

<b>Institution:</b> University of Stirling		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 23. Education		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Curriculum making: transforming policy and practice in three countries		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2006 - 2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Mark Priestley	Professor	04/2001 - Present
Valerie Drew	Senior Lecturer	08/2008 - Present
Richard Edwards	Professor	05/2001 - 08/2016
Gert Biesta	Professor	12/2007 - 12/2012
Maureen Michael	Lecturer	05/2015 - Present
	Research Assistant	11/2012 - 06/2014
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 08/2012 - 12/2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>Curriculum policy and practice are fundamental to modernising education systems; curriculum making is how curriculum policies, support infrastructure and school-based practice are developed across different system levels. Our research and knowledge exchange, in the areas of curriculum theory, policy and practice, have had a major impact on curriculum making in the national education systems of Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. revised approaches to implementing Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (CfE);</li> <li>2. the development of processes to support curriculum making in Welsh schools; and</li> <li>3. the development of new curricular policy in Ireland.</li> </ol>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<p>The research focuses on curriculum making in three countries: Scotland, Wales, and the Republic of Ireland. Curriculum making is defined as the development of curriculum policies, support infrastructure and school-based practice, across different system levels (e.g. government, national and local agencies, schools). The research comprises the following strands (numbers refer to publications listed in section 3):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Conceptual analysis of new curricular policies.</i> This includes critique of policy (<b>R4</b>), analysis and comparison of worldwide trends in curricula (<b>R2</b>), and analysis about the framing of curricular policy (<b>R3</b>). This research has, for example, identified contradictions in Scottish policy (<b>R4</b>) that have created conceptual and implementation tensions for teachers (<b>R5</b>). It has led to the development of a purposes-led approach to curriculum making that focuses on understanding of 'big ideas', and the development of fit-for-purpose practices.</li> <li>2. <i>Empirical case study research in schools, exploring the effects of new curricular policy.</i> This includes research around teacher professional engagement with policy and research (<b>R1, R3</b>), curriculum implementation (<b>R1, R5, R6</b>) and teacher agency in curriculum making (<b>R1, R3, R6</b>). The research has revealed difficulties in schools implementing policy, often caused by competing policy agendas, and has informed the processes that drive curriculum planning (including the development of curriculum infrastructure) in the three countries.</li> <li>3. <i>Curriculum development programmes;</i> action research with teachers and school leaders to develop understanding of curriculum concepts and facilitate curriculum making (<b>R1</b>). The research has built understanding of the tensions between system dynamics and local imperatives that shape curriculum making in schools.</li> </ol> <p>This is important research in a changing educational context; recent years have seen a policy shift internationally, from centralisation to local flexibility in curriculum making, with teachers as supposedly autonomous curriculum makers. Yet, such curricular policies are problematic. Importantly, they are subject to tensions between a policy rhetoric of teacher autonomy and a continued recourse to output regulation, including detailed specification of learning outcomes and comparison of schools using statistical data from testing. These approaches undermine teachers'</p>		

professional agency as curriculum makers, at a time when new policy increasingly demands an active curriculum making role from them.

The case study focuses on curriculum making across multiple layers of the three education systems, primarily focusing on the macro-level (national policymaking) and meso-level (e.g., regional infrastructure and support) contexts where curriculum is made and remade. The research has generated a significant body of work – conceptual and practical – in the field of curriculum making. It includes work by Priestley (policy analysis, curriculum implementation and teacher agency), Drew and Michael (curriculum development and professional enquiry), Biesta (teacher agency) and Edwards (curriculum making). It has explored complex patterns of curriculum making, including identification of barriers, drivers, and unintended consequences of policy (e.g. **R3, R5, R6**).

The research represents a sustained trajectory of activity since 2006. It has been facilitated by grants totally over GBP700,000, including: ESRC (2008, Cultures of Curriculum Making; 2012, Teacher agency and Curriculum Change); Nuffield (2019, Secondary Curriculum Provision); Scottish Government (2011, Extending and Sustaining Curriculum Change); East Lothian Council (2012-15, Curriculum Development through Professional Enquiry); EAS Wales (2016-18, Curriculum Development through Professional Enquiry); National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) Ireland (2014-19, learning outcomes).

