

From an age of measurement to an evidence era? Policy-making in teacher education in England

Jo B. Helgetun^a * & Ian Menter^b

^aGIRSEF, UC Louvain, Louvain la Neuve, Belgium

^b Department of Education, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

*Corresponding author.

Institute for the Analysis of Change in Contemporary and Historical Societies UC Louvain, Place Montesque 1, bte L2.08.04, 1348 Louvain la Neuve, Belgium.

Email: jo.helgetun@uclouvain.be

Jo B. Helgetun, is Doctoral Research Fellow at the University of Louvain. His current research focuses on the national trajectories of education policy reform and their embeddedness in the global education policy field, particularly teacher education policy in England and France. While his past work was on the new governance of Educational Research, comparing trajectories, turns and transformations in the United Kingdom, Germany, and Norway.

Ian Menter, is Professor Emeritus of Teacher Education at the University of Oxford and a Senior Research Associate at Kazan Federal University, Russia. His current research focuses on knowledge production, policy issues, and practices in teacher education, as well as the labour market for teachers and teacher's work. He is a former president of both BERA (2013-15) and SERA (2005-07)

Abstract:

The Department for Education (DfE) in England¹ seeks to determine the actions of educationists in both the public and private sectors through the use of targeted instructive documents and white papers where broader policy intention are presented. Since 2010, as we will show, there has been a shift in the nature of such papers towards justification with 'evidence' and transparency through referencing in a 'scientific' style, with ramifications for both how policy is justified and the contestation of practices in education. This leads us to suggest that we are in an 'evidence era' where a dominant rationalized myth centres on the use of 'evidence' to justify practice. Meanwhile, how 'evidence' is constructed as research is undertaken, and how it is transformed as it enters a political environment, are important questions that are often overlooked. In this text, we analyse the change in 'evidence' practices before and after 2010, consider why the practices changed, and infer the effects the changes have had on the wider education environment.

Keywords: Evidence, Policy, Teacher Education, New Public Management

¹ As education is a devolved matter in the United Kingdom, even though we are talking of a Department (and cabinet ministry) in the Parliament of Westminster, the policies of the Department for Education only applies to England.

Introduction

In this paper, we consider the case of education policymaking in England, particularly relating to teacher education. We are interested in the processes of policy making, in particular what Bowe and Ball (1992) called the 'context of influence'. How is evidence of various different forms (including research) used by policymakers? Who and how do particular actors have an influence on the processes? How are processes of influence changing not least in the era of 'new media' such as blogs or the twittersphere?

The time period in which we are especially interested is that following the emergence of the Coalition Government in the UK, in 2010, and the apparent upsurge of commitment to 'evidence based policymaking'. This had certainly been foreshadowed by a discussion on the value, impact, and quality of much educational research in the 1990s and particularly the New Labour governments' emphasis on 'what works' after 1997 (Gardner, 2011; Whitty, 2006), as well as the use of evidence (Clegg, 2005), but appeared to take on new forms after 2010 as we discuss further below. It is perhaps no coincidence that this also developed at the same time as greatly increased interest in 'evidence-based teaching', which is now more colloquially called 'evidence-based practice'². We extend and build on criticism of 'evidence' in its current form (e.g. Biesta, 2009; Malone and Hogan, 2019; Steiner-Khamsi, Karseth and Baek 2019), by articulating 'evidence' as a rationalized myth, by focusing on policymaking and the governing of teacher education, and by providing empirical insights into recent changes in the role and use of 'evidence' in English teacher education policymaking. As such, we aim to contribute both to a general discussion on the use of scientific evidence in policy, and to the specific context of 'evidence' in teacher education in England.

In short, through this paper we argue that we are now in an 'evidence era', where actions are justified through a language shrouded in talk of research, data, and best practice. If measurement usually relates to quantitative large scale data and related instrumentation, evidence is a much broader term that encompasses different forms of "research shows" types of argumentation that lay claim to a form of rational legitimacy, that is distinguished from argumentation rooted in broader value driven normative, philosophical, and purpose inclusive discourse in teacher education. Measurement continues to be important - we are not arguing that it has disappeared. However, a broader concept of evidence is now the dominant feature of the prevailing educational discourse in England. "Evidence" has connotations rooted in clues, observations, and experience that can be applied to other contexts, shifting how public discourse may be undertaken and problematized (see Tröhler 2014 on the importance of connotations). Hence, under an "evidence" paradigm

² 'Evidence-based practice' was a term furiously debated in England by Martyn Hammersley and David Hargreaves during the first decade of this century - see Hammersley, 2007.

disentangling what we may call scientific evidence rooted in good research practices from politically constructed evidence rooted in dogmatic ideology and popular ideation becomes a critical endeavour. Here we limit ourselves to the place and use of evidence in teacher education policymaking, thus, we look at the use of ‘evidence’³ in policy and practice, and what the internal discourse on evidence-based policy seems to be, then discuss this in light of current practices and norms in both academia and the wider teacher education environment. This discussion in turn raises important questions about the ontology/ies and epistemology/ies of the research that is being used as ‘evidence’, but yet are rarely explicitly articulated.

Importantly, as Lesley Saunders (2007) points out, it is the responsibility of politicians and policymakers to make value decisions and develop practices using evidence. This argument can be seen in relation to how any form of ‘good’ education and what we ought to do in education, what ‘evidence’ attempts to denote, relates to purpose and values (Biesta 2009), while the *democratic legitimacy* of policymakers is arguably greater than that of an academic, which is of importance if we acknowledge that policy is by its nature very much based on social appropriateness not pure consequentiality (Campbell 2002).

