

FROM THE EDITORS

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This special issue of the *Scottish Educational Review* brings together a range of articles examining different facets of social justice, diversity and equality in Scottish education. Social justice and fairness is a current policy theme in Scottish education. In a previous special edition of the *Scottish Educational Review* (Volume 48, Issue 1) the focus was on the issue of access and widening participation in higher education. For all other educational sectors such as early childhood education, school and further education, tackling disadvantaged and exclusion is an equally important policy imperative. There is an expectation that the needs of all learners will be addressed across all educational settings. In the current edition we reflect on these issues of social justice, diversity and equality in different educational contexts. These articles also reflect the range of approaches to the investigation and critical examination of social justice, diversity and equality in Scottish education.

We begin the edition with a conceptual paper from Rowena Arshad who draws from several empirical studies to reflect on issues of diversity in education. As she notes, teachers and other educators are well aware of the issues facing many learners. However, a theme in Arshad's research is the question of confidence on the part of the professional in tackling issues of marginalization and discrimination. In this article, Arshad helps us to explore the complex nature of concepts related to diversity and equality as the basis upon which effective practice can be forged. This is followed by an article from Walter Humes whose timely study illustrates the way in which social justice and equality in education has become a major policy tool. He examines the political manifestos of the five main parties in the Scottish Parliament for the 2016 elections for the Holyrood Parliament. As Humes notes political manifestos are important but neglected political documents. These not only set out the aims and intentions of the political party concerned but also provide a means potentially of building alliances. Humes' detailed analysis of these political manifestos illustrates clearly the economic concerns underpinning Scottish educational policy. While the tackling of disadvantage through education, though perhaps expressed in different ways, is a common theme, education is a central strategy in work towards economic development.

These first two articles help contextualise questions of social justice, diversity and equality in the Scottish education. In her article, Val Corry raises concerns that the place of gender as an issue in education is being lost in Scottish policy. Corry examines systematically statistical data on attainment and policy on equality since the landmark legislation of 1975. She notes the limitations of policy based on broad notions of 'equality' and of the use of global figures of attainment as the means of monitoring progress. Corry argues that we need a more nuanced understanding of different social factors such as gender, ethnicity, social class

which can impact on patterns of attainment and achievement and further, how these various factors intersect and cumulatively work to create barriers to achievement in the educational experiences of diverse groups of learners.

In the next article Torrance and Forde examine some of the challenges faced by headteachers in implementing these policy imperatives. Headteachers are charged with the task of tackling disadvantage and ensuring the learning needs of diverse groups of learners are met on a day-to-day basis. Torrance and Forde draw from the Scottish element of an international study on social justice leadership, the International School Leadership Development Network. They report on the lived experiences of headteachers committed to social justice in education and highlight what these case study headteachers perceived as facilitating and hindering factors in the pursuit of their work as social justice leaders. The article exemplifies the various ways in which headteachers can successfully tackle specific issues of inequality and marginalization. The final two articles examine specific initiatives designed to address the learning needs of a specific group of learners.

Kirstie Rees, Scott Tully and Kirstin Ferguson examine the way in which the learning needs of pupils with severe and profound learning needs might be enabled to learn within the context of the *Curriculum for Excellence*. This article provides an interesting case study of how change in practice can be realised. The authors report on the development of a local authority framework where an important aspect of the design of the programme was the combination of theoretical understandings of the issues related to severe and profound learning needs with the experience of practitioners in the field. They illustrate clearly the importance of enabling teachers to work collaboratively to translate policy intentions around social justice and equality into workable solutions in their own context. In the first article in this edition Arshad raises questions about the confidence of educators in tackling issues of diversity. The strong sense of ownership expressed by the practitioners for the framework in Rees *et al.*'s study helps to illustrate ways in which this might be addressed. The final article in this special edition on social justice, diversity and equality, is set in tertiary education exploring the transition of students from further education into higher education to complete a degree. This, as Debbie Meharg, Stephanie Craighill, Alison Varey and Sandra Cairncross argue, is a key strategy in achieving providing access and widening participation in higher education. They characterise this transition as 'third space' and using the experiences of students making the transition propose ways in which these learners might be supported more effectively.

We are pleased to include Morag Redford's comprehensive report on education at the Scottish Parliament and to have a book review to include in this edition and would welcome more book reviews for subsequent editions.