### 3. References to the research (University of Stirling authors in **bold** text)

- R1. Drew, V., Priestley, M. & Michael, M.K.** (2016). Curriculum Development Through Critical Collaborative Professional Enquiry. *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*, 1 (1), pp. 92-106. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JPCC-09-2015-0006>. Chosen as one of the 50 most impactful papers to celebrate Emerald's 50th anniversary – see <http://www.emerald50.com/impact/2010/#years>.
- R2. Priestley, M. & Biesta, G.J.J.** (eds.) (2013). *Reinventing the Curriculum: New Trends in Curriculum Policy and Practice*. London: Bloomsbury Academic,
- R3. Priestley, M., Biesta, G.J.J. & Robinson, S.** (2015). *Teacher Agency: An Ecological Approach*. London: Bloomsbury Academic. Nominated for British Society for Educational Studies book of 2016.
- R4. Priestley, M. & Humes, W.** (2010). The development of Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Amnesia and Déjà Vu. *Oxford Review of Education*, 36 (3), pp. 345-361. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03054980903518951>.
- R5. Priestley, M. & Minty, S.** (2013). Curriculum for Excellence: 'A brilliant idea, but. . .'. *Scottish Educational Review*, 45 (1), pp. 39-52. <https://www.scotedreview.org.uk/media/microsites/scottish-educational-review/documents/355.pdf>
- R6. Priestley, M., Edwards, R., Priestley, A. & Miller, K.** (2012). Teacher agency in curriculum making: agents of change and spaces for manoeuvre. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 42 (2), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-873X.2012.00588.x>

### 4. Details of the impact

The research has had a major impact on macro-level national policy formation and within meso-level fields of curricular policy interpretation and support (e.g. the work of national agencies, local and regional governance). Additional impacts are occurring within the micro-level fields of educational practice (e.g. schools), although the case study focuses on the macro- and meso-levels. Note that the impact in this case study relates to curriculum making; a separate impact case study in this submission (REF3.UoS.C23.1), while drawing upon some of a complementary body of work by the same researchers (Priestley and Drew), relates to teacher professional learning. Thus, the two case studies apply to quite distinct areas of impact.

#### Macro impacts (national policy making)

Our research has significant reach, in that it has shaped the development of policy in Scotland, Wales, and the Republic of Ireland.

*Scotland*

In Scotland, research on teacher agency (**R3, R6**) and curriculum-making (**R1, R2, R5**) led to **improvements in curriculum policy**. The Scottish Government provided the following assessment of the impact of the research:

“[Testimonial redacted from publication at request of testimonial provider]” (**S2**)

The research has also **underpinned the development of the ‘Refreshed Narrative’ for the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) (S1, S2, S3)**, as recommended by the 2015 OECD report on Scottish education (**S8**), which extensively cited Priestley’s publications, and was critical of the complexity of the curriculum. Priestley was a member of the national working group that developed the Refreshed Narrative (2019), and its structuring around ‘why’, ‘what’ and ‘how’ questions, is **explicitly based upon Priestley’s conceptual purposes-led model for curriculum making**. The narrative has also adopted some of the key terminology and concepts in the research (e.g. ‘the process of engaging with the core principles of CfE and the development of practices that are fit for purpose’; ‘curriculum making’), which were absent from previous iterations of the curriculum. According to the Scottish Government:

“[Testimonial redacted from publication at request of testimonial provider]” (**S2**)

*Wales*

In Wales, the development of national policy and the thinking that underpins it has been significantly influenced by our research. For example, **the strong emphasis in Welsh curriculum policy and guidance on purposes-led curriculum making largely stem from Priestley’s research (R1, R4)**. His membership of the national Curriculum and Assessment Group, which advises the government, invited workshops for national curriculum developers on curriculum concepts and practices, and commissioned papers on emerging policy specification were important pathways to maximise this impact. Additionally, the Welsh Government produced a podcast featuring Priestley, designed to stimulate new thinking about the curriculum (**S4**). **Our research also underpins key national approaches for fostering curriculum making**. According to Kevin Palmer (Deputy Director, Pedagogy, Leadership and Professional Learning, Welsh Government), the curriculum making approach developed by Drew and Priestley (**R1**) has been fundamental to the development of:

- “our understanding of the criticality of teacher agency in the realisation of the new curriculum, where published work from Stirling informed our approach to teacher agency as a key feature of successful curriculum realisation at school level;
- [and] our understanding of enquiry-based approaches to curriculum making at school and practitioner level, leading to a national project to support Welsh universities to work with our school improvement regions and groups of schools.” (**S5**)

*Republic of Ireland*

Major elements of the Irish school curriculum in Ireland have relied on Priestley’s research, including commissioned papers. This has led to a **reduction in both the number and emphasis of learning outcomes** in the curriculum specification for the Junior Cycle curriculum. His purposes-led model for curriculum making has been a major driver of national curriculum policy (**S6**). According to Ben Murray (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, Ireland):

“The research on curriculum making has had a significant impact on the development of curriculum policy. [For example,] Teacher Agency: An Ecological Approach (R3) informed the Brief for the Review of Junior Cycle subjects.” (**S6**)

**Meso impacts (support for curriculum making)**

Meso-level infrastructure and activity to support curriculum making in Scotland, Wales and Ireland have relied on our research.

