

Anticipating policy and the logics of practice: Australian institutional and academic responses to the globalising “quality research” agenda

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ABSTRACT

Research assessment is now an international trend. This article mobilises a critical policy sociology informed by Bourdieu to unpack the differential effects of research policy shifts in Australia on universities, academics and the field of educational research. It argues in anticipating policy moves – from surveying the logics of practice that have emerged elsewhere from research assessment – that institutional, individual and field responses, while specific to the Australian policy context and mix, have assumed a logic of practice counterproductive to “quality” research, education as a field, and equity.

Introduction

With the introduction of research assessment policies that emphasise quality and not just productivity, Australia has now aligned with the UK, New Zealand and emerging international trends in Europe and Asia (Codd, 2006). There have been two phases of development in Australian policies related to quality research and assessment, each with distinctive characteristics: first the Coalition government’s Research Quality Framework (RQF) (2004–2007) and now Labour’s Excellence in Research in Australia Initiative (ERA, 2008). Each policy initiative has sought to shape the nature of university based research, the relationship between research, innovation and the economy, as well as who does research. This article explores through a critical and feminist policy sociology (Bacchi, 2000; Lingard, Rawolle & Taylor, 2005; Shaw, 2004) the discourses surrounding the production of the RQF and ERA, their reception by, and effects on, Australian universities, professional associations, disciplines and academics. The paper considers why research quality became a priority in the 2000s, and how globalising policies of research assessment articulate “locally” with national policies on higher education, with a specific university’s strategic agenda, with different disciplinary fields and for academics differentially. What does this mean for educational research as a field and for equity (Grenfell & James, 2004)?

The article draws on the texts – consultation papers, submissions, ministerial announcements, the media debates and documentation – central to the iterative processes of production, reception, and effects of the RQF and ERA policies. It is informed by an empirical study commencing in 2004 that has tracked the processes of production of research assessment policies and documented changes in policy processes and governance with regard to the relationship between the state, education and the individual. This project involved monitoring institutional responses, interviews

with research professors in education, a literature review and policy analysis of research assessment policies in the UK and elsewhere (Blackmore, 2006, 2009; Blackmore, Wright & Harwood, 2006).

Other than providing an Australian case study of the initial effects of research assessment policies, the article illustrates how the process of production of policy in itself produces a discursive logic of practice that informs changes in institutional and individual practice. With the successive policy shifts between the RQF and ERA, changes in practice occur as various policy actors seek to identify, influence and strategically play with the emerging rules of the game in what Bourdieu (1993) refers to as “position taking”. The resources of the field – academic capital in the sense of dispositions and scientific capital linked to authority and intellectual renown – are being reshaped, it is argued, by discourses and practices of quality assurance generally, and research assessment policies in particular as they promote limited notions of quality and undermine equity.

The global policy environment and the quality agenda

Policy borrowing, particularly amongst the Anglophone nation states, has characterised educational reform and restructuring in all education sectors during the 1990s; policies framed largely by neoliberal theories of human capital, public choice theory and the new public administration (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard & Henry, 1997). Education policy is increasingly being made outside the field of education and outside national borders within global education policy communities such as the World Bank, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and UNESCO, mobilised at transnational, international, national, and local levels (Ball, 1998). Bourdieu’s notion of a social field provides analytical leverage to understand the “play of the game” internationally and locally. A social field is constituted with specific relations of power, those who dominate and those who are dominated. Fields are subject to domination, and their level of autonomy is determined by the extent to which the field can reject domination by other fields (Bourdieu, 1998). Education can be understood as a field with both global reach, but also local specificities. Arguably, education as a numerically feminised field has, with neoliberal reforms of marketisation and managerialisation in most Western nation states, also endured a loss of autonomy as it has become subjected to the fields of economics, politics and journalism. The independence of the sub-field of higher education (HE) specifically has been reduced as HE has been linked more closely to national economic priorities underpinned by discourses of knowledge economies (Delanty, 2001).