We are drawn to Sayers' (2010) epistemological concept of "adequate knowledge", Scott's (2013) views on the importance of using comprehensive frameworks in theorization, as well as adherence to the importance of triangulation and scepticism to observations (e.g. King et al. 1994; George & Bennett 2005; Checkel 2007; Tansey 2007). However, this article is not concerned with academic discussions on "good research", rather we limit ourselves to call for robustness in adherence to methodology and scientific rigour in the extrapolation of evidence from observations, and the transformation from research to application in policy. Scientific rigour is important in all forms of research, from anthropological ethnographic accounts and interviews in sociology to randomised control trials. What we are concerned with in this paper is the seeming lack of attention from some researchers, influential bloggers, and policy-makers to coherence between methodology, analysis, and conclusions, while acknowledging how and where normative concerns and observer bias might also be at play.

We begin by defining some key uses of ‘evidence’, specifically ‘evidence’ as a rationalized myth centred on New Public Management, and ‘evidence’ as a cultural-cognition embedded and taken for granted in policy processes today - certainly in England and possibly elsewhere - before

³ We should note that due to the many meanings of the word ‘evidence’ depending on who uses it and in what context, we here consequently use quotation marks to denote that it is a fluid, unfixed, concept that we do not attempt to pin down.

discussing briefly our methodology and presenting some empirical findings to underpin the arguments that are then presented.

Rationalized myths: New Public Management ideations and policy

Institutions and institutionalised environments, such as the public policy environment, encourage conformity towards dominant ‘rationalized myths’ of perceived optimal behaviour (Schriewer, 2012). Rationalized myths arise when past behaviour is perceived to have yielded desirable results (Pierson and Skocpol, 2002) or when a practice has become so ingrained in daily routines that it is taken for granted and provides culturally supported legitimacy to existing behaviour (Scott, 2013). Hence, once a perceived ‘best practice’ has become dominant, and sufficiently taken for granted as ‘good’, it arguably becomes a myth that constrains actors and tends to ossify (through mimesis) the environment. Central in English policymaking is the ‘myth’ of economic rationality, outputs and outcomes being seen only in relation to and measured against inputs, and the importance of targets to establish ‘value for money’. Later in the paper we discuss how this myth developed in the aftermath of the second world war, but more recently the myth may be seen as having made a significant contribution to ‘New Public Management’ (NPM) reforms (Ball, 2008; Keraudren, 1999). At the heart of the NPM discourse, we find the centrality of ‘evidence’ to establish what works and what constitutes ‘best practice’.

A further reading of the existing literature also supports the creation of an ‘evidence’ centred myth in education. Through what has been coined ‘governing by numbers’ (Rose, 1991; Ozga, 2009), a new form of government control over social policy related to ‘audit-cultures’ has arguably emerged, legitimizing the government’s control through large scale data collection (Graf, 2009; LeTendre, 2018), and arguably bringing in an ‘age of measurement’ in education (Biesta, 2009). However, we would argue that the evidence era, at present, is also distinct from a mere age of measurement, or an audit-culture, as it goes beyond that, involving a whole range of efforts to justify policy in terms of ‘evidence’, for example through referencing what works elsewhere (Chung, Atkin, & Moore, 2012; Chung, 2016), through comparisons with medical research (Goldacre, 2013; McKnight & Morgan, 2019) or through aspirations for Randomised Control Trials such as those favoured by the Education Endowment Foundation to become the basis of policy (Menter, 2013; Gale, 2018).

In teacher education, we suggest that the origin of this myth can be traced to the creation of the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (CATE), that was instructed to work with Her Majesty’s Inspectorate (HMI) and base decisions on information from HMI inspections upon its

creation in 1984 (Childs and Menter, 2013). To our knowledge, this is the first official iteration of explicit evidence-guided decisions in teacher education.

Furthermore, we may argue the audit culture has in part led to 'self-referral' as a central characteristic of the English education policy environment, including in teacher education, where the system looks to internal data furthering existing trends. Increasingly, more data internal to the system are collected, and referred to as the evidence base of new decisions. This works through the establishment of 'best practice' within the system in the form of OFSTED rankings of teacher education providers, the use of internal reviews of the system to identify 'what works' and what does not (e.g. the 2014/15 Carter review – see Mutton, Burn, and Menter, 2016), and a peer-to-peer system of teacher education improvement for School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) providers, recently sometimes associated with the concept of Teaching Schools. We may therefore imagine that the system not only looks abroad to justify policy in a form of 'policy-borrowing' (Steiner-Khamsi, 2012), but also increasingly inwards towards internal reviews, national censuses of the teacher workforce, and inspections (Whiting, Whitty, Menter et al. 2018).

Additionally, it is important to remember that even though policy is seemingly based on forms of evidence, research has found it too often lacks sufficient contextualisation, particularly when imported from abroad. For example, Chung (2016) suggests that some attempts to model English education on Finnish 'successes' in PISA, can lead to 'evidence-based policy-making' becoming 'policy-based evidence-making' (Chung (2016)). Nor are citations and excerpts from scientific research always correct or accurate representations of that research.⁴ Importantly, the practice of 'academic style' citations in policy documents appeared to be much more significant following the establishment of the Coalition Government in 2010. Prior to that, what 'evidence' was behind decisions was more obscure, even though large scale projects were funded to improve both policy and practice under Labour (1997-2010) (see e.g. Rickinson, Sebba and Edwards, 2011; Saunders, 2007).

We will now present the theoretical implications of 'evidence' as a rationalized myth, as it forms part of a cognitive framework that is both socially embedded and taken for granted in practice.

Possible implications of evidence as a rationalized myth

A first step in theorizing the implications of 'evidence' as a rationalized myth is to consider how it forms an integral part of common beliefs and shared understandings that legitimise cognitive

⁴ See this 2016 (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/use-misuse-and-abuse-research-education-white-paper> accessed 15.07.2019) blog post of Professor Ian Menter for an instance of this occurring in the white paper 'Educational Excellence Everywhere' (DfE 2016)

expression. Although fallible and contested, the concept of a rationalized myth may be seen as an integral part of a cognitive frame (Verger, Steiner-Khamisi, and Lubienski, 2017) or as a blueprint of best practice (Zapp, Helgetun and Powell, 2018), in essence both denote awareness raising and agenda setting through comprehensive plans of action including both perceived problems and proposed solutions, while cognitive frames emphasise types of ideas that social, political and economic actors may mobilise to advance their vision, cognitive blueprints are more rooted in global scripts of 'what works'. In spite of minute differences, they both constitute central carriers of mimetic change (Scott 2013), that we may believe it to be a powerful tool for shaping practices and bestowing legitimacy to action. These phenomena we may talk of as cultural-cognitions, that is to say cognitive frames and blueprints of best practice are culturally constructed and supported, while enabling cognition and legitimizing expressed thought, recognising the interdependence between culture, ideation, and the ideas articulated.

