduced in 2014 (see for example Gorard, 2004; McNay, 2003; Whitty, 2006). However, Whitty (2006), among others, highlights that these results did not necessarily reflect the quality of all education research. A side-effect of years of ‘low’ RAE results for education was that many newer universities received little or no funding compared to more established research-focused universities such as those in the Russell Group (Tanner & Davies, 2009; Furlong, 2011). This was seen as reinforcing a hierarchy of institutional prestige and, more specifically, a hierarchy of education departments. The REF has been seen to have produced a similar effect, with Smith (2015, p. 747) writing that: ‘the channelling of research funding to the REF “winners” is beginning to result in a de facto degree of stratification’.

Both the RAE and REF were seen as strongly driving behaviour in HE and, in turn, education departments

(n=13). It is important to keep in mind the year of publication of the texts under discussion, as over time changes have been introduced due to wider discussions of the type they represent. For example, Winch (2001) writes that RAE requirements have often led to decisions and choices among academic managers and individual researchers that are perceived as appealing to the panels that judge the quality of submissions, thus affecting the trajectory of some research pursuits. It has been argued, for example, that longitudinal studies could be discouraged by the timeframes of the exercises, and that interdisciplinary research might not always fit well with the assessment criteria (McNay, 2003). However, interdisciplinarity has arguably won greater recognition in the REF in recent years: HEI units of assessment now have the option of flagging interdisciplinary research and identifying them for cross-referral to other disciplinary panels.⁴

When discussing the research exercises in relation to impact, Colley (2014) notes that critical research that does not satisfy powerful research users’ expectations can potentially be marginalised; similarly, Marques et al. (2017) point out that certain topics and themes tend to become ‘fashionable’ in different research assessment cycles. Others argue though that the sector is learning how to ‘play the game’ (Cotton et al., 2017, p. 1633) and ‘reverse engineer’ to achieve best individual or departmental results (Marques et al., 2017, p. 837). For example, in the located studies there was evidence of academic managers putting forward only a small number of staff for the RAE/ REF in order to create a stronger portfolio, recruiting successful academics from other institutions and overseas, and creating new research-related job roles in advance of the RAE/REF submission cycles (see for example Furlong, 2011; Oancea, 2014; Marques et al., 2017). It was noted that more prestigious universities were more likely to be able to mobilise the capitals necessary to engage in this game-playing (Torrance, 2020) – in effect creating a virtuous (or, depending on one’s point of view, vicious) circle.

Wilson and Holligan (2013) discuss a lack of resistance to the culture of performativity and accountability within education. However, some positive influences of the research assessment exercises have also been acknowledged: Oancea (2014, p. 90) quotes one participant as saying, ‘it does make you get up and write up research for publication’, and (Marques et al., 2017) credit it as having developed and enhanced the research culture of education departments.

4 <https://www.ref.ac.uk/about/interdisciplinary-research/>

There was also evidence of ratings and metrics creating a hierarchy of disciplines within HEIs, with education departments seen as having to compete internally with other disciplines for resources and reputation. It was noted how ‘good’ performance in the research assessment exercises was crucial if education departments were to be valued institutionally – in part to counter entrenched assumptions that education is of lesser status due to its practical orientation (Furlong, 2011; Marques & Powell, 2020). However, the Stern review (2016) has sought to address these criticisms by giving weightage to research impact, and it will be important to undertake future studies of these issues after REF 2021.

It was interesting to note that we located no papers that discussed the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), which was introduced in 2015, and the implications that this new form of assessment might have for education researchers’ research activities (for example, an greater emphasis being placed on ‘quality’ teaching instead of ‘quality’ research). It could be that little research has yet considered the TEF in relation to this issue – or that, perhaps more likely, the search terms we used in this review which, in focussing on ‘research’, did not capture this literature. We therefore cannot make claims within this report about the TEF as a structural force shaping education researchers’ research activity.

The funding regime

Cultures of performativity and accountability also have implications for the way research is funded and conducted (Finlay et al. 2013), with funders (such as the ESRC, external contractors/private sector organisations and/or governments and charities) seen as controlling the research agenda (n=13; see for example Marshall et al., 2015; Leitch, 2018).

Funders are often perceived as prioritising the use of particular research approaches and determining the content of research (largely but not only through the projects they put out for tender). This has been common in the sciences for some time, but is now becoming more prevalent in the social sciences, including education research (Lawy & Armstrong, 2009). A side effect of this greater external control is an increased focus on evidence-based practice (discussed below), which is seen as being championed by both funders and governments (see for example Biesta, 2007; Constable, 2018). The corollary of this is the gradual marginalisation of perspectives and methodologies influenced by

the arts and humanities: for example, it has been argued that narrative research, arts-based research and ethnographic studies are less likely to be looked upon favourably by funding panels than other studies (Finlay et al., 2013; Marshall et al., 2015; Leitch, 2018). With regards to the tendering process, St Clair and Belzer (2007, p. 484) write that ‘if the methodological, philosophical and quality aspects of the research are defined in advance, all that remains is to determine who will offer to conduct it most cheaply’. Writing as far back as the mid-1990s, Simons (1995, p. 437) also emphasises the notion that education research independent of politics or of specific political interests (understood as government agendas rather than broader ideologies) was by then a thing of the past: ‘educational research funded by government has an agenda set by the ruling party, controlled by the ruling party and used by the ruling party’.

One of the main concerns for academics appears to be the ‘unwritten’ requirement to generate research income based on broader agendas at the expense of personal research interests, with such demands often generating a great deal of dissatisfaction and, in some cases, forms of resistance (Lawy & Armstrong, 2009; Rowbottom & Aiston, 2011; Casey & Fletcher, 2016). For example, there was some evidence of researchers obtaining grants from key funders and then working ‘from within’ (that is, making small changes to proposed methodological approaches) in order to satisfy personal research agendas (see for example Lawy & Armstrong, 2009; Finlay et al., 2013).

The reputation and esteem of an HEI (as reflected in metrics and the media) was also perceived to be related to the levels of funding awarded, and researchers’ ability to pursue a more autonomous research agenda. Four papers discussed how education researchers working in more ‘prestigious’ institutions might be more likely to be awarded grants (for example, Lawn & Furlong, 2007; Papatsiba & Cohen, 2020). This was generally linked with two factors.

1. Prestigious institutions are more likely to have good research infrastructure and capacity in place, so can develop stronger bids.
2. It is assumed that researchers in prestigious institutions are more likely to produce high quality work (Papatsiba & Cohen, 2020).

The impact agenda

Closely related to issues concerning the RAE/REF and funding regimes is the growing emphasis on demonstrating research impact, which was discussed in seven papers. Francis (2011), for example, discusses how the discourse of ‘impact’ has gradually come to dominate education research and its aims, through the RAE/REF and the subsequent redefining of research priorities within education departments. Writing in 2011, Francis argued that ‘impact’ was often something that academics added later on, through a ‘retrospective construction of narratives’ (p. 5) to fit in with the REF criterion.

Zapp et al. (2017) make a similar point when they argue that research proposals to research councils (and the ESRC in particular) now include a separate section in which to describe the potential impact of the work, with such funder requirements seen as shaping and driving ‘the research aims and the cognitive development of a discipline’ (p. 391). O’Connell (2019) found that the impact agenda is often perceived by education researchers as having negative effects, including the valuing of certain types of research over others, internal rankings of departments based on impact, and the strengthening of a managerial culture within education. Positive effects were also reported, however, including the opportunity for departments to extend the reach of their research, and the chance for those engaging in more applied, practice-based research to gain greater recognition for their work (see for example Jerome, 2020).

There was a general sense from the literature that education researchers are increasingly under pressure to demonstrate the impact of their research (Laing et al., 2017), particularly in the form of impact case studies, which are a prominent feature of the REF and are given increasing weightage – they now constitute 25 per cent of a submission’s weighting in REF 2021 as compared to 2 per cent in REF 2014. Marques and Powell’s (2020) study found that the emphasis on impact case studies had changed academic behaviour, with one academic asserting in an interview that

‘institutions are constantly on the lookout for potential impact case studies. They start to draft them and refine them from very early on [and make] political choices about which ones to strengthen even more.’

Marques & Powell, 2020, p. 841

Jerome (2020) calls this ‘performativity in action’ and writes that

‘academics feel compelled to perform to external agendas with a degree of inauthenticity as they respond to the (policy-led) priorities established by government and start to second-guess what outcomes they might achieve in order to project desirable impacts.’

Jerome, 2020, p. 11

This is often reflected in the impact case studies produced which, Jerome argues, might emphasise superficial elements or rely on the writer’s skill to produce a convincing and well-written narrative. Francis (2011) states that academics might lack the skills to engage user groups and demonstrate impact; however, in the 10 years since this study was published, universities may have become better at public engagement and providing staff with training and opportunities to improve their practice in this regard.