Policy sociologists have argued that policy operates as both discourse and text (Bacchi, 2000). This conceptualisation is:

a heuristic that rejects a linear policy text production/policy implementation conceptualisation of policy processes and instead argues for a cyclical, non-linear site of relationships consisting of three contexts of influence, text production and practice, with multidirectional effects between each context. (Lingard et al., 2005: 761)

This policy cycle approach better explains the messiness of the policy process, and why there are unintended as well as intended consequences as policy texts circulate and are reinterpreted in practice. Ball (1998) also argues that there has been a paradigm convergence within policy as a result of improved communications with the flows of globalisation. Henry et al. (2001) argue that this convergence arises because the global policy community in education is marked by a rapid diaspora of ideas and policies and the cosmopolitan habitus of policy makers who are located in international bodies such as UNESCO and the OECD, many of them academics, bureaucrats, consultants, NGOs (Non Government Organisations) and policy advisors. Policies within this global policy field become travelling texts, with multiple articulations within national contexts and organisations, producing close but not isomorphic resemblances, because policies are also products of local contestation and conditions.

Quality has become the most recent rubric of educational reform that circulates within higher-education policy discourse. Quality-assurance policy discourses and texts in teaching have travelled

particularly well because of concerns arising from increased competitiveness with the rapid internationalisation of higher education (Broadfoot, 1998). Research-assessment policies are indicative of the mobility and uneven flows of policy discourses and actors within the global-education policy circuit. Sir Gareth Roberts, Chair of the Expert Advisory Group (EAG – formed in 2004) developing the initial discussion paper for the Research Quality Framework in Australia, was Chair of the Science Council in UK, a member of the Higher Education Funding Council of England Board and reviewer of the UK's Research Assessment Exercise (2003 RAE). Much of the language, ranking descriptors, definitions and criteria of the RAE appear in the Australian RQF texts. Descriptions of the United Kingdom and New Zealand processes are included as Appendices to the EAG's Discussion Paper and their procedures provided the basic foundations from which the Australian RQF was developed. The NZ Performance-Based Research Fund in 2003 was a mixed model derived from the Australian Research Quantum and British RAE, but with a focus on individual, not group, portfolios (Codd, 2006). Likewise, there is considerable iterative dialogue occurring in 2008 between the review of the RAE in the UK and the next phase of ERA in Australia (Oancea, 2008). These global networks of mobile policy actors are therefore the new space of play for transnational masculinities who are rewarded for their mobility and flexibility (Connell, 1998).

Research-assessment policies should also be viewed in the context of understanding the significance of discourses (ideologies) about knowledge-based economies, a highly elastic term often mobilised in policy texts but rarely defined (Delanty, 2001). HE is now perceived by government seeking to promote knowledge economies on the one hand to be an industry seeking students in volatile and fragmented international markets with Australian export earnings in education averaging over \$10 billion per annum. On the other hand universities are being linked tightly to the national economy as the new driver in "academic capitalism" (Slaughter & Leslie, 1998) and a source of productivity through innovation and skills formation (Department of Education, Skills and Training [DEST], 2008). Research has to be immediately "relevant" and "applied", and increasingly undertaken by private and public providers, often in collaboration (Cutler, 2008). Again, the type of entrepreneurialism required in privatised or consultancy-based research, usually in science and technology, provides greater career opportunities for mobile academic scientific and technical masculinities than women researchers who tend to be bound by localised/national/domestic responsibilities, by social relationships and researching the social (Deem & Johnson, 2003; Metcalfe & Slaughter, 2006).

And there are continuities in policy. Labour's ERA is still premised, as was the RQF, upon the simplistic equation of innovation with science and technology (Fahey et al., 2006; Rawolle 2008). In defining innovation as in the case of research assessment, what is left out is marginalised, as is typically the case of arts and humanities disciplines. Cultural economies and the aesthetic are "deemed incommensurable with the techno-economic paradigm" (Fahey et al., 2006: 287). Labour's inclusion of the education portfolio as part of workplace planning and the industrial-relations ministerial portfolio indicates an unproblematic assumption of human-capital theory and lifelong learning. This is also evident in the disturbing separation of teaching from research with the location of research and innovation and educational governance and operations with different Ministers for Education. For the field of education, both the object of policy but also a field of research, this is an issue. In the UK, "science" broadly includes science, engineering, social science and humanities. So while notions of innovation and human capital are narrow, leaching out what and how "the social and cultural" contributes, a whole of government approach to significant policy problems is emerging that sees education as integral to economic and social policies (Lee & McWilliam, 2007). In this context, the RQF and ERA can be viewed as "national policy templates" that are expected to develop and harvest information bases through commercial application (Peters, 2007: 31).