A second step in theorizing the significance of rationalized myths is how cultural-cognitions have been found to shape norms and policies in an education environment (Marques, Powell, Zapp and Biesta 2017), and in turn to be shaped by them (Zapp, Helgetun and Powell 2018). Through the entwined processes of institutional change and maintenance, we note an interdependence between cultural-cognitions, norms, and policies (Helgetun, Powell, and Zapp, 2018). Thus, changes in one of these dimensions should reverberate across the other two, meaning policy is dependent on norms and cultural-cognitions while it is also capable of shaping them.

Importantly, the phenomenon of *selective use* of 'evidence' as it moves from a research to a policy environment has been observed elsewhere, and may be considered a general phenomenon of policymaking (Steiner-Khamisi, Karseth and Baek, 2019), particularly as different sources of 'evidence' may actually be contradictory. Moreover, looking at the concept of 'consequentiality', the forming of action based on perceived consequence (what evidence in policy claims to do), we may note that logically it is an inherent impossibility (we cannot be absolutely certain about the future (e.g. Sayer, 2010)). Due to this uncertainty, decisions cannot be made based on a pure logic of consequentiality, therefore policy decisions are by logical necessity based on a logic of social appropriateness, what is perceived as the right thing to do based on the norms regulating a particular (social) context (Campbell, 2002), that can be contested in different guises. Meanwhile, if we consider that perceived consequences in policy terms relate to desired outcomes, there are already elements of social appropriateness present in defining what is desired, leading to a high risk of valuing what we can measure in a 'data' paradigm (Biesta, 2009).

Even scientific evidence should be seen as something that can be contested and is possibly of a political or socially appropriate nature (see e.g. the book 'Science in Action' by Bruno Latour (1987) for a series of examples, or Zapp, Helgetun, and Powell (2018) on the political nature of educational

research – or the ontological and epistemological debates often raging within the science community). For example, recent work by Malone and Hogan (2019) for example attempts to push for ‘evidence’ as rooted in John Dewey’s pragmatist approach to both education and research, stating the importance of ‘action research’ in informing policy. Others, such as Burn and Mutton (2015) emphasise the strengths of research, particularly ‘research-informed clinical practices’, in teacher education, while Pamela Lomax in her 1998 BERA presidential address lamented the lack of constraint in disagreement regarding research and education (Lomax, 1998). Of interest then is how contestation over what constitutes ‘evidence’ and what the ‘evidence’ says, and what are the outcomes from the contestation, shapes the use of ‘evidence’ in policy.

Meanwhile, one of the main producers of both cultural-cognitions and contestable ‘evidence’, the universities (Powell, Baker and Fernandez, 2017), are in England stratified in terms of quality and quantity of research output and are reported to have a ‘fear’ of appearing to be opposed to government policy in education (Furlong, 2013), which may be of concern when the use of research and data in policy is discussed.⁵ Meanwhile, historically government tended to put much more emphasis on the expertise of its own bodies such as the Teacher Training Agency or OFSTED than on Higher Education Institutions in questions of the professional development of teachers (Bates, Gough, and Stammers, 1999), leaving room for contestation over ‘evidence’ and denying academia any monopoly over research. In addition, ‘international’ actors of various kinds, such as McKinsey (based in England), the OECD, the EU and UNESCO have all at different times and with different goals and methods promoted different kinds of ‘evidence’ in an attempt to shape practices through the promotion of what we have called cultural-cognitions in education (Ball, 2016); Normand, 2017). Thus there is a range of actors with an opinion of what constitutes best practice rooted in ‘evidence’. All of these actors are arguably attempting to shape policy and contest the meaning of ‘evidence’.

Moving beyond the production of ‘evidence’, there are also questions related to the status of research as it informs policymaking. To quote Oates (2007): ‘If policy-makers and politicians are encouraged to rely on knowledge generated by educational research (Davies et al. 2000; Sebba 2004) they have a right to know the status of that knowledge – and I contend that this issue has been grossly neglected, leading to frustration on the parts of both researchers and of those in the policy community.’ (p.150). Here we see the dilemma of the status of research, but arguably also

⁵ An example here would be the attacks on academia by Michael Gove both as shadow Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families (2007-2010) and later Secretary of State for Education (2010-14), through terms such as ‘enemies of progress’ and the ‘blob’ – see: Adamson, Forestier, Morris, & Han 2017; Childs & Menter 2013)

questions relating to both ontology and epistemology as different research findings are often taken out of context and repurposed.

Furthermore, there is arguably a need for intermediaries as mediators of research (Saunders 2007). But we may also question how well such mediation may work and how intermediaries may cause a disconnect between researchers and policymakers, and they themselves become a form of central node controlling what informs policy or not. Hence, one may argue there are epistemological challenges regarding the very concept of evidence-based policymaking that often go untreated, and become more evident as we move from a research environment to one of policy.

In short, it appears as if dialogue between policymakers and researchers is far from straightforward, and causes tensions in the system. Hence, any notion of research informed practice or evidence based policy is likely to involve *translation*, that is to say the research has had its meaning changed to varying degrees as new ideas come into contact with existing practices (Campbell, 2004; Maroy, Pons and Dupuy, 2016), and thus altered that meaning from its original state as it moves from a research environment to a political environment.