The increased emphasis on impact is also discussed with regards to the broader aims of education research, and education as an intellectual endeavour. Rees and Power (2007), for example, note that

‘conventional distinctions can be drawn between research which is “curiosity-driven”, aiming to contribute to the development of knowledge and understanding, and research which – to varying degrees – is defined in terms of practical problems and their solution.’

Rees & Power, 2007, p. 88

Similarly, Francis (2011) writes that

‘clearly not all research in education can or should have direct relevance or utility for educational practice – “blue skies” research remains valuable, here as in other disciplines.’

Francis, 2011, p. 6

The distinction between applied and ‘blue skies’ research is further discussed in the next sections.

The ‘what works’ agenda

Critiques of education research have focused on its perceived lack of relevance to practitioners, the lack of ‘scientific’ approaches (such as RCTs and systematic literature reviews) and a lack of rigour (Whitty, 2006). For instance, 20 papers discuss elements of the 1997

talk that David Hargreaves delivered to the Teacher Training Agency, in which he argued that teaching was not a sufficiently research-based profession, and that education research was poor value for money and could not enhance the quality of school education. This talk (Hargreaves, 1997) has seemingly fuelled a 25-year-long debate about the quality of education research: it has been argued that the talk caused a ‘moral panic’ (Pirrie, 2001, p. 125), and Hargreaves’ arguments have since been heavily questioned (see for example Atkinson, 2000).

Biesta (2007) notes that Hargreaves raised two main issues:

- that education research should be more practically relevant
- that education research should support a transformation of educational practice into evidence-based practice.

Twenty-five of the papers in the review critically examined issues of evidence-based practice, with particular foci on the perceived high value placed on RCTs and the growing emphasis on systematic literature reviews (Oakley, 2006). These trends were described as part of shifting government agendas (Pollard, 2006; Lawy & Armstrong, 2009), and can in turn be related to an understanding of the state as determining, producing and consuming research (Rees & Power, 2007). In addition to David Hargreaves’ (1997) talk, Tooley and Darby’s (1998) review of educational research commissioned by Ofsted, and the contemporaneous Hillage report (Hillage et al., 1998) were identified by a number of authors as key ‘turning points’ in the field of education research, and as sparking longstanding questions concerning the quality of such research in the UK (see for example Oancea, 2005; Lawy & Armstrong, 2009; Oakley, 2006).

Debates about the quality & purpose of education research

These arguments and counterarguments have led to what Byrne and Ozga (2008) call a series of ‘rather heated’ (p. 378) or acrimonious debates within the academic community about the relationships between education research, policy and practice (for example, Gorard, 2004; Oancea, 2005; Rees & Power, 2007). These arguments reflect different conceptions of the purposes of education research (such as evidence-based practice; curiosity; capturing ‘voices’; advancing theory). It has also been argued that research deemed to be more relevant to policy or practice is not

necessarily more rigorous, particularly when political bodies rather than academics put forward research agendas (Gorard, 2002).

A similar point has been raised by Hammersley (2005a), who writes that

‘policy or practice cannot be based on research, in any exclusive sense, and that to try to make it research-based will distort either research or practice, or both. The most likely outcome [...] is a damaging effect on research.’

Hammersley, 2005a, p. 321

Hammersley argues that although research has a role in policymaking and practice, seeking to develop ‘research-based policymaking practice’ might result in:

- increased bias
- further decline in funding for studies not seen as crucial by policymakers or practitioners
- a focus on research that seeks to answer questions that cannot be answered effectively
- a reduction of turnaround time for projects, which might further negatively impact the quality of education research (2005a, p. 321).

Munn (2005) discusses this same issue with regards to a distinction between applied and ‘blue skies’ research, with the latter being ‘unpredictable, high-risk for funders and usually not intended to have a direct and immediate effect on policy’ (p. 19).

Professional bodies, values & ethics

Another formal structure that might be regarded as shaping the work of education researchers in the UK is that of the professional bodies that lead the field, such as BERA and SERA. Pollard (2006), for example, discusses the role that BERA plays in organising events and conferences, and facilitating the dissemination of ideas among the educational community through its journals and *Research Intelligence* magazine. Pollard suggests that this ‘improv[es the] climate for debate’ so that ‘collective progress’ can be made (2006, p.257).

There was also discussion of the wider professional and ethical values that education researchers need to uphold in order to maintain trust and integrity in the profession. Two studies mentioned BERA’s *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* – first published in 1992, and subsequently updated – as providing a framework for collective action (for example, Simons, 1995; Rowbottom & Aiston, 2011). However, both

studies raised questions as to whether all sponsors and education researchers always abide by these ethical guidelines in practice – particularly given the increasingly pressurised and performance-driven nature of academia. Indeed, Rowbottom and Aiston (2011) contend that ‘the competitive nature of the tendering process will mean that there is always someone willing to do whatever the funding bodies ask for’ (p. 651).

Some authors raised questions as to whether the need to seek external funds forced researchers to pursue projects that did not necessarily align with their personal values, which could cause tensions (see for example Casey & Fletcher, 2016), or make dubious decisions to cater to funder requirements – for example, providing the funder with ‘what they want to hear’, or signing over data access and control rights (Rowbottom & Aiston, 2011). Colley (2014) reflects on the tensions she and her colleagues experienced when a research project on the youth support service Connexions produced findings that painted the service in a negative light. Colley documents both the research team’s attempts to disseminate the findings out of a sense of moral duty and responsibility to academic freedom, and the hostility they faced from certain UK policymakers and stakeholders who sought to publicly criticise the rigour of their research.

3.2.2 Informal structures & processes affecting education research

This section examines the main informal structures and processes identified in this review. We found that of the 114 papers, 63 reported on some kind of informal structure affecting education research in the UK. We defined informal structures and process as those that are associated with institutional cultures, career priorities and matters of identity, as well as individuals’ beliefs, assumptions, norms, values, attitudes and perceptions (Prell et al., 2010).

We identified the following six broad themes in relation to informal structures:

- academic pressures
- affective issues
- non-traditional academics
- second-career researchers
- career stages
- departmental cultures.

Academic pressures

One of the informal structures discussed in 20 papers related to the pressures on academics working in HE education departments (for example, Deem & Lucas, 2007; Holligan, 2011). Such pressures appeared to be generated through the dual demands of teaching alongside research, and it was noted that a delicate balance was required to fulfil both obligations satisfactorily. Eleven papers discussed the heavy teaching loads given to academics – particularly early career researchers and staff responsible for initial teaching training – which limited the time that individuals could devote to research (see for example Skelton, 2004; Sikes, 2006a; Read & Leathwood, 2018). Research was also widely discussed as being highly valued both within HEIs and by academics themselves, with the implication that teaching was of lesser importance and could ‘get in the way’ of research (Furlong, 2011) – although there was some indication that certain groups (such as teacher educators who had previously worked in the school sector) could place higher value on teaching than research (Calvert et al., 2012; Hemmings et al., 2013).

Pressures relating to research included publication demands – in particular, the need to consistently produce a high quantity of high-quality publications (Marques et al., 2017), which was seen as not only important in order to fulfil personal goals and satisfy intellectual curiosity but vital in order to meet the demands of the research assessment exercises (Oancea, 2014). This in turn was seen to justify one’s position within both academia and one’s department, ensuring continued employment (Marques & Powell, 2020). Marques and Powell (2020) describe the need for academics to build up a ‘good’ research profile in order to generate academic capital and become a profitable asset to their employing institution in an increasingly marketised sphere.

Another strong research pressure to emerge related to external grant capture. The academic work environment was described as particularly competitive, with authors writing about academics’ ‘frenetic attempts’ to secure funding (Holligan, 2011, p. 54). It was noted that this could place academics under considerable stress, given that their job security, probation and promotion prospects were dependent on it (Read & Leathwood, 2018).

The most precious commodity in education departments appears to be time – more specifically, the time that academics can devote to research (Deem & Lucas, 2007; Sharp et al., 2015). It is notable that time can be secured

by winning grants that can, in turn, bring with them elevated status, publications and support from research students (Holligan, 2011). Finlay et al. (2013) and Francis (2011) discuss how lack of time can also have a negative impact on research design and dissemination.

Being an academic also means job uncertainty for some, and there was discussion of recent shifts in HE employment policy towards fixed-term and temporary contracts. These positions were often said to be held by younger researchers, women and Black and minority ethnic (BAME) staff (for example, Read & Leathwood, 2018; Mahony & Weiner, 2020). Reay (2000, 2004), for example, discusses the challenges that contract researchers can encounter based on her past experiences – namely, being undervalued despite doing much of the ‘spadework’ (2000, p. 15) on projects – which can often lead to frustration and anxiety. Researchers on fixed-term contracts may also feel that they cannot make an intellectual contribution to research given that they do not have ultimate control over projects (Rees et al., 2007) – and can therefore feel that they are not ‘real academics’ (Read & Leathwood, 2018, p. 341).

