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**One journey, several destinations:  
an exploratory study of local contextualisation of  
national assessment policy.**

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**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for  
The Degree of Doctor of Education (EdD)**

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**Abstract**

In Scotland, as in many countries, the relationship between research, policy and practice has been complicated, not least because of the multiple stakeholders involved in the change process. This interpretive study focuses on Assessment is for Learning (AifL), a centrally-funded development programme (2002-2008) established to address concerns raised in reviews of assessment practice and intended to create a coherent system of assessment for pupils aged 3-14 in Scottish schools. AifL's central aspiration was to learn from previous experience of curriculum and assessment development and develop evidence-based national policy and practice in assessment which met the needs of all stakeholders. The study explores the policy messages communicated, and considers how policy communities can influence the relationship between national policy and practice in assessment.

The design of the AifL programme was influenced by research on both assessment and transformational change. A crucial feature of the change process was the opportunity it provided for local contextualisation through the engagement of local education authorities, a group perceived as particularly important in ensuring the long term sustainability of the programme. AifL co-ordinators were appointed to take forward this important role in all 32 local authorities in Scotland but, although they shared a title, background experience and the nature of their appointment meant that this was not a homogenous group. Through analysis of interviews with AifL co-ordinators in seven Scottish local authorities, the study sought to explore the process of change and, in particular, what policy imperatives such as 'local contextualisation' actually mean in practice. It considered co-ordinators' background experience, their perception of their role and the direction of assessment development within their local authority.

The study has been conducted from an insider standpoint and the small-scale nature of the study allowed exploration of contextualization through narratives revealing individual perspectives. It raised several issues for, while the study had intended to explore approaches to building capacity and discern the impact of difference on national policy, the narratives themselves altered its direction. What emerged from this further illustrates the complexity of change for, although national assessment policy reinforced AifL, the study revealed that prevailing concerns with accountability had compromised its realisation. Whilst AifL had recognised that changing assessment practice required reform of the system as a whole, local contextualisation focused on formative assessment in classrooms to the comparative neglect of other functions of assessment. Other policy legislation had

led to systems and structures for accountability in local authorities which placed persistent demands on teachers, so that identified tensions in assessment remained largely unresolved. To address conflicts between what are currently two separate streams of activity and improve the validity of the school evaluation process, assessment literacy generally and alignment of support and improvement roles specifically require further development.

The study indicated that national reform initiatives dependent on local contextualisation must not only appreciate the multiple perspectives of stakeholders as AifL attempted to do, but also seek to expose and address competing priorities, underlying hierarchies and the influence of individuals with specific agendas. Policy messages should be clear and unambiguous taking account of relevant research findings and, crucially, must be reinforced in behaviours which reflect discourse and text. These conclusions may have implications for *Curriculum for Excellence*, a major reform of the Scottish curriculum. Much can be learned from what AifL managed to achieve - and more from what has been learned from the experience.

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Finally this is for my parents, Henry Benjamin Wilson and Mary Gilchrist Fyffe Brunton, both now deceased. I am particularly conscious that my mother's family circumstances denied her the education which I have been privileged to enjoy. Sadly, she did not live to see the dissertation completed but I think she would have been pleased.

## **Certificate of Originality**

I certify that this dissertation is my original work and that all references to, and quotations from, the work of others contained in it have been clearly identified and fully attributed.

## **Glossary**

The glossary on the following pages contains some of the terms used in this dissertation. It is not exhaustive. Rather, the purpose of the glossary is to remove potential barriers to understanding by clarifying meanings likely to have been intended by those involved in the study and for readers less familiar with the Scottish education system.

As the context for the dissertation was a centrally-funded assessment development programme, the definitions offered are in the main those which were publicly available in policy documentation or on national websites; some definitions were developed through the programme of support for national assessment policy in Scotland 2002-08.

It is acknowledged that some definitions will be contestable in other contexts and that there are contradictions evident between different, and even within the same, policy areas. In retrospect, it would appear that this had the potential to send mixed messages to those involved and these issues have been raised in the dissertation.

Action research	Action research is a reflective process of progressive problem solving, led by individuals working with others as part of a 'community of practice' to improve the way they address issues and solve problems <sup>1</sup> .
AAG	Abbreviation for the Assessment Action Group, formed in 2001 to oversee the strategic direction of the assessment development programme known as AifL - Assessment is for Learning. The group was chaired by the Deputy Minister for Education and represented the wider education community. Membership was drawn from education authorities, schools, university faculties of education, parent groups, professional associations, the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Learning and Teaching Scotland and the Scottish Executive Education Department <sup>2</sup> .
AAP	Abbreviation for the Assessment of Achievement Programme which, from the 1980s to 2004, monitored the attainment of pupils in Scotland in English language, mathematics and science in P4, P7, and S2. In 2004, the Minister for Education and Young People announced that from May 2005, the Scottish Survey of Achievement (SSA) would replace the annual survey of 5-14 attainment levels. The approach used in the AAP would be build upon in the SSA to assess pupils' attainments and provide an overview of attainment levels <sup>3</sup> .
AifL 'triangle'	The AifL diagram (included as Appendix 2(a) on page 212) illustrates the relationship between the curriculum, learning and teaching, and assessment. Each side of the diagram contains key features assigned to three strands of assessment: Assessment FOR Learning, Assessment AS Learning and Assessment OF Learning <sup>4</sup> .
APMG	Abbreviation for the Assessment Programme Action Group, a small group drawn from membership of the AAG to manage the ten projects within the Assessment is for Learning programme and their evaluation. Members represented the Scottish Executive, Scottish Qualifications Authority, Learning and Teaching Scotland, parents, and university faculties of education.
Assessment	The process of evaluating how effectively learning is occurring. This may be undertaken internally by teachers, by learners, by learners and teachers collaboratively, or by learners in collaboration with one another or it may be conducted as part of an external process, for example for certification and qualifications or as part of a national monitoring system. A wide range of activities undertaken by teachers and learners can provide information on learning <sup>5</sup> .

<sup>1</sup> Source: CPDScotland website <http://www.cpdscotland.org.uk/index.asp> (last accessed 6/1/11).

<sup>2</sup> Source: the Assessment is for Learning website now archived at <http://wayback.archive-it.org/1961/20100625100920/http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/assess/about/historyofaifl/2002-2004.asp> (last accessed 1/4/11).

<sup>3</sup> Source: the Assessment is for Learning website now archived at <http://wayback.archive-it.org/1961/20100625100126/http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/assess/of/aap/index.asp> (last accessed 1/4/11).

<sup>4</sup> Source: Assessment is for Learning website now archived at <http://wayback.archive-it.org/1961/20100805225224/http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/assess/index.asp> (last accessed 6/1/11).

<sup>5</sup> Source: AifL glossary on the Assessment is for Learning website, now archived at [http://wayback.archive-it.org/1961/20100806023131/http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/Images/Glossary\\_020310\\_tcm4-456792.pdf](http://wayback.archive-it.org/1961/20100806023131/http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/Images/Glossary_020310_tcm4-456792.pdf) (last accessed 6/1/11).

Assessment is for Learning (AifL)	Assessment is for Learning was a centrally-funded programme in Scotland, 2002-08. It aimed to provide a coherent framework for assessment, in which evidence of learning could be gathered and interpreted to best meet the needs of learners, their parents and teachers, as well as school managers and others with responsibility for ensuring that education in Scotland was as good as it can be. Three different uses of assessment (assessment for, as and of learning) were identified. AifL promoted appropriate gathering and use of evidence to link curriculum, learning, teaching and assessment.
Assessment FOR Learning (AfL)	Assessment which focuses on the gap between where learners are in their learning, and where they need to be – the desired goal. This can be achieved through processes such as sharing criteria with learners, effective questioning and feedback <sup>6</sup> .
Assessment AS Learning (AaL)	Assessment which involves learners themselves reflecting on evidence of learning. This is part of the cycle of assessment where learners are set learning goals, share learning intentions and success criteria, and evaluate their learning through dialogue and self and peer assessment <sup>7</sup> .
Assessment OF Learning (AoL)	This involves working with the range of available evidence that enables staff and the wider assessment community to check on pupils' progress and use this information to effect improvement <sup>8</sup> .
ASGs	Abbreviation for Associated Schools Groups.
Associated Schools Groups (ASGs)	Any group of practitioners collaborating and working across traditional boundaries with the aim of developing professional practice <sup>9</sup> . Groups can vary in size and comprise staff working across classes or departments within and across establishments and education authorities. Through AifL, ASGs received funding from the Scottish Government from 2004-2008 to take forward action research focused on assessment practices on the three sides of the AifL triangle.
BtC (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)	Abbreviation for Building the Curriculum, usually followed by a number which refers to a document published to support specific aspects of Curriculum for Excellence.
CfE	Abbreviation for Curriculum for Excellence.
Collaborative enquiry	Collaborative enquiry requires people to come together in groups. Groups provide the setting for professional dialogue, including clarifying the enquiry focus, planning actions, reviewing evidence and reflecting on outcomes <sup>10</sup> .

<sup>6</sup> Source: Assessment is for Learning website now archived at <http://wayback.archive-it.org/1961/20100805222808/http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/assess/for/index.asp> (last accessed 6/1/11).

<sup>7</sup> Source: Assessment is for Learning website, now archived at <http://wayback.archive-it.org/1961/20100805222829/http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/assess/as/index.asp> (last accessed 6/1/11).

<sup>8</sup> Source: Assessment is for Learning website, now archived at <http://wayback.archive-it.org/1961/20100805222846/http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/assess/of/index.asp> (last accessed 6/1/11).

<sup>9</sup> Source: definition provided on Assessment is for Learning website, now archived at <http://wayback.archive-it.org/1961/20100730134740/http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/glossary/a/associatedschoolsgroup.asp?strReferringChannel=assess> (last accessed 6/1/11).

<sup>10</sup> Source: National Council for School Leadership (2006) Leading collaborative enquiry in school networks available on-line <http://networkedlearning.ncsl.org.uk/collections/network-research-series/summaries/leading-collaborative-enquiry-in-school-networks.pdf> (last accessed 6/1/11).

Circular 02/05	Abbreviation for Education Department Circular No. 02 June 2005: Assessment and Reporting 3-14, the assessment policy document setting out the components of a coherent system of assessment and incorporating aspects of assessment promoted through the Assessment is for Learning programme.
Curriculum for Excellence	The Scottish curriculum which aims to provide a coherent, more flexible and enriched curriculum from 3 to 18, the rationale for which was published in 2004. The curriculum is said to include the totality of experiences which are planned for children and young people through their education, wherever they are being educated <sup>11</sup> .
HGIOS	Acronym for How Good is Our School? published by HMIE to support the process of school self-evaluation in Scotland
HMI	Abbreviation for Her Majesty's Inspectorate, a generic name applied to aspects of the service.
HMIE	Abbreviation for Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education ( <a href="http://www.hmie.gov.uk">www.hmie.gov.uk</a> ).
INEA	Abbreviation for Inspection of Education Authority. Section 9 of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000 charged HMIE, on behalf of the Scottish Ministers, to provide an external evaluation of the effectiveness of the local authority in its quality assurance of educational provision within the Council and of its support to schools in improving quality <sup>12</sup> .
LAs	Abbreviation for Local Authorities. Following the disaggregation in 1996 of the eight regional councils in Scotland, 32 local authorities were formed.
LTS	Abbreviation for Learning and Teaching Scotland ( <a href="http://www.ltscotland.org.uk">www.ltscotland.org.uk</a> ).
NAR	Acronym for National Assessment Resource, an online resource that supports Curriculum for Excellence. It is a key component of the assessment framework described in Building the Curriculum 5. It is intended to support practitioners in developing a shared understanding of standards and expectations for Curriculum for Excellence and how to apply these consistently. Initial examples of assessment have been provided for learners aged 3-15 <sup>13</sup> .
Professional development (PD)	Also known as continuing professional development (CPD) <sup>14</sup> , the process by which development and training needs are identified and agreed. Effective PD is based on self-evaluation and personal reflection related to the relevant professional standard, involving quality dialogue within a culture of improvement, alternative timescales for review, and evidence of impact on professional practice and pupil learning <sup>15</sup> . Commitment to the concept of teachers' CPD was written into the agreement reached in 2001, following recommendations made in the McCrone Report (2000) <sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Source: Learning and Teaching Scotland website:

<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/understandingthecurriculum/whatiscurriculumforexcellence/index.asp> (last accessed 01/04/11).

<sup>12</sup> Source: website of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education

<http://www.hmie.gov.uk/Generic/About+Validated+Self+evaluation> (last accessed 04/04/11)

<sup>13</sup> Source: Learning and Teaching Scotland: <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/nationalassessmentresource/about/>

<sup>14</sup> Source: CPD Scotland <http://www.cpdscotland.org.uk/about/aboutcpd/index.asp> (last accessed 06/01/11).

<sup>15</sup> Further information is available from <http://www.cpdscotland.org.uk/index.asp> (last accessed 06/01/11).

<sup>16</sup> Source: Scottish Government website: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/158413/0042924.pdf> (last accessed 06/01/11).

Scottish Survey of Achievement	The Scottish Survey of Achievement (SSA) was established to discover how well pupils across Scotland were learning in the primary and the first two years of secondary schooling. The survey gathered evidence from P3, P5, P7 and S2 using a range of assessments which includes written assessments and practical activities. The main findings provided information about performance in Scottish schools and were published by Scottish Government in the year following the survey <sup>17</sup> .
SEED	Acronym for Scottish Executive Education Department. Following the devolution settlement in 1999, responsibility for education was devolved to the Scottish Executive. The name of the administration was changed to Scottish Government after the 2007 Scottish election when the Scottish National Party assumed power.
SOEID	Abbreviation for Scottish Office Education and Industry Department. Prior to devolution in 1999, Scotland was governed through the Scottish Office of the Westminster government.
SSA	Abbreviation for the Scottish Survey of Achievement, introduced in 2005 as part of the Assessment is for Learning (AifL) programme.

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<sup>17</sup> Source: the archived AifL website <http://wayback.archive-it.org/1961/20100625100129/http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/assess/of/ssa/introduction.asp> (last accessed 01/04/11).

## 1. Background to the study and context for investigation

*A group of French visitors asked why our teachers never riot. "In France, the children would take to the streets, never mind the teachers," said one, amazed at the absence of manure at the entrance of the Department of Education and Employment. It is yet another example of the difference between the English and the French: nous ne riotons pas en Angleterre. In France, the crap is deposited at the front door of the ministry by angry protestors; in Britain, it is delivered to schools every second day in official envelopes (Wragg, 2000).*

### Introduction

The context for the study is a policy initiative in Scotland, intended to break the mould of policy delivered in 'official envelopes'. Policy is a contentious term. Parsons (2001: 13) explains that 'there are differences over whether policy is more than an "intended" course of action' and cites Dror (1989) who viewed policy-making as 'a conscious awareness of choice between two main alternatives for steering society'. Parsons (2001: XV) also references Dewey's (1927) statement that public policy concerns 'the public and its problems', and Dye's (1976) explanation of policy studies as concerning 'what governments do, why they do it and what difference it makes'. Ball's (1990) working definition, quoted by Daugherty and Ecclestone (2006: 150), is similarly focused on intended action, and is perhaps most helpful in situating policy in the context of problems, localised solutions and change:

[Policies] are pre-eminently, statements about practice – the way things could or should be – which rest upon, derive from, statements about the world – about the way things are. They are intended to bring about individual solutions to diagnosed problems.

The policy area is education, the agenda is assessment reform, and the initiative was entitled AifL-Assessment is for Learning, referred to throughout as AifL. AifL received central funding from the Scottish Government during the period 2002-08 but, while support for policy had traditionally involved a development programme, policy formulation, guidelines for implementation, and training to support policy delivery, AifL took a different approach. It asked teachers and schools to try out ideas from research and feed back on their experience, before the policy guidelines were finalised for wider



dissemination. This process required co-operation and partnership-working among the various parties involved: policy-makers, non-governmental organisations such as Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) and the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), local authorities (LAs), university researchers and representatives of parents and carers, all of whom were regarded as stakeholders in assessment. Information about AifL will be provided throughout this chapter and further insights will emerge in chapters 2, 4, 5 and 6, but, given the nature of the initiative, it may be salient to begin by establishing the background to AifL.

My own involvement in AifL will become clear in section 1.5, with further details emerging in chapter 3 where a rationale is offered for the methodology adopted. While I will endeavour to give an objective overview of what led to the introduction of AifL, it is important to appreciate that mine is an insider's view of events. Familiarity both facilitated the study and introduced a complexity, for I have been able to bring to the study knowledge gathered from papers to which I had access or knew how to access and insights gained from meetings I attended, but undertaking research from an insider's perspective introduced challenge in identifying assumptions not yet acknowledged and in disengaging from the system I had been part of and from the policy I had been employed to support.

## 1.1 The impetus for change

Unlike in other parts of the UK, where curriculum and assessment are subject to legislation, policy in Scotland is reputedly reliant on consensus (Harlen, 2007: 100).

Fifteen years before the introduction of AifL, aims for the education of pupils in primary schools and the first two years of secondary had been set out in a Scottish Office vision statement (Scottish Education Department, 1987) which led to the national curriculum and assessment initiative, known as '5-14'. This initiative was intended to:

- offer clear guidance on what pupils should be learning;
- improve assessment of their progress;
- provide better information for parents.

The main components of the 5-14 assessment system were:

- National Tests, which provided a means of monitoring pupils' progress through levels A-F in reading, writing and mathematics and were intended for use by teachers to confirm their professional judgment based on classroom-based evidence;
- National Survey 5-14, conducted each year by the Scottish Office and the Scottish Executive administration<sup>18</sup>. Attainment levels were collected for all pupils in state schools, from the second year of primary through to, and including, the second year of secondary;
- Assessment of Achievement Programme (AAP), which sampled pupils at specific stages in a three-year rolling programme and monitored levels of attainment nationally in English language, mathematics and science.

Five years into the 5-14 programme, Harlen (1996) reported that, although the new curriculum guidelines (SEED, 1991) had largely formed the basis for lesson planning in primary schools, there was inconsistent provision across primary and secondary sectors, and in different areas of the curriculum. While she concluded that much had been achieved by the 5-14 programme, she saw considerable scope for improvement in the quality and consistency of the information teachers collected and shared with pupils, parents and others with an interest in children's education.

An internal paper introducing AifL (SEED, 2002) which was made available on the AifL website<sup>19</sup>, refers to the system lacking overall cohesion and being difficult to understand. The paper (SEED, 2002) also observes that initiatives intended to raise standards in schools (SOED, 1997) and improve early years provision (SEED, 1999) had placed unanticipated demands on the 5-14 system of assessment, and that an increasing focus on national standards of attainment and on public accountability was resulting in demands for more consistent and reliable information, both to report on pupils' progress and to monitor and evaluate the quality of provision in Scottish schools.