Governments have also sought to be seen to be more accountable by displaying the efficient use of research expenditure. Both Coalition and Labour Ministers justified the RQF and ERA on the grounds of increased transparency and efficiency. Some efficiencies had previously been achieved by devolving the risk associated with research down to universities while governing "from a

distance" (Orr, 2004) through policies aligning institutional and national priorities and strong accountability frameworks focusing on quantifiable and measurable outcomes. Australian government control over what is taught and researched has increased as funding decreased (Davis, 2005). Now efficiency is being equated to greater research concentration in fewer universities. Again, this has equity implications, with women most likely concentrated in less research-intensive fields of research (e.g. education) and universities, or in areas where there is greatest private investment (e.g. science and technology). Meanwhile, the state remains the "regulator of quality" of a mix of public and private producers of research.

Paradoxically, these discourses about quality research have been until 2008 in the context of a lack of a coherent Australian federal policy for building research capability and investment in research. Gallagher (2005: 10), a former high-level federal education bureaucrat argued:

The Howard government has confused its approach to research with its policies for higher education and we have a lack of clarity about the respective roles of universities and public research institutes, a set of conflicting signals and perverse incentives, and a dissipation of effort that will cause Australia to slip further off world pace.

The Coalition agenda of privatisation of education and research underpinned its justification for the RQF to:

- a. increase differentiation between universities;
- b. constrain public expenditure;
- c. improve quality of research; and,
- d. indicate public accountability (Nelson, 2005b).

Labour in 2008, confronted with the need to rebuild research capacity for national economic growth, initiated a review of HE and the Cutler Report (2008) on innovation. In this context, the objectives of ERA as stated: to identify excellence in research; to compare Australia's university research effort against international benchmarks; to create incentives to improve the quality of research; and to identify emerging research areas and opportunities (ARC, 2008: 5). Labour seeks to simultaneously increase efficiency and accountability while reducing the burden on universities through simplification of research assessment (Carr, 2008).

Whereas quality assurance in teaching and learning provides standardising imperatives to guarantee quality for students wherever they are located, quality research is now the marker of distinction and differentiation internationally and nationally (Marginson, 2005a). The notion of quality and excellence is imbued with significant performative power within the global education policy community. Externally, with increasingly competitive global markets, quality has become the primary focus to attract students and investment in universities. International ranking scales such as the Shanghai Jia Tong World ranking are now texts that define "quality" of individual institutions globally, ranks premised largely on research performance (Marginson, 2005a, b). These rankings, as texts, mediate relations of power between universities internationally, and in turn impact on hierarchies between universities and within universities within each nation state, while shaping institutional practices. Such rankings are reproduced in other textual forms e.g. advertising bill boards ("We are number seven in world ranking in Arts") and marketing brochures to indicate the international standing of the institution for local customers. Research assessment policies therefore do significant symbolic work, by offering transparency and therefore accountability, as well as efficiency and effectiveness, in the use of public funds. Bourdieu (1998: 38) argues that "it is in the realm of the symbolic production that the grip of the state is felt most powerfully".

The quality research agenda is therefore about differentiation and ranking. There has emerged a reluctant consensus within the HE sector to develop new funding mechanisms to encourage institutional diversity in ways that recognise different research specialisms. The Diversity in Higher Education Discussion paper (2004) proposed greater differentiation between universities in terms

of specialisms, profiles and also funding leading to three tiers of universities: research intensive; teaching and research; and teaching intensive (Nelson, 2005a). In this policy context, the notion of diversity has become:

entangled in the vertical differentiation of institutions or 'tiering'. Tiering is understood in terms of differences in the institutional status, in the pulling power of the university brand, if you like. Though the policy papers are coy about status, most students, most employees, every academic and every VC knows it is important. (Marginson, 2005b: 35)

With Labour, the notion of diversity has taken on greater import with the proposed move towards institutional compacts based on profiles as a basis for future funding. It is widely recognised that a predicted outcome of any research assessment linked to funding will be a hierarchy of universities based on research intensity, as was an outcome of the RAE in the UK and PBRF in New Zealand, with a third of the 39 universities research intensive, a third research and teaching, and a third teaching intensive.