An additional issue raised in the papers was that of life–work balance. Six papers reported that academics often work significantly more than their contractual hours, including during evenings and weekends (see for example Sikes, 2006a). Heavy workloads were also said to impact on family life and, in some cases, academics’ decisions as to whether or not they might be able to have children and continue in their jobs. For example, an academic in Holligan’s (2011) study stated

‘it can take a dreadful toll from your personal life. I am not surprised that many of my colleagues don’t have children... I have got four kids, but thankfully I have got a very understanding partner.’

Holligan, 2011, p. 67

A healthy life–work balance is often seen as an ‘unattainable chimera’ (Sikes, 2006a, p. 564). It is important to note that these work conditions were not described as temporary, or as a response to extreme and unanticipated circumstances, but rather as the norm. In terms of how this situation came about, Wilson & Holligan (2013) note that

‘work intensification [can be] attributed partly to performance-driven research, coupled with demanding research grant and publication targets at a time of severe competition to gain external funding.’

Wilson & Holligan, 2013, p. 230

Affective issues

There were also reflections on affective issues. For example, four papers discuss the difficulties in dealing with personal criticisms from other academics, such as when sending out papers and research proposals for peer review, or when research is published and enters the public domain. Such judgments have been said to reveal that one’s ‘rational mind cannot be separated out from [one’s] emotional self’ (Hodkinson, 2004, p. 18). Indeed, academics were discussed as having an emotional and personal investment in their approaches and ideas, meaning that criticism can be keenly felt (Lefstein, 2008).

Others documented the need for academics to possess certain traits that might make them more likely to succeed in the profession: namely, self-esteem, confidence and an ability to deal with rejection (Holligan, 2011). It was noted that some staff members might be more likely to possess these traits than others – teacher entrants and younger academics, for example, might have less confidence in conducting research due to their relative inexperience, lack of training and/or conflict between their pre-established professional identities and their new academic identities (for example, Murray & Male, 2005; Hemmings et al., 2013).

Perhaps surprisingly, only one paper discussed the positives and pleasures of academic life in a significant way: Wilson and Holligan (2013) reported that academics could gain pleasure from collaborations, publications and research activities.

Non-traditional academics

A very small number of papers discussed the experiences of women (n=5) and BAME (n=1) academics, both seen as underrepresented groups in academia. Using an intersectional approach, Mahony & Weiner (2020) explored the experiences of female BAME academics and reported that they can:

- encounter challenges due to colleagues and students questioning their competence
- be subject to racism and sexual harassment
- receive less support within their department from managers
- be less represented at professorial level (or their recruitment is tokenistic)
- be more likely to be paid less than colleagues with similar experience and qualifications.

Others note that women academics often shoulder teaching and administrative duties at the expense of research, due to gender-biased assumptions among managers that women are better suited to such work (Deem & Lucas, 2007). There was discussion of how women do not fit the stereotype of the 'traditional' academic, who is 'male, middle-class and middle-aged' (Skelton, 2004, p. 99). This can prompt 'compensatory' behaviours: for example, Skelton (2004) discusses how some of the 'young' female academics in her study sought to align themselves with a more masculine identity, such as trying to appear more serious, mature and formal. Another finding related to gendered perceptions of what constitutes a successful research culture: the women in Holligan's (2011) study emphasised the importance of networking, support and community, while the men often cited personal drive and outputs as important. Finally, Sikes (2006a) found that some of the female academics in her study expressed deep-seated feelings of inadequacy and confusion (for example, in relation to whether they should be prioritising teaching or research), despite the fact that they, Sikes observed, performed their jobs 'in a committed, conscientious and effective manner [and] undertake research and have published in peer-reviewed outlets' (p. 564). Such findings are indicative of tensions and challenges in women's academic identity work (however, this is based on two studies by Sikes, 2006a and 2006b, with very small sample sizes).

In addition to our identification of only one study focusing on BAME academics, there were also notable omissions in the literature pertaining to other 'non-traditional' academics – notably those from backgrounds of lower socioeconomic status (apart from Reay, 2000 & 2004, who focuses on working class female contract researchers), those who identify as having disabilities, and LGBTQ+ academics.

Second-career researchers

We found that there was little consistency in the terminology used by authors when referring to individuals who had entered academia following a teaching career (discussed in 15 papers), with some referring to 'teacher researchers', 'teacher educators', 'practitioner researchers' and/or 'second-career researchers'. We use the latter term here to refer to all of these groupings, provided that they include only individuals who are employed by HEIs and work in education departments, rather than in schools (that is, not teachers conducting research within their schools).

Education academics often have very different career trajectories to those in other disciplines, and many have started their careers as teachers in schools or further education colleges – Deem and Lucas (2007), for example, write that 'new entrants typically arrive in midcareer, with significant professional experience but minimal research experience' (p. 121). This has led to a separation between teaching and research that is, in many cases, wider in education departments than in others (Jerome, 2020), and this can translate into different identities, expectations and concerns, and might hinder the development of a sense of community within educational research (Lucas, 2007; Deem & Lucas, 2007). Furlong (2013) and Sharp et al. (2015) note that many academics employed in education departments do not have a doctorate and are not research active (they are often employed on teaching-only contracts): some academics will therefore never have the opportunity to develop their research and publications. Some of these elements are seen as unique to education.

Findings suggest that second-career researchers are disproportionately employed in institutions with lower levels of 'prestige', lower research capacity, and that are teaching-led; this can inhibit staff's ability to gain research training and 'learn their trade' (see for example Murray & Male, 2005; Sharp et al., 2015). It was frequently stated that second-career researchers are often allocated very high teaching loads – including responsibilities for placements and school visits – which can impact on their time and ability to produce high-quality research (for example, Murray & Male, 2005; Furlong, 2011; Mercer, 2013).

Another factor that was considered important was second-career researchers' lack of confidence in their ability to conduct research. It was suggested that because teacher entrants are likely to be older and successful in their previous careers, it is often mistakenly assumed that they know how to conduct research (Mercer, 2013). Furthermore, some studies reported on the identity-shifts required when such individuals make the transition into HE: it was noted that some can hold different perceptions of the relative importance of teaching and research, and seek to prioritise teaching as it aligns more closely with their existing identities, which in turn impacts upon their desire to engage in research (see for example Lucas, 2007; Deem & Lucas, 2007; Hulme & Sangster, 2013; Sharp et al., 2015). This can, given the increasing emphasis placed on high-quality research outputs in HE, cause tension and identity conflict (Sikes, 2006a; Wilson & Holligan, 2013). This can further reinforce

perceptions among second-career researchers that they are not as 'valued' as others within the education research community.

Career stages

There was also discussion of education researchers in terms of career stage, and the specific challenges that those at different stages might encounter. We identified only one text that explicitly discussed those in the mid-career phase – Leitch (2018), who, employing an autoethnographic method, reflected on her own need as a mid-to-late career academic to avoid 'career boredom' (p.163) through utilising different research approaches and taking up different managerial roles. Small pockets of the literature explored the experiences of early-career academics (n=7) and later-career academics (n=3), each of which we will now discuss in turn. However, the small number of texts located should be kept in mind when interpreting the following findings.

Early-career academics (ECAs)

A notable finding in the literature is that ECAs can experience heavy workloads and be affected by anxiety caused by temporary and short-term contracts. Studies indicated that ECAs are often allocated high teaching and administrative workloads, which can take time away from developing a strong publication profile and securing research grants in order to establish themselves as leading academics in their field (Hulme & Sangster, 2013; Read & Leathwood, 2018). For example, Skelton (2004, p. 93) found that a number of the 'young' female academics in her study were expected to take on leadership and administrative roles (such as programme leaders) beyond their experience and contractual obligations in order to demonstrate commitment and to receive tenure. Hulme and Sangster's (2013) findings were similar, and one example they highlighted was an ECA being advised to work part-time in order to have more time for research activities.

Another pressure seemingly experienced quite intensely by ECAs is the need to gain external funding (Skelton, 2004; Casey & Fletcher, 2016). Such grants were seen as enabling ECAs to advance their careers and be promoted. However, authors discussed the difficulties that ECAs can experience in seeking 'attainable' funds (such as contract research and government projects) or funds to further their own lines of inquiry. For example, Casey & Fletcher (2016) used self-study to reflect on their experiences as ECAs in physical education. They describe how they entered the profession post-PhD under the

illusion that they could pursue their own research agendas and be autonomous academics. Casey in particular documents his disillusionment with the HE system that rewards those who obtain funding, regardless of the 'worth' of the project; his attempts to pursue his own (unfunded) line of inquiry; and the responses of the managers in his department (Casey & Fletcher, 2016).

It was also highlighted that, in education, ECAs who are 'second-career' researchers can be older than those in other disciplines. Some authors noted that it was relatively rare in education for academics to have followed a linear trajectory from an undergraduate degree, to a postgraduate degree, to a PhD, which is traditional in other disciplines (Lawn & Furlong, 2007). This can necessitate the creation of hybrid-identities, with older ECAs having to combine both old and new professional identities. This can leave them questioning their place in academia (Read & Leathwood, 2018).