The origins of AifL may also lie in the results of the 1997 UK General Election. Although Scotland has an education system distinct from the rest of the United Kingdom, as part of the UK government's political agenda for education, the then Labour Secretary of State for Scotland commissioned a review of assessment in pre-school, primary and the first two

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<sup>18</sup> Henceforth referred to as the Scottish Government, although this nomenclature was not official until 2007.

<sup>19</sup> Briefing paper for 5-14 Reference Group – March 2002, available from [http://wayback.archive-it.org/1961/20100730171026/http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/Images/assessmentactionplan\\_tcm4-122533.pdf](http://wayback.archive-it.org/1961/20100730171026/http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/Images/assessmentactionplan_tcm4-122533.pdf).

years of secondary. The review by Her Majesty's Inspectors (SOEID, 1999) outlined two main purposes for assessment:

- to support learning by providing information to pupils, parents and other teachers to help inform next steps in learning;
- to provide information with which to monitor and evaluate the quality of educational provision and attainment at school, LA and national levels.

Critically, it highlighted a tension between these two purposes and a need to ensure greater coherence nationally in meeting the needs of both learning and accountability.

By the time of publication (SOEID, 1999), the new Scottish Parliament had assumed devolved responsibility for education and the Labour/Liberal coalition had initiated a national consultation on assessment, responses to which were collated and analysed (Hayward et al, 2000) for the new Scottish administration. In summary, these indicated:

- a manageable system was required;
- assessment for monitoring and evaluation should not be allowed to dominate the system or take precedence over assessment supporting learning and teaching;
- national assessments should focus on specific areas, such as literacy and numeracy;
- a range of professional development should help ensure sound classroom assessment.

The report also indicated that national formats should be provided to support reporting procedures, especially at points of transition<sup>20</sup>. Hayward et al (2000) reported widespread support for the principles of assessment in *Curriculum and Assessment in Scotland: Assessment 5-14* and a preference for building on existing practice over radical change.

The National Debate on Education in 2000, also instigated by the coalition administration, provided a mandate for simplifying assessment policy and practice. On 20 September 2001, the then Minister and Deputy Minister for Education, representing both parties in the coalition, took part in a parliamentary debate on assessment, entitled *Effective Assessment for Scotland's Schools*. Opening the debate, the Minister set out his response to the findings of the national consultation on the HMI review (SOEID, 1999). The internal paper (SEED, 2002) referenced earlier contains the main points of his statement<sup>2</sup>. Essentially, the Minister's statement indicated the importance of assessment in education, and emphasised the role of assessment in supporting learning and achievement. It stated

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<sup>20</sup> In Scotland, the transition from early years education to primary at approximately 5 years of age and from primary to secondary at 11-12 years of age.

that Scotland needed a coherent and effective system focused on promoting progress and learning, but the new system would build on existing good practice rather than introduce radical change. Teachers were seen as best placed to take responsibility for assessment of pupils' progress and their professionalism would be relied upon to deliver effective assessment. Finally, the statement outlined proposals for a single coherent system regarded as more manageable for teaching staff and more meaningful for learners and their parents.

Initial points in the statement referred to assessment supporting learning, emphasising the importance of effective communication with pupils and their parents but it also referred to the use that other stakeholders make of assessment information. In particular, the statement contained a reminder that accurate information is needed if those responsible for quality in education are to monitor educational provision effectively and promote improvement, but the key message was that these different functions were to be streamlined into a single, integrated system (SEED, 2002).

This led to planning for the introduction of AifL in 2002. The internal paper referred to earlier (SEED, 2002) indicated that this should take account of the National Priorities<sup>21</sup>, as well as the views expressed in the national consultation exercise.

Further information on AifL will be provided in chapter 2, but its component parts are outlined here. The planning papers (SEED, 2002) established the ten projects comprising the development programme, which together would explore ways of reconciling the different uses of assessment.

As the National Development Officer for Project 1: support for professional practice in formative assessment, I understood that the project would acknowledge the meta-research on formative assessment by Black and Wiliam (1998a) and the ten principles for assessment for learning subsequently published by the Assessment Reform Group (ARG, 2002). Project 1 built on the work of the KMOFAP project<sup>22</sup> in England (Black et al 2002, Black et al 2003) by exploring practical ways of improving formative classroom practice.

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<sup>21</sup> The National Priorities were: achievement and attainment, framework for learning, inclusion and equality, values and citizenship and learning for life.

<sup>22</sup> Acronym for the King's College Oxford Medway Formative Assessment project.

Two further projects investigated ways of involving learners in the learning process, in gathering good quality evidence of learning and in identifying strengths, development needs, barriers to learning and next steps.

Other projects sought to devise means of gathering and interpreting evidence of learning in each curriculum area, and develop procedures to achieve consistent professional judgments of pupils' learning. These projects also aimed to provide guidance based on practice, to support staff more widely and help ensure long-term manageability. A sixth project explored communication with parents as co-educators, while another sought to ensure proposed arrangements were inclusive of all pupils in Scottish schools, irrespective of their background, needs or aspirations. The eighth exploratory project was an attempt to harness the potential of ICT to support assessment without constraining assessment practice in the classroom, while the remaining projects related to quality assurance of the system as a whole through the Assessment of Achievement Programme (AAP) and National Testing.

Acknowledging the reported need for professional development in assessment (Hayward et al, 2000), AifL was planned to ensure professional development opportunities through teachers' involvement in the AAP. As a further contribution to the overall coherence of the programme, assessment items validated in AAP would be placed in the National Assessment Bank, giving schools online access to quality-assured assessment materials. Further planning resulted in these downloadable assets being randomly generated, to support staff confirming their professional judgments of pupils' learning with validated materials, while removing a temptation to teach to the test.

These ten projects deconstructed the original purposes of assessment identified in the HMI review (SOEID, 1999):

- helping learning and fostering deeper engagement;
- keeping records or making decisions about individual students;
- reporting to parents, students, and other teachers;
- evaluation of teachers, schools and local authorities;
- year-on-year comparison of students' achievements for monitoring national or regional standards (Harlen, 2007: 117).

As well as seeking to achieve assessment reform, AifL intended to explore ways of sustaining change in an area where views were frequently polarised. What is clear from minutes of meetings and notes of discussions, is that AifL set out to change assessment policy and practice, not by delivering instructions to schools in the ‘official envelopes’ referred to by Wragg (2000), but by harnessing the energies of those involved, encouraging ownership of change, and attempting to link policy, research and practice. The collaborative action research approach was informed by Senge and Scharmer (2001) who advocate engagement in achieving sustainable change.

The emphasis on collaboration in AifL appears to have been clarified from the outset. The first issue of the AifL newsletter<sup>23</sup> (LTS, 2002) contains quotations from different stakeholder groups, one of which states the programme is ‘a real partnership of teachers, researchers and policymakers working together ... to understand and develop approaches to assessment’ and, beneath a statement that ‘the range of individuals in this project is very wide’, are the names of Assessment Co-ordinators in the 32 LAs and others from different organisations who formed the Assessment Action Group (AAG) and the Assessment Programme Management Group (APMG).

The policy picture which follows represents a recollection of events from my own perspective, which changed as I assumed different roles. Further, my reality may be different from others’ for, as Geertz (1973) suggests, objectivity is a complex concept and I am conscious that individuals’ perspectives can be influenced by a number of factors including their personal circumstances. My own perspective of AifL may be coloured by my insider role, the people I met and the documents to which I had access. The issues this raised in my research role will be described in chapter 3.

In Appendix 1(a) on page 208, I have contextualised AifL in a timeline encapsulating thirty years of significant curriculum and assessment policy activity in Scotland. Set against the dates of UK and Scottish elections, the right hand column indicates the interest in assessment demonstrated by successive governments of different political persuasions since the 1979 UK General Election, when the New Right swept to power and whilst the education system in Scotland is distinct from the rest of the UK, the number of developments listed in Appendices 1(a) and 1(b) on pages 208 and 209 is indicative of

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<sup>23</sup> Between 2002 and 2008, 12 editions of the AifL newsletter were published, providing insights on the programme over time.

education policy activity in Scotland, illustrating Daugherty and Ecclestone's (2006) assertion that political interest in education increased significantly over this period.

## 1.2 The impact of politics on education in Scotland

Pages 210 and 211 summarise political interest in Scottish education. Torrance (2002) notes that politicians increasingly link educational standards with national economic development and Daugherty and Ecclestone (2006: 149) highlight 'fundamental changes in expectations about the social, political and educational purposes that assessment systems must serve'. Previously, the demands of both capital and labour had been met through welfare liberalism and equality of access to education, but the decline in traditional UK manufacturing industries had reduced the number of unskilled jobs available. The creation of comprehensive schools in the 1970s also prompted a re-think of the curriculum in Scotland as elsewhere.

The rise of neo-liberalism increased political concern to raise educational standards and the victory of the "New Right" in the 1979 UK general election marked a watershed in the education policy landscape. Political desire for change resulted in a perception that schools operated in a 'market' where teachers were workers in a service sector rather than professionals (Ball, 1995: online). In England, the original desire to establish common curriculum objectives (DES, 1988) had been superseded by Key Stage standardised tests, education policy became more prescriptive and the National Curriculum was enshrined in legislation. With few elected members in Scotland, the governing party was unable to achieve similar changes in Scotland; nevertheless the country was not unaffected.

The introduction to this chapter contained a reference to the publication of the National Guidelines 5-14: Assessment and to their aim of embedding assessment in learning and teaching in Scottish schools (SOED, 1991). These guidelines identified 'five key elements' in the assessment process: planning, teaching, recording, reporting and evaluating, intended to be neither 'separate nor sequential' (SOED, 1991: 4). Each of these also contained 'key principles [to] highlight and summarise the basis of good policy on assessment' (SOED, 1991: 9).

The SOED circular which accompanied the Guidelines (SOED, 1991: i) states:

The Secretary of State is of the view that the guidance now issued provides a sound basis for effective, coherent and manageable assessment of pupils' achievement in relation to standards of attainment set out in the 5-14 curriculum guidelines.

This indicates an assumption on the part of policy-makers that guidance on the 'key principles' for planning, teaching, recording, reporting and evaluating (SOED, 1991: 9) would form the basis of teachers' assessment practice, and that the proposed changes to recording pupils' progress would ensure parents received information of a quality enabling them to support their children's learning more effectively than before. Hutchinson and Hayward (2005: 228) also identify 'an assumption built into the dissemination model that the research-based ... policy was robust and had only to be put into practice by the teachers and the schools, who had expressed support of its principles'.

Hutchinson and Hayward (2005: 227) also report that the 5-14 assessment guidelines (SOED, 1991) were 'explicitly based on recent research' although the research base was not acknowledged. The guidelines emphasised learning and teaching, identification of prior learning and future goals, and the planning of a range of activities to encourage and provide evidence of learning. Assessment was therefore presented as a formative and continuous practical process, integral to learning and teaching.

The policy focus was on individual pupils, shifting away from normative approaches and the notion of assessment as measurement but, as a Depute Headteacher at the time, I was becoming more aware of the 'standards issue', recognising the increasing emphasis among managers in schools and LAs on gathering hard data and the effect this had on teachers, diverting their attention from learning to measurement of performance. Ball (1995: online) describes how the ideology of the market requires the public sector to demonstrate it is effective, efficient and, especially, accountable:

The market solution holds politicians around the world in its thrall. We should not be surprised by this for the market provides politicians with all the benefits of being seen to act decisively and very few of the problems of being blamed if things go wrong.

In their insider reflection on progress, Hutchinson and Hayward (2005: 229) suggest a number of reasons for the qualified success of Assessment 5-14. One of these was the relative importance accorded to English reading and writing and to mathematics, with



‘national tests in both areas appear[ing] to reinforce their status’. In addition, the neo-liberal viewpoint suggested that only standardised tests could provide objective, authoritative assessment and, ‘with HMI promoting the government policy that tests should form part of the assessment arrangements in a school, [they] pressed for test results as confirmation of teachers’ judgments’ (Hutchinson and Hayward, 2005: 229).

With increasing political demands for accountability, the influence of neo-liberal politics permeated schools and LAs where the demand for data increased. Concerns were expressed that existing arrangements, based on teachers’ judgments of pupils’ progress, were inadequate. The growing emphasis on raising standards through whole-school improvement and the publication of *How Good Is Our School* (SOEID, 1996), with its performance indicators for school self-evaluation, increased interest in schools and LAs in testing as a quick and easy (Hutchinson and Hayward, 2005) means of evaluating school performance. The introduction, by what was then the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department (SOEID), of the collection of schools’ aggregate attainment data for reading, writing and mathematics, and the expectation that results would be confirmed by testing, effectively emphasised the importance of testing for teachers, schools and LAs.

The response to the National Debate had indicated that Scots were proud of their education provision and perceived the comprehensive system to be one of its strengths (SEED, 2003a). Responses acknowledged the two main purposes of assessment identified in the HMI review (SOEID, 1999) but highlighted the increasing use of information from classroom assessments to monitor performance in Scottish schools, rather than guiding improvements in learning. There was a view that too much time was being spent testing pupils aged 5-14 (Scottish Executive, 2003a) at the expense of learning and teaching.

Acknowledging the desire to build on existing strengths, the then Minister for Education in Scotland introduced AifL, proposing ‘evolution, not revolution’ (McConnell, 2001).

### 1.3 The assessment development programme (AifL)

The complexity of the Scottish policy context should not be underestimated (Arnott and Menter, 2007, Hayward, 2007). In contributing to profiles of education systems worldwide, Hayward (2007: 251) suggests one reason why the Scottish education system is distinctive:

Scotland is a small country [...] proud of its independent education and legal systems [...] It] has a common education system, driven not by legislation but by a form of consensus. The world of education is small and the system is run by people who know one another, politicians and professionals.

Hayward describes Scotland's comparatively small population and its demographic profile. Most of the country is rural but the population is concentrated around Glasgow and Edinburgh. Since 1996, it has been divided into 32 areas, known as local authorities (LAs). Hayward (2007) also alludes to the uneasy power relationship between the devolved Scottish administration, which is primarily responsible for policy formulation and development, and the LAs which have delegated responsibility for ensuring the quality of education in Scottish schools.

The relationship between central and local government involves central government relying on each of the 32 LAs to ensure adoption of national policy, monitor practice in their schools and strive to improve the quality of educational provision (SEED, 2000). In my advisory role in the Scottish Government, I learned that LAs, in turn, depend on central government for finance and, while mutual dependency might bring benefits, the relationship can also be contentious. These complexities and sensitivities need to be acknowledged when exploring LA approaches to assessment reform, a policy area which is itself contentious. The challenges will be explored in chapters 5 and 6.

Collaborative development was regarded as the key to resolving difficulties associated with changing assessment practice through AifL. The assessment action group referred to in section 1.1 was drawn from a wide range of interested parties<sup>24</sup> and involved different stakeholder groups with an interest in assessment in an attempt to reconcile the tension between assessment for learning and assessment for accountability.

In this way, AifL was intended to address the issues raised in the HMI review (SOEID, 1999) and the subsequent report on the consultation (Hayward et al, 2000). In particular, the assessment development programme sought to address the unanticipated outcomes of the 5-14 guidelines, specifically by linking the previously separate worlds of research, policy and practice. Commenting on the impact of research evidence on education policy

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<sup>24</sup> Assessment is for Learning Newsletter No. 1 indicates a wide membership base, including academics and researchers, officers from Local Authorities and teachers' professional associations, parents' representatives, as well as staff from LTS and SQA and officials from Scottish Executive.

in Scotland, Hayward (2007: 258) concludes that, in common with other 'well-intentioned' examples, the 5-14 programme had failed to achieve what it set out to do. Reasons for this, she suggests, were the concern for performativity, perceived to be at odds with the enhanced professionalism promoted by the initiative, and an approach to change based on a transmissive model of staff development where teachers were required 'to put into practice ideas developed by others' rather than engage in professional learning.

AifL aimed to bring about the kind of improvements necessary to enable all partners in education to receive the information they required to inform decisions about learning. The name of the programme, Assessment is for Learning, conveyed a message that the ultimate purpose of assessment was improving learning. It sought to encourage learning at every level in the system and, by improving understanding of assessment, eradicate the tensions which then existed. The issues highlighted by the HMI review (SOEID, 1999) formed the framework for action:

- the complexities of formative assessment as part of daily classroom activity;
- the difficulty of reconciling the relationship between assessment for learning and assessment for accountability;
- the manageability of collecting evidence in ways which maintained a focus on learning.

Publicity for AifL (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2002) indicates that the programme sought to build on existing good practice in assessment by providing extensive staff development and support, regarded as an important missing element in Assessment: 5-14 (Hayward et al 2000, Hutchinson and Hayward 2005, Hayward 2007), through its project-based, action research approach and through the involvement of practitioners in the national survey, renamed the Scottish Survey of Achievement (SSA).

During this time, a per capita core grant was made available to all LAs for assessment development from 2002-06 with further funding available for action research projects conducted by staff in Associated Schools Groups (ASGs). My own role involved monitoring the distribution and expenditure of the latter, grant for projects carried out by staff working collaboratively in ASGs between 2004 and 2008.

Initial evaluation of the programme (Condie et al, 2005a) indicated that most teachers in the pilot phase followed a collaborative action research approach and, with support provided by LA assessment co-ordinators and staff from university faculties of education

working alongside development officers from LTS, this had culminated in a case study report. Condie et al (2005a) also referred to a programme of project-specific conferences, seminars and staff development events, organised to provide opportunities for participants to meet, review and share progress. They indicated (2005b: 11) that this was ‘a beginning, albeit a positive one’ and recommended that support for practitioner development be continued beyond the pilot phase through dialogue, not only with colleagues, but also through wider networks and communities of enquiry.

From my involvement, I know that approximately 200 ASGs were funded each year from 2004 to 2008, to undertake situated enquiry with colleagues. This recollection is matched by statistics quoted in the published information sheet (SEED, 2005b) discussed in chapter 4, which indicate that the number of schools involved in AifL rose from 195 to 1,581 schools within two years. The number signifies approximately half the schools in Scotland and would appear to indicate substantial progress.

Supporting documentation<sup>25</sup> produced by the assessment team in SEED was made available to schools from 2005. These materials demonstrate the growing appreciation of teachers as learners, with prompts developed to assist reflection on practice and evaluation of impact, and facilitate practitioner action research and assessment development taking account of local circumstances and priorities. In turn, the reflective reports which staff in ASGs submitted provided real-life illustrations of modified assessment practice, used by LTS to share the programme’s main ideas with a wider audience<sup>26</sup>.

However, despite increasing involvement in AifL, concern grew in policy circles that the tensions between assessment for learning and assessment for accountability were not yet reconciled. Evaluation (George Street Research, 2007) indicated that, despite six years of intense activity, some of the original issues (SOEID, 1999, Hayward et al, 2000, SEED 2002) remained unresolved. At the same time, in my role as professional adviser, I became increasingly aware of factors influencing local enactment of the national strategy.