Australian HE policy therefore indicates a series of tensions: the tension between the desire to create a "nationally consistent, well defined 'brand' to support our engagement with the international marketplace for higher education" and "a sector with a wide diversity of institutions with a flexibility to pursue their own distinct missions and develop innovative responses to opportunities which arise" (Nelson, 2005b: 1). Other tensions in this policy mix are between diversity of institutional missions and the fundamentals (funding) that limit diversity; the tension between creativity and originality and the conformity demanded by markets (Marginson, 2005b). Any research assessment exercise is therefore critical to each university's status and position in the market. The priority of all universities in 2008 is to increase research capacity generally to address both ERA and possible funding arrangements premised upon diversity. Whereas policies in the 1990s encouraged massification and unifying the sector with all universities doing research, the contemporary focus highlights differentiation based on research quality and intensity in ways that reassert old knowledge and institutional hierarchies weakened by massification.

Shaping up for quality regimes

Quality, as a discursive strategy, exercises considerable control over professional fields and academics. While it is difficult to reject as a bad thing, management of quality and of risk is dispersed down to the professions and academics, who in turn have become captured by a continuous cycle of production of, and feedback to and through, multiple texts of evaluation and assessment (Morley, 2001). Quality "has become a key signifier, conveying that universities must be seen to improve their performance" (Worthington & Hodgson, 2005: 96). Research assessment is not merely a resource allocation mechanism and a means by which governments can deliver value for money. As other quality assurance technologies, research assessment produces performative academic identities focused on institutional and national priorities (Broadfoot, 1998; Blackmore, 2009). The danger of research assessment lies not only in the operationalisation of definitions and measurement of quality but also in the institutional responses of universities, professional bodies and academics as they seek to position themselves within the field strategically.

Australian academic and institutional responses to the RQF and then ERA have been informed by their observations as participant-observers in multiple global policy communities (research networks, conferences, collaborations) as to the effects of research assessment elsewhere. At the institutional level, the proliferation of Pro Vice Chancellors of Research with all their administrative structures is indicative of the symbolic capital being invested in the management of quality in Australian universities. These divisions are often more about managing academics (and risk) to be more compliant to rule governed quality regimes than supporting quality research and teaching (Deem & Johnson, 2004). Internally, institutional managers see quality discourses as serving the specific purposes of ensuring compliance to organisational objectives and strategic plans and

reining in the eccentric academic, thus achieving institutional and individual “alignment” by appealing to academic professionalism to provide “quality” teaching and research (Olssen, 2000). In research, the premise is that visible processes and text-based definitions of research assessment regimes indicate quality as textual links are made between individual and institutional performance, while promising productivity gains through processes of “responsibilisation” and “regulation” (Morley, 2001). Ethics procedures are a critical feature of this surveillance and risk management (Dehli & Taylor, 2006).

While research assessment is in a relatively experimental stage, until recently the summative approach of the UK RAE has been seen to be the model to follow, despite its demonstrated expense. The RAE has been based on moderation between cross-disciplinary panels and disciplinary sub-panels, the sub-panels having the capacity to recognise disciplinary differences in research practice within the broader framework. Thus the UK Education Sub-panel in 2008 argued for the distinctiveness of education as a field and the different “quality levels of outputs” as designated against the common criteria of originality, significance and rigour (RAE in 2008). The centrality of peer review in the RAE was evident with discretionary academic judgement by experts within the disciplinary field.

The RQF framework outlined in 2006, informed by the RAE (DEST, 2006, 2007), also had peer review as central and adopted as the unit of assessment research groupings to be aggregated for each university portfolio. Each research group was to provide a context statement, individual portfolios consisting of four “best” readings indicators of esteem (e.g. keynotes, editorial boards etc) and four case studies of impact identifying “users” (individuals and organisations). Education was grouped with Law and Professional Practices (e.g. Social Work), with some discretionary capacity for each panel to decide on appropriate measures of quality, e.g. social sciences focus on books, edited collections not recognised in other fields (DEST, 2007). But the RQF proposed two measures of quality: quality of impact on the disciplinary field that was of “intrinsic merit and academic impact” as determined by peer review; and impact on policy and practice as determined by “qualified user” testifying that rigorous and systematic research has been “successfully applied to achieve social, economic or environmental and/or cultural outcomes” (DEST, 2006: 14). A key problematic was how to measure *through evidence* the impact on policy and practice (Holbrook, 2007).