Later-career academics (LCAs)

A different set of challenges emerged in relation to LCAs. One theme emanating from Skelton (2004) and Read and Leathwood's (2018) studies was that LCAs are growing increasingly disillusioned with the business-managerial discourse that is becoming embedded in HE (an example of which is the priority placed on external grants and certain types of publication for the RAE/REF). Several of the 'vintage' women academics in Skelton's (2004) study found the culture to be workaholic and competitive. Some of the participants in Read and Leathwood's (2018) study were concerned about keeping pace with the rigours of increasingly heavy workloads, and articulated fears of failing to 'make the grade' (p. 344); they said that, as a result, that they might like to reduce their hours, voluntarily take up a 'lower status' teaching post, or leave the profession. However, there was some evidence in these studies of LCAs acknowledging the fortunate positions that they occupied, and a sense of guilt about holding onto positions that could be given to younger academics.

Departmental cultures

There was also discussion of the centrality of departmental cultures to education academics' happiness with their jobs and ability to produce high quality research (n=10). A key finding was that good leadership was necessary for an education department to flourish (Lucas, 2007; Holligan, 2011; Wilson & Holligan, 2013) and that, conversely, bad leadership could quickly 'damage' a department.

For example, when reflecting on her career as an education academic and her personal experiences of being a manager, Ozga (2009) writes

‘The work of management, even good management, is written on water, and thriving departments can be restructured into mediocrity in less time than it takes to rewrite a job description’

Ozga, 2009, p. 1

Good leadership was said to consist of multiple facets, but centred on the head being supportive of research and becoming a ‘role model’ for staff. For example, Holligan (2011) interviewed academics across 10 Scottish and English universities and asked them what they felt facilitated a positive research culture. Holligan concluded that ‘effective leaders are good role models, inspire a sense of purpose, provide clear direction and inject others with enthusiasm’ (2011, p. 725). However, Holligan also notes that leaders need to provide adequate infrastructure to support research, such as:

- the allocation of sufficient time for academics to pursue research
- research centres where staff with similar interests can network and share expertise
- opportunities for study leave
- a programme of external speakers
- internal ‘seedcorn’ funds
- mentoring opportunities (see also Deem & Lucas, 2007; Sharp et al., 2015).

While good leadership is clearly important, many papers discussed the need for individual staff members to be self-motivated and possess positive attitudes. As one education lecturer in Holligan’s (2011) study asserted, ‘you might have the best sort of management structure, but if the people at the ground level are not interested for whatever reason then it will fail’ (p. 725). Factors also seen as inhibiting a positive research culture included ‘cliques’ and a lack of collegiality. For example, the academics in Hulme and Sangster’s (2013) study did not always enjoy working in their institutions and found it difficult to negotiate the ‘micro-politics’ within their department, sometimes stating that they could have a higher profile ‘externally than internally’ (p. 190).

It was also acknowledged, however, that wider structural forces such as the level of prestige a university enjoys, its history and its position as either a teaching-led or research-led institution

have an impact on driving a flourishing research culture (for example, Deem & Lucas, 2007). Perhaps unsurprisingly, education departments in research-led institutions are likely to have better infrastructure, support and networks already in place to enable academics to engage in research. For example, it is likely that such departments will have a larger number of senior, established academics (such as professors) who can mentor others, lead research teams, include ECAs on bids for larger grants, be a ‘critical friend’ and/or engage in co-writing (Holligan, 2011). Conversely, there was evidence of managers in teaching-led institutions not actively encouraging staff to engage in research as it was not seen as an institutional priority.

3.3.3. Northern Ireland, Scotland & Wales

Having presented our analytic findings emerging from the 114 peer-reviewed articles in terms of structures and processes, in this section we provide a breakdown of thematic trends specifically for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

As noted in the descriptive findings (section 3.1.1.), there were distinct trends in the quantities of published literature relating to the different nations of the UK. While most authors discussed the UK seemingly as a whole (n=79) many appeared to refer largely to the English context, with little consideration of how differing policies and practices across the four nations might impact on education research activity. Only six papers included some sort of explicit comparative element (for example, between England and Scotland in Deem & Lucas, 2007).

A reasonable pocket of literature focused solely on Scotland (n=13), but significantly fewer papers focused exclusively on Wales (n=4) and Northern Ireland (n=2), which could reflect the lower number of universities and smaller populations in the latter two nations. Given the small number of texts located for Wales and Northern Ireland, in this section we attempt to draw out key themes relating to the structures and processes shaping education research activity across these three nations. Given the low number of papers identified (n=19), and the fact that many were published over a decade ago, these findings should be treated cautiously and as indications of possible issues rather than accurate representations of current conditions. A comprehensive history of issues relating to educational research activity in the three nations is beyond the scope of this review.

Devolved governments & political histories

Across all three nations, authors discussed the impact of changing political structures and moves towards devolution, and noted how these have often shaped education research activities in HE. While different UK nations have always had unique education systems in place at both compulsory and post-compulsory levels, and some degree of political autonomy, many authors noted how more recent moves towards devolution had to some extent handed further control to the three nations. For example, Humes (2007) stated that after the transfer of devolved powers in 1999, Scottish government officials and politicians were more receptive to and encouraging of research, and teacher engagement in and with it, than those in England, and that a range of policy initiatives had attracted greater focus on education. In contrast, Daugherty and Davies (2011) contended that, at the time of writing in 2011, education research in Wales had become fractured, with one set of research ‘undertaken in response to the policy-driven needs of the [devolved] Welsh Assembly Government...[and] mainly undertaken by private sector consultancies’, and the other set conducted by education academics in HEIs who engage in more specialist research that is suitable for the RAE/REF (p. 20).

Northern Ireland was also discussed in relation to its very specific and turbulent political history and religious tensions. While local politicians and policymakers have been ‘highly sensitive to the perennial problems associated with religious and identity affiliations, the lack of political consensus [and] perceived differences in educational priorities’ (Leitch, 2009, p.360), Leitch contends that the complexity of these issues has meant that ideological appeasement rather than evidence-based decision-making has frequently tipped the balance when it comes to issues of educational policy and practice.

A lack of research capacity

Another theme to emerge that connected strongly with quality concerns was lack of research capacity: authors reported that this was a key reason why research quality was not ‘higher’ across these three nations. Gardner and Gallagher (2007) discuss the small number of education researchers in Northern Ireland, which recorded just 39 ‘active’ education researchers in the RAE 2001, and 38 in 2008. According to Leitch (2009), this creates a systemic problem in that it makes it difficult to retain high-quality national and international researchers in

this small nation. Furthermore, the issues of a lack of funding, training and skills were raised in papers concerned with the Northern Irish, Scottish and Welsh contexts (for example, Leitch, 2009; S. Brown, 2007; Daugherty & Davies, 2011)

The literature also discussed a number of large-scale initiatives that had been implemented with the objective of building research capacity across the three nations. The most widely discussed initiative in Scotland was the Applied Education Research Scheme, which ran from 2004 to 2009 and was funded by the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council and the Scottish Executive’s education department (Lucas, 2007). In the Welsh context, Delamont et al. (2008) discuss the Welsh Education Research Network and WISERD, both of which were instigated with Welsh Assembly government and ESRC funds with the aim of increasing research capacity in Welsh HEIs other than Cardiff University. Concerns were expressed by Leitch (2009) that similar levels of funding and drives for capacity building had not, at that point, emerged in Northern Ireland.

Research assessment & quality concerns

The literature located in this review indicated that there has often been unease about the quality of education research in these nations (in RAE/REF terms), particularly in Scotland and Wales. Several authors focusing on the Scottish context drew attention to the fact that no HE institution in Scotland achieved a rating of 5* or 5 in the 2001 RAE (for example, Humes, 2007; Deem & Lucas, 2007), and discussed how this seemed to provoke concern among policymakers and the education research community. Much was also made of research quality in Wales: authors noted that in the RAEs in the 1990s and early 2000s, only Cardiff University performed well (a 5*, ‘world-class’ rating in 2001, for example), with other Welsh universities rating towards the lower end of the assessment scale. This meant that only Cardiff received core funding for education research, which disadvantaged other Welsh universities (Murray et al., 2008; Delamont et al., 2008). Northern Ireland was less discussed in relation to research quality and the RAE/REF, although Gardner and Gallagher (2007) suggest that the nation has performed reasonably well, albeit not at world-leading levels.

Cultures of performativity & accountability

Another theme that emerged from the literature was that, despite having some degree of political autonomy, all four nations were subject to the

rigours of the RAE/REF, both of which were and are UK-wide. For the professional experiences of education researchers in these three nations, the implications of the RAE/REF were seen as being similar to those discussed previously in this report. For example, authors highlighted issues such as the pressures on academics to obtain research funding, publish in peer-reviewed outlets and gain good ratings in the REF, and the very heavy teaching and administrative loads that often made it difficult to produce high-quality research and maintain a healthy work–life balance (for example, Deem & Lucas, 2007; Ozga, 2009).