Methodology

To ensure a thorough understanding of the role of evidence in English teacher education policy, we conducted 20 open ended elite interviews (Aberbach and Rockman, 2002; Berry, 2002) with people who had varying levels of ‘insider’ access to the policymaking process (Adamson, Forestier, Morris and Han., 2017)(see annex). Additionally we undertook an in-depth reading of 46 central documents between 1983 (when CATE was first proposed) and 2019, related to teacher education.⁶ The analysis was structured by a circular method of constantly moving between data sources, theory, and the field to illuminate what was going on and to infer the processes of policymaking in relation to the use of evidence as we triangulated between different sources of information (Checkel, 2006; Flick, 2009). The policy documents were coded using MAXQDA to track referencing, conduct word searches, and sort documents in accordance with type and purpose.

We turn now to our findings, attempting at first to establish the current practices and justify the concept of an ‘evidence era’ as more than an age of measurement, while also presenting the use of ‘evidence’ in teacher education policymaking. We then address the role of government in controlling and shaping ‘evidence’ and the implications this has both on modes of dissemination and the validity of research as it informs practice.

⁶ An overview of the documents analysed can be seen at <https://www.teacherscareers.eu/research-material/> (accessed 21.03.2020)

Referencing and Evidence in Teacher Education policy documents

Since 2010, ostensibly to enhance transparency, according to a DfE civil servant we spoke with (A12), there has been an increased possibility to track where the rationale for policy comes from, whilst changing the contestation over how a policy is legitimized, arguably in an even more evidence driven direction than before. In the 1983 White Paper 'Teaching Quality' (DES 1983) (which foreshadowed the creation of CATE), seven references are listed, all with an internal origin. Three were committee reports, two were HMI reports, one was from The Royal Society, and one was an 'internal report'. By contrast, the 2010 White Paper 'The Importance of Teaching' (which foreshadowed the creation of School Direct and the marginalisation of higher education) had 34 such references, within the paragraphs directly related to teacher education, that come from a range of sources, ranging from academics (e.g. Ehri et al. 2001) to the BBC (ICM, 2010 bbc.co.uk/news, last accessed 28th June 2010.). Importantly, there was no distinction offered between what we may consider research-based 'evidence' and non-systematic 'evidence', nor are questions raised of an epistemological nature pertaining to the construction of the 'evidence' and its generalizability to the English context. Of further note, in the 46 documents we analysed, the only use of traceable references to where 'evidence' came from between 1983 and 2010 was in Circular 24/89 with five. Meanwhile, all documents that we looked at between 2010 and 2019 used a high amount of references to signal where 'evidence' came from. This is indicative of a paradigm change that pushes 'evidence' beyond measurement, especially if we look at how 'evidence' is presented and used in the texts, as we explore below.

Furthermore, as mentioned in the theoretical section above, in 2010 English policymakers looked towards Finland to provide some 'evidence' of how to conduct teacher education. In fact, Finland was mentioned nine times in the 2010 White Paper 'The Importance of Teaching' (DfE 2010), and was employed as a central justification for proposed new initiatives surrounding research informed teaching. However, an emphasis on 'Finnish' style teacher education was for the most part subsequently dropped due to perceived cost issues, according to our interviews, thus how well thought out it was, and thereby its merit as 'evidence' in a major policy drive is a matter of some doubt. Beyond Finland however, there were also several references to other PISA high performing countries in different policy and political documents. For example, Singapore was mentioned 79 times in the House of Commons Education Committee report 'Great teachers: attracting, training and retaining the best' (2012).

Additionally, the main national sources of 'evidence' for policy are seemingly two-fold. One centres on reviews such as the 2014 Carter Review of Initial Teacher Training (Carter 2015; DfE 2015) or the round-table discussions leading up to the Early Career Framework (DfE 2019a) and

Recruitment and Retention Strategy (DfE 2019b). The other key source appears to be data from Ofsted inspections and evaluations of national data such as test and exam performance, school workforce census, and other large scale data sets enabling 'governing at a distance' through the use of numbers, all centred on the aforementioned logic of value for money – outputs being evaluated only in relation to inputs.

Government and the Department for Education as gatekeepers

An important characteristic of teacher education policymaking in England today is that government, or rather the DfE, acts as a kind of gatekeeper to policy reviews, round-tables, and national dialogue on teacher education. Through our interviews, actors were of the opinion that the DfE selectively chose who would conduct reviews and fact-finding missions based on perceived political leanings (in favour of either school-based teacher education or university-based for example), but also in some cases people who possessed skills the DfE lacked internally. Along the lines outlined by Ball and Junemann (2012) in their work on networks and new governance in education, this has seemingly evolved over the past few years to a system where government promotes desired 'voices' of the profession and sector as seen through the government-established Chartered College of Teaching or the Teaching Schools Council, both given central places alongside 'invited' organisations in the recent early career framework (DfE 2019a) and recruitment and retention strategy (DfE 2019b). One external advisor to government we spoke with stated something we found to be representative of the consensus amongst those external to the department but with inside access to the policy process:

'You have to work with them, you have to be part of the team, you can't just be sitting on the sidelines criticizing and complaining about everything.' (A18).

Although the main view is one of cooperation, there are some who see a need to resist:

'whatever policy comes out, the response is: how can we work with the politicians and never standing up and say 'no, you're wrong.' Because the argument and the approach is it's better to be in the room discussing, influencing where you can than standing up against nonsense. I think sometimes if it's ridiculous nonsense, you have to stand up against it.' (A1).

However such resistors often find the only means is to threaten withdrawal and deal with the subsequent negative news headlines (A1; A7). Perhaps this indicates both the necessity to gain access, and to cooperate with government to get something done, whilst the means of resistance are seemingly limited at present. One interviewee (A6) made the central observation that she could

either put her name on a report, or see the report published without her name on it but with the name of others, there was no way of pressuring government directly. This we may imagine has great implications for the scientific quality of 'evidence' used in policymaking.