While the focus on research groupings tended to lead to inclusions and exclusions and hierarchies of researchers within disciplines, groupings could be interdisciplinary and indicative of research excellence without a significant research mass. While the RQF recognised the diffuse nature of the production and dissemination of educational research, particularly of the fields of professional practice and industry partnerships more typical of regional universities (Blackmore, Wright & Harwood, 2006), there was concern that the RQF did not address research capacity building because of its focus on high performing groups (Powles, 2005). On the other hand, the rankings of impact – the highest of which required inter/national scope to validate widespread social, economic and cultural impact – was also difficult for the professional fields because knowledge production was cumulative and not based on a single “discovery” but diffuse processes of dissemination. Impact is often invisible to the users and is usually the result of a body of work rather than individuals or a research group (Holbrook, 2007). The DETYA (2001) *Impact of Educational Research on Educational Policy and Practice Report* illustrated through a case study, for example, how gender equity research during the 1980s and 1990s had significant impact on both policy and practice, but in ways difficult to track and measure. Education is also highly politicised. So while research can be significant, it may not get into policy, and even when utilised, its impact could be the opposite of the researcher’s intent (Levin, 2006).

ERA significantly changed the rules of the game. ERA limited the definition of quality to:

1. measures of research activity and intensity (as indicated by research income, higher degree research (HDR) completions and ratio of active to non-active researchers in the cluster);
2. indicators of research quality (metrics and, where not appropriate, other indicators); and

3. indicators of excellent applied research and translation of research outcomes (Australian Research Council [ARC], 2008: 9).

The ERA favours the use of metrics (citations indexes, ranking of journals) and income as proxies for quality (ARC, 2008) which in turn favours the natural sciences with its emphasis first, on income and intensity. The natural sciences are capital intensive with greater research concentration than the social sciences and humanities because of the nature, but not necessarily quality, of research. It is easier to measure scientific and technological outcomes in terms of application and impact because the focus is on products and not relationships, process or people as in the social sciences. The regression to metrics as the proxy for quality has been adopted despite extensive submissions from the humanities and social sciences learned academies, including education, that stated that “standard bibliometric measures alone are not enough ... a position supported by voluminous feedback from the sector, indicating that quantitative data are at best used as supporting evidence in a nuanced case” (Powles, 2005: 9).

Second, ERA returns to disciplinary panels that undermine moves to inter-disciplinarity. Additionally, the unit of assessment moves away from smaller elite research groupings to all inclusive disciplinary clusters and intensity; that is, the ratio of all active/inactive researchers within the cluster. Universities now select which disciplinary fields they will submit to ERA. At the same time, the fields of research codes have been revised in ways that also undermines the multi-disciplinarity of some fields of research such as education. For example, policy studies in education will be in 2009 located within the subfield of policy studies in politics and not within the subfield of policy studies in education, despite the distinctive nature of educational policy sociology. ERA thus ironically reasserts old disciplinary boundaries which had dissipated, penalising multidisciplinary fields such as education, and disadvantaging emergent interdisciplinary research that focuses on problem solving and whole of government. Finally, the focus on research intensity and application is premised upon the view that “bigger is better” research is done in large teams. The *Impact Report* (DETYA, 2001), while recognising the strengths of the education field, found that research performance was based on research dispersion rather than concentration and a diffusion model of research dissemination (Holbrook, 2007). Again, ERA assumes a model of natural science rather than social science research (Blackmore, 2002; Young et al., 2002; Smith & Jesson, 2005).

Thus research assessment can be counterproductive to its intended aims of measuring quality. The technologies of categorisation can mean a failure to recognise all aspects of excellence in research, whether pure intellectual quality, value added to professional practice, or applicability and impact within and beyond the research community. They can impede inter-disciplinarity as well as inadequately recognise university collaborations and partnerships (industry linkages), and thus discourage enterprise activities. Paradoxically, both the RQF and ERA are seen to encourage reification of Mode 1 disciplinary based knowledge that reproduces a theory practice divide (quality = peer review), at a time when some argue knowledge based economies are moving towards Mode 2 knowledge that is interdisciplinary and problem focused, collapsing the theory/practice divide (quality = user value) (Gibbons et al., 1994; Fahey et al., 2006). Such contradictions create irresolvable tensions for, and overwhelming demands on, the time and energy of academics particularly in professional and feminised fields such as education, where research is expected to both to inform practice but also to lead to papers in high quality peer reviewed journals.

Second, research assessment is seen to reduce the building of research capacity by affecting the sustainability of research due to the imposed time frames on impact, by increasing risk due to game playing, and adding to the administrative burden for universities and academics. Demographics indicate an ageing academic cohort in Australia and elsewhere. Building research capacity of early career researchers is critical, with many ECRs being women with work/ family responsibilities. Yet ERA will broadly disadvantage women and early career researchers as it favours those with sustained research records. Indeed, funding policies and institutional flexibility to meet student markets encourages the casualisation of academic work and research, discouraging many

from viewing the academy or research as a viable career option (OECD, 2008; Metcalfe & Slaughter, 2008).