Funding structures

Questions were also raised in the literature in relation to the fairness of the allocation of research funds in these smaller nations. Holligan & Wilson (2013), for example, noted both an increasing trend for the Scottish government to award grants to research organisations outside of Scotland, and that the third sector dominated the applied education research marketplace – both of which caused the Scottish education research community to feel marginalised. Similarly, Gardner and Gallagher (2007) noted how the Northern Ireland executive often awarded funds to non-governmental organisations or researchers in other UK universities, reducing the opportunities for researchers based in local HEIs to develop their skills and research profiles.

3.3.4 How the narrative has changed over time: Trends in paper topics, 1990–2020

As part of this review we sought to establish what key topics authors had focused on across all 114 papers, in order to allow us to map potential trends over time. We read each paper several times and identified the topic that it focused on. While we found that the articles often discussed a number of topics, for the purpose of analysis the team agreed on what was felt to be the primary focus that was foregrounded in the text in each case.

The overall trends in topics of focus across the entire 31-year period are presented in table 3.3.

When the frequencies of topics were further broken down by decade, some interesting trends emerged. In table 3.4, we present the top five topics for each decade between 1990 and 2020.

Table 3.3
Top five overall topics of focus in papers, by number of papers

Top five overall topics of focus	Frequencies (no. peer-reviewed articles)
Performativity, accountability, RAE/REF	20
Evidence based policy & practice	19
Researcher identities	13
Teacher educator research	11
Impact agenda	7

Table 3.4
Top five overall topics of focus in papers, by decade of publication*

Topics of focus	Frequencies (no. peer-reviewed papers)
1990–1999*	
Research funding structures & constraints	2
Location/purpose of education as a discipline in HE	2
Evidence based policy & practice	2
Research ethics	1
2000–2009	
Evidence based policy & practice	16
Performativity, accountability, RAE/REF	9
Researcher identities	6
Teacher educator research	6
Government influence	3
2010–2020	
Performativity, accountability, RAE/REF	11
Impact agenda	7
Researcher identities	7
Teacher educator research	5
Research funding structures & constraints	4

*Only four different topics were identified among papers published between 1990 and 1999.

It is possible to place the topics and their frequencies shown in tables 3.3 and 3.4 in wider socio-historical context and consider what important events, debates and ‘turning points’ might have been taking place during the periods in question that might have ignited research interest.

1990–1999

As previously noted, we identified relatively few papers matching our criteria published in the 1990s (n=7). Topics of focus included research funding structures and constraints, as well as research ethics. Two papers focused on broader concerns about the structural location and purpose of education as a discipline in HE, and its relationship with other disciplines (Deem, 1996; Ranson, 1996).

2000–2009

By the 2000s (n=62) there had been a clear shift in focus towards evidence-based policy and practice. Papers with this focus discussed – often critically – the shift in educational policy discourse towards evidence-based practice and the ‘what works’ agenda (for example, Hammersley, 2005a; Whitty, 2006; Biesta, 2007). It is not surprising that researchers might have devoted significant attention to this topic in the 2000s, given the ‘heated debates’ taking place about the quality and relevance of education research that were sparked by key events in the late 1990s (such as Hargreaves’ TTA talk in 1997, and Tooley and Darby’s critique of education research in 1998).

Also prominent were papers exploring aspects of performativity, accountability and the RAE/REF. Many of these focused on the increasing emphasis placed on the RAEs (2001, 2008), and sought to question the narrow and instrumental way in which research was being evaluated (for instance, McNay, 2003; Oancea, 2007).

There was also an emerging interest in education researcher identities – such papers were often authored by prominent UK scholars known for their qualitative research on social inequalities and gender issues, particularly those working in the field of the sociology of education (for example, Sara Delamont and Diane Reay). Teacher educator research also garnered some interest: Jean Murray was lead author of four of the six papers in this category, which included findings from projects that explored capacity-building in teacher educator research that had been funded by the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (see for example, Murray et al., 2008).

2010–2020

During the 2010s (and in 2020) there was a notable shift in attention away from debates around evidence-based policy and practice – a topic that was identified as the main focus of only one (Holligan, 2020) of the 45 included papers published within this decade. (It therefore does not feature among the top five topics for 2010–2020, despite having been the most strongly represented, by a significant margin, in the previous decade; see table 3.4.) Instead, authors appear to have become more preoccupied with issues of performativity, accountability, the RAE/REF and the impact agenda. This is, again, perhaps unsurprising given the wider structural changes taking place in HE governance and finance (specifically neoliberal regimes and reforms, which are discussed in greater depth in the peer-reviewed article based on this systematic scoping review, Stentiford et al., 2021), which might be seen as having intensified in the 2010s. Again, these papers are often critical of assessment frameworks and how they have impacted upon academics’ lives (for example, Furlong, 2011; Oancea, 2014; Marques et al., 2017). The impact agenda also comes to the foreground in this decade, with a number of authors analysing impact case studies submitted as part of the REF 2014 (for instance, Cain & Allan, 2017; O’Connell, 2019). Researcher identities also continue to be of interest – particularly how regimes of performance and accountability might shape the experiences of researchers from different backgrounds (Holligan & Wilson, 2013; Read & Leathwood, 2018).

3.3.5 BERA presidential addresses

Having presented the findings of our analysis of the 114 peer-reviewed articles, we now turn our attention to the 21 BERA presidential addresses. As table 3.2 indicates, overall these addresses covered a wide variety of topics, but discussion centred on education research and researchers, and their (often fractious) relationships with government, policymakers and policy (n=9). This emerged as a particular trend in the early-to-mid 1990s, but has recurred across the three decades in question. This topic aligns closely with others identified as the focuses of presidential addresses:

- criticisms of education research (n=2) (Lomax, 1999; Mortimore, 2000)
- impact/dissemination of education research (n=2) (Gardner, 2011; James, 2012)
- education research as a profession (n=1) (McIntyre, 1997).

These topics mirror the above discussion of the criticisms levelled against education research by key government actors in the mid-to-late-1990s.

When comparing the core topics of interest in the BERA presidential addresses with those in the 114 articles published over the same three decades, it is interesting to note that the addresses focus much more substantially on relations between education researchers and government(s) and policymaking – and, in particular, how more harmonious links might be established between the two camps. Consequently, also evident are:

- deeper reflections on the purpose of education, and what and who education research should be for (for example, Bassey, 1992; Moss, 2016; Menter, 2014)
- the diverse nature of the field in terms of epistemological debates (for example, paradigms, quantitative ‘versus’ qualitative approaches) (for example, Furlong, 2004; Whitty, 2006; Munn, 2008)
- questions in relation to the value of partnerships with the practitioner and stakeholder communities (for example, Gipps, 1993; Lomax, 1999). Issues of performativity and accountability do not feature heavily in the addresses, other than those of Elliott (1990), published at the very beginning of the period in question, and Wyse (2020), published at the very end.

BERA as an organisation was established to advance research quality, capacity and engagement, and the president finds her/himself in the position of figurehead, representing the interests of its many members. It therefore appears logical that the presidents often adopt an overtly political stance in their addresses, and seek to defend the profession against perceived outside attacks. Less attention appears to be paid in these addresses to issues of working cultures and climates, and issues of equality, diversity and inclusion within the profession – although for some discussion of these issues see, for example, Murphy (1996) and Sally Brown (1991).

4. Conclusions

4.1 OVERALL REFLECTIONS OF THE TYPES OF RESEARCH FOUND & QUALITY OF THE STUDIES

This review located 114 peer-reviewed journal articles, 21 BERA presidential addresses, and one doctoral thesis published between 1990 and 2020. The 114 articles were published across 56 journals, with *BERJ* the most strongly represented. Most studies focused on the UK (or more specifically the English context), with a dearth of studies focusing on Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Of the 114 articles, 62 per cent (n=71) were narrative papers and 38 per cent (n=43) were empirical. Just 1.43 empirical studies were published per year, on average, over the 31-year period in question, which suggests that more empirical studies are required that add to our understanding of the structures and processes that influence education research activities in the UK. While the papers used a diversity of methods, generally the empirical studies that were conducted with education researchers and stakeholders were qualitative and small-scale; for example, the highest number of interviews conducted in a single study was 40, in a study by Deem and Lucas (2007). There were also few studies conducted with ‘powerful’ groups who arguably possess considerable influence within the field, such as senior HEI staff, managers and policymakers, journal editors and individuals from funding bodies. Larger-scale qualitative and quantitative studies are needed in the future – with sample sizes large enough to allow analysis both within and across those demographics – if we are to more fully understand the formal and informal structures and processes that influence the discipline. In general, the quality of the 114 articles was deemed to be relatively high, although with the caveat that it was difficult to appraise the quality of the papers in many instances – particularly the narrative texts.