Listening to assessment co-ordinators’ concerns in seminars or in one-to-one meetings, I began to appreciate that individuals’ interest in and commitment to AifL varied, perhaps as a result of their background, experience or values, or simply because of their various responsibilities and competing priorities. Conversations indicated local contextualisation

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<sup>25</sup> The AifL planning and headline reporting templates produced by assessment branch in the Scottish Executive are provided as Appendices 2(b) and 2(c) on pages 213 and 220 respectively.

could also be affected by local demographics, local politics and policies, and the availability of resources to support action.

Local authority co-ordinators were essential to local contextualisation of national policy. In AifL, their role was to ensure that all staff in the LA used assessment information to support learning, and to help develop a sustainable strategy for AifL. As a public policy initiative, it was considered unlikely that central funding would continue beyond the pilot phase and, as such, the success of the programme and its long-term sustainability were dependent on nominated AifL co-ordinators supporting the programme's aims within their own LAs. In fact, as a result of central government's aspiration to ensure 'all schools [were] part of AifL by 2007' (SEED, 2004c: 15), central funding continued for three years beyond the formalisation of the new assessment system in the Scottish Executive Education Department Circular No. 02 June 2005: assessment and reporting 3-14 (SEED, 2005a) but, while this extended the period of central support for AifL, long-term sustainability was still an issue.

As a government directive to LAs, the circular referred to above is an important document and will be discussed in chapter 4. It may be helpful simply to note at this point that it (SEED, 2005a) detailed three strands of assessment policy in Scotland for pupils aged 3-14:

- good assessment to support children's learning as part of classroom practice;
- sound quality assurance of teachers' assessments in schools and local authorities;
- a robust national monitoring system providing information about overall standards.

These three strands encapsulated AifL developments but the dream to drive up standards (Black, 1997) had left a legacy. Fullan (1991, 1993, 2001) advises that organisational change requires culture shift, unlearning of old paradigms and their replacement with new mindsets. AifL therefore required to change mindsets in order to realise the aims and aspirations of a coherent system, and those supporting the changes required a sound understanding not only of assessment but also of the need for change and its likely implications for teachers and their pupils.

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<sup>26</sup> Case study extracts were published online and can be accessed on the archived AifL website: <http://wayback.archive-it.org/1961/20100626043742/>

In theory, implementation of policy involves a synergy between research, policy and practice: research, it could be argued, should inform policy, which should then influence practice. In reality, it appeared to involve a complex interplay of research and policy at local and national levels and further interaction with the world of practice at local level. This study sought to explore this complex relationship, and in particular to learn more about the role of assessment co-ordinators and the influences on their actions and decisions.

#### 1.4 My involvement in AifL

My own interest in this study grew from my involvement in AifL from 2002, joining the programme as LTS Development Officer, becoming Professional Adviser within Scottish Government in 2003 and, from 2007, employed as Education Manager in LTS. Over the period, the remits associated with these roles included:

- supporting teachers in schools to investigate aspects of their practice in AifL Project 1: support for professional practice in formative assessment;
- assisting officers in LAs to disseminate national policy messages and understand the implications of policy for staff in their schools;
- providing staff in ASGs with an enquiry framework within which to carry out their action research projects;
- ensuring national support for assessment policy acknowledged research literature on change management and that opportunities for continuing professional development (CPD) promoted professional learning.

Involvement over a number of years enabled me to clarify the historical and policy background to AifL and become acquainted with related research findings. Throughout my teaching career, I had mused on the apparent disconnect between the worlds of policy and practice, confirming this impression while working in the policy environment. While on secondment, I also noted the disconnect between research and policy and now have a better appreciation that the worlds of policy, research and practice are not aligned. Where I had previously understood policy to be informed by research, I am now aware of research studies are either highlighted or ignored by policy-makers, reaction determined by whether or not findings appear to affirm policy direction.

During my time in Scottish Government, my colleagues were civil servants whose core values are defined as integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality. The latter is manifested in successfully carrying out a prescribed remit, irrespective of ruling party or political ideology. Their role focuses on formulation and implementation of policy, with performance reviews matched to efficiency and service delivery and, although my colleagues undoubtedly sought to bring about improvements in education, advertisements for Civil Service vacancies emphasise the importance of translating strategic priorities into ‘operational delivery’ so that policymakers are obliged to abide by the rhetoric of the market, with its focus on performance and service delivery.

It would be erroneous to polarise the two standpoints, but a comparison is suggested by Ball’s (1995: online) description of the ‘authentic teacher’, whose practice is likely to be underpinned by personal rather than corporate values. As a teacher working in the policy environment, I experienced tension between my objectives as a secondee and the desire as a teaching professional to ensuring quality educational experiences for all children. I am also conscious of the pervasive influence of the years working in a policy environment and have struggled at times to come to terms with my position as researcher rather than policy supporter. Acknowledging that change requires learning and that learning takes time can be problematical when the Cabinet Secretary (Hyslop, 2009) demands transformational change within the life of a parliament.

Further details of these challenges are included in the discussion of methodology in chapter 3. The next section outlines the aims of the study and accounts for its design.

## 1.5 Aims of the study

Previous sections have indicated that assessment has become a contentious issue. They have also described how one of the acclaimed<sup>27</sup> strengths of AifL was its emphasis on collaboration amongst the various partners with an interest in assessment. This collaboration was intended to deepen understanding of others’ needs and perspectives, in order to change mindsets and practice.

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<sup>27</sup> Notes from workshop discussions at assessment seminars 2007-10, available on the National Assessment Group on the Glow national portal.

The management of change, as explained earlier, was integral to AifL<sup>28</sup>, and subsequently commended in evaluations (Hallam et al 2004, Condie et al 2005a) and exploratory studies (Hayward et al, 2005), though one evaluation of the programme (George Street Research, 2007) highlighted inconsistencies. One of the aims of the study was to discover whether or not local contextualisation could account for the inconsistencies identified in the evaluation, and to discern whether or not these differences were important.

The consultation on assessment 5-14 (Hayward et al, 2000) had provided clear direction based on perceived development needs and lessons learned from previous assessment initiatives. The second aim of the study was to discover whether difference had influenced resolution of the issues identified<sup>29</sup>, and the third was to discern whether assessment in Scotland had changed since the publication of the report by Hayward et al (2000).

The study explores assessment co-ordinators' understanding of AifL, their perceptions of their role, and how this influenced enactment of AifL within different LAs. It is intended to gather insights on the meanings different individuals take from national policy and explore how this affected the direction of AifL in different LAs.

In looking more deeply at the role of assessment co-ordinators and their influence on the strategic direction of AifL, the following questions were addressed:

- How was AifL enacted within different LAs?
- Were there any differences and, if so, what might account for these differences?
- Do differences matter?
- What implications might there be for future policy initiatives?

Given that designated assessment co-ordinators had an important role in developing teachers' involvement in AifL, the study explored the following:

- the policy as presented to the education community;
- the background experience of different assessment co-ordinators;
- how they came to be assigned the role;
- the organisational culture in which they worked;
- how they took AifL forward.

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<sup>28</sup> AifL Newsletter No. 1.

<sup>29</sup> The AifL programme set out to create a streamlined and coherent system of assessment enabling all stakeholders the information they required to inform decisions about learning and without impacting negatively on the practice of any other group.



Participants were selected from seven LAs in different parts of the country, reflecting the range of posts held by LA staff with responsibility for assessment. Because of an existing working relationship with the participants and to minimise direction in the interview situation, the research instrument was unstructured interview. The study was constructivist in orientation and the data qualitative.

The study is confined to specific activities in specified areas within a defined timeframe: that is, assessment development in seven Scottish LAs during the centrally-funded period of AifL from 2002 to 2008. While the outcome may have relevance for other policy areas or for assessment development in other countries, there will be no attempt to generalise the findings or claim they have applicability in other contexts.

Issues related to assessment, to the change process and to professional development are highlighted in this exploration of the relationship between policy and practice in promoting change. Insights are offered on the effect of individuals' dispositions and circumstances on policy objectives, relevant at a time when curriculum reform is high on the Scottish political agenda and new arrangements for national qualifications are being developed.

## 1.6 Significance of the study

The study considers how policy messages are received through experiential filters, and examines how interpretation is influenced by organisational cultures. Through analysis of Scottish Government documents and HMIE reports in chapter 4, and of assessment co-ordinators' interview responses in chapters 5 and 6, it identifies and reflects on issues which can arise from local contextualisation of national policy.

It is relevant to the reform of the curriculum currently underway. Since the early stages of its development, it has been claimed that *Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)*<sup>30</sup> will provide a context within which the key features of AifL are implicitly promoted as providing the most appropriate and effective approaches to learning, teaching and assessment (Emerson, 2006). The final edition of the AifL newsletter (LTS, 2008) makes explicit the link between AifL and *Curriculum for Excellence*: 'AifL and *Curriculum for Excellence* both aim to deepen children's learning and improve their achievement' (McIroy, 2008: 3)

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<sup>30</sup> Italics form part of Scottish Government branding for Curriculum for Excellence.

This author (2008: 3) also claims that AifL has provided a foundation for *CfE* development, stating that *CfE* should:

build on AifL work in ‘sharing the standard’ so that teachers develop a common understanding of the outcomes and experiences. Alongside this, we need to update ways of tracking learners’ progress and using benchmark data to improve learning and achievement.

As well as linking the two reforms, the references to deepening learning, sharing the standard and using benchmark data reveal a preoccupation with standards and highlight the continuing need to ensure reconciliation between assessment for learning and assessment of learning in the classroom and assessment for school evaluation and accountability within the system as a whole. The published framework for assessment in *CfE* (Scottish Government, 2010a) promotes assessment to support learning and learner engagement, and emphasises that quality in assessment is most likely to be achieved through collaborative working and shared standards. Policy rhetoric also indicates that central funding for assessment is now part of the Scottish Government’s overall support for *CfE* which includes an online National Assessment Resource (NAR) to support assessment in *CfE*.

The NAR has replaced the online bank set up in 2005 to give schools access to downloadable national assessment materials, but it is intended to be more than a bank of tests containing centrally-prepared assessments for staff and their pupils. Rather, the NAR is promoted (Scottish Government, 2010a) as support for assessment in *CfE* by extending established approaches, and providing opportunities for professional learning about assessment. The plan is to provide an interactive resource, firstly to support staff in all aspects of assessment through the availability of research literature, assessment resources and exemplification and, in the future, to support pupil peer and self-assessment and encourage innovative assessment approaches to be carried out online.

If AifL is seen as the fertile ground for curriculum review in Scotland, and its ‘bottom up, with direction’ approach hailed as one approach worth emulating (SEED 2004c), LAs will have a pivotal role in ensuring staff have opportunity to enhance their understanding of the reform and refine their practice as a result. The reflections arising from this study provide a contextualised starting point for those charged with supporting change nationally.

## 1.7 Overview of the dissertation

This first chapter outlines the context for the investigation, highlighting the contentious nature of assessment, the complexity of policy development and implementation, and the sensitivity of issues arising in the AifL programme which prompted the study. It refers to AifL's emphasis on collaborative working in pursuit of sustainable change. The significance of this study is suggested, specifically in the context of current curriculum reform and where local contextualisation of national policy is encouraged. The first chapter also states the aims of the study, lists the research questions and briefly describes the methodological approach, all of which are detailed further in chapter 3. Importantly, the limitations of the study are clarified in order to avoid the perception that ambitious claims are being made with respect to the study.

Chapter 2 contains a review of literature available when the interviews were undertaken and considered relevant to both the context and the focus of the study. The third chapter is devoted to the research methodology. It considers different methodological paradigms, acknowledging their advantages and disadvantages. It offers a rationale for the methodology adopted, and argues the approach taken is appropriate for the purpose of the study and for eliciting the data required. It recognises the ethics of research involving human subjects and provides reasons for the sample selected. It also acknowledges issues associated with insider research and makes transparent my own involvement in the area. Finally, it describes the data collection process and the approach to data analysis.

The fourth chapter makes reference to notes written some years before the study was undertaken. It also analyses policy communications, illustrating inconsistencies within the system itself. Discourse analysis of the seminal government document communicating assessment policy to senior staff in LAs is undertaken. This is followed by analysis of the government-published information sheets more widely circulated. Also considered are HMIE reports of inspections of LAs for their contribution in reinforcing policy.

The diversity among participants is outlined in chapter 5 and interview responses analysed. The transcripts are interrogated, the first of two recurring themes identified and, within this, several emerging ideas are explored. Common concepts are grouped together and similar features of practice suggested. Distinctive differences are also highlighted between LAs in taking forward the same central policy ideas.

Chapter 6 is also based on participants' responses. This chapter contains reference to interviewees' concerns which are included in order to be true to the data collected. These indicate the demands of accountability are as prevalent as they were when they were first reported in 1999. To reinforce the continuing existence of this tension, the issues have been set out in a separate chapter.

In chapter 7, the themes identified from the interview responses are used to answer the research questions set out in section 1.5. In the light of this, and of the literature reviewed in chapter 2 supplemented by literature published since, issues are identified with findings from this study appearing to confirm and augment those from earlier studies. In the light of this, considerations are offered for future centrally-funded policy initiatives where the approach involves LA contextualisation of national policy.

To help prevent ambiguity or confusion, a glossary has been provided to clarify how language was used in the context of AifL and explain concepts as they were likely to have been understood by participants. Whilst the explanations might be contested, and some are queried in the course of the dissertation, the definitions are those in the public domain which informed policy papers or presentations during the funded period and, since then, with respect to *Curriculum for Excellence*.

The next chapter now continues with a review of literature available during the defined period of the investigation. It includes the global imperative for change to meet the challenge of the knowledge economy, as well as recent curriculum and assessment reform in Scotland. It acknowledges issues associated with change generally and reflects specifically on change in education. The literature includes reference to current thinking on professional development in education and, in particular, to collaborative communities of enquiry as a means of achieving sustainable change.

## 2. Demand for assessment reform and strategies for sustainability

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre*

*The falcon cannot hear the falconer;*

*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;*

*Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,*

*W. B. Yeats (1916)*

### Introduction

The previous chapter established the background to this study. The policy context in Scotland was summarised and the background outlined. This included the national guidelines for curriculum and assessment 5-14 (SOED, 1991), the review of assessment (SOEID, 1999) and the report on the national consultation (Hayward et al, 2000), all of which had created a demand for change. The purpose of the assessment development programme 2002-08 was to create a streamlined and coherent system of assessment and local contextualisation was considered important in sustaining change beyond the period of central funding. The collaborative nature of the programme was intended to link research, policy and practice.

This chapter will consider assessment literature, explaining the perceived dichotomy between assessment for learning and assessment of learning which AifL set out to resolve. Given the importance of sustainable change, it will also consider approaches to professional development and especially those related to change in education.

Because increasing reference is made to the requirements of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and Daugherty (2007: 148) argues that ‘the importance of the changing nature of the wider social and political context cannot be overstated’, the next section will set AifL in the context of contemporary political, social and economic change.

## 2.1 The global context for national policy

The image created by Yeats (1916), quoted at the start of the chapter, portrays a society in flux and could well describe the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Hutton and Giddens (2000) and Peters and Hume (2003) posit that every generation considers that it has experienced radical change, but agree that today's world is facing unprecedented transformation, prompted by 'the interaction of extraordinary technological innovation combined with world-wide reach driven by global capitalism' (Hutton and Giddens, 2000: vii).

The effects may be as wide-reaching as the industrial revolution which altered forever 'feudal habits of subordination and deference ... [and] ... social cohesion' (Bain, 1995: 2). According to Hutton and Giddens (2000, vii) four factors have provided the 'power and momentum [for current] economic, political and economic change'. These are: 'the world-wide communications revolution ... the weightless [or knowledge] economy' (2000: 1-2), the fall of Soviet communism, and changes affecting family life, all of which have contributed to changes in the distribution of tasks in the workplace.

Where economic development once depended on building infrastructure and factories for production, current preoccupations are with building knowledge-capacity and promoting knowledge creation. The knowledge economy is likely to such have far-reaching effects on society that Levy and Murnane (2004) argue Adam Smith's 'division of labour', his epithet for the impact of industrialisation on productivity, now applies to different economic conditions (2004: 2). These, they argue, will demand changed systems for education and training.

Drawing on Lyotard, Peters (1995: xxxii) recognises that transformations in society have 'altered the game rules not only for science, literature, and the arts but also for the ... institutions of education that are responsible for their transmission and production'. Arguing that knowledge and skills will be the new source of economic advantage, Peters and Hume (2003: 5) say education is an 'undervalued form of knowledge capital'. They echo Thurow's claim (1996: 68) that, while knowledge and skills are unlike other commodities, they have become the key ingredient in the 'late twentieth century's location of economic activity'.

Peters (1995: xxxvi) asserts that political interests are focused on 'maximizing the system's performance' but warns that, if knowledge is mercantilised, powerful

corporations and nation states may exert political and economic advantage over others to restrict access to knowledge, potentially widening existing gaps between the developed and developing worlds, and between the rich and poor in the developed world. While Stobart (2008: 140) more recently argues that links between education and national prosperity have been ‘oversimplified’, Cullingford (1997: 3) identifies ‘an increasing interpenetration of the state and education system ... in the face of international competition and the need for different types of skill’ and Stiglitz (1999: online) argues that governments’ role is to ‘narrow the knowledge gap’ by highlighting connections between knowledge and economic well-being, and by devising policies that build human capital.

Parsons (2001: 233) contends that globalisation impacts on individuals’ lives, which are ‘increasingly influenced by activities and events happening well away from the social contexts in which [they] carry out [their] day to day activities’ and, in addition to political demands for change, Papert (c1980) insists that educators have to find new ways of relating to children affected by societal change while Giroux (1994) identifies a need for greater democracy in classrooms. Consequently, economic and technological transformations appear to emphasise the need for the kind of education once advocated by Dewey and Freire. That their views previously received limited political support is possibly because they did not fit, until now, with government’s economic purpose. Indeed, Freire (c1980) argues that Dewey’s biggest mistake was that he did not fully appreciate the influence of politics. However, Hargreaves (2003: 72) argues that ‘teaching for the knowledge society and teaching beyond it need not be incompatible’. Although teaching has a wider purpose, he explains, ‘if people are unprepared for the knowledge economy, they will be excluded from it – lacking the basic necessities that enable communities to survive and succeed in the first place’.

Yet another result of increasing globalisation, says Parsons (2001: 234), is the diminished ‘capacity of national policymakers to frame their own agendas’. He cites (2001: 232-233) Wallerstein’s argument that national policy agendas can no longer be ‘defined by national boundaries’ nor determined in isolation, and Deutsch’s contention that the ‘political system’ now also ‘operates within ... a “world system”’. This new ‘world system’ may have prompted demand for curriculum and assessment reform in many countries, including Scotland.

## 2.2 Curriculum and assessment reform in Scotland

In the previous section, global trends contributing to societal change were acknowledged. Successive Scottish administrations have stressed the role of education in a globally competitive market and, while AifL was established to address specific concerns about assessment (SOEID 1999, Hayward et al 2000), policy direction since 2003 has tended to link aspects of assessment with curriculum reform.