Third, research assessment, particularly when linked to funding, will be instrumental in producing teaching-intensive universities, thus dismantling the links between quality research and quality teaching that many regard critical for any university (Jenkins, Breen & Lindsay, 2002). Paradoxically, professional faculties are being exhorted by dominant discourses to encourage evidence based practice and yet research will not be done by academics in the disciplines oriented to professional practice such as nursing and education, again where women academics and students are concentrated (Blackmore, 2002; Young et al., 2002). Faculties of Education with large undergraduate student cohorts tend to be located in the regional and newer universities, those most vulnerable to becoming teaching intensive. Any tiering of universities on the basis of research/non-research universities will have significant impact on academic careers in education particularly if there is a decoupling of teaching from research (Furlong & Oancea, 2006; Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2006).

Finally, this trend to universalise and standardise the techniques of research assessment, as the UK also moves towards metrics despite opposition from the Chairs of the Disciplinary panels, is facilitated by advances in the technologies of metrics (*The Higher Education*, 8 August, 2008).

Anticipating policy: Managing consent through policy formation

For Australian educational researchers and education faculties, knowledge of the detrimental consequences of these performative regimes for education as a field of research and for individual researchers in the UK and NZ loomed large when the RQF was announced in the federal government policy *Backing Australia's Ability 2* (DEST, 2004). This knowledge, and the possible effects of a similar Australian exercise, informed the responses of universities, faculties, disciplines, professional associations and academics to the RQF.

The act that texts circulate without their context, that is ... they don't bring with them the field of production of which they are a product ... and the fact that recipients who are themselves in a different field of production, reinterpret the texts in accordance with the structure of the field of reception, are facts that generate some formidable misunderstandings and that can have good or bad consequences. (Bourdieu, 1998: 221)

While the conditions of production of the Australian research assessment policy are shaped outside the field of education as part of national economic policies, the processes of producing policy within the field are multilayered with polyphonic input of the various policy actors within the national subfield of HE. The development of the RQF involved iterative phases of consultation with multiple stakeholders (VCs, research administrators, academics, industry users, professions) marked by discussion papers and preferred models. As each phase provided greater detail, academics, learned academics, professional research associations and university research managers engaged with their international networks as they sought to interpret and anticipate the implications, fully aware of the power of policy to impact on institutions and careers. As policy actors, both academics and managers sought to both shape and learn the "rules of the game", while buffering themselves against perceived detrimental consequences. They became active players in the arena of research assessment: analysing the profiles and strategies of UK and NZ institutions with regard to prior RAEs; researching and reviewing the impact of RAE and PBRF and other research assessment exercises on universities and academics; reviewing publishers' journal ranking and citation lists; submitting and responding to discussion papers; arguing the case for their specific fields and institutions; undertaking pilots of research assessment with like institutions; being involved in DEST pilots; while all the time reflecting on personal knowledge gained from overseas experiences and the stories from the field of international colleagues. Each policy text produced locally was part of wider "ruling relations of power" that coordinated across multiple sites (disciplines, universities, countries) as

institutional relations stretched beyond the local. In attempting to second guess the research policies and their possible effects, these inter-textual and cross-national discourses (and counter-discourses) re/produced particular logics (and counter-logics) of practice already evident in prior research exercises elsewhere.

Professional associations similarly responded. One strategy was the emergence of new disciplinary organisations and alliances such as the Council for the Humanities and Social Science (CHASS) to lobby government. This followed the success of the science lobby group (FAST) with the appointment of a Chief Scientist (Batterham) and increased funding for science and technology in 2002 (Lingard, Rawolle & Taylor, 2005). The Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences (CHASS) criticised the dominant science model of research concentrations and teams embedded in the research policies and offered alternative approaches (CHASS, 2006). Education as a multidisciplinary field neither belongs to the social sciences and humanities nor does it have a Learned Academy (Lingard & Blackmore, 1997), although it is represented at policy forums by the peak educational research body, the Australian Association of Research in Education (AARE). This ad hoc relationship of education with the social sciences was, as one professor in education commented, “a real worry for education because it means that capacity to advocate is only coming from your own organisational level” (interview with author, 2005). Such alliances also located education as only one aspect, and a subordinate one, within the field of social sciences, raising debates about the need to develop a learned academy in education.