The 21 BERA presidential addresses focused on largely the same themes as those emanating from the 114 articles – reinforcing those themes. However, in the addresses there was greater emphasis on both discussing relationships between the profession and government, and on defending the profession against external criticism.

4.2 OVERALL REFLECTIONS ON FORMAL & INFORMAL STRUCTURES & PROCESSES

4.2.1 Formal structures & processes

Six main themes relating to formal structures and processes were identified in the 114 articles:

- cultures of performativity and accountability
- funding regime
- the impact agenda
- the ‘what works’ agenda
- debates about the quality and purpose of education research
- professional bodies.

Although they have been separated out for the purpose of analysis, these themes are complex and appear to interact. In figure 4.1, we attempt to represent their interrelationships visually to capture their interplay. Emerging most strongly (in a numeric sense) as a theme in the located literature was ‘culture of performativity and accountability’ (n=27), which suggests that this topic is of particular interest – or, perhaps more accurately, of concern – among education researchers. The cultures of performativity and accountability are firmly embedded in, and driven by, UK-wide government policy structures that frame HE as a field and the political decisions that underpin its generation. The research assessment exercises were highlighted by authors as critical in driving behaviour in HE and, in turn, the organisational structures and day-to-day operations within education departments. Perhaps unsurprisingly, our longitudinal analysis revealed that matters of performativity and accountability have received increasing levels of research interest over the past decade (2010–2020).

Cultures of performativity and accountability might be seen as linked with funding regimes and the impact agenda (the latter of which emerged from funding bodies’ and REF’s requirements), though these relationships are not unidirectional. Some papers engaged with tensions between:

- universities’ expectations of education researchers to generate funding, and the funders’ agenda in prioritising particular research topics and methodologies over others

- individuals’ freedom to undertake research and/or methodologies that they consider professionally and ethically most appropriate to their personal values.

In the main the discourse around these external factors was negative, with both authors and their participants (that is, education researchers) expressing dissatisfaction. Furthermore, there was a perception of divisions, based on metrics and league tables, between universities, and of competition being embedded at the heart of HE. Those HEIs that were seen to be highly reputable were also seen as able to not only attract more research funding due to better capacity and infrastructure, but benefit from the perception that their research was of a higher quality. This, in turn, was seen to give more autonomy and freedom to education researchers employed by such institutions.

Another tension, leading to heated debates, related to the relationship between research, policy and practice. These debates concerned the purpose and nature of education research, including whether research should be undertaken to drive policy and/or practice, both of which often require quick turnaround times, which is perceived as impacting negatively on the quality of research and limiting the attractiveness of ‘blue skies’ research. Professional bodies within the discipline might be understood as framing these tensions and debates, and as providing some sort of guidance to the field. Values and ethics may differ between education researchers at the individual and personal level, but they are to some extent guided and informed by the ethical codes produced by these professional bodies.

When reviewing the papers, the sociopolitical environments in which these formal structures and processes were experienced appeared significant. For example, in the devolved nations, the specific political and/or religious contexts in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales mediated the relationship between policy and practice and the emphasis placed on certain ‘types’ of research (such as practitioner research). The different funding contexts and organisational properties of HE in the nations (such as the number of HEIs/education researchers) were also seen as enabling or constraining research quality and capacity building. However, UK-wide policy initiatives such as the RAE/REF were seen as overriding national structures and geographic boundaries, and as producing similar working environments and cultures within education departments across UK HEIs.

4.2.2 Informal structures & processes

Although distinguishing between formal and informal structures and processes is a false dichotomy, it proved useful and practical to examine each separately. An analysis of the papers that focused on informal structures and processes led to the identification of six key themes:

- academic pressures
- affective issues
- non-traditional academics
- second-career researchers
- career stages
- departmental cultures.

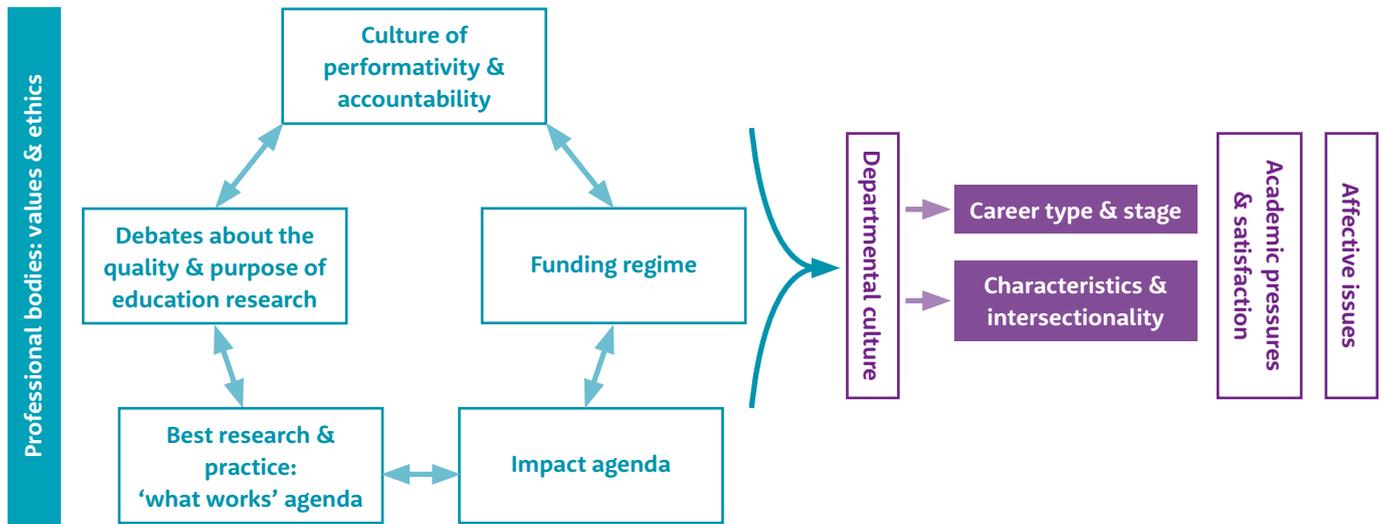
We represent the relationships between these themes, and the formal structures discussed above, visually in figure 4.2.

Figure 4.1

An illustration of the relationships between formal structures & processes



Figure 4.2
The intersection of formal & informal structures & processes



Our findings suggested that the identities of researchers and career stages are situated in a departmental culture that can lead to or produce affective issues and perceived academic pressures. Formal structures and processes were, in turn, seen to have an impact on these. One example is the impact of RAE/REF on academic pressures, and on researchers’ affective responses and identities.

There was evidence in the papers that there may be differences in departmental cultures and expectations specifically between departments and universities that are research-intensive and those that are teaching-intensive, further to a more general variance in cultures and expectations between institutions. However, a focus on teaching and research across all HEI contexts and nations seemed to lead to high workloads and a shortage of time, with individuals trying to fulfil both obligations. This was seen to have an impact on their work-life balance, and to exacerbate the already considerable pressures on those employed on temporary or fixed-term contracts, and those on probation. Relatedly, affective issues were highlighted – mainly negative ones, such as feelings of rejection and perceived criticism during the peer review process. Overall, as can be expected, academics’ job satisfaction was seen to depend on ‘good’ departmental cultures, in which ‘good’ leadership was seen as instrumental, though individual academics being self-motivated and having positive attitudes was also considered important.

Only five studies focused on, or implicitly discussed, the experiences of women in academia, and only one considered the experiences of BAME academics. None of the included studies

looked at the experiences of disabled and/or LGBTQ+ academics – an important omission on social justice and equality grounds. Papers focused more substantially on second-career professionals (that is, former teachers) (n=15), and some authors explored the narratives of early-career researchers (n=7) and later-career academics (n=3). A common connector was that all groups were identified as experiencing challenges in relation to their social, self and professional identities, which the authors related to the formal structures of accountability and research targets driven by funding agendas and the RAE/REF. There was also emerging evidence of systemic structural barriers within education departments (that is, gender and/or racial barriers) that might disadvantage members of affected groups – such as in the case of women academics being given disproportionately heavy teaching and pastoral loads.

4.3 OVERALL REFLECTIONS ON THE NARRATIVE OF EDUCATION RESEARCH, & CHANGE OVER TIME

As this systematic scoping review covers a 31-year period, some of the discussions are slightly dated, and it is important to keep changing trends in mind. If we look at the most researched topics in the 1990s, the discussion focused on the purpose of education as a discipline in HEIs; this was perhaps due to colleges of education merging with universities, which might have sparked academic interest. Other foci included research funding constraints and a drive for evidence-based policy and practice. Interestingly, the latter became the main focus between 2000

and 2009, during which time a growing amount of attention was also paid to issues of performativity and accountability. A focus on performativity and accountability dominated the decade 2010–2020, alongside the impact agenda and researcher identities.