The first Scottish government publication linking education and the global economy is the partnership agreement<sup>31</sup> (Scottish Executive, 2003b) which outlined the Scottish Labour/Liberal Democrat coalition government's agenda for action. Subtitled '*Growing Scotland's Economy*', it asserts that social justice is dependent on national economic prosperity:

[g]rowing the economy is our top priority. A successful economy is key to our future prosperity and a pre-requisite for ... social justice and a Scotland of opportunity (Scottish Executive, 2003b: 6).

The agreement states that the coalition will work to 'significantly improve the skills base of Scotland to be better prepared to meet the demands of the knowledge economy' (Scottish Executive, 2003b: 7). It contains proposals for curriculum and pedagogical change to narrow the attainment gap, and a pledge to ensure teachers have the 'right skills' (Scottish Executive, 2003b: 27). The same section includes proposals for radical change in assessment practice:

- more time for learning by simplifying and reducing assessment, ending the current system of national tests for 5-14 year olds;
- assessment methods that support learning and teaching;
- improvement in overall attainment through broad surveys rather than reliance on national tests.

The first two points reflect the proposal to abolish 'the current system' for national tests, criticisms of which had been noted in the report on the consultation (Hayward et al, 2000) and in the government's response to the National Debate on Education (SEED, 2003a). They also appear to reiterate the intention of the 5-14 guidelines (SOED, 1991) to integrate

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<sup>31</sup> A Partnership for a Better Scotland: partnership agreement (Scottish Executive, 2003) described the coalition government's agreed agenda for the next four years. It focused on education, justice, transport, enterprise and health.



assessment with learning and teaching, and they propose a new approach to monitoring national standards and planning for improvement. They make no specific reference to local monitoring procedures. Nevertheless, the proposals appear to be generally in line with the aims of AifL and the document seems consistent with the direction of the previous administration.

Four subsequent government publications (SEED 2004a, SEED 2004b, SEED 2004c, SEED 2004d) also make explicit connections between education and the economy. The first (SEED, 2004a) includes proposals from a group, designed to be representative<sup>32</sup> of interested parties and commissioned to consider education issues, and ‘global factors which would have strong influences on the aims and purposes of education over the coming decades’ (SEED, 2004a: 7). The document indicates a policy shift from bureaucratic systems and structures in favour of individuals’ needs and entitlements:

The curriculum reflects what we value as a nation and what we seek for our children and young people. It should enable all of the young people of Scotland to flourish as individuals, reach high levels of achievement, and make valuable contributions to society (SEED, 2004a: 9).

It outlines the purpose of school education (SEED, 2004a) and claims to establish a ‘clear structure for improvement’ (SEED, 2004a, 7), where improvement is defined as ‘... not merely about academic attainment but encompass[ing] the whole needs of the young person and the whole life of the school’.

The second publication is the ministerial response (SEED, 2004b) endorsing the values<sup>33</sup>, purposes<sup>34</sup> and principles<sup>35</sup> of education identified by the curriculum review group. It acknowledges proposals for a new curriculum, and introduces ‘a programme of work, entitled *a<sup>36</sup> curriculum for excellence*, addressing issues ... [to be] tackled as a matter of priority’ (SEED, 2004b: 3). Of particular significance to this study is a further reference to reform of assessment 3-14 to ensure that ‘assessment supports learning’ (SEED, 2004b: 7).

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<sup>32</sup> The review group comprised representatives from schools and local authorities, further and higher education, national agencies, parents’ groups as well as policy makers.

<sup>33</sup> Values identified by the Curriculum Review Group: wisdom, justice, compassion, integrity, as inscribed on the mace of the Scottish parliament ‘helping to define the values for our democracy’ (SEED, 2004b: 11).

<sup>34</sup> The four purposes of education are intended to enable all young people to be successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens (SEED, 2004b: 12).

<sup>35</sup> The principles of curriculum design identified by the Curriculum Review Group and endorsed by Scottish Ministers are: challenge and enjoyment, personalisation and choice, breadth, depth, coherence, relevance and progression (SEED, 2004b: 13).

<sup>36</sup> Following a policy decision in 2007, the indefinite article was dropped.

The third document (SEED, 2004c) outlines the agenda for action for the remaining life of the coalition. Specifically, ministers indicate their commitment to continuing support for AifL to ‘ensure all schools are part of the assessment is for learning programme, by 2007...’ (SEED, 2004: 15). Five high level aims are proposed, the last of which relates to assessment. It is entitled ‘tough, intelligent accountabilities’ (SEED, 2004c: 6).

Reference to ‘tough’ is repeated in both the title and the text (SEED: 2004c: 15).

Accountability is defined as an expectation that ‘local authorities [will] drive improvement ... to add value to the work of their schools’ and that ‘schools [will] meet the needs of their community and each and every one of their pupils’ (SEED, 2004c: 15). There is reference to continued monitoring of educational provision in Scottish schools suggesting that ‘[d]elivering excellence in education requires both professional freedom and public accountability’ (SEED, 2004c: 15) but ‘intelligent’ is implied in descriptions of ‘systems that are proportionate’, not burdensome for schools, that ‘promote self evaluation’ as well as external monitoring, with support for staff and schools experiencing difficulty. In the detail provided, Scotland’s ‘world renowned system of inspection and evaluation’ is described as the starting point for sustained improvement, to ensure ‘Scotland performs well, and that we stand comparison with other high performing nations’.

Expansion of ‘tough, intelligent accountabilities’ (SEED, 2004c: 20) is provided in the fourth document in the *CfE* policy portfolio (SEED, 2004d), described by Daugherty and Ecclestone (2006: 161) as a ‘reformulation and reinvigoration of policy priorities’. In essence, it is a response to the 2003 national consultation on assessment, testing and reporting 3-14 which sought the views of the wider education community on ‘a system which fits the needs of the children, which supports effective learning and teaching and which places accountability at the most appropriate level’ (SEED, 2004d: 3). In keeping with the aims of AifL, proposals to address the findings of the consultation relate to three different aspects of learning and include: guidance on annual reporting to parents; replacing national tests with resources available from a new national assessment bank; and monitoring national performance through the new Scottish Survey of Achievement, instead of the annual survey of 5-14 attainment levels previously provided by schools.

Further information is provided on all three proposals. Each begins with the policy aim, contains a summary of the consultation results and provides the ministers’ response, listing the support which will be put in place.

The aim of the new assessment bank is to:

... rebalance the emphasis in assessment towards good quality assurance of teachers' judgements, through local moderation and the use of 'benchmarking' as part of self-evaluation so that assessments are robust and reliable and standards can be shared, without negative impact on classroom practice (SEED, 2004d: 7).

which suggests that 'tough, intelligent accountabilities' (SEED, 2004c: 20) may be achieved by using teachers' judgments of pupils' work not only to support pupils' learning but also to monitor attainment and improvement at school and local authority level.

Crucially, the assertion that judgments need to be based on a 'shared understanding of standards' (SEED, 2004d: 7) communicates implicit advice that local moderation has an important part to play in procedures for monitoring attainment. To support this, ministers commit to prioritising local moderation in session 2004-05, extending the national assessment bank and to developing materials to support local moderation and devising CPD activities on using 'evidence and data as part of ... quality assurance' (SEED, 2004d: 8). Perhaps because of the strength of responses from 'school and authority managers' (SEED, 2004d: 7), there is also reference to providing advice for school managers and LA staff on 'managing assessment policy and on using evidence and data as part of ... quality assurance' (SEED, 2004d: 8).

The immediate priority assigned to supporting arrangements for local moderation may reflect policymakers' concern about the dichotomy of opinion indicated by the consultation results summarised in this section: whilst the majority of respondents (82%) are said to be in favour of a national assessment bank to confirm teachers' judgments, only 58% wanted support to put arrangements in place for moderation of these judgments. Thus it may be surmised that the wider education community had yet to appreciate the centrality of local moderation in a coherent system of assessment.

The proposal relating to the SSA acknowledges the importance of 'quality assurance, self-evaluation and improvement' (SEED, 2004d: 9) at school, local authority and national level in achieving 'tough, intelligent accountabilities' (SEED, 2004c: 20). The planned sample-based national monitoring system was intended to lower the stakes for schools and minimise negative impact on teachers and pupils. Importantly, the policy response indicates an intention to '[r]eaffirm that teachers, schools and education authorities have important responsibilities in monitoring levels of attainment'. In assigning this significant responsibility to staff at all levels, the ministers communicate their intention that teachers,

as well as local authority and national officers, need to be accountable for quality and improvement and the link with local moderation is implied.

The policy concept of ‘tough, intelligent accountabilities’ was the ministers’ response to the perception in the national consultation (SEED, 2004d) that a preoccupation with testing was taking time from teaching and learning and resulting in a narrowed curriculum. However, the policy text (SEED, 2004c), ostensibly promoting responsibility at all levels for self-evaluation and improvement, reinforces established hierarchies, between central government and LAs, and LAs and schools in the reference to LAs ‘driv[ing] improvement’. In section 2.2.3, connections will be explored between the Scottish Government’s proposals for accountability and concurrent literature. This will include O’Neill’s (2002) contrasting definition of intelligent accountability.

One year later, Circular 02/05 was published, formalising the proposals as assessment policy. As indicated in chapter 1, Circular 02/05 (SEED, 2005a) set out the expectations of the Minister and Depute Minister for Education for assessment in Scottish schools and LAs. The system outlined in the circular also appears to be consistent with the aims of AifL, although the document includes scope for revision<sup>37</sup> to take account of impending curriculum reform. The circular will be examined in closer detail in chapter 4, while chapter 7 includes reference to more recent assessment guidance.

Briefly, the circular (SEED, 2005a) formalised assessment arrangements by describing how formative and summative functions of assessment (Harlen, 2007) can work in harmony. It recognised the potential for assessment to impact on what is taught and signalled the end of the national collection and reporting of test results for benchmarking purposes but, like the previous document (SEED, 2004c), it acknowledged the role of inspectors in promoting sound assessment practice:

They will want to be satisfied that policy and practice support learning that information and data collected are dependable and of good quality, and that the analysis and use of data support planning for improvement (SEED, 2005a: 13).

The circular (SEED, 2005a) does not use the term ‘tough, intelligent accountabilities’ (SEED, 2004c: 15) but it does set out requirements for accountability and assigns HMIE a key role in ensuring that assessment practice supports learning, and that assessment

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<sup>37</sup> Circular 02/05 (SEED, 2005) has since been superseded by the publication of guidance and supporting documents for assessment in *CfE* (Scottish Government 2009b, Scottish Government 2010).

information is of sufficient quality to inform improvement at all levels in the system.

Overall, therefore the general direction of policy from 2002-2005 seems aligned with the principles and practice advocated by AifL, the scope of which is explored in the following section and the subsections within it.

## 2.3 Assessment policy intention

AifL's aspiration was to reconcile the needs of pupils and their teachers with the needs of those quality assuring the system as a whole. Formalised in assessment policy (SEED, 2005a) three years into the development programme, a largely consistent sense of purpose and direction was maintained, despite changing administrations. In particular, policy continued to stress that assessment should support learning.

In the sections which follow, the links between research and policy will be explored. They will include reflections firstly on the contribution of assessment for learning, then the distinction between formative and summative functions of assessment and, finally, a review of literature acknowledging the demands of accountability.

The emphasis on assessment supporting learning has been undoubtedly influenced by the work of Black and Wiliam (1998a, 1998b), supported by the practical reflections of teachers working with researchers (Black et al 2002, Black et al 2003), and the publication of the 10 principles of formative assessment (Assessment Reform Group, 2002). Together they have helped define what is important in assessment as part of teaching and learning. Ideas on transformational change, in particular the work of Senge and Scharmer (2001) on community action research provided a foundation for the Scottish formative assessment project and influenced the nature of support provided for teachers as learners. The change aspect of the programme will be explored in section 2.4.

### 2.3.1 The value of formative assessment

In defining the 'post-modern condition', Lyotard (1979) states that it questions traditional values, challenging the boundaries of academic knowledge and rejecting fixed societal and cultural distinctions, and he argues that schools of the future must recognise that the rules have changed. Kellner (2004:10) makes a similar point: 'It is [...] debatable whether it is

any longer desirable to encourage ‘conformity, subordination and normalization’. He (2004: 1) urges educators ‘... to rethink their basic tenets ... and to restructure schooling to respond constructively and progressively to the ... changes currently underway’ to give ‘people ... the tools and competencies to enable them to succeed in an ever more complex and changing world’, advising a move away from the traditional role of teacher as font of knowledge and student as passive recipient.

According to Fullan (2009: 103-104), this will involve changing teaching practice as well as school structures. He cites Rohlen’s ‘convincing case’ that:

... our schools need to teach learning processes that better fit the way work is evolving. Above all, this means teaching the skills and habits of mind that are essential to problem-solving, especially where many minds need to interact. (2009:104).

For Fullan, the solution involves reconsidering values and habits, changing learning environments as well as redefining teacher and student roles. This may involve not only a review of pedagogy, but agreement on what needs to be learned and how to assess this. Kellner (2004: 24) argues that current tools for measurement are unable to assess the range of competences valued in post-modern society:

... it becomes increasingly irrational to focus education on producing higher test scores on exams that themselves are becoming obsolete and outdated by the changes in the economy, society and culture.

In this context, formative assessment makes an important contribution. Black and Wiliam (1998b: 2) define this as:

‘all those activities undertaken by teachers, *and by their students themselves*<sup>38</sup>, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. *Such assessment becomes “formative assessment” when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching work to meet the needs*’.

The Assessment Reform Group (2002: online) proposes the following definition:

the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there.

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<sup>38</sup> Emphasis assigned in the original text.

Popham (2008: 5) suggests:

formative assessment is a process used by teachers and students during instruction that provides feedback to adjust ongoing teaching and learning to improve students' achievement of intended instructional outcomes.

Common to all three definitions is an emphasis on effective interaction between students and teachers, leading to improved learning, which Harlen (2006: 103) summarises as 'help[ing] learning'. Beyond its important contribution to improving learning through ongoing adjustments to planned teaching and provision of feedback for improvement, the increased involvement of students is said to lead to improved motivation and engagement (Harlen, 2006) and student involvement has the potential to increase the range of assessment tools available (Herbert, 1997), enabling teachers to elicit evidence of skills and competences not easily assessed by traditional means.

For example, the involvement of students in formative assessment can support the gathering of evidence in the affective as well as cognitive domain. Herbert (1997) argues that teachers need to attend to how children learn and what they take from any opportunity for learning, as well as from prescribed curriculum outcomes. He suggests, like Wragg (1997), that learning is three dimensional, citing Pring's (1984) development of self representing both cognitive and affective elements. He also acknowledges Watkins' themes (1997: 148) relating to the adolescent self: the bodily self, the sexual self, the social self, the vocational self, the moral self, the self as a learner and self in the organisation. These curriculum purposes are similar to Pring's, leading to the conclusion that pupils need to become protagonists in this complex system of learning, and that assessment must be supported by the pupils themselves.

Highlighting areas where formative assessment might be improved, Black and Wiliam (1998a) suggest that the development of pupils' capacity for self-assessment is crucial. They cite evidence that this critical faculty can be developed in classrooms. Interactions between teachers and students are essential in understanding both the learning intended and the criteria by which their work will be judged. Black and Wiliam (1998b: 11) argue that 'opportunities for pupils to express their understanding should be designed into any piece of teaching, for this will initiate the interaction whereby formative assessment aids learning'. Brooks and Brooks (1999: 126-127) also highlight the connection between formative assessment and the development of critical thinking. Promoting the constructivist classroom, they suggest that schools need to become:

settings in which students are encouraged to develop hypotheses to test out their own and others' ideas, to make connections among "content areas", to explore issues and problems of personal relevance ... to work cooperatively with peers and adults in the pursuit of understanding, and to form the disposition to be life-long learners.

Formative assessment could therefore be a valuable tool in facilitating a culture enabling deep learning and providing the means by which a wide range of skills and competences might be assessed. The ultimate aim is pupil empowerment with students asking questions to elicit the answers they need, assessing their progress and setting their own learning goals.

Later work by Black and Wiliam (2006a: 100) suggests that formative assessment has the capacity to 'catalyse more radical change'. They present (2006a: 85-91) four components in an 'activity system framework' which, they argue, combine and interact to bring about change. These four components are: teachers, learners and the subject discipline; the teacher's role and the regulation of learning; feedback and student-teacher interaction; and the student's role in learning. They suggest that teachers' efforts to improve interaction with students are likely to result in changing teachers and student roles. This new relationship will, in turn, alter perceptions of the subject and lead to different opportunities for learning.

Popham (2008) agrees that formative assessment can be transformative, for effective formative assessment transforms the classroom climate as teachers adjust how they teach and students change how they learn. He suggests (2008) that formative assessment alters classroom practice in three ways: learning expectations, responsibility for learning, and the role of classroom assessment. In an 'assessment-informed classroom climate', Popham (2008: 94) argues, teachers are focused on helping students to learn 'and students share this pre-occupation' (2008: 95). Classroom ethos is likely to be collaborative rather than competitive as students see themselves as 'instructional partners who have significant responsibility for making sure learning takes place' (2008: 96).

Despite these persuasive arguments, other demands on teachers can undermine efforts to achieve radical change. Even in the context of Scotland's 'distinctive ideology', Daugherty and Ecclestone (2006: 11) report that the concerns teachers raised in AifL were similar to those aired by staff working with researchers from King's College, London in



the KMOFAP<sup>39</sup> project who, according to Stobart (2008: 116), work within one of the ‘most draconian systems in the world’. Referring to the outcome of the Scottish pilot, Black and Wiliam suggest (2006b: 23) that:

a need to meet the demands of external accountability was ... a cause of concern, with teachers reporting tension between the requirements of summative assessment and the implementation of new formative practices.

Recognising the potential for generating robust information for self-evaluation and improvement in schools, AifL sought to build teachers’ confidence and achieve consistent summative judgments. Despite this intention, the evaluation of the status of assessment of learning in Scotland in 2006 (George Street Research, 2007) confirmed that this was a neglected strand of work, and that there was a lack of understanding of the purpose of National Assessments and the national monitoring system (SSA). The next section explores the formative-summative tension, while section 2.3.3 considers the impact of accountability procedures.

### 2.3.2 Formative and summative tensions

Black and Wiliam’s (2006b) reflections on the evaluation of the Scottish formative assessment project, referred to above, parallel the concerns aired six years previously (Hayward et al, 2000) and which prompted the AifL programme. They indicate that the demands of accountability can inhibit efforts to improve formative assessment.

Harlen (2006) classifies four uses of assessment information: formative, diagnostic, summative and evaluative and explains that formative subsumes the diagnostic function through the emphasis on helping learners to bridge the gap between present performance and desired goals (Sadler 1989, Black and Wiliam, 1998b) and enabling them to identify strengths and what they need to do to improve. Tensions, however, arise with summative assessment which generally forms the basis for reporting to parents on pupils’ learning but is also used for evaluative purposes, informing accounts to government and local politicians on the quality of educational provision.

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<sup>39</sup> Acronym for Kings Medway Formative Assessment Project.