The focus on quality also countered AARE’s focus on building research capacity of the field since the creation of a unified sector in 1989 (Yates, 2006). Another education professor commented: “education had supported a kind of inclusive model of building ... capacity building if you like” as most education faculties have focused on an inclusive model of capacity building (interview with author, Blackmore, 2005). This strategy was seen to be successful in that Australian education researchers were seen to be performing well internationally in publications and citations relative to size (DETYA, 2001). But the downsizing and restructuring post-2000 meant the need for “a lot of rebuilding and in a way the research part has been the slowest to get going” (Professor 3) (interview with author, Blackmore, 2005).

The dilemma for AARE was how to both highlight the detrimental impact on education of the RQF but also to position education as favourably as possible. While keeping one eye on the policy production process and preparing submissions, AARE, as did other professional associations, escalated and expanded their activities by organising research conferences, workshops and capacity building activities. AARE established a secretariat with other key education organisations; mobilised its Australian Research Directors in Education Network (ARDEN), and partially funding a contested project ranking and banding of education journal exercise (SORTI) (<http://www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/sorti/>). The rationale in supporting SORTI was that if journal ranking is to be used as a metric, then it is preferable that it be done by consultation with all educational researchers as a field rather than by a bureaucrat, non-educational researcher, or an unrepresentative group of researchers. Certainly ranking journals could be seen to be “educative” for early career researchers in terms of where to publish, but the banding of journals into tiers was seen to have detrimental consequences given the breadth of the field, as some subfields may not have a “top ranking” journal. In supporting this ranking activity the profession became reluctantly complicit in the production of policies that were arguably counterproductive for educational research.

Likewise, universities sought to position themselves favourably, although with some cynicism if such an expensive exercise would not deliver adequate, if any, financial benefits. Individual universities and university groups (e.g. Utech Network) undertook pilot research audits and research assessment exercises based on what was known about the RQF framework at any point in time, while heavily relying on the UK model for the detail of implementation. University planning focused on research priorities and the creation of research groupings, some more contrived than others.

Research groups were encouraged to develop storylines, a key theme of the RAE, to provide a sense of coherence and focus for groups that were previously loose groupings. Individual academics selected into pilots and research groupings were accorded a new status, while those not selected felt devalued. Academic research profiles are now subjected to intensified surveillance and measurement as faculties develop more rigorous criteria for what counts as an active researcher, producing ranked lists and raising the bar for promotion etc. These textually mediated practices continue to produce more disaggregated and finer calibrations of distinction and definition favouring well-established researchers, the majority being male professors (women constitute only 18% of professors in 2008 in Australia) (Blackmore, 2008).

Faculties now foreground research in recruitment and in performance appraisal regimes, while workload formulas recognise and reward research productive academics. Universities have realigned promotion criteria and processes to foreground the most likely criteria of quality that research assessment could expect (e.g. publishing in internationally-refereed journals) but also to facilitate rapid promotion of high-flying early career researchers so they will not be “poached”. Universities have begun recruiting and hiring high performing research staff to achieve research concentrations and established digital repositories to store research publications etc. Some universities reward academics differentially according to their research output. Research centres have been formed and funded to create coherent research groups. Institutional and faculty working papers have been developed to consider how to build research capacity (Vickers, 2004). Many universities are proposing teaching-only as well as research-only designated positions. A professor in a Group of Eight university commented:

And what’s been happening is that there’s been a very strong attempt to try to move away from the kind of mass structure which says everybody is an individual academic allocated to teach wherever they’re told to teach into a more kind of knowledge based organisation. So you can start to see you know clusters and concentrations and so on. (Interview with author, Blackmore, 2005)

With ERA, the rules of the game have been revised. Much of what was contested has become a *fait accompli*, such as a single list ranking over 1,600 journals. University policies have now moved from focusing on the high-flyer researchers and research groupings to focus on building research capacity generally within disciplinary areas, balancing this against how research specialisms will be judged in the institutional compacts that will determine funding. Universities are now investing in early and mid-career researchers both in terms of recruitment and retention, and creating capacity for the management of large research output databases that will be required by metrics regimes. Thus a modified “logic of practice” of research assessment has permeated the discourses and textually mediated practices of Australian universities. Academics are now expected to work more strategically and in alignment with research priorities and faculty plans. In conforming to and performing for these multiple texts, academics manage themselves better, internalising the policy moves. The problem is the goal becomes not self-improvement, but to improve your rating in this “fever of enhancement” (Strathern, 2000).