Policy based evidence-making: the importance of 'how it will land'

With government as a gatekeeper, actors seem more worried about how a policy will 'land' with ministers and the DfE than with whether or not it is the best thing to do. In our interviews this was stated surprisingly straightforwardly as an accepted and central part of the policy process, but with implications for how this might distort the 'evidence' process. For instance, one government advisor stated in our interview with him:

'We have to see how it will land. How it will land with the politicians. So, if I had written a report that was different, the government could just say: 'Thank you very much for your report.' It would never get published.' (A14).

In a sense then there is a 'bottom line', and it must be adhered to. Another advisor (A6) echoed this sentiment of social appropriateness and 'rebranding' of observations by referring to a fact-finding review the person had worked on:

'It had no validity, reliability or really... You know'

but also highlighted that it was informative nonetheless and something the people involved learned from even if it was anecdotal:

'I personally learned quite a lot from it'

further mentioning how people's minds were changed throughout the process, but also pointing out

'I don't know if he realises he has changed'.

Thus, opinions were shaped through the fact-finding mission, even though it had no scientific rigour. Still the review in question was, and is, framed in a language of 'evidence' and research-informed policy in policy documents and policy discourse, which may also be problematic.

Some further nuances must be observed, one external advisor had mixed experiences ranging from feeling she had to fall in line, to contributing constructively. Speaking of an early fact finding mission she was part of she noted:

'I definitely experienced that as they already had the outcome and were just going through the processes.' (A18).

However, the experience on a more recent series of round tables was much more positive:

'...they were genuinely listening and I tried myself to constantly play a proactive role in modelling that we should be listening and build on each other's ideas and evolve in the idea and a solution in those rooms, not just saying the things that we'd always be saying.' (A18).

This can arguably also be seen in how our interviewees felt there had been a shift in political involvement in teacher education following the departure of Michael Gove and his strongly ideologically driven approach and the subsequent appointments of Nicky Morgan (2014-16) Justine Greening (2016-18), Damian Hinds (2018-19) and eventually Gavin Williamson (2019-) as Secretaries of State for Education, but can also be in relation to the person 'working with' government rather than against them as seen in the section above. In any regard, the ITT Core Content Framework, published just after the end of our analysis appears to be more 'open' to focusing on academic research. Hence, 'how it will land' may be dependent on the personalities and views on education of the political echelon. However, regardless of political leanings the centrality of 'evidence' and establishing value for money remains a key theme. Thus we may also infer that these concepts have become somewhat taken for granted in the environment. Importantly, while there were several political concerns addressed there were none regarding what the actual data can tell us, what are the limits of the research, issues with methodology or lack of scientific consensus regarding what generalizations can be made, how observations in one context can be applied to others, nor how analyses were conducted and the limitations of findings. These are seemingly foreign concepts. Here, evidence appears to be what can we plausibly claim data supports that fits ministerial views on teacher education. In other words, 'evidence' from national reviews was cherry picked to fit the (emerging) policy. Issues of communication in the evidence era

So far, we have presented some evidence of problems in communicating research findings directly without first 'politicising' them in order to ensure they 'land' correctly. The issue also extends to how research of any kind is and can be disseminated. As an illustration we found representative of the current climate, two of our interviewees (A5;A16) found they had the most influence on policy through writing blogs which policy advisors occasionally read, having abandoned any notion of pushing 'pure' academic literature on the civil-service, special policy advisers, or ministers. We also found that these two respondents appeared to have had some noticeable impact on recent policy discourse. In addition, one senior academic (A1) suggested, after noting that he might speak with the DfE officials almost on a weekly basis, that he had no influence there:

'...it's not long-term stability because people change roles quite frequently and that's the frustration that when you start to engage and understand and discuss with policy makers and

somebody's not there anymore. All the work[] building the relationship and the understanding just goes.'

The main concern was centred on communication. He also made the interesting observation relating to how one may get a message across, echoing the mentioned emphasis on blogs with a slight twist:

'I think people who have influence in policy are a small group of people who are heavily involved with Twitter, and that's quite influential, you know.'

Arguably, this signals issues arising from communicating research of a complex nature, particularly with the rise of new forms of media and technology. No time within the policy process is actually explicitly devoted to increase the understanding of issues and problems. Meanwhile, while we interviewed a government employee (A19), she spoke about the influence of an article by two members of Oxford University academic staff, Burn and Mutton (2015), on clinical practices, following a citation of their work in the Carter Review, but was unaware of the articles' authors, only knowing of the work through intermediaries who had the ear of the DfE. By contrast, the named intermediary was acquainted with the articles' authors, this perhaps being symbolic of issues in communication between academia and policymakers. Word of mouth then, is more central than robust scientific rigour while at the same time it is claimed policy is based on scientific evidence. We should not forget that the Atlantic magazine (a news and idea magazine focused on 'thought leaders') was also cited in the same style as peer-reviewed academic research in 'The Importance of Teaching': 'Ripley, A.(2010), *What makes a great teacher? The Atlantic Magazine January/ February 2010*' (DfE 2010).

Discussion

In this paper, we have presented a case for teacher education as dominated by 'evidence' as a central rationalized myth. As such, we find that 'evidence' has become a fully incorporated rationalized myth, and share the general observations of both Verger, Steiner-Khamisi, and Lubienski (2017) and Zapp, Helgetun, and Powell (2018) on the centrality of 'evidence' of what is claimed 'works' in the rhetoric policymakers employ to justify their political approaches. Even though it is not readily possible, from an epistemological standpoint, to observe when a myth is created and rationalized, what we have observed is its increasing presence in public life. The evidence myth in England seems to have developed from the earlier myth of measurement during the New Labour years, and to have come to fruition during the early Gove years (as far as teacher education is concerned). The indicators of this myth are the obsessions over measured value for money, and a scientification of public discourse where 'evidence' takes the place of moral or philosophical thought.