Formative and summative assessment terminology is often used interchangeably with assessment for learning and assessment for accountability respectively but the terms ‘formative’ and ‘summative’ will be used here in order to avoid confusion although Newton (2007) argues that no assessment is inherently formative or summative, but rather defined by the use to which assessment information is put. In this section, the focus will be on Harlen’s (2006) distinction between formative and summative classroom assessment and issues relating to evaluation and monitoring will be addressed in section 2.3.3.

Harlen (2006) argues the main difference between formative and summative is that summative assessment is concerned with what has been learned, while formative assessment provides feedback focused on what is still to be accomplished. She describes feedback as passing from teacher to pupil, or from pupil to pupil, on what has been learned and what needs to be done next but teachers also receive feedback from their pupils’ responses indicating what needs to be planned into future lessons to provide the support and challenge the learner needs. Crucially, formative feedback must be specific to the task and to the individual, based on expectations agreed between teacher and individual students (Harlen, 2006).

Harlen (2006: 106) suggests summative assessment may be gathered either from students’ involvement in ‘regular activities or from special assessments or tests’ but, in either case, teachers need to interpret evidence against predetermined criteria to decide the extent of learning which has taken place. In contrast to formative feedback, summative assessment must refer to criteria which apply to all students, to enable reporting on the basis of expectations for the entire group. Although she acknowledges that summative assessments can provide feedback to individuals, ‘it is not in the same immediate way as in the assessment for learning cycle’ (Harlen, 2006: 106).

In distinguishing between formative and summative assessment, Harlen (2006) ponders whether the distinction she makes is so clear in classrooms, and considers why they need be kept separate. Her dilemma is similar to Black and Wiliam’s (2006b) initial assumption that summative and formative assessments are so different in purpose they should be kept apart in the classroom context. With hindsight, they argue (2006b: 16):

... summative tests should be, and should be seen to be, a positive part of the learning process. If they could be actively involved in the test process, students might see that they can be beneficiaries rather than victims of testing, because tests can help them improve their learning.

In considering the role of teachers in assessment of learning, the Assessment Reform Group (ARG, 2005: 1) argues for both formative and summative assessment in the classroom. The group explains that increased teacher assessment is required because systems reliant on testing are not necessarily valid. Paper and pencil tests cannot assess skills and competences and, if assessment is to cover all the learning outcomes considered essential for life and work 'in our shrinking world' (2005: 8), it needs to determine both that pupils have understood the learning process, and that they have learned with understanding (Stobart, 2006). For these reasons, teachers need to be able to gather information from both formative and summative assessments.

Harlen (2006) cites Maxwell's experience (2004) of summative evidence used formatively but reflects that, in Queensland, staff have access to common criteria which can be used in discussion with students. She argues that teachers need both criteria and an understanding of progression in learning with which to interrogate the criteria (Harlen, 2006: 107).

The use of formative assessment for summative purposes is equally problematical for, says Harlen, evidence from ongoing classroom activities is context-dependent and results are often 'contradictory' (2006: 109). She remains convinced (2006: 108) that summative and formative assessment must be planned separately, as long as teachers are subject to 'pressures exerted by current external testing and assessment requirements' although she concedes that evidence can fit both purposes, 'providing a distinction is made between the *evidence* itself and the teacher's *interpretation of the evidence*<sup>40</sup>' which provides the summative assessment. Once again, Harlen argues, (2006) teachers need to have an understanding of developmental progression in order to be able to summarise learning from the evidence available. She concludes teachers have a great deal to learn about assessment (2006: 113).

Referring favourably to the sample Survey of Achievement (SSA), Harlen (2007) draws on the Scottish context as illustration of how formative and summative assessment can work in harmony, and suggests how all staff, in school, in LAs or working nationally, can play their part in ensuring assessment, formative or summative, is used to improve learning.

The suggestions she offers are included by ARG (2005) as conditions for sound assessment to be observed by teachers, by school managers, by inspectors and advisers, by providers

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<sup>40</sup> Emphasis assigned in the original text.

of professional development, and by those involved in national and local policy. It is the pre-requisites for inspectors and advisers supporting national and local policy (ARG 2005, Harlen 2007) which seem most relevant to this study. Their role is to:

- review school policies and practices to ensure assessment is being used formatively and not overshadowed by summative tasks and tests;
- encourage a range of evidence of pupils' achievements;
- ensure that continuing professional development in assessment is available for those who require it;
- review the thoroughness of moderation and other procedures for quality assurance (ARG, 2005: 13-14).

In reality, this means that, in order to ensure that summative assessment remains in appropriate balance with assessment which supports learning, any evaluation of school effectiveness should include a review of assessment policies and practice to ensure that summative judgments are based on a range of evidence and moderated to ensure the standard has been understood and applied consistently. Inspectors and advisers also have responsibility for ensuring summative assessment is not carried out at the expense of ongoing formative assessment.

A later publication (Gardner et al, 2008: 20-23) details standards for effective assessment practice as they apply to classteachers, school managers, inspectors and advisers and those involved in formulating national policy. The responsibilities for officers listed above are supplemented by those listed below:

- the use of assessment to support learning is included as a key factor in evaluating the effectiveness of schools;
- schools are encouraged to develop their formative use of assessment;
- schools are helped to develop action plans based on self-evaluation across a range of indicators beyond students' levels of achievement;
- advice on school assessment policies takes account of what is known about the reliability and validity of different assessment methods;
- schools are helped to use assessment results to identify areas for improvement of learning opportunities.

Together these establish a benchmark for local authority practice to ensure that assessment supporting learning is not subordinate to procedures for evaluating the quality of provision

in schools. The points are made clearly, shifting the focus of school evaluation from abstract data to procedures to enhance learning and teaching, ensuring assessments are valid and reliable and improvement plans are informed by self-evaluation based on a range of evidence, not merely attainment results. This detail provides the basis for interpreting the interview responses in chapters 5 and 6.

### 2.3.3 Evaluation for improvement and intelligent accountability

For more than a decade, schools in Scotland have been encouraged to self-evaluate their practice using HMIE quality indicators (HMIE, 1996). However, as explained in chapter 1, both the review of assessment (SOEID, 1999) and the report on the consultation (Hayward et al, 2000) found that assessment information intended to improve learning was being used to monitor and evaluate school performance. Central government (SEED, 2000) has also stipulated that LAs must demonstrate continuing improvement in its schools, and this renewed emphasis on accountability may have created the difficulty Black and Wiliam (2006) suggest Scottish teachers experienced when reviewing their formative assessment practice.

Hopkins et al (1997) outline three distinctive approaches to evaluation and their links with school improvement, classifying each according to its perceived purpose: evaluation of school improvement; evaluation for school improvement; and evaluation as school improvement. Paralleling but pre-dating the three aspects of assessment addressed by an AifL school<sup>41</sup>, they describe (1997: 160) the focus of improvement as shifting over time from ‘curriculum development to the strength in the school organisation to the teaching/learning process, and finally to a developmental approach to evaluation’. From initial evaluation of provision with a focus on outcomes, the trend - say the authors - is moving toward evaluation for improvement where the evaluation process facilitates improvement planning. Increasingly, they argue (1997: 169) teachers need to become ‘partners in the evaluation process instead of objects of evaluation’ for, when evaluation is used to develop pedagogy, it becomes an integral part of improvement and, just as assessment *as* learning requires pupils’ active involvement in the learning process, Hopkins et al (1997: 169) suggest that evaluation *as* school improvement will help to build ‘a continuously developing culture’ in schools.

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<sup>41</sup> See the AifL triangle diagram included as Appendix 2(a) on page 212.

Studies conducted by Hopkins et al (1997: 185) found that evaluations such as those undertaken by Ofsted can impact on improvement but only because of the legislative framework surrounding the inspection and, even in this high stakes context, the school's ability to respond to the findings is 'a function of its internal conditions for school improvement' (1997: 186). The authors argue that evaluation alone does not make the difference; rather, it is the link between a 'practical focus for development [and] simultaneous work on the internal conditions within the school' (Hopkins et al, 1997: 186); if internal conditions do not contribute to cultural change, then external evaluation is pointless. These findings are echoed in more recent literature advocating intelligent accountability (O'Neill 2002, Stobart 2006).

Stobart (2006: 116) offers a balanced case for accountability arguing that it enables judgments about the effectiveness or otherwise of particular activities. His case for accountability is founded on the need for all public services to gain and maintain public confidence. He concedes that accountability testing has increased expectations of improvement, challenging fixed mindsets (Dweck, 2000) but he takes issue with targets based on unrealistic aspirations rather than empirical evidence and acknowledges that, while accountability may help determine priorities for improvement, it may also disadvantage aspects not subject to testing.

Like others (ARG 2005, Harlen 2007), Stobart (2006) highlights a number of drawbacks to using certain information for accountability. If schools are judged on their pupils' results, testing becomes 'high stakes'. In turn, teaching time is likely to be devoted to practising tests to ensure good results, and the focus shifts to 'test-taking technique rather than effective learning' (Stobart, 2006: 122). Stobart illustrates (2006: 128) how teachers learn to 'play the system' but recognises policymakers often accept this as an inevitable consequence and the issue remains unresolved because policymakers are 'trapped by their own logic' (2006: 130) and, whilst the reliability of test results might be called into question, close investigation is unlikely for fear of undermining public confidence in the education system.

Most importantly, while the aim of accountability testing is to increase confidence, it often results in distrust, with teachers engaging in 'defensive professional practices' (2006: 135). To counteract such practices, Stobart (2006: 134) argues against 'build[ing] punitive accountability systems on the fragile base of test scores' and advocates more sophisticated

measures, including self-evaluation, to gauge whether or not educational provision is effective. Stobart calls this 'intelligent accountability' (2006: 134).

Interest in 'intelligent accountability' was first prompted by O'Neill (2002). Her argument is that professionals and institutions should inspire their stakeholders' trust, because stakeholders (such as learners and their parents) need to rely on them to act in their interests. In reality, she suggests, professionals often feel more accountable to regulators and auditors, but the introduction of financial audit and monitoring practices, using performance indicators to measure the quality of practice and create league tables, can undermine rather than enhance provision, because professional purposes and aims are not easily translated into performance indicators and measurable, externally-set targets. This kind of accountability leaves limited freedom for teachers and schools to decide their own goals and, she argues, may act as perverse incentives with the result that professionals strive to improve their ratings rather than students' learning.

O'Neill (2002) concludes that 'intelligent accountability' in educational settings requires trust in professionals and self-evaluation, in order to support the purposes of schooling and encourage the learning of all pupils. For Stobart (2006) 'intelligent accountability' comes from the way data is analysed for accountability purposes. He acknowledges that some accountability procedures set out with the best of intentions but, in effect, undermine what they seek to improve. For him (2006: 142), intelligent accountability involves a move away from 'narrow targets' to more sustainable change based on empirical evidence. This includes continuous evaluation of the evaluation system itself, monitoring its effect on learning and teaching and being alert to unintended consequences.

He regards (2006: 142) intelligent accountability as a sustained cycle of planning, implementing and evaluating with 'intelligent accountability emphasising understanding of why something is not working, and focused less on panic-driven change'. Despite the strength of his argument, contributions to an online local authority forum (now no longer in use) indicated the pressure on LA staff in Scotland to prioritise attainment data over self-evaluation. Typical contributions insisted collection of 5-14 assessment data would continue, although this was no longer required by central government. Others planned to replace National Testing with standardised tests. The comments reveal a preoccupation with system reliability at the expense of validity. There was no concern with data limitation or the possible impact of benchmarking on learners and learning. This lack of concern is also apparent in the analysis of interviews in chapter 6.

In describing what is wrong with assessment in the UK, Wiliam (2001: online) argues that, unless used with care, ‘tests, originally meant simply as a sample of the curriculum, come to be the whole curriculum’. He further suggests (2001: online) that undue emphasis has been placed on tests and undeserved value placed on the information gathered in this way for ‘tests test only what a test tests’.

The practice of developing policy targets based on performance indicators, he argues, only serves to raise the stakes of assessment and create vulnerabilities. This results in practice to demonstrate improvement against the quality indicators, despite there being no evidence of achieving improvements in quality of provision.

It is possible to recognise similarities between the Scottish Survey of Achievement, one of the manifestations of ‘tough, intelligent accountabilities’ in Scotland, and Wiliam’s proposals (2001). Intended to replace the 5-14 survey as a means of monitoring national standards in education, the survey was designed to ‘disentangle the evaluation of ...school[s] from the scores that a student gets’ (Wiliam, 2001: online) by ending the annual national uplift of 5-14 test results and removing the perceived pressure on teachers to teach to the test. Wiliam (2001: online) argues that the only way to avoid narrowing the curriculum is to discourage teachers teaching to the test or find ways of ensuring they ‘teach the whole curriculum to every student’. In Scotland, a large item bank was produced each year to enable the SSA to cover the entire syllabus for a specified area of the curriculum. Items were allocated at random to booklets and, to minimise the possibility of pupils being taught to the test, pupils worked through different booklets.

Wiliam (2001) also argues for replacing externally-produced tests with teachers’ moderated judgments and suggests this would facilitate curriculum coverage and enhance validity and reliability. In addition, the rigour of moderation would help establish a shared standard and guard against what Wiliam calls (2001: online) ‘grade drift’. Importantly, the moderation exercise itself would provide opportunity for high quality CPD.

SSA arrangements included opportunities for teacher CPD through participation as field officers and national moderators. Double marking during the national moderation exercise was also intended to allow comparison of teachers’ judgments of submitted work with the judgments of trained moderators.



The Scottish government's interpretation of 'tough, intelligent accountabilities' (SEED, 2004c: 20) therefore included increased emphasis on arrangements for local moderation and for the sample survey. It did not include Wiliam's (2001) more radical proposal that 'schools that taught only half the curriculum, or concentrated their resources on only the most able students, would be shown up as providing a limited education'. In line with AifL and the government's agenda for action, the SSA remained a means of monitoring the system as a whole, and of providing a national benchmark for schools and LAs to promote and support local moderation.

I am conscious, however, that these high ideals were not borne out in practice. The anonymous nature of the information was intended to protect individual schools but the lack of feedback to schools about pupils' attainment, and to LAs about schools' performance, attracted criticism. This kind of reaction reinforces the extent of change required.

## 2.4 Change policy intention

The previous section explored literature related to the first of AifL's aims: ensuring alignment of assessment to support and motivate learners and assessment for accountability. The second aim was to sustain change beyond the life of the development programme and without central support. This required not only the involvement of a range of stakeholders, but also changing established habits and mindsets.

The influences on the early development of the AifL programme (Black and Wiliam, 1998a) were acknowledged in section 2.3. They not only provided a foundation for the formative assessment project, but also influenced an approach to change which supported teachers as learners. Literature related to change management included Fullan (1999) and Senge and Scharmer (2001) and AifL development through collaborative action research confirmed the direction of travel.

The change intention acknowledged issues associated with change (for example, Fullan 1991, Senge and Scharmer 2001, Seel 2005). On organisational change in general, Senge and Scharmer (2001) suggest these difficulties should not be underestimated and, referring specifically to changing assessment practice, Gardner et al (2008: 1) confirms this for,

despite assessment for learning having ‘a persuasive rationale for change ... changes in assessment practices have been notoriously difficult to sustain’.

For Senge and Scharmer (2001: 205), the problem lies in outmoded structures and practice: ‘Industrial Age institutions face unprecedented challenges to adapt and evolve, and we seriously question the adequacy of present approaches to the task’.

Seel (2005: online) argues that conventional approaches generally ask:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to go?
- Where are the gaps?
- What is our plan for action?

This linear approach assumes a stable starting point and is based on the implicit belief that responding to these questions will lead to change, either through altered structures or by applying incentives. For Seel (2005: online) ‘culture isn’t static’ but ‘the result of daily conversation and negotiations’ around values and beliefs. Lasting change, he argues, requires that ‘the paradigm at the heart of a culture is addressed’. However paradigms, he claims, ‘are self-sustaining, because [they] affect the way people perceive their world and encourage particular behaviours’. Therefore, instead of external motivation for change, Seel argues for helping organisations to prepare for change by moving them to ‘a state of self-organised criticality’ (Seel, 2005, online). These views are similar to those expressed by Cullingford (1997).

Fullan (1991) argues change is difficult because planners often make faulty assumptions and organisations seldom behave in logical, predictable ways towards rational, intended solutions. Most importantly, Fullan acknowledges individuals need to understand change, recognise their role in the process, influence what they can and, where they have limited control, minimise disruption. He argues that change managers need to be aware of different perceptions as well as the factors inhibiting change.

On managing change in assessment, Gardner et al (2008) explore why pilot projects do not transfer more widely and lead to sustainable change. They believe changes to assessment practice have been necessitated by ‘new learning’ (2008: 4), the development of skills considered important for 21<sup>st</sup> century life and work (SEED 2004a, QCA 2007, LTS, 2009).

Crucially, Gardner et al (2008: 3) also argue that change is not linear, and that sustainability involves surmounting ‘three fundamental obstacles:

- the extent of reflection on practice;
- resistance to change;
- under-design of educational change.’

Like Black and Wiliam (2006b), Gardner et al (2008: 3) acknowledge that change is likely to be context-dependent, and that individuals must come to their own understanding of theory translated into practice (2008: 5). They advocate professional learning through action research where individuals have ‘agency’ (ownership) for change (2008: 7-8) in an iterative process. For Gardner et al (2008), the ultimate purpose of any educational innovation is improvement in pupils’ learning and, as improvements through change programmes are unlikely in the short-term, planners must plan for sustainability.

Senge and Scharmer (2001) argue that isolation and insularity inhibit sustainable change. They criticise (2001: 199) ‘the self-referential, self-reinforcing activities in each of the three professional worlds of academia, consulting and managerial practice’ and say that, whilst each group can make a unique contribution to educational reform, it also ‘creates its own island of activity’ so links between ‘research, capacity building and practice’ remain tenuous.

#### 2.4.1 Obstacles to change in education

One identified obstacle is teachers’ capacity for change. Illich (1973) argues that institutionalisation undermines confidence and problem-solving capacity, and encourages dependencies which exacerbate difficulties and McNiff (1998: xiv) argues that the traditional view of academics as experts has encouraged teachers ‘systematically and deliberately, to deskill themselves’. However, Black and Wiliam (2006b) suggest that teachers are better placed to answer practical questions than their academic collaborators.

Yet, in Fullan’s (2003a) account of a study of change, one group of teachers worked to improve their practice while a second merely ‘interacted around their traditional teaching practices’. Echoing Seel’s description of the self-sustaining paradigm in section 2.4, Fullan states that the latter group ‘simply reinforced those things that weren’t working’

(2003a: 55). This suggests that teachers will only solve contextualised problems if they reflect on their existing practice as part of their commitment to change.

While change is currently linked to improvement and supported by professional development, combining the terms ‘professional’ and ‘development’ is contentious say Patrick et al (2003). They argue that the ambiguity impacts on the nature of professional development, and ultimately on experiences for pupils, for the focus may be simply ‘the acquisition of knowledge or a discrete set of skills, which seem to address the latest policy priority’ (2003: 250). Gardner et al (2008: 7-10) agree that professional development in large scale reforms is often based on transmission and instruction, rather than transformation.