These trends clearly relate to socio-historically situated formal and informal structures and processes, including political and economic shifts. The findings of our longitudinal analysis thus indicate that future research should use a longitudinal research design (both retrospective and prospective) and/or a life histories design that can capture the impact of such changes over time. This will lead to a richer and historically-sensitive research account.

4.4 LIMITATIONS

Our scoping of previous mapping activities funded by BERA, UK governments and research councils suggests that a systematic scoping review of this scale on this topic has not previously been undertaken. As such, the findings presented here provide unique insights into the structures and processes governing education research, including trends across the decades and by UK nation. Despite the rigorous methodology and ongoing quality assurance systems used by the team, we acknowledge limitations that will inevitably impact upon the conclusions we can draw.

It has been argued that it is more difficult to conduct a truly exhaustive search of qualitative literature than quantitative literature, given the practical and epistemological difficulties associated with searching for and screening qualitative studies (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006). These difficulties include the less standardised ways in which qualitative researchers write abstracts, issues with the indexing of qualitative studies in electronic databases, and the multiplicity of terms used by qualitative researchers to refer to similar concepts and constructs (such as ‘teacher research’). For practical reasons (time limitations, Covid-19 restrictions), we were also prohibited from incorporating certain grey literature sources (such as articles from BERA’s *Research Intelligence* magazine and *Times Higher Education*) and books and book chapters due to library closures. Such omissions might be seen to have narrowed the scope of the search. Nevertheless, we feel that the rigour with which we have conducted this review, the inclusion of both published and unpublished literature sources (journal articles, BERA presidential addresses and

doctoral theses), and the transparency of the reporting should enable meaningful conclusions to be drawn.

4.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the review’s findings, we make the following recommendations both for further research and to BERA to guide its work in mapping the state and health of education as a discipline moving forwards.

- We need more quantitative insights: we identified a distinct lack of robust, large-scale studies probing the structures and processes governing education research across all four UK nations. BERA should further explore the findings of this review by conducting a large-scale survey of education researchers in the UK, examining the six formal and six informal themes that we identified in greater depth. This should be a longitudinal survey, repeated periodically (perhaps every 10 years) in order to capture potential change. Special attention should be paid to the following needs.
 - We need to understand the pressures and strains on academic life caused by the gradual incursion of neoliberal regimes and performance agendas into the UK HE sector.
 - We need to understand how academics balance externally imposed funding priorities and research targets with their own research interests and values.
 - We need to examine the implications of pressurised cultures in education research, and in academia more widely, for staff mental health and wellbeing, especially following the Covid-19 pandemic and the changes brought about in terms of workload and the balance between teaching and research.
 - We need to understand the experiences of academics perceived to be non-traditional and/or those currently underrepresented in academia (such as women, BAME and LGBTQ+ academics, those with disabilities, working-class academics and so on), especially in light of the Black Lives Matter and decolonisation movements that are currently having an impact within the HE sector. This could involve issues of belonging, inclusion/exclusion, career prospects, and whether all academics have opportunities to pursue personal research agendas.
 - We need to understand the experiences of and pressures on academics at different stages of their careers (for example, early-, mid- and

later-stages). We also need to know more about second-career professionals and those on fixed-term and temporary contracts.

- We need to understand the different structures and processes influencing research activities within different types of institutions (such as Russell Group and post-1992 universities).
- We need to better understand the different sociopolitical, cultural and religious contexts in the different UK nations, and how these impact on academics and research. Current insights are skewed towards those working in England.
- BERA could consider a special issue of one of their journals (*BERJ*, for example) that focuses on the structures and processes in the four UK nations and their impact on education research activities. The themes could be based on the findings of this review, alongside a range of narrative and empirical studies. To the best of our knowledge, the last journal to attempt this was an issue of *EERJ* published in 2007 (Lawn & Rees, 2007), highlighting the need for a more up-to-date special issue.
- There should be more focus on research that listens to the voices of all stakeholders in the discipline (education researchers, journal editors, funding body representatives, senior leaders in HEIs, and so on). In the short term, this could take the form of multi-stakeholder symposiums organised through BERA special interest groups. This might lead to more effective communication between those responsible for particular structures and processes and those whose professional lives are affected by them.
- A Delphi study (see for example Green, 2014) on education research priorities should be undertaken to provide a clearer idea of different stakeholder groups' priorities, which can lead to a more cohesive mapping of research. Equal weighting should be attributed to different stakeholders in the priority setting exercise. This might help academics to feel a greater sense of ownership and control over the education research agenda.

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Appendix

A list and details of the 114 peer-reviewed articles included in this systematic scoping review.

First author surname	Year of publication	Journal	Narrative (N) or empirical (E)?	Type of study*	Method (primary method used)	Formal processes	Informal processes	UK nation(s)
Atkinson	2000	<i>British Journal of Sociology of Education</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	Yes	UK
Baker	2018	<i>Spanish Journal of Pedagogy</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	Yes	UK
Beauchamp	2015	<i>Oxford Review of Education</i>	E	Policy analysis	Policy analysis	Yes	No	UK
Biesta	2007	<i>Educational Theory</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	UK
Bridges	2009	<i>British Educational Research Journal</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	No	Yes	England
Brine	1997	<i>British Educational Research Journal</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	Yes	UK
Brown	2005	<i>Cambridge Journal of Education</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	Wales
Brown	2007	<i>Scottish Educational Review</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	Yes	Wales
Byrne	2008	<i>Research Papers in Education</i>	N	Literature review (unsystematic)	Literature review (unsystematic)	Yes	Yes	England & Scotland
Cain	2017	<i>Oxford Review of Education</i>	E	Document analysis	Document analysis	Yes	No	Scotland
Calvert	2011	<i>Research in Education</i>	E	Time logs, group interviews, semi-structured interviews	Interviews (unspecified)	Yes	No	UK
Casey	2017	<i>Sport, Education and Society</i>	E	Self-study	Diary method	Yes	Yes	England
Christie	2009	<i>Journal of Education for Teaching</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	UK
Colley	2014	<i>British Educational Research Journal</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	UK
Constable	2018	<i>Research in Education</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	Yes	UK
Cotton	2018	<i>Studies in Higher Education</i>	E	Document analysis, semi-structured interviews	Interviews (semi-structured)	Yes	Yes	UK
Daugherty	2011	<i>Welsh Journal of Education</i>	E	Secondary data analysis	Secondary data analysis	Yes	No	Scotland
Deem	1996	<i>British Journal of Educational Studies</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	UK

First author surname	Year of publication	Journal	Narrative (N) or empirical (E)?	Type of study*	Method (primary method used)	Formal processes	Informal processes	UK nation(s)
Deem	2004	<i>International Studies in Sociology of Education</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	UK
Deem	2007	<i>Higher Education</i>	E	Case study: interviews, document analysis, website analysis	Interviews (semi-structured)	Yes	Yes	UK
Delamont	2008	<i>Critical Perspectives on Communication, Cultural & Policy Studies</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	UK
Ebbutt	2000	<i>Teacher Development</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	Yes	UK
Edwards	2000	<i>Oxford Review of Education</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	Yes	UK
Finlay	2013	<i>Research in Post-Compulsory Education</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	Yes	Scotland
Francis	2011	<i>Scottish Educational Review</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	Yes	UK
Furlong	2011	<i>Power and Education</i>	E	Case studies: document analysis (RAE submissions), semi-structured interviews	Interviews (semi-structured)	Yes	Yes	UK
Furlong	2013	<i>Australian Educational Researcher</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	Yes	UK
Gardner	2007	<i>European Educational Research Journal</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	Yes	UK
Gilroy	2009	<i>Journal of Education for Teaching</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	UK
Gorard	2002	<i>British Journal of Educational Studies</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	Yes	UK
Gorard	2004	<i>Oxford Review of Education</i>	E	Interviews, questionnaire, document analysis, secondary data analysis	Secondary data analysis	Yes	No	UK
Gorard	2004	<i>Educational Studies</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	UK
Grenfell	2004	<i>British Journal of Sociology of Education</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	Yes	Northern Ireland
Hammersley	1997	<i>British Educational Research Journal</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	Yes	UK