Strategic interventions or self-managing educational research(ers)?

This process of policy production of the RQF has been shaped and mediated by multiple texts – frameworks, flow charts, organisational mappings, rankings, measures, discussion papers, submissions. But ultimately what gets represented in the texts, data and how quality will be judged, while contested on the ground and in the workings of the disciplinary panels, will appear as procedurally fair, transparent and objective. Quality has become a textually mediated practice that produces its own logic which re/produces particular performative behaviours that become the end in themselves, with the technologies of assessment not only disciplining academics but also changing the practices within and between disciplinary fields. The focus of the RQF was on the text based portfolios as representations of quality, which was indicative as much of the skills of writing a portfolio, of providing a persuasive storyline, writing elaborate and rich case studies, and tracking

consensual networks of users. The power of the RQF lay in its allocation of funds to leverage change in the social organisation of academic and institutional behaviour. ERA has, with its focus on metrics as proxies for quality, removed much discretionary judgement from within the field of HE, and academics as quality is defined externally through bibliometrics and journal ranking. These technologies, with their lean categories and questionable measures, are as much a product of how academic publications are organised within the context of “academic capitalism” as they are of quality. This produces the internal contradiction for academics who are both excluded from management of their research but also participants in the self management of their academic labour.

The dilemma confronting the education research community is the extent to which they become policy actors and therefore complicit in the development of the disciplinary technology which govern academics already overwhelmed by the textually mediated practices of other quality measures in teaching and learning (e.g. AUQA, consumer exit questionnaires, etc.). How can policy actors in educational research strategically intervene to gain greater recognition of the specificity of Australian educational research while showing that Australian research is internationally comparable? How can they achieve this without moving towards a reductionist model of assessment and narrow definitions of quality that are driven by international policy trends that favour universalising and standardised measures of quality? Certainly, the focus of both the RQF and ERA has vitalised discussions within universities and research communities around quality and research, and increased university and government investment in research. For the professional associations, it has provoked unprecedented alliances, debates, discussions, which have had their benefits.

Conclusion

This analysis of the process of policy production of the RQF, while charting the formation of a particular policy in a specific context, is indicative of the need to attend to the global policy communities in relation to developments nationally. As a study of policy formation, it indicates that knowledge of global policy can mean policy actors change their practices even in the process of policy formation in order to be able to “play the game”. Thus the notion of social fields “draws attention to the social conditions of text production picturing the effects of the process in multiples” (Lingard et al., 2005: 768). Educational researchers in this instance are both the objects of the policy, but also reflexive subjects in the process, actively seeking to modify the rules of the game. Through their positioning as policy actors within the debates there is some cross-fertilisation between the fields of education, politics and economics, challenging dominant views about the nature and significance of social science research, as well as cross-fertilisation between the disciplinary fields in terms of the logics of practice, e.g. research concentrations are now being formed in the social sciences. This analysis is also indicative of new forms of governance of multiple stakeholders through developing policy consent, as well as changing modes of governance within the social field of education.

Tracking the global flows of policy and regulatory frames, such as quality assurance and quality research, and how they will impact on local practice is now increasingly important in policy studies. Thinking about education policy globally provides some insights as to what comes into play in local contexts, but also the cross-field effects. For example, it illustrates how particular texts and textual forms (e.g. citations, metrics, etc.) imported from other disciplinary fields (science) penetrate and become embedded in the practices of education (Rawolle, 2005) and how different logics of practice in particular fields (bureaucracies, politics and education) clash in ways that some fields (education) are subordinated to others (politics). It illustrates the paradox of how markets tend to standardise, rank and normalise while increasing differentiation through particular modes of distinction (e.g. quality), and how institutions respond by seeking to secure internal order by separating from everyday practices through more bureaucratised versions of power. Research quality is increasingly

defined external to the field. Ultimately, in any quality assurance exercise, what is audited is the system, for example:

A system which embodies standards and the standards of performance themselves are shaped by the need to be auditable ... the audit becomes a formal 'loop' by which the system observes itself. (Power, 1997: 36–37)

Thus the practices of academic research are being distanced from the measures of their success, at the same time that the global flows of regulative regimes of quality assurance transform the everyday practices in specific places.

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