Fraser et al (2007) also question the term ‘professional development’, suggesting that it may apply to individuals or to the profession collectively. It may promote professional learning or be designed to improve standards in schools. Patrick et al (2003: 239) query whether LA CPD is intended ‘to enhance professional autonomy and practice or ... to improve performativity’ for provision can be ‘technicist in its emphasis’ (2003: 249) and ‘often reinforces the notion of the teacher as a deliverer of measurable standards’ (2003: 241). Their concern is that competing managerial and developmental approaches can create tensions between professional autonomy and improved performativity (2003: 239). They contrast excellence, which characterises all professional roles, with effectiveness, currently defined in terms of performativity (managing individuals to maximise their output). This view is shared by Fraser et al (2007) who cite other studies (Hargreaves 1994, Bolam 2000) where the purpose of professional development provided by LAs is related to school improvement.

Fraser et al (2007: 155) claim there are ‘strong arguments in favour of a much broader, intrinsic and ethical purpose for teachers’ professional learning’ (2007: 156), an aspect explored by Schön (1983) through his models for professional development: the ‘technical rationalist’ approach and ‘the reflective practitioner’. Essentially, the former is concerned with training, while the latter requires the active involvement of the practitioner in a virtuous circle of reflection and action.

Ball (1999: online) argues that the neo-liberal legacy of competition and performativity leads schools to ‘manage and manipulate their performance’ rather than seek to underpin their practice with ‘philosophical principles like social justice and equity’. He warns of the

dangers of expecting teachers to deliver on competition and targets set, which recasts them as ‘technician[s] rather than professionals capable of critical judgment and reflection’.

Patrick et al (2003: 237) believe teachers’ professional development must take account of both affective and cognitive domains, acknowledging ‘the social processes of change within society and schools’ and that it should ‘result in improvement at the level of classroom and, therefore, at the level of the individual learner’ (2003: 245). This, they argue, is unlikely to be achieved through short courses, led by visiting experts or transmissive approaches focused on acquisition of a repertoire of strategies (2003: 247).

Patrick et al (2003: 247) argue that ‘professional learning should have a higher aim than changing practice’ and advocate a balance between promoting school improvement and empowering individuals, whilst James and Pedder (2006) criticise teacher learning practices whose sole purpose is the building of social capital and Revell (2005: 71) argues for engagement befitting teachers’ professional status. Without this:

Deprived of a real understanding of both pedagogy and policy [teachers] are simply parroting the latest curriculum directives. Teachers in name, technicians in reality, emasculated servants of government policy.

James and Pedder (2006: 30) recognise that links between research and insights gained from classroom and school practice offer the ‘best chance of furthering understanding of effective learning, its nature, the teaching practices that promote it and the professional learning and institutional conditions that help teachers to adopt new practices’.

Empirical evidence of the potential of action research for professional learning is provided by Black and Wiliam (2002, 2003 and 2006b), by the evaluation of AifL Project 1 (Hallam et al, 2004), the review of Project 1 (Hayward et al, 2004) and the exploration of AifL success (Hayward et al, 2005). These form a background to discussion on the difference between professional development and professional learning.

#### 2.4.2 Lessons from change studies in assessment

Building on their review of research on formative assessment (Black and Wiliam 1998a, Black and Wiliam 1998b) and their work with teachers in the KMOFAP<sup>39</sup> project (Black et al 2002, Black et al 2003), Black and Wiliam (2006b) advocate an approach to

professional development which involves teachers exploring research findings within their own context. They appreciate that merely highlighting evidence of the ‘significant and substantial learning gains’ to be made through formative assessment will not realise the impact in classrooms, partly because of the lack of practical detail in research reports, but also:

More significantly, successful implementation of methods of this kind is heavily dependent on the social and educational cultures of the context of their development, so that they cannot be merely ‘replicated’ in a different context (2006b: 11).

In KMOFAP, ‘the teachers had to work out the answers in their classrooms to many of the practical questions which the research evidence ... could not answer’ (Black and Wiliam, 2006b: 20). These authors (2006b: 20) explain that the teachers were involved in knowledge generation of a ‘different kind’ for, unlike conventional instruction-based professional development, there was ‘no structured scheme’ to work through. They describe teachers’ initial discomfort followed by gradual understanding of how to apply research findings as more than ‘replication’, for insights were context-dependent. For Black and Wiliam (2006b: 25), KMOFAP ‘helped put classroom flesh on the conceptual bones of the idea of assessment for learning’.

They argue that further innovation must also take account of individuals’ circumstances, ‘bearing in mind that any such innovation will start where our work finished and not from where it started’ (Black and Wiliam, 2006b: 21). This differs from the ‘cascade model’ as a typical approach (Gardner et al, 2008: 6), where key individuals are trained to train others in ‘the matters to be disseminated’. While economically efficient, this model can be less effective than pilots which preceded it, as it allows limited opportunity for active involvement in developing new practices.

AifL’s Project1: Support for Professional Practice in Formative Assessment conscientiously avoided the ‘cascade model’ critiqued by Gardner et al (2008: 6). Rather, it sought to build on the understandings developed through the KMOFAP project by supporting a group of 66 Scottish teachers from 32 LAs and one school in the independent sector, to explore aspects of their assessment practice. Mentored by researchers from King’s College London and teachers from KMOFAP, the Scottish teachers continued the investigative approach begun in Oxford and Medway. This development activity led, in turn, to the second phase of AifL, where the enquiry model continued on the

recommendations of the independent evaluation team (Hallam et al, 2004). It also involved professional dialogue and reflection, but through wider communities of enquiry supported by LAs as well as the central team.

In their interpretive study of Project 1, Hayward et al (2004: 18) cite Black's (2001) description of formative assessment as an alternative to the dream to drive up standards. They describe the project as seeking to enhance achievement through collaboration involving the different worlds of research, policy and practice and, while they report that AifL embraced such collaboration, they also highlight the fragility of the approach in a culture that emphasises assessment for measurement. This reflects the findings of Black and Wiliam (2006b: 22) who describe teachers' stress at having to make 'fundamental change in ... pedagogy' in the context of external accountability. Like Black and Wiliam (2006b), Hayward et al (2004) argue that lasting pedagogic change requires increasing numbers of teachers to consider their assessment practice and build on whatever AifL achieved. They believe political will and courage is needed to sustain change although, citing Eisner (1996), they argue for teachers' ownership of the reform.

Gardner et al (2008: 3) argue 'education systems, whether local or national, must fully commit to all of the necessary ingredients for sustainable development' and that planning must take account of the ways in which 'warrant,' 'agency' and 'professional learning' can shape dissemination and impact. Like Hayward et al (2005), Gardner et al (2008) note that teachers are more likely to engage when they see evidence of effectiveness. Where this is not apparent, especially beyond the pilot phase, innovation is less likely to succeed. Similarly, 'teachers "being told" about ... an initiative without experiencing the participation ... are not likely to adopt the changes with the same commitment' (2008: 5). To make sense of what they are engaged in doing, participants need opportunities for dialogue with others 'until new ideas and processes become internalized' (2008: 7); without such opportunities, strategies become separated from the principles which underpin them.

In pursuing a model for changing assessment practice, Gardner et al (2008: 8) identify the importance of 'agency', of personal commitment to improvement (2008: 9), and of 'professional learning', demonstrated when teachers adapt ways of working to suit their needs rather than simply adopting others' techniques. This qualitative difference between professional development and professional learning is considered in the next section.

### 2.4.3 Educare or educere

For Craft (1948), ‘education’ has two possible derivations: *educare*, to train or to mould; and *educere*, to lead out. This etymological distinction symbolises two different approaches to professional development: one concerning the acquisition of technical knowledge and skills; the other valuing questioning, thinking and creativity.

Fraser et al (2007: 157) suggest the former concerns ‘processes that result in specific changes in the professional knowledge, skills attitudes, beliefs or actions of teachers’, while the latter anticipates ‘broader changes that may take place over time resulting in qualitative shifts in aspects of teachers’ professionalism’. They argue teachers’ learning should be *embedded*<sup>42</sup> in classroom practice and reflection, *extended*<sup>42</sup> through consulting sources of knowledge, *expanded*<sup>42</sup> through collaborative activity and *deepened*<sup>42</sup> through talking about learning and valuing it.

Rejecting behaviourist approaches to teachers’ professional development, James and Pedder (2006: 32) also indicate professional development is about learning, not training, and argue that teacher learning is not about issuing teachers ‘with ring-binders containing information and advice, showing examples of “best practice”, and reinforcing the messages through inspection’ (2006: 29). Fullan (2003a) suggests professional development should not involve formal training sessions, but collaborative exploration of the theories underpinning change, sharing, reflecting and gradually reforming practice. James and Pedder (2006: 29) call this ‘learning as participation’, alongside ‘learning as acquisition ... because teachers need to practise new roles’.

James and Pedder highlight other high-profile national initiatives which have focused on subject knowledge and pedagogical practice without addressing the personal and social aspects important in transformative professional learning. Fraser et al (2007: 159) also recognise that this kind of omission can be particularly significant in areas requiring exploration of ‘beliefs, values and attitudes’. Particularly relevant to this study is their description of the experience for ‘teachers in the AiFL programme, [where] transformative learning was facilitated when formal, planned learning opportunities were augmented by informal, incidental learning opportunities’ (2007: 165).

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<sup>42</sup> My emphasis.



James and Pedder (2006: 29) argue that, if change means learning, the process for teachers as learners is similar to that for pupils: 'just as such transformation requires new dimensions of student learning, so it is essential for teachers to learn if they are to promote and support change in classroom assessment roles and practices'. Concerning assessment for learning, they advise that teachers need to be:

prepared and committed to engage in the risky business of problematising their own practice, seeking evidence in order to judge where change is needed, and then to act on their decisions, they are thus engaging in assessment for learning with respect to their own professional learning (2006: 4).

Echoing Black and Wiliam (2006a) and Popham (2008) whose definitions of formative assessment were discussed in section 2.3.1, James and Pedder (2006: 28) regard assessment for learning as effective only when teachers as well as students 'change the way they think about their classroom roles and their norms of behaviour'.

Patrick et al (2003: 250) issue a reminder that the ultimate purpose of professional learning is improved pupil learning; ignoring this may result in professional development which is individualised, 'competitive, careerist and narrow'. James and Pedder (2006: 39) agree that:

if promoting learning autonomy [among students] is the ultimate goal ... then more emphasis needs to be placed on providing opportunity and encouragement to teachers to engage with and use research relevant to their classroom interests'.

Their solution lies in staff being 'encouraged by a supportive culture for continuous professional learning that gives teachers permission and opportunity to develop critically reflective modes of participation, for themselves and for their students' (2006: 30).

While James and Pedder (2006: 4) refer to professional learning as 'a risky business' and call for 'a supportive culture' (2006: 30), Hargreaves (2003) suggests teachers' collective confidence may have been undermined by the 1990s' accountability agenda.

Transformational change may therefore require greater trust between school staff and LA managers, and a climate where teachers can take risks without fear of criticism. In the context of AifL, Hayward et al (2004: 400) argue that transformational learning is not simply about acquiring new knowledge and skills. They assert it is also about building communities of practice, based on shared values and taking ownership of the change process, which 'rests on a basic pattern of interdependency, the continuing cycle linking

research, capacity-building and practice'. Professional development which involves instruction, or focused on practical techniques and ready answers may fail to recognise teachers as learners and inhibit deep understanding.

Concerning professional development promoting assessment for learning, James and Pedder (2006: 28-29) argue:

effective assessment for learning involves radical transformation in classroom teaching through the development of two key aspects ... new understandings and perspectives need to be developed among teachers and students about each other and, therefore, about the nature of teaching and of learning, [and] new attitudes to and practices of learning and teaching ... need to be acquired and implemented.

For them professional development that anticipates changed practice requires teachers to rethink their role: 'rational-empirical or power coercive strategies will not do ... but alternative normative re-educative approaches require opportunities to try out and evaluate new ways of thinking and practising' (James and Pedder, 2006: 29). Fraser et al (2007: 160) agree that the 'empirical-rational' model involves knowledge-transfer, while the 'normative re-educative' encourages professional growth and increased autonomy.

Kennedy's (2005) analysis places professional development on the transmissive - transitional - transformative continuum and argues that transmissive models support only replication and compliance while transformative models, as advocated by Gardner et al (2008), are deemed capable of supporting considerable autonomy for individuals and the wider profession. This is explored further in the next section.

#### 2.4.4 Professional enquiry and sustainable change

The previous section suggested that sustainable change is more likely where staff review their practice in the light of relevant research and engage in mutual encouragement to reflect and evaluate practice. This section explores collaborative enquiry as an opportunity for professional learning.

In outlining the principles and practice of action research, McNiff (1988: ix) argues it is most likely to lead to changed practice. For Reeves (2003), professional learning results from a collaborative culture where teachers can articulate and try out thinking on their

peers. This echoes Spillane's (1999) study investigating the role of networking in efforts to change practice. He found that the teachers who successfully changed their practice had sought opportunities to maintain a discourse with colleagues in school and the wider educational community. His findings reflect learning as a social activity and just as students learn effectively when operating within a zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), so teachers as learners benefit from trialling and professional discussion which provides scaffolded support within their 'zones of enactment' (Spillane, 1999 143-175).

Westwell (2006: 4) describes 'the changing unit of enquiry', a development from 'the lone researcher' to 'the research engaged school' and, in its most highly-developed state, 'the enquiring school network'. For Katz and Earl (2006), progress comes when teachers and leaders move from enthusiasm for change to collective engagement in analysing their beliefs and practices and learning to do things they do not yet know how to do: an example of what Hopkins et al (1997: 164) term 'evaluation as learning', described in section 2.3.1. Primarily accountable to themselves, these are informal communities which decide the focus for enquiry and take account of members' diverse contexts and circumstances.

Wenger (2006: 4) warns, however, that 'the very characteristics that make communities of practice a good fit for stewarding knowledge - autonomy, practitioner-orientation, informality, crossing boundaries - are also characteristics that make them a challenge for hierarchical organisations' but Fullan (2003a: 58) argues there are bigger issues for organisations than simply protecting and maintaining hierarchies:

Sustainability is based on changes in the social and moral environment. Moral purpose is more than passionate teachers trying to make a difference in their classroom.

Fullan's (2003a) views reflect the argument about educational purpose outlined in the previous section. This is further reinforced by Katz and Earl (2006:3):

Successful educational change is driven by a pervasive commitment to improving education for all, treating people with respect, improving the environment for learning and changing the context for learning at all levels.

Like Katz and Earl (2006), Fullan (2003a) sees improvements in students' learning deriving from professionals working collaboratively to improve their practice. His message (2003: 55a) is unequivocal: 'It has become increasingly clear from various

sources that we need professional learning communities in which teachers and leaders work together and focus on student learning’.

Increasingly, the case for professional development appears to involve the kind of collaborative action research proposed by Senge and Scharmer (2001), Westwell (2006) and Katz and Earl (2006), capable of sustainability because it involves the kind of context-dependent learning which Black and Wiliam (2006b) and Gardner et al (2008) consider critical.

## 2.5 Policy and politics

As indicated in chapter 1 and also in earlier sections of this chapter, the policy intention was that AifL should address the findings of the HMI review of assessment (SOEID, 1999) and respond to concerns raised in the national consultation on assessment and reporting 3-14 (Hayward et al, 2000). Responses submitted as part of the National Debate in Education (SEED, 2003a), also led to the introduction of the AifL programme. Sections 2.3 and 2.4 of this chapter have outlined the research base for policy direction which determined the nature of AifL’s development activity. Discussion of policy must, however, include consideration of politics, and issues related to policy and politics are explored in this section.

Those closely involved in AifL have recounted that the deputy minister himself was responsible for including the formative assessment project, whether by chance or as illustration of wider political concerns matching the needs of Scottish education at the time. Whatever the reason for its inclusion, empirical evidence in ASG case studies has indicated this aspect of AifL was embraced by schools across the country. Other aspects have been less widely adopted.

In a chapter concerning assessment for learning in the UK policy environment, Daugherty and Ecclestone (2006: 150) suggest the policy-making process, policy texts and policy discourse can all contrive to render policy enactment tangential to intention. They offer several reasons and suggest it is useful to differentiate between the politics of education and education politics. They define the former as the processes and structures of government which help determine the policy agenda and how it will be promoted, while the latter are the powerful processes, tacitly acknowledged, ‘that operate inside official

government departments and agencies and through engagement with other interested groups'. They (2006:150) also credit Dale (1994) with arguing that education policy involves the overt processes which 'translate a political agenda into proposals to which institutions and practitioners respond'; in contrast, education politics exert covert influence over how a policy is formulated and presented.

Daugherty and Ecclestone (2006: 151) suggest examining how different parties interact both within and outwith formal policy processes. They also advocate discussion of how a 'particular notion... is symbolized and then enacted through policy conceptualization, formation and transmission'. Consideration of these issues will be resumed in the analysis of government documents in chapter 4 and of interviewees' responses in chapters 5 and 6.

Daugherty and Ecclestone (2006: 151) suggest that policy documents are often interpreted by different interest groups at different stages of policy development, resulting in 'official positions' being represented in secondary texts 'in subtle and contradictory ways'. They explain that secondary texts are then subjected to further interpretation as part of the implementation process and they cite (2006: 151) Ball's (1994) argument that texts should not be seen as:

clear or complete [but] the products of compromise at various stages (at points of initial influence, in the micropolitics of legislative formation, in the parliamentary process, and in the political and micropolitics of interest group articulation).

According to Daugherty and Ecclestone (2006) a range of publications is commonly produced in support of new policies, often augmented by materials published by interest groups, professional associations and commercial organisations. Again, they (2006: 152) refer to Ball (1994), describing the effect as '... cannibalised products of multiple (but circumscribed) influences and agendas' and add that policy texts can also demonstrate changing direction as 'key actors move on or are removed' (2006: 152). This issue is raised as part of the analysis in chapters 4, 5 and 6 and discussed further in chapter 7.

In their discussion of policy discourse 'as a parallel notion' to policy text, Daugherty and Ecclestone (2006: 152-153) argue that the voice of influential groups can affect how policies are viewed, lending legitimacy to some aspects of policy and implicitly neglecting others through 'silences'. Daugherty and Ecclestone (2006: 153) suggest these effects are a manifestation of power struggles taking place 'inside and outside policy' and that

discourse analysis can pinpoint ‘shifts in the locus of power ... in the struggle to maintain or change views’.

The factors described above can affect interpretation of policy at source, but other factors may affect policy translation. In one of three illustrations of policy enactment in the UK, Daugherty and Ecclestone (2006: 159) describe Scotland’s distinctive policies and the distinctive politics which operate there, a reminder of Hayward’s (2007) description of the uneasy relationship between central and local government where central government is the funding provider with increasingly limited control over LA expenditure (Scottish Government, 2007b), and local government has devolved responsibility for teachers and schools but is reliant on central government for funding. This balance of power may determine how policy is translated and enacted locally.