As such, we may infer that the myth relates to NPM and bears some continuity with an observed scientification or even medicalization of society following World War Two (see Tröhler 2014). Thus, we may argue the current iteration of evidence as a rationalized myth originates with new politico-administrative thinking in the 1940s, and a gradual articulation through a period of medicalization and measurement into evidence as the heart of public discourse on teacher education.

We have observed that there seem to have been a move towards justification of policy not only in terms of "large scale data" but also of "what works elsewhere" such as references to Singapore and Finland. Our point is that "evidence" is a broader and more apt term than measurement because new forms of justification of policy seemingly rooted in both research and empirical observations as well as in reflective argumentation on education, which goes beyond large scale measuring, can be observed. Therefore, we believe that the term 'evidence era' has become more apt than 'age of measurement' to indicate how even though large-scale data uses are still central, they are not alone, and require new forms of problematization.

In that regard, we have argued that, at present, the role of 'evidence' in policymaking has moved the environment from an age of measurement to an 'evidence era'. Furthermore, we have showed how 'evidence' has become a tool of government to justify policy, but also to grant speaking rights to selected actors whom ministers deem to have the right ideological leanings. This takes place under a tight central control with 'evidence' translated through an emphasis on how it will be received by politicians and the general public, not through any academic notions of rigour, robustness or reliability. Moreover, we have noted a lack of epistemological discourses in the 'evidence' project as findings move from a research environment to a political one⁷.

Our ideas on the need to separate politics and science as concepts in order to avoid falling into a trap of "technological solutions to life's-problems", and to think long and hard about what and how science may inform policy are not new. Max Weber expressed similar concerns in his lectures on *Science as a Vocation* in 1917 and *Politics as a Vocation* in 1921 (Weber 2004). However, what has changed is the context, that has arguably undergone several stages of change both in terms of evidence production (it is by no means the exclusive domain of the research university) and in terms

⁷ We should note that after completing our analysis for this article, the DfE published a paper setting out an 'ITT Core Content Framework' which was written by a working group including at least two leading education academics. This document is unusual in including as an appendix an extensive list of research references which apparently underpin each section of the document (DfE, 2019). 'A full bibliography is provided with suggested reading, which can be shared with trainee teachers to support their critical engagement with research. This evidence includes high-quality reviews and syntheses, including meta-analyses and rigorous individual studies.' (p.4) This provides yet more evidence of the evidence era we are outlining in our paper! Once more, it arguably is a continuation of a weak trend first observed in the recruitment and retention strategy, where key actors in the education sector promote and justify government policy by granting their 'seal of approval'

of policy construction and political discourse. As Weber pointed out, a researcher is lucky if his/her theories hold after 10, 20, or 50 years (Weber 2004), thus we must constantly re-evaluate old claims, particularly as the context changes. Moreover, we must ensure the context of one policy area is similar to another. What we have argued in this paper is that, in line with wider shifts in public policy, there has been a shift in teacher education, and that this has some distinctive features, particularly when the sequence of events is considered. To draw a comparison, school education arguably became centralised through standards and inspections from 1988 onwards (Alexander 2001), whereas by contrast, teacher education became centralised through inspections and demands of evidence relating to a provider's fitness to educate as early as 1984 (Barton et al. 1993). Teacher education and education are intertwined domains, but also distinct in their particular details and contexts. Thus, this paper should be understood as relating mainly to the context of teacher education policy. To follow our own advice on denoting epistemological limitations, we argue that this may inform a general understanding of public policy, but that the details of the case only pertain to teacher education policymaking. To return to Weber, "To ascribe a unified national character to the Englishmen of the seventeenth century would be simply to falsify history." ... "On the other hand, a difference of character between the English merchant adventurers and the old Hanseatic merchants is not to be found." (Weber 2003[1952] p.44). In other words, we must generalize only with attention (scientific rigour) as to what we may generalize and how, regardless of the source of information.

Other researchers have pointed out that the goal of research is to use evidence to investigate phenomena, but that conducting research on something is not the same as advocating it (Wiseman, Astiz and Baker, 2014). Meanwhile, research is also (arguably) fundamentally about uncovering something and learning/enhancing our knowledge, not normative prescription *tout-court*. It is indeed our view that politicians and policymakers have a responsibility to make value decisions and develop practices using evidence. This view is based on the idea of education as a social good within democratic societies. Therefore, we assert that the evidence which is used should relate the purpose and values of education (Biesta 2009). Thus, the *democratic legitimacy* of policymakers is arguably greater than that of researchers or academics, which is of importance if we acknowledge that policy is by its nature based on social appropriateness not pure consequentiality. Furthermore, we should, as Robin Alexander (2001) argues, likely not assume academics are any more objective than administrators and politicians. Therefore, producers of research should perhaps not 'pre-translate' 'evidence' to ensure it 'lands' with the ministers, but rather provide as accurate an estimate of what the current state of the evidence may or may not inform. Hence, when discussing 'evidence' one should likely be more careful with what is said and how, bearing in mind that policymakers should

know the limits of research (Saunders, 2007), and that 'evidence' can have wider ramifications as cultural-cognitions transform practices (Scott, 2013).

Moreover, one may discuss whether perhaps thinking of 'evidence' as internal or external can be misleading, as whether or not justification for practice comes from within the English teacher education system or not is not the only contextual sin that may be committed as 'evidence' informs practice. At the very least, discussions should be had regarding what evidence has bearing on causation, what is a descriptive account, and what is early 'soaking and poking' at the frontiers of science (George and Bennett, 2005). Important in this regard, we believe *coherent logic* should extend from the start of evidence production (a coherent logic of the research process from inception to observation to analysis) to application (evidence informed policy continuing with the same logic), if not the *full* research process from inception to application cannot be considered robust, regardless of the validity of each individual step. Epistemologically speaking, this form of coherence must be applied for any research, be it done by academics, civil-servants, teachers, or journalists, if the goal is to separate episteme from doxa and to construct valid evidence for informing any practice. The epistemological limitations relating to generalization and application of results from singular RCTs for example ought to be adhered to.