*Scotland*

**Scotland’s national programmes of curriculum capacity-building amongst school leaders** were underpinned by **R1, R2, R3, and R5**. Drew’s role as Consultant to Education Scotland on

the Teacher Leadership Prototype programme has been pivotal to this. These programmes include Excellence in Headship, on which Drew and Priestley have been invited by Education Scotland for the past three years to deliver series of three full-day workshops to experienced headteachers on curriculum concepts and practices. According to Gayle Gorman (Chief Executive, Education Scotland):

“The research from Professor Mark Priestley has influenced thinking around the design and content of the EiH programme with regard to the programme overview as a whole, as well as professional learning sessions that contain content related to curriculum, learning and teaching and teacher agency.” (S7)

Research by Priestley and Drew (R1, R2, R3, R5) is significantly shaping the new national conversation on curriculum (2020) by Education Scotland (S7). Gayle Gorman states that:

“Research from Professor Mark Priestley is currently being built into the emerging work plans of the Curriculum Innovation function in Education Scotland. An example would be the contribution to the current design work on Interdisciplinary Learning.” (S7)

At a regional level (in two of Scotland’s six Regional Improvement Collaboratives [RICs]), research by Drew and Priestley on professional enquiry and teacher agency (R1) has led to **the development of large scale programmes to build capacity in curriculum making** amongst middle and senior school leaders, and Priestley has been co-opted onto the curriculum leadership group of the Forth Valley and West Lothian RIC.

#### *Wales*

Research by Priestley and Drew (R1, R3) has been fundamental to **the development of resources and activities by Wales’s South East regional consortium to support curriculum making in schools**. The Stirling approach has been explicitly adopted as the model for curriculum making, reinforced by regionally funded programmes to build capacity amongst curriculum leaders, led by Drew and Priestley, and the development of support materials, which explicitly reference the approach (S10). According to James Kent (Assistant Director: Professional Learning (Curriculum, Collaboration & Research) Education Achievement Service for South East Wales):

“Working with Professor Mark Priestley and Dr Valerie Drew has been invaluable in supporting pioneer schools in southeast Wales to frame their thinking in terms of the ongoing curriculum reform programme. [...] The practice interruption phase of the programme ensured that practitioners were able to put their ideas in to practice in a manageable way, then evaluate and reflect upon the impact of their work. Above all, this approach has given practitioners a framework and the professional confidence to take forward exciting curricular innovations in their schools and begin to support other practitioners as they embark upon their own curriculum reform journey.” (S9)

#### *Republic of Ireland*

Priestley’s research on teacher agency (R3, R6) has been of critical importance to **the development of Ireland’s national support infrastructure for curriculum making** since 2015, including the work of the national Professional Development for Teachers (PDST) and Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) organisations, which work directly to support curriculum development in schools. Ben Murray (Director, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, Ireland) points to ongoing engagement in 2020 with national groups supporting the development of new curricula in Ireland:

“[Mark led] a collaborative learning day attended by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT), National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and the lead partner for the day the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST). This day, rooted in the research quoted above, was focused on developing an awareness, a shared understanding, and a critical look at curriculum design, concepts and teacher agency.” (S6)

#### **Impact on curriculum making**

In summary, our research on curriculum policy and practice, especially the theoretical and empirical work around teacher agency and curriculum making, has been enormously influential

in Scotland, Wales, and the Republic of Ireland. The impact is evident in changed emphases in policy development, and in new approaches to supporting schools as they make the curriculum in their local settings. This work in curriculum making is both ongoing and increasing in scope: our networking has expanded across a greater number of country contexts (for example, the production of a new conceptual framing for curriculum making in an edited collection, *Curriculum making in Europe: policy and practice within and across diverse contexts*, published January 2021); and our expertise in curriculum making continues to be sought by governments (e.g. the recent Rapid Review of National Qualification in Scotland, led by Priestley), national agencies (e.g. the greater emphasis on curriculum thinking in Scotland's newly developed teacher standards, advocated by Drew) and local/regional authorities (e.g. a request for the development of curriculum-focused materials for professional learning in a second Welsh regional consortium).

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- S1. *The 'refreshed narrative' for Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence.*  
<https://scotlandscurriculum.scot/>
- S2. Scottish Government testimonial [details redacted from publication at request of testimonial provider].
- S3. Scotland's Curriculum – article in Teaching Scotland (members' magazine of the General Teaching Council Scotland)
- S4. Podcast produced by the Welsh government to support thinking about the new curriculum.  
<https://curriculumforwales.gov.wales/2018/06/19/new-curriculum-special-podcast/>
- S5. Testimony from the Kevin Palmer (Deputy Director, Pedagogy, Leadership and Professional Learning, Welsh Government).
- S6. Testimony from Ben Murray (Director, Ireland's National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA]).
- S7. Testimony by Gayle Gorman (Chief Executive, Education Scotland)
- S8. Improving Schools in Scotland: An OECD Perspective. Extensive references to work on CfE and its influence by Priestley and colleagues.  
<https://www.oecd.org/education/school/Improving-Schools-in-Scotland-An-OECD-Perspective.pdf>
- S9. Testimony from James Kent (Assistant Director: Professional Learning (Curriculum, Collaboration & Research) Education Achievement Service for South East Wales)
- S10. CPD material produced by EAS. <https://thingi.easmysid.co.uk/playlists/view/fdcf78fa-ff46-41c3-9bf2-ec0fb8d76c29/en#page11>