Different perspectives can produce multiple interpretations of a single policy intention, as can LAs’ demographic circumstances, reference to which is made in chapter 4. Other factors are significant when policy reaches schools. Referencing Ball (1988), Butroyd (1997: 57) says teachers have been blamed for ‘Britain’s economic decline’ since the early 1980s, a point Black (1997) also makes in describing assessment development in England as driven by government distrust of teachers. Black (1997) explains a mistaken belief that ministers could achieve improved standards in schools by applying rigorous external accountability measures, what Patrick et al (2003: 242) describe as ‘the negative impact of neo-liberal and reformatory discourses upon education professionals in the United Kingdom in the 1980s’. In Scotland, the requirement for LA accountability (SEED, 2000) referenced in chapters 1 and 2, is likely to involve increasing demands on schools which may influence reaction to policy and how it is enacted.

While Stobart (2008: 118) notes that politicians have ‘realised that assessment can be used as a powerful tool for reform in education’, Daugherty and Ecclestone (2006: 162) reflect on AifL and whether its potential is likely to be realised in Scottish schools:

With Scotland being the first of the four UK countries to identify assessment for learning as a policy priority and to move, from 2005, into whole system implementation, it will be interesting to see the extent to which that distinctive political ideology continues to colour the realisation of assessment for learning in the day-to-day practices of schools and classroom.

## Conclusion

This chapter has discussed literature highlighting the need for educational change in the light of technological advances and global competition. It acknowledges the view that individual and national wellbeing and economic prosperity may depend on preparing all young people for life and work in the 21st century, and indicates this is likely to have informed demand for curriculum and assessment reform in Scotland. It has also suggested a need for assessment which takes account of a wide range of competences and described concerns that validity can be compromised by narrow testing regimes serving the need for accountability rather than learning.

Arguments for intelligent accountability have been discussed as has professional learning which enables deeper understanding of the different functions of assessment and their impact on learning. If, as Harlen (2007) suggests, moderation processes are essential to enable clarification of criteria and agreed professional judgments, this is doubly useful in helping teachers to understand that assessment is not the precise or objective process it is imagined to be.

Given the aims of AifL, literature related to change has also been considered, including reference to obstacles to change. Emerging literature on transformational change suggests that everyone is a learner in a change situation and appropriate scaffolding is essential: teachers as learners require support, just as their pupils do. Literature also indicates that collaborative enquiry is more likely to promote the understanding that results in transformational change and suggests that traditional transmissive approaches to professional development afford limited opportunity for reflection and creativity (Gardner et al, 2008: 7). Some insights on the extent to which the aims of AifL were realised are set out in chapters 5 and 6 and discussed further in chapter 7.

The next chapter contains details of the design of the study and of how the research was conducted. Further reference is made to research literature as a means of justifying the approach and explaining the decisions taken.

### 3. Research design: enabling conversations

*'We only think through the medium of words'*

*(Abbe Etienne de Condillac, translated 2000)*

#### Introduction

A review of literature considered relevant to the subject of this study was presented in chapter 2. This included a description of the change demanded as a result of post-industrialisation and the knowledge economy. The impact of this on education in Scotland was considered and the policy direction explored through Scottish government literature promoting curriculum and assessment reform. In particular, the chapter outlined the perceived need for assessment reform and the plan to create a coherent system of assessment by aligning formative and summative assessment in classrooms, and reconciling the demands of assessment for accountability with assessment supporting learning. Because responsibility for schools and teachers in Scotland is devolved to LAs, the implications of change were considered and collaborative enquiry discussed as a model for professional learning likely to lead to sustainable change.

Consistent with socio-cultural theory, where individuals' learning is described as a product of their society and its cultural values and mores, the study was intended to explore how seven AifL co-ordinators enacted assessment policy as defined by AifL. It sought to explain the implications of local contextualisation because co-ordinators are not a homogenous group and the LAs in which they work are geographically, demographically and culturally diverse. Involvement had led me to consider whether these factors have a bearing on individuals' understanding and behaviour, so the central purpose of this study was to explore how different perceptions of policy affect local contextualisation.

In seeking to deepen my understanding, I set out to explore both how the policy messages were communicated and the perspectives of seven LA assessment co-ordinators. This chapter focuses on the design of the study, justifying decisions concerning:

- the research paradigm and epistemological standpoint;
- the research method and instrument selected;
- the study sample and selection process;
- information gathering, interrogation and analysis.



At each stage, I try to make explicit the thinking behind my decisions and I discuss the practical implications of my choice. In particular, I reflect on the distinctive features of my approach to qualitative research within this study, and I explain how I endeavoured to ensure validity and reliability.

According to Cohen et al (1994: 105), research aims, research focus, data gathering and analysis and presentation of findings are all determined by the prevailing paradigm:

Questions of method are secondary to questions of paradigm, the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways.

Consistent with this position, I first of all discuss the two main research paradigms and suggest which of these I consider most appropriate for this study.

### 3.1 Paradigm choice

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994: 107), a paradigm, is:

a set of *basic beliefs*<sup>43</sup> (or metaphysics) that deals with ultimates or first principles. It represents a *worldview*<sup>43</sup> that defines for its holder, the nature of the “world”, the individual’s place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts.

Thus, an individual’s understanding of the world and how it is made up has a bearing on the kind of information (s)he thinks is important, seeks out and uses to draw conclusions.

Cohen et al (2004: 5) summarise ‘two conceptions of social reality’ and the ontological and epistemological assumptions which underpin these views of reality. The assumptions relate to researchers’ opinion of the world and their perception of the nature of knowledge, as well as to their view of human beings and their relationship with their environment.

The positivist ‘worldview’ assumes there is one external reality, and that questions can be answered objectively (Guba and Lincoln 1994, Cohen et al 2004). For example, philosophers, such as Comte and Locke, believed the world existed separately from the

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<sup>43</sup> Emphasis assigned in the original text.

people in it, and new knowledge could only be gained by observation of that external reality from the standpoint of a disinterested bystander: 'all good intellects have repeated, since Bacon's time, that there can be no real knowledge but that which is based on observed facts' (Comte, 1853: online).

Although the positivist tradition has a long history, Cohen et al (2004) argue that it was the 19th century philosopher Augustus Comte who used the term 'positivism' to describe a philosophical position. Studies undertaken from a positivist standpoint are normative in orientation, tend to assume that 'human behaviour is [...] rule-governed' (Cohen et al, 2004: 22) and that the most appropriate methods are those used in the natural sciences. The data derived is quantifiable and the outcome factual. Importantly, positivism takes little account of social diversity where meanings and understandings are influenced by cultural values and traditions; although it can accommodate variables, it assumes controls can be put in place. Findings are often generalised for specific purposes, such as influencing organisational decisions or informing policy.

In an alternative paradigm, a number of models have emerged. These include 'social constructionism' (Berger and Luckman, 1966), 'interpretive sociology' (Habermas, 1970), 'new paradigm enquiry' (Reason and Rowe, 1981) and 'naturalistic enquiry' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Each of these naturalistic approaches takes issue in its own way with the positivist worldview that 'human behaviour is governed by general, universal laws and characterised by underlying regularities' (Cohen et al, 2004: 19). Anti-positivists believe that events and individuals are unique and meanings and perspectives are formed by autonomous individuals and their circumstances: 'human action arises from the sense that people make of different situations rather than as a direct response from external stimuli' (Easterby-Smith et al, 1995: 24). Naturalistic studies are underpinned by a belief that human actions are affected by context, that there is no absolute truth, only situated knowledge (Fay, 1996). As multiple interpretations are possible, the world can only be understood from the standpoint of those involved.

Gubrium and Holstein (2003: 83) argue that naturalistic, qualitative and interpretive research reaches beyond facts and statistics to interpret meanings and infer reasons for behaviours from what people say, do and use while Griffiths (2000) contends that knowledge quality is enhanced by exploring different perspectives, uncovering similarities and gaining greater understanding.

Interpretive research put people at the heart of the enquiry and seeks increased understanding of a situation through a study of the individuals involved, their motives and the meanings behind their actions. This standpoint sees researchers as ‘meaning-makers rather than passive conduits for retrieving knowledge from an existing vessel of answers’ (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003: 83), and Cohen et al (2004: 19-20) argue that the detachment so valued in positivist research is inappropriate in the social sciences because ‘behaviour can only be understood by the researcher sharing [others’] frame of reference’. They advocate subjectivity in studies which explore the direct experience of real people in real contexts, not objectivity:

The purpose of social science is to understand social reality as different people see it and to demonstrate how their views shape the action they take within that reality ...

While the social sciences do not reveal ultimate truth, they do help us make sense of our world (Cohen et al, 2004: 20).

Pendlebury and Enslin (2001: 361) also contend that any study intending to explore ‘the meanings and implications of human practices’ must begin with the assumption that there is no objective reality, only products of individual and collective consciousness and Cohen et al (2004: 6) argue that ‘to see knowledge as personal, subjective and unique ... imposes on researchers an involvement with their subjects and a rejection of the ways of the natural scientist’. This standpoint allows for researcher participation but, crucially, it regards all research as subjective because it involves people, and people bring their own meanings to a situation.

A further distinguishing feature of naturalistic studies is that they make no claim to generalisability and they are generally smaller in scale than positivist studies, which allows for the probing required.

These are cogent arguments for research which explores situations more deeply, where the researcher is part of the world under study, and where differences can be accommodated. I share the view that the ‘social world can only be understood from the standpoint of the individuals who are part of the ongoing action being investigated’ (Cohen et al, 2004: 19). The assumption underpinning this study is that those involved have different backgrounds which will influence their thinking and actions so that ‘[h]uman behaviour, unlike that of physical objects, cannot be understood without reference to the meanings and purposes attached by human actors to their activities’ (Guba and Lincoln, 1994: 106).

Because this study concerns difference, I recognised that the approach needed to provide scope for exploration. As interpretive research is less about measuring, and more about looking for patterns and explanations for the different experiences people have, it seemed the most appropriate approach for this study.

Another reason for adopting this approach was my involvement in the world I was seeking to interpret. Given the nature of my role in AifL, outlined in chapter 1 and expanded on in this chapter, I could not claim detachment. As a 'passionate participant' (Guba and Lincoln, 1994: 112), I brought my own subjective meanings to the study as did those whose perspectives are explored in chapters 5 and 6. It follows that I believe that there is no absolute, external truth and that all participants in the study, including myself, are likely to contribute to its subjectivity, a point illustrated by Geertz (1973) in his description of the layers of meaning brought by researcher and subject to the process of telling, listening, selecting and editing evidence. Of the two research paradigms, the interpretive better reflects my standpoint and is more likely to enable the aims of this study to be met.

It is important to clarify here that this study does not aim to be a catalyst for change. In critical theory, where research can be a force for change, studies may investigate the workings of social systems or expose ideologies concealing processes of oppression and control (Harvey, 1990: 6). Critical theorists, Ball (1992) argues, must recognise potential for struggle, conflict and contradiction to appreciate scope for change in education systems, for these can be sites of struggle between reproductive forces and transformatory, liberatory processes. She offers a persuasive argument for critical theory in education, given the relative autonomy of schools, alternative agendas and theories of resistance.

I recognised that interview interaction might lead to reflection and changed behaviour and, in that sense, the research has *potential*<sup>44</sup> to affect the status quo. However, the principal purpose of the study is to deepen understanding of the influences on people's beliefs and actions. As such it is interpretive, although it may also be described as ethnographic and constructivist in orientation: ethnographic in its acceptance that individuals' actions and perceptions are influenced by the situations in which they find themselves, and that these are not necessarily of their own choosing; and constructivist in its appreciation that the context itself is ever-changing, influenced by the actions and interactions of all those involved (Cohen et al, 2004).

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<sup>44</sup> My emphasis.

Whilst I was clear that a positivist approach was inappropriate for this study, the methodological distinctions between the different alternative positions were less straightforward. However, I believe that meanings do not happen in isolation but are context-bound. All participants including myself were involved in the research context and held views on what it meant. The study, therefore, was principally interpretive, its purpose to explore differences of perception. This required information which could be probed and interpreted which, in turn, determined the nature of data to be gathered.

### 3.2 Data distinctions

Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that methodological issues can be addressed and research instruments selected only after the following questions have been answered:

- What is the nature of reality?
- What is there to find out?
- What is the relationship between the knower and what can be known?

In section 3.1, I clarified my belief that there is no single truth, only multiple truths held by different people, based on their individual, situational perspectives. I explained that the study would be interpretive and recognised that this would determine the nature of the information required. In this section, I distinguish between qualitative and quantitative data and indicate that the nature of qualitative information makes it more appropriate for this interpretive study.

The widespread faith in the precision of quantitative data may be traced to the historical dominance of positivist research, as well as research in fields which traditionally use numbers:

Mathematics is often termed “the queen of the sciences” and those sciences, such as physics and chemistry, that lend themselves especially well to quantification are generally known as “hard”. Less quantifiable areas ... are referred to as “soft” ... to signal their imprecision and lack of dependability’ (Guba and Lincoln, 1994: 105-106).

The apparent precision of numerical data may have led to an assumption that anything less exact is less dependable, but this view has been challenged. Whilst quantitative methods are seen as fast and economical (Easterby-Smith et al, 1995), allowing for large samples

and enabling wide coverage, there is increasing recognition that qualitative methods provide scope for researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the meanings people take from their situations. Qualitative studies enable data to be captured naturally, allowing for researcher and participants to adjust to new issues and ideas as and when they emerge in the course of an investigation. Importantly, rather than produce generalised conclusions which have no individual applicability, qualitative methods can contribute relevant contextual information, thereby enhancing the validity of the research and the reliability of the findings.

### 3.3 Evidential source

In deciding the nature of the data, the primary consideration was the purpose of the study: to arrive at a better understanding of others' perspectives. In section 3.1, I acknowledged my standpoint and, in section 3.2, I indicated that the interpretive nature of the study required information which was qualitative.

Descriptive information about activities in LAs is readily available from their websites or from published HMIE reports of inspections of schools and local authorities. Inspection reports (reviewed in chapter 4) have contextualised the interview responses analysed in chapters 5 and 6 but they do not provide the insights required on individuals' perceptions, motives and actions. This kind of information is more likely to be gleaned from individuals' reflections on their situation, prompted by open-ended questions. Given this, I planned to undertake one-to-one interviews knowing that this method allows for deeper exploration than questionnaires are able to achieve. Easterby-Smith et al (1995:73) confirm that interviews can help provide insights on the respondents' world:

[the interview] is ... the opportunity for the writer to probe deeply to uncover new clues, open up new dimensions of a problem and to secure vivid, accurate, inclusive accounts that are based on personal experience (Easterby-Smith et al, 1995:73).

Since they are conducted in real time, interviews allow opportunity for clarifying details and avoiding potential misunderstandings on the part of either the researcher or the interviewee. They provide opportunities for considering how different people see and feel about aspects of their experience and, where responses are ambiguous, they highlight apparent contradictions in people's lives. This makes interviews highly suitable in studies concerned to gather information about individual viewpoints.

As the study sought to deepen understanding of a situation in which I was myself involved, it required an instrument that built on existing relationships, enabled genuine responses and acknowledged the complementary role of each partner in AifL. The method selected needed to take account of the expectations participants might have which, based on my previous experience of working with those involved, was likely to include opportunity for mutual disclosure.

One-to-one interviews seemed a natural extension of that existing practice. As professional adviser for assessment in Scottish Government, I had enjoyed regular scheduled conversations with LA officers in their own environment. These frank and open conversations to ascertain progress, discuss difficulties and agree on future action were founded on mutual respect.

I also recognised the potential for individual views to emerge in a one-to-one interview. Previous experience had led to an appreciation that LA officers had different standpoints but individuals' views did not always surface in group discussions, perhaps because individuals were influenced by their peers or constrained by more dominant members in the group. Whilst I believed that honest responses were more likely to be forthcoming in a confidential situation, the policy context provided a further reason for undertaking individual interviews rather than conducting group interviews or convening a focus group discussion, to avoid exposing individuals who had prominent roles in their LA.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that all interviews are effective in eliciting others' construction of events but Cohen et al (2004) recommend focused interviews when the study requires deep exploration of subjective experience. They argue that these allow researchers to control the interview situation and help restrict discussion to the aspects under investigation. However, I was conscious that participants' genuine engagement could be inhibited if they were asked to follow a standardised set of questions based on my assumptions.

I briefly considered semi-structured interviews which could have provided increased flexibility. Instead of eliciting answers to a standard set of questions, semi-structured interviews are based on specific themes that the researcher wishes to explore. Topics or themes which the researcher would like to focus on are planned in advance, but interviewees are not constrained by having to adhere to a particular format. This method allows new questions to be introduced as necessary, according to the nature of

interviewees' responses. Despite these benefits, I was concerned that semi-structured interviews might fail to elicit anything more enlightening than had already been shared with me in my government role, or might be gathered through a questionnaire.

I was also concerned that my own views might already be apparent to those who had worked with me, and that interviewees might provide answers which they thought I might want to hear. Briggs (1986) warns that even carefully constructed questions can impose structure and content on interview responses and Gubrium and Holstein (2003: 68) also suggest this possibility: 'interviews [can] shape the form and content of what is said'. I concluded that even semi-structured interview could sub-consciously direct participants and influence their responses. Given that the aim was to encourage participants to discuss their understanding and beliefs, I concluded it was preferable neither to prescribe discussion nor to restrict responses. To better understand individual worldviews, I needed to find a natural way of exploring the worlds in which interviewees lived and worked.

The context lent itself to the 'reflexive didactive' model of interview (Ellis and Berger, 2001: 854) where I and the participants could observe the traditional protocols of question and answer, but have opportunities for real sharing of reflections and experiences. Consistent with partnership-working in AifL, I wanted to avoid a distinction between the researcher and the researched.

The interviews, therefore, had to go beyond capturing 'precise data' based on 'a priori categories' Fontana (2001: 163) which are established by the researcher involved. This kind of interview requires impartiality, where the researcher conceals personal beliefs or opinions lest they contaminate the objectivity of the findings. Attempting false detachment would have been inappropriate in the circumstances because there was a pre-existing professional relationship and, while more structured interviews might reveal information of a factual nature, I felt that they were less appropriate for a study such as this which explores multiple perspectives.

Unstructured interview seemed the most appropriate means of eliciting this kind of information. In unstructured interview, Lincoln and Guba (1985: 269) suggest researchers have less control over how the interview progresses, but the absence of prescription allows them to derive data which is unique and personal to individual participants. Questions can emerge naturally so that the topics addressed are salient to the individuals concerned, and matched to their circumstances. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that this kind of interview



is particularly useful in situations where researchers need to reassure participants that desired responses should do more than confirm the researcher's preconceptions.