The importance of having scientific rigour in mind when using 'evidence' to inform practice does however move beyond the incorporation of academic texts in DfE policy documents. It also implies a responsibility of other actors, be it bloggers, twitterers, or journalists, to ensure they do not use 'evidence' to promote an ideology, but rather use it to change their ideology. Central then is an acceptance to look beyond dogma, to be critical and sceptical, but not for the sake of being critical and holding government to account, but to help inform government of 'evidence'. Therefore, if academics must cooperate with government to have an impact, they should do so but with vigour, rigour, and epistemological clarity, not just to stand up to nonsense, but to identify what is nonsense, how is it nonsense, and how can we avoid it. Meanwhile, if the way to be heard is through blogs and twitter, then universities should likely encourage staff to be more active in these new media, and use them to take control over the important concept that is *Evidence*.

Funding details: The project leading to this article has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 714641)

Acknowledgements: The authors would like to thank the TeachersCareers team for insightful discussions and helpful advice during the analysis. We would particularly like to thank Katharine Burn

(University of Oxford) for her help in identifying and obtaining documents for the analysis, as well as Tore Sørensen and Xavier Dumay (UC Louvain) for their comments and feedback on drafts of this paper. We would also like to thank our interviewees for sharing their time with us and providing valuable insights.

References

- Aberbach, J. D., & Rockman, B. A. (2002). Conducting and Coding Elite Interviews. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 35(4), 673-676.
- Adamson, B., Forestier, K., Morris, P., & Han, C. (2017). PISA, policymaking and political pantomime: education policy referencing between England and Hong Kong. *Comparative Education*, 53(2), 192-208. doi:10.1080/03050068.2017.1294666
- Alexander, R. J. (2001). *Culture & Pedagogy: International comparisons in primary education* Oxford: Blackwell.
- Ball, S. J. (2008). *The education debate*. Bristol: the policy press university of Bristol.
- Ball, S. J. (2016). Following policy: networks, network ethnography and education policy mobilities. *Journal of Education Policy*, 31(5), 549-566. doi:10.1080/02680939.2015.1122232
- Ball, S.J. and Junemann, C. (2012) *Networks, New Governance and Education*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Barton, L., A. Pollard and G. Whitty (1993). Change in teacher education: the case of England. In T. Popkewitz (Ed.) *Changing Patterns of Power: Social Regulation and Teacher Education Reform*. New York, State University of New York Press: 303-341.
- Bates, T., Gough, B., & Stammers, P. (1999). The role of central government and its agencies in the continuing professional development of teachers: an evaluation of recent changes in its financing in England. *Journal of In-Service Education*, 25(2), 321-335. doi:10.1080/13674589900200086
- Berry, J. M. (2002). Validity and Reliability Issues in Elite Interviewing. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 35(4), 679-682.
- Biesta, G. (2009). Good education in an age of measurement: on the need to reconnect with the question of purpose in education. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, 21(1), 33-46. doi:10.1007/s11092-008-9064-9
- Bowe, R., & Ball, S. J. (1992). *Reforming Education and Changing Schools*. London: Routledge.
- Burn, K., & Mutton, T. (2015). A review of 'research-informed clinical practice' in Initial Teacher Education. *Oxford Review of Education*, 41(2), 217-233. doi:10.1080/03054985.2015.1020104
- Campbell, J. L. (2002). Ideas, Politics, and Public Policy. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 28(1), 21-38. doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.28.110601.141111
- Campbell, J. L. (2004). *Institutional change and globalization*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Checkel, J. T. (2006). Tracing Causal Mechanisms. *International Studies Review*, 8(2), 362-370. doi:https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2486.2006.00598_2.x
- Childs, A., & Menter, I. (2013). Teacher education in 21st century England. A case study in neoliberal public policy. *Revista Española de Educación Comparada*, 22, 93-116.
- Chung, J. (2016). The (mis)use of the Finnish teacher education model: 'policy-based evidence-making'? *Educational Research*, 58(2), 207-219. doi:10.1080/00131881.2016.1167485