First author surname	Year of publication	Journal	Narrative (N) or empirical (E)?	Type of study*	Method (primary method used)	Formal processes	Informal processes	UK nation(s)
Hammersley	2005a	<i>International journal of social research methodology</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	UK
Hammersley	2005b	<i>British Educational Research Journal</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	UK
Hargreaves	1997	<i>British Educational Research Journal</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	UK
Hayward	2005	<i>Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	Yes	UK
Hemmings	2013	<i>Tertiary Education and Management</i>	E	Collective case study: interviews, document analysis, observational fieldnotes	Interviews (semi-structured)	Yes	Yes	UK
Hodkinson	2004	<i>British Educational Research Journal</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	UK
Hodkinson	2008	<i>Cultural Studies/Critical Methodologies</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	Scotland
Holligan	2011	<i>International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education</i>	E	Interviews	Interviews (unspecified)	Yes	No	UK
Holligan	2011	<i>British Educational Research Journal</i>	E	Semi-structured interviews	Interviews (semi-structured)	Yes	No	UK
Holligan	2013	<i>Scottish Educational Review</i>	E	Secondary data analysis	Secondary data analysis	Yes	Yes	UK
Holligan	2015	<i>British Journal of Sociology of Education</i>	E	Semi-structured interviews	Interviews (semi-structured)	Yes	No	UK & Scotland
Holligan	2020	<i>Power and Education</i>	E	Policy analysis	Policy analysis	Yes	Yes	UK
Holmes	2016	<i>Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	UK
Hulme	2020	<i>Journal of Education for Teaching</i>	E	Bibliometric analysis, secondary data	Bibliometric analysis	Yes	Yes	UK
Hulme	2013	<i>Journal of Further and Higher Education</i>	E	Semi-structured interviews	Interviews (semi-structured)	Yes	No	UK
Humes	2001	<i>British Journal of Educational Studies</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	Yes	UK
Humes	2007	<i>European Educational Research Journal</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	UK

First author surname	Year of publication	Journal	Narrative (N) or empirical (E)?	Type of study*	Method (primary method used)	Formal processes	Informal processes	UK nation(s)
Humes	2013	<i>Scottish Educational Review</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	UK
Jerome	2020	<i>Journal of Social Science Education</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	UK
Laing	2018	<i>Policy Futures in Education</i>	E	Document analysis	Document analysis	Yes	Yes	UK
Lawn	2007	<i>European Educational Research Journal</i>	E	Secondary data analysis	Secondary data analysis	Yes	No	Scotland
Lawy	2009	<i>International Journal of Lifelong Education</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	England
Lefstein	2008	<i>Teachers College Record</i>	E	Case study - video analysis, interviews	Video analysis	Yes	Yes	Scotland
Leitch	2009	<i>Journal of Education for Teaching</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	Yes	UK
Leitch	2018	<i>Irish Educational Studies</i>	E	Autoethnography	Self reflection	Yes	No	Scotland
Lucas	2007	<i>Journal of Further and Higher Education</i>	E	Semi-structured interviews	Interviews (semi-structured)	Yes	Yes	UK
Mahony	2020	<i>Race Ethnicity and Education</i>	E	Secondary data analysis (demographic HE data), semi-structured interviews	Interviews (semi-structured)	Yes	Yes	Scotland
Marques	2017	<i>European Educational Research Journal</i>	E	Secondary data analysis, document analysis	Secondary data analysis	Yes	Yes	UK
Marques	2020	<i>Higher Education</i>	E	Case study: interviews, website analysis	Interviews (semi-structured)	Yes	Yes	UK
Marshall	2015	<i>Qualitative Research Journal</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	UK**
McGrath	2001	<i>International Journal of Educational Development</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	England
McNay	2003	<i>Science and Public Policy</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	Yes	UK
Menter	2010	<i>Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Bildungswissenschaften</i>	N	Literature review (unsystematic)	Literature review (unsystematic)	Yes	No	UK
Mercer	2013	<i>Women's Studies International Forum</i>	E	Collective memory work method (reflective writing, group discussions)	Group discussions	Yes	Yes	UK

First author surname	Year of publication	Journal	Narrative (N) or empirical (E)?	Type of study*	Method (primary method used)	Formal processes	Informal processes	UK nation(s)
Munn	2005	<i>Scottish Educational Review</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	Yes	UK
Murray	2005	<i>Teaching and Teacher Education</i>	E	Semi-structured interviews, questionnaires	Interviews (semi-structured)	Yes	No	UK
Murray	2008	<i>European Educational Research Journal</i>	N	Project discussion/review	Project discussion/review	No	Yes	UK
Murray	2009	<i>Journal of Education for Teaching</i>	E	Project evaluation: semi-structured interviews, engagement in workshops and online activities, online evaluations, secondary data analysis	Secondary data analysis	Yes	Yes	England & Scotland
Murray	2009	<i>Teaching and Teacher Education</i>	N	Project discussion/review	Project discussion/review	Yes	No	UK
Murray	2010	<i>Professional Development in Education</i>	E	Case study	Unclear	Yes	Yes	UK
O'Connell	2019	<i>Studies in Higher Education</i>	E	Document analysis, interviews (semi-structured)	Document analysis	Yes	Yes	UK
Oakley	2006	<i>Evidence & Policy</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	Wales
Oancea	2005	<i>British Educational Research Journal</i>	E	Document analysis	Document analysis	Yes	Yes	Wales
Oancea	2007	<i>International Journal of Research & Method in Education</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	Yes	Scotland
Oancea	2008	<i>Journal of Philosophy of Education</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	England & Scotland
Oancea	2009	<i>South African Journal of Higher Education</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	Yes	Scotland
Oancea	2014	<i>Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft</i>	E	Survey	Questionnaire	Yes	Yes	UK
Ozga	2007	<i>Research Papers in Education</i>	N	Project discussion/review	Project discussion/review	Yes	Yes	UK
Ozga	2009	<i>Soziale Welt</i>	E	Policy analysis	Policy analysis	Yes	Yes	Scotland
Ozga	2009	<i>Education in the North</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	UK

First author surname	Year of publication	Journal	Narrative (N) or empirical (E)?	Type of study*	Method (primary method used)	Formal processes	Informal processes	UK nation(s)
Papatsiba	2020	<i>British Journal of Sociology of Education</i>	E	Document analysis	Document analysis	Yes	Yes	Scotland
Pirrie	2001	<i>British Journal of Educational Studies</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	UK & Scotland
Pollard	2005	<i>International Studies in Sociology of Education</i>	E	Biographical	Self reflection	Yes	Yes	UK
Pollard	2006	<i>Educational Review</i>	N	Project discussion/review	Project discussion/review	Yes	No	UK
Pollard	2010	<i>British Journal of Educational Studies</i>	N	Project discussion/review	Project discussion/review	Yes	Yes	UK
Ranson	1993	<i>Research Papers in Education</i>	E	Interviews, correspondence	Interviews (telephone)	No	Yes	UK
Ranson	1996	<i>British Educational Research Journal</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	England
Read	2018	<i>International Studies in Sociology of Education</i>	E	Email interviews	Interviews (email)	Yes	Yes	UK
Reay	2000	<i>Women's Studies International Forum</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	Yes	England & Scotland
Reay	2004	<i>Women's Studies International Forum</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	UK
Rees	2007	<i>European Educational Research Journal</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	No	Yes	England
Rees	2007	<i>British Educational Research Journal</i>	E	Secondary data analysis, questionnaire, semi-structured interviews	Secondary data analysis, questionnaire, semi-structured interviews	Yes	Yes	UK
Rowbottom	2011	<i>British Educational Research Journal</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	Yes	UK
Shain	2001	<i>British Journal of Sociology of Education</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	UK
Sharp	2015	<i>Journal of Further and Higher Education</i>	E	Mixed methods: case study, questionnaire, interviews	Interviews (semi-structured)	Yes	Yes	UK
Sikes	2006a	<i>International Journal of Research & Method in Education</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	No	Yes	England

First author surname	Year of publication	Journal	Narrative (N) or empirical (E)?	Type of study*	Method (primary method used)	Formal processes	Informal processes	UK nation(s)
Sikes	2006b	<i>Studies in Higher Education</i>	E	Autoethnography: interviews, conversations, discussions, written communications, documents, research papers	Interviews (unspecified)	Yes	Yes	Northern Ireland
Simons	1995	<i>British Educational Research Journal</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	UK
Skelton	2004	<i>Research in Education</i>	E	Semi-structured interviews	Interviews (semi-structured)	Yes	No	England
Smith	2015	<i>Educational Theory</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	Yes	England
St Clair	2007	<i>Comparative Education</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	Scotland
Stelmach	2011	<i>European Educational Research Journal</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	Yes	UK
Sylva	2007	<i>Research Papers in Education</i>	N	Project discussion/review	Project discussion/review	Yes	Yes	UK
Tanner	2009	<i>Journal of Education for Teaching</i>	N	Project discussion/review	Project discussion/review	Yes	No	UK
Torrence	2020	<i>Qualitative Inquiry</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	UK
Whitty	2006	<i>British Educational Research Journal</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	UK
Wilson	2013	<i>Cambridge Journal of Education</i>	E	Semi-structured interviews	Interviews (semi-structured)	Yes	No	UK
Winch	2001	<i>Journal of Philosophy of Education</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	Yes	England
Yorke	2000	<i>Higher Education Quarterly</i>	N	Perspective/opinion	Perspective/opinion	Yes	No	UK
Zapp	2017	<i>Research in Comparative and International Education</i>	E	Cross-national comparative study: document analysis	Document analysis	Yes	Yes	UK

This table is available to view and download in spreadsheet format; see Boyle et al., 2021.

*Note: study type as defined by the authors of this report, rather than by the authors/editors/publishers etc. of each source.

**A comparison of all four UK nations.



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