Unstructured interviews tend to be longer in duration than more structured interviews might be but, built on trust and mutual disclosure, they create the climate whereby interviewer and interviewee are able to share information unlikely to be aired in a more structured situation. The nature of this kind of interview means that researchers can suggest connections and create an environment in which meanings can be explored. For Fontana (2001), interviews make a significant contribution to the understanding of all parties involved. She argues the importance of prompting which Holstein and Gubrium (2003: 75) describe as enabling the interviewer to 'attempt to activate the respondent's stock of knowledge and bring it to bear on the discussion at hand in ways appropriate to the research agenda'. Ellis and Berger argue that, in this situation:

the interviewing process becomes less a conduit of information from informants to researchers ... and more a sea swell of meaning-making in which researchers connect their own experiences with those of others and provide stories that open up conversations about how we live and cope (2001: 853).

The interviews were therefore planned to be informal, with four of the five overarching research questions outlined in chapter 1 providing an agenda for discussion so that information emerged as the conversation flowed. Holstein and Gubrium (2003:67) present this as a natural process:

Put simply, interviewing provides a way of generating empirical data about the social world by asking people to talk about their lives ... interviews are special forms of *conversations*<sup>45</sup>.

I have emphasised the word 'conversations' because the study's design acknowledged Douglas' (1985) description of creative interviewing and Feldman's (1999) concept of conversations as research. Their definitions are stylistically close to informal conversation where prompts elicit lengthy answers and meanings are followed up and clarified, so that interpretation forms part of the 'conversation'.

In a chapter on qualitative interviews, Warren (Gubrium and Holstein, 2001: 86) uses Kvale's classical references to justify methods which produce qualitative data. She

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<sup>45</sup> My emphasis.

explains Kvale's argument that the Greek derivation of 'method' is a word referring to a route that leads to a goal, while the Latin origin of 'conversation' means 'wandering together with'. Whilst I was familiar with the policy context in which I and other participants had defined roles, exploration of individual perspectives would take me into uncharted territory. The journey metaphor seemed particularly appropriate as it conjured images of a researcher wandering without a map, but attuned to fellow travellers. Investigations conducted in this way are likely to be qualitatively different from more directed studies where the researcher knows what she needs to know (Cohen et al, 2004) and constructs questions which determine the course of the interview.

The image (Gubrium and Holstein, 2001: 86) also resonated with the journey motif used in AifL. This purely personal link between my familiar role in AifL and my new research role was further reinforced by Gubrium and Holstein's description of conversational method as 'a companionable stroll over old ground' (2001: 86). As indicated in chapter 2, initial planning for AifL had promoted community action research (Senge and Scharmer, 2001) as an alternative to managerial approaches to change. To remain consistent with this approach, it was important that I encouraged the active engagement of all participants in the interview process. These considerations helped convince me that conversation was an appropriate instrument for the purpose, although the decision introduced further challenge.

I wanted to deepen my understanding of the source of assessment co-ordinators' perspective on AifL and explore how this might have affected the understanding of others. Foucault (2000) argues that perspectives are the product of the particular culture in which people live and work and the roles that they have in that culture. Fairclough's (2001) argument is similar, that discourse is both shaped and constrained by social structure and culture. If, as McGregor (2003: online) states, 'our words are never neutral', the consequence of this is that: '[w]e cannot take the role of discourse in social practices for granted, it has to be established through analysis' (Fairclough, 2002: online).

In Fairclough's (2002: online) view, critical discourse analysis is concerned with 'the radical changes that are taking place in contemporary life, with how discourse figures within processes of change'. Given the change context, critical discourse analysis appeared appropriate for this study. I sought to analyse first of all the language used in the policy documents identified, both to interpret the communication itself and to discern how this might have influenced assessment co-ordinators' understanding of AifL.

Parsons (1995) suggests that policy analysis is dictated by the analyst's values and perspectives and, in the context of critical discourse analysis, Fairclough (2001: 8) also argues that different readers may arrive at different interpretations:

You do not simply 'decode' an utterance, you arrive at an interpretation through an active process of matching features of the utterance with representations you have stored in your long-term memory ... comprehension is the interaction between the utterance being interpreted and MR [members' resources].

I acknowledge that my analysis is the product of the particular 'resources' (Fairclough, 2001: 8) that I bring to this study, although McGregor (2003: online) cites Fairclough's (2002) argument that, whilst there may be no one correct interpretation, 'a more or less plausible or adequate interpretation is likely'. In acknowledgment of the role of discourse analysis in critical theory, McGregor (2003) concedes that it cannot on its own resolve issues but she insists that it enables better understanding of the source of a problem, and that this fundamental understanding could be the first step in its resolution. Later, in chapter 4, I will demonstrate policy discourse as one issue identified by this study.

### 3.4 Challenges and resolution

I explained in the last section my wish to involve others as co-contributors, in the hope of creating a climate of genuine enquiry in which to explore what Fontana calls 'ambiguity and contextuality of meaning' (2001: 162) and I offered justification for this decision based on Ellis and Berger's (2001: 851) description of 'rigid separation of researcher and respondent' which I considered undesirable given the collaborative nature of AifL.

Blurring the roles of researcher and participant was initially attractive, but the appeal was tempered by concern that familiarity might detract from the quality of data collected. For example, individuals used to working with me in my role as professional adviser with SEED (the funding provider) might seek to impress or influence me in a different role (Cohen et al, 2004) and, if they perceived me to be in any way judgmental because of the hierarchies acknowledged in chapter 1, authentic conversation and genuine discussion would be difficult.

The study was designed to elicit honest responses but the sensitivity of the topic introduced a challenge. I was concerned that responses might be less genuine if participants felt the

need to protect themselves, their position or their local authority. The converse was also true: I considered that participants could, in conversation, divulge sensitive information about their own working circumstances and, if I omitted to include this, it would compromise the authenticity of the study.

The post-interview stage was also potentially problematic. Whilst informal interviews are designed to allow responses to emerge naturally, the open-ended prompts intended to stimulate dialogue were likely to elicit lengthy responses which could be difficult to manage and analyse.

I also acknowledged that my active involvement in the area under investigation could result in biased conclusions and, whilst appreciating the power of the chosen instrument, I was aware that my close proximity to the topic might be seen to compromise the rigour of the study. I therefore had to find a means of resolving issues of bias.

Research literature (for example Oppenheim, 1992) indicates that all interviews, but particularly unstructured interviews, have considerable potential for bias and error.

Oppenheim (1992) lists a number of causes:

- biased sampling; poor rapport with participants;
- badly worded questions;
- leading questions or biased probing;
- changes to wording or alterations to sequence of questions;
- selective recording;
- inconsistent coding.

Sources of bias are therefore discussed in this section and again in sections 3.7, which describes the approach to analysis.

Potential for bias lies primarily in my deep interest in the area being investigated. However, my long-term association had resulted in strong working relationships with participants and the research instrument had been chosen with this in mind. While involvement might be an issue, poor rapport was not.

Details of the sample and how it was selected will be outlined in section 3.6, with further demographic information about the LAs provided in chapter 4. As responses were likely

to be unique to the individuals involved, there was no plan to generalise the findings so a representative sample was not required. Rather, it was essential that the sample captured the diversity of the AifL co-ordinator group.

Because the interviews were unstructured, participants were prompted by phrases like: *'I'm interested in knowing more about why you think you were given this role...'* and *'I'd like you to describe how you've been taking AifL forward'*. Thereafter, the direction of the conversation was determined by respective interviewees' responses. At an appropriate point, I hoped to move the interview from description and reflection to more evaluative responses: *'I'd like to understand better what you think worked'* and *'I wonder if there's anything you think you'd do differently'*.

The focus on individual perspectives meant that each interview was different in structure and content although, as I will endeavour to demonstrate in chapters 5 and 6, interview responses produced similar themes. Whilst structured interviews demand that wording and question sequence are identical, unstructured interviews do not. Gubrium and Holstein (2003: 74) advise that 'active interviewing' is preferable to standardising the wording or order of questions. For these authors (2003: 74), understanding the meaning-making process is as important as trying to interpret the meaning itself, as the active subject is a 'productive source of knowledge'. Pring (2001) also argues that meaning-making is important as knowledge is constantly constructed and reconstructed through interactions.

Cohen et al (2004: 157) assert that researchers are, in themselves, research instruments who can distort findings through the 'halo effect', recording only what suits or using information selectively to present a personal interpretation of the evidence. I was acutely aware that I possessed information linked to the subject of the study, gathered informally or stored subconsciously, but I would argue that the method I selected was no more susceptible to bias than other research methods. Pendlebury and Enslin (2001: 364) argue that all researchers, irrespective of their standpoint, bring their subconscious views to research, asserting '[t]here is no view from nowhere'. They recommend that all researchers constantly 'interrogate [their] positionality', which prompted me to focus on participants' discourse to help prevent unidentified assumptions distorting the findings.

However, Lincoln and Guba (1985) regard involvement as an advantage. They argue that descriptions of situations, events and feelings need to be rich enough for the reader to be able to translate the message to other contexts and, to ensure accuracy and consistency,

they argue for prolonged engagement in the research area with peer debriefing and member-checking if possible. To satisfy critics they suggest triangulation and, in my endeavours to reduce the possibility of bias in the study, I consulted other sources.

Those who believe in a single external viewpoint may still allege bias, and criticise the design for allowing participants to relate their particular version of reality. However, Gubrium and Holstein (2003: 68) argue that interviews are neither neutral constructions, nor distorted versions of reality. They argue that neutrality is a myth and that even formal interviews involve interaction. Interviews do not simply transmit knowledge; rather, they are: 'a site of ... producing reputable knowledge'. They conclude that interpretive analysis can be as rigorous as analysis of data from conventional, structured interviews, as long as the process is sensitive to both situation and content. Therefore, while I was conscious that there was potential for bias, I sought to demonstrate how I attempted to minimise this possibility.

Another challenge was to ensure validity and reliability in this qualitative study. Cohen et al (2004:105) assert that 'if a piece of research is invalid then it is worthless'. They explain that definitions of validity now go further than ensuring that a 'particular instrument in fact measures what it purports to measure'. Although validity in quantitative research may be addressed through sample selection, choice of instrument or treatment of data, Cohen et al (2004) imply that this may be inadequate in a study exploring individual perspectives through qualitative data.

Because of this, I sought other ways of addressing issues of validity. Cohen et al (2004: 105) argue that this may involve rigorous consideration of 'honesty, depth, richness, and scope of the data, the participants, the triangulation and the disinterestedness or objectivity of the researcher'. I have declared my interest in the topic, so objectivity was not an option. However, I did endeavour to address validity through sample selection, discussed in section 3.6 and through triangulation referenced in chapter 4. In chapters 5 and 6, I will outline how validity was addressed at the stage of analysis.

According to Cohen et al (2004), validity requires the researcher to be faithful to the approach, to be part of the researched world, ensuring that the data is socially situated and allowing for human interpretation and error. They argue (2004: 106) that 'valid instruments enable information to emerge naturally' and that researchers should be concerned with both process and outcome, seeing and reporting through the eyes of those

interviewed, 'catching meaning and intention'. The context for this study, the AifL development programme, was one which should have been familiar to both interviewer and interviewees, and participants' responses are contextualised in this dissertation through the description of their backgrounds and explanation of the circumstances of the interviews. As the information relating to individual perspectives was gathered through one-to-one interviews, the method enabled participants' active engagement.

Hammersley (1992) argues that findings must be plausible and credible, with all claims backed by citable evidence, accurately recorded, safely stored, and retrieved without distortion and that the process should also allow for peer examination of the data. The procedures outlined in this section were designed to address these demands.

Even anticipating these steps, Cohen et al (2004) refer to Maxwell's (1992) suggestion that studies aiming to uncover perspectives, where participants' words are examined and interpreted, need to be conducted honestly and so qualitative researchers should aim for authenticity rather than validity to illustrate their argument. They conclude (2004: 105) with reference to Gronlund (1981): 'validity [in qualitative research] is a matter of degree rather than an absolute' and 'at best we strive to minimize invalidity and maximize validity'.

The information provided in chapter 6 demonstrates my commitment to transparency and a desire for authenticity which I hope will add credibility to findings presented in chapter 7.

I also considered how potential invalidity might be addressed. Firstly, I would never knowingly jeopardise existing professional relationships; secondly, the aims of the study were shared with participants who all participated willingly; and, thirdly, interviews were recorded and transcribed to address the possibility of distortion through poor recollection, or through notes which were in themselves interpretations. Full transcriptions were then returned to participants with a request that they confirm the authenticity of the transcript and add any further comment they wished to make. I was aware of the risk of selective analysis and have made every effort to remain true to the data. Where presentation of the findings has involved augmenting the extract to clarify a point, I have drawn attention to the interjection and explained why it was included.

Like validity, reliability is defined differently in qualitative studies. Again, Cohen et al (2004) begin by giving details of reliability in quantitative studies, where consistency and

replicability enable generalisable conclusions. Three types of reliability are named: 'stability' (2004: 117) defined as consistency over time and across samples; 'equivalence' (2004: 118) where similar instruments yield the same result; and 'internal consistency' (2004:118) where a single test, divided by item into two equal halves and administered to a group of students, is internally consistent if identical scores are revealed for items in each half of the test.

Quoting LeCompte and Preissle, Cohen et al (2004: 119) argue that these criteria are 'simply unworkable for qualitative research' and they caution against trying to apply positivist criteria for reliability to qualitative research, since generalisability is difficult where human behaviour is context-bound and unique. They illustrate their argument (2004: 119) by highlighting idiosyncratic studies where replicability is neither possible nor desirable, and argue that reliability applies to researcher position, choice of informants, social situations and conditions, analytic constructs and methods of data collection and analysis. Cohen et al (2004) also refer to Bogdan and Biklen's (1992) definition of reliability as accuracy and coverage, while Guba and Lincoln (1985) equate reliability with dependability. Again, the words reiterated are honesty, authenticity, fidelity, comprehensiveness and depth. Given these criteria, reliability in qualitative studies may be addressed by procedures to enhance validity.

Addressing validity and reliability in this study meant acknowledging subjective representation of experience and 'convey[ing] situated, experiential realities that are locally comprehensible' (Holstein and Gubrium, 2003: 70-71). Initial considerations concerned timescale, resources, focus, methodology, instrument and sample, although efforts to address validity and reliability were maintained throughout the data collection and analysis process also.

Cohen et al (2004) argue that reliability is improved if bias is minimised and the way I did this is described earlier in this section. Citing Oppenheim (1992), Cohen et al (2004: 122) suggest that 'interviewers seeking attitudinal responses have to ensure that people with known characteristics are included in the sample'. This advice resulted in the inclusion of one individual known to hold specific views.

Lee (1993) and Neal (1995) urge due attention to issues of power and powerlessness, a timely reminder that I had previously represented the funding agency. Acknowledging that



misinterpretation of my role might present issues, I endeavoured to ensure that participants had some control over the conduct of the interview.

Above all, I believed that poor quality data was unlikely to lead to deeper understanding. I therefore planned to demonstrate my commitment to gathering data of sufficient quality to lead to the insights sought. To achieve transparency, my own position is explained in the section which follows and documentary analysis is included in chapter 4 as evidence of triangulation and contextualisation of the analysis presented in chapters 5 and 6. Details of the interview sample are also provided in the next section.

### 3.5 Sampling, consent and ethical considerations

Earlier sections refer to practical issues associated with conducting one-to-one conversations and analysing data. This section contains further information about my own background and interest in the topic and includes details of how the sample was drawn.

My own interest in education policy and its enactment within established structures has developed over several years. An interest in the theory and practice of change in education led to a master's degree project. Since then, I have developed a deeper appreciation that teachers are learners in a change situation (Black and Wiliam, 2006), requiring time and support to develop their understanding and skills. My learning has been facilitated by my background in education and my association with the focus of this study.

Working nationally, I became increasingly aware that all LAs have distinctive structures and diverse cultures. In particular, I have been intrigued by differences in the way national assessment policy is contextualised locally and became interested to explore this more deeply. As the AifL co-ordinator group comprised 32 individuals, it seemed unlikely that the sample would be representative of the membership unless every co-ordinator was interviewed. However, I considered that a sample reflective of this range would enable me to explore issues related to local contextualisation and satisfy the aims of the study. In order to be as sure as I could be that the sample reflected the range within the co-ordinator group, I established a sampling frame from a matrix recording known characteristics.

The final sample reflected Scotland's local authority profile, with LTS area adviser groupings<sup>46</sup> forming the basis of the spread. Two participants came from north/north east Scotland, three from east/central Scotland and two from the south-west. A breakdown is contained in Table 3-1 on page 91, which also indicates the spread of representation.

Participants were drawn from LAs reflecting different social, economic and geographical circumstances. Of the 32 Scottish LAs, six provide services for a large percentage of the population. Five of these larger LAs are in the central belt and are urban in composition; the sixth is remote and predominantly rural. Acknowledging this diversity, the sample included interviewees from two of the larger authorities, while other participants came from smaller LAs, representing suburban, industrial and rural catchments. This diversity was confirmed by information contained in the HMIE reports reported in chapter 4.

Three women and four men formed the sample. It included a Performance Manager, a Quality Improvement Manager, a Curriculum Support Manager, two Quality Improvement Officers, an Education Support Officer, and a teacher seconded as a Development Officer. Five had been in post for most of the development phase and two had more recently assumed the assessment remit. The selection reflected typical staffing turnover: since 2002, almost all assessment co-ordinators have changed their remit, retired or moved on to new post.

My own involvement in the area under investigation created challenge, not least in seeking to preserve the anonymity of the colleagues from the LAs which had agreed to participate. I understood the principle of informed consent and so the research was conducted openly and its purpose outlined for all interested parties with an indication of the commitment required<sup>47</sup>. Consent was sought from both participants and their employers.

As I was on secondment to the Scottish Government when the study began and because it focused on local contextualisation of national policy guidance, I alerted the office of the Permanent Secretary to the research proposed. The reply<sup>48</sup> indicated there was 'no corporate policy constraint' on my study, provided that I made clear the study was being conducted in a personal capacity and it did not run counter to government policy

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<sup>46</sup> These groupings no longer apply. LTS revised its area groupings in September 2009 and again in 2010.

<sup>47</sup> The Plain Language Statement sent to all participants is included as Appendix 3(e) on page 229. Sample emails sent to Directors of Education and to the participants identified are available as Appendix 3(c) and 3(d) on pages 227 and 228 respectively.

intentions. Observing these conditions posed no difficulty for me, but while the study was still underway, the secondment came to an end and I took up a post in LTS where my remit involved supporting national assessment policy. As a courtesy, I informed my new employers. They were equally supportive and imposed no further conditions on the conduct of the study.

<b>North East</b> (1)	<b>South &amp; West</b> (1)	<b>East &amp; South</b> (1)	<b>Central</b> (2)	<b>West</b> (1)	<b>North</b> (1)
Aberdeen	Argyll & Bute	City of Edinburgh	Clackmannanshire	East Dunbartonshire	Highland
Aberdeenshire	Dumfries & Galloway	East Lothian	Falkirk	Glasgow City	Orkney Isles
Angus	East Ayrshire	Midlothian	Fife	Inverclyde	Perth & Kinross
Dundee	East Renfrewshire	Scottish Borders	North Lanarkshire	Renfrewshire