- Chung, J., Atkin, C., & Moore, J. (2012). The rise and fall of the MTL: an example of European policy borrowing. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 35(3), 259-274. doi:10.1080/02619768.2011.633996
- Flick, U. (2009). *An introduction to qualitative research* (4th ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Furlong, J. (2013). *Education - An anatomy of the discipline: Rescuing the university project?* London and New York: Routledge.
- Gale, T. (2018) 'What's not to like about RCTs in education?' In Childs, A. & Menter, I. (Eds.) *Mobilising Teacher Researchers*. London: Routledge.
- Gardner, J. (2011). Educational research: what (a) to do about impact! *British Educational Research Journal*, 37(4), 543-561. doi:10.1080/01411926.2011.596321
- George, A. L., & Bennett, A. (2005). *Case studies and theory development in the social sciences*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: MIT press.
- Goldacre, B. (2013) *Building Evidence into Education*. Available online: <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/b/ben%20goldacre%20paper.pdf>
- Graf, L. (2009). Applying the Varieties of Capitalism Approach to Higher Education: comparing the internationalisation of German and British universities. *European Journal of Education*, 44(4), 569-585.
- Hammersley, M. (Ed.) (2007) *Educational Research and Evidence-based Practice*. London: Sage.
- Helgetun, J. B., Powell, J. J. W., & Zapp, M. (2018). Governing Educational Research in Norway: coercion, cooperation or consensus? In M. Zapp, M. Marques, & J. J. W. Powell (Eds.), *European Educational Research (Re)Constructed: institutional change in Germany, the United Kingdom, Norway, and the European Union* (pp. 91-111). Oxford, England: Symposium Books.
- Keraudren, P. (1999). Entre nouveau management public et gouvernance : les spécificités de la réforme de l'administration centrale en Grande Bretagne. *Politique et Management Public*, 17(1), 59-92.
- LeTendre, G. K. (2018). *Neo-institutional Theory, Education Policy and Teachers*. Paper presented at the ECER, Bolzano, Italy.
- Lomax, P. (1998) 'Working together for educative community through research.' *BERA presidential addresses*. Available at: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/1998-pamela-lomax-bera-presidential-address> (Accessed 14.11.2019)
- Malone, A., & Hogan, P. (2019). Evidence and its consequences in educational research. *British Educational Research Journal*. doi:10.1002/berj.3580
- Maroy, C., Pons, X., & Dupuy, C. (2016). Vernacular globalisations: neo-statist accountability policies in France and Quebec education. *Journal of Education Policy*, 32(1), 100-122. doi:10.1080/02680939.2016.1239841
- Marques, M., Powell, J. J. W., Zapp, M., & Biesta, G. (2017). How does research evaluation impact educational research? Exploring intended and unintended consequences of research assessment in the United Kingdom, 1986–2014. *European Educational Research Journal*, 16(6), 820-842. doi:10.1177/1474904117730159
- McKnight, L. & Morgan, A. (2019) A broken paradigm? What education needs to learn from evidence-based medicine. *Journal of Education Policy*. doi: 10.1080/02680939.2019.1578902.
- Menter, I. (2013). From interesting times to critical times? Teacher education and educational research in England. *Research in Teacher Education*, 3(1), 38-40.
- Mutton, T., Burn, K., & Menter, I. (2016). Deconstructing the Carter Review: competing conceptions of quality in England's 'school-led' system of initial teacher education. *Journal of Education Policy*, 32(1), 14-33. doi:10.1080/02680939.2016.1214751
- Normand, R. (2017). *The Changing Epistemic Governance of European Education: The Fabrication of the Homo Academicus Europeanus?* : Springer.
- Ozga, J. (2009). Governing education through data in England: from regulation to self-evaluation. *Journal of Education Policy*, 24(2), 149-162. doi:10.1080/02680930902733121
- Pierson, P., & Skocpol, T. (2002). Historical institutionalism in contemporary political science. In K. I. & H. V. Milner (Eds.), *Political Science: State of the Discipline*. New York: W. W. Norton.

- Powell, J. J. W., Baker, D. P., & Fernandez, F. (2017). *The Century of Science: The Global Triumph of the Research University* (Vol. 33). Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK: Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Rickinson, M., Sebb, J., & Edwards, A. (2011). *Improving Research through User Engagement*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Rose, N. (1991). Governing by numbers: figuring out democracy. *Accounting Organizations and SocieQ*, 16(7), 673-692.
- Saunders, L. (Ed.) (2007). *Educational Research and Policy-Making: Exploring the Border Country Between Research and Policy*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Sayer, A. (2010). *Method in Social Science: a realist approach* (2nd ed.). London & New York: Routledge.
- Schriewer, J. (2012). EDITORIAL: Meaning constellations in the world society. *Comparative Education*, 48(4), 411-422. doi:10.1080/03050068.2012.737233
- Scott, W. R. (2013). *Institutions and Organizations: ideas, interests, and identities* (4th ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Steiner-Khamsi, G. (2012). Understanding Policy Borrowing and Lending: Building comparative policy studies. In G. steiner-Khamsi & F. Waldo (Eds.), *World Yearbook of Education 2012: Policy Borrowing and Lending in Education* (pp. 3-18). London and New York: Routledge.
- Steiner-Khamsi, G., Karseth, B., & Baek, C. (2019). From science to politics: commissioned reports and their political translation into White Papers. *Journal of Education Policy*, 1-26. doi:10.1080/02680939.2019.1656289
- Tröhler, D. (2014). The medicalization of current educational research and its effects on education policy and school reforms. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 36(5): 749-764.
- Verger, A., Steiner-Khamsi, G., & Lubienski, C. (2017). The emerging global education industry: analysing market-making in education through market sociology. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 15(3), 325-340. doi:10.1080/14767724.2017.1330141
- Weber, M. (2003[1958]). The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism. Online, Dover.
- Weber, M. (2004 [1917/1919]). The vocation lectures: science as a vocation, politics as a vocation. Indianapolis, Indiana, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. .
- Whiting, C., G. Whitty, I. Menter, P. Black, J. Hordern, A. Parfitt, K. Reynolds and N. Sorensen (2018). Diversity and complexity: Becoming a teacher in England in 2015-2016. *Review of Education* 6(1): 69-96.
- Whitty, G. (2006). Education(al) research and education policy making: is conflict inevitable? *British Educational Research Journal*, 32(2), 159-176. doi:10.1080/01411920600568919
- Wiseman, A. W., Astiz, M. F., & Baker, D. P. (2014). Comparative education research framed by neo-institutional theory: a review of diverse approaches and conflicting assumptions. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 44(5), 688-709. doi:10.1080/03057925.2013.800783
- Zapp, M., Helgetun, J. B., & Powell, J. J. W. (2018). (Re)shaping educational research through 'programmification': Institutional expansion, change, and translation in Norway. *European Journal of Education*, 53(2), 202-217. doi:10.1111/ejed.12267

Annex:

List of Interview subjects:

A 1: Senior academic, Russell Group university

A2: Academic Russell Group university

A3: ITT interest group organization representative, former TTA, external government advisor

- A4: ITT interest group organization representative, former head of teacher education in a SCITT, external government advisor
- A5: Local councillor and analyst
- A6: Senior academic, post-92 university, external government advisor
- A7 Senior Civil servant, DfE
- A8: State employee working on education
- A9: Interest organization employee
- A10: Researcher in education
- A11: Head of a MAT and SCITT, works with the teaching schools alliance
- A12: Senior civil servant, DfE – former TDA
- A13: Senior civil servant, DfE – former TDA
- A14: Head of a MAT and SCITT, external government adviser
- A15: Researcher in education
- A16: Academic, government adviser
- A17: Senior academic, Russell Group, involved in British teacher education policy
- A18: Responsible for ITT and CPD at a major MAT, former Teach First employee
- A19: Civil servant, DfE
- A20: Union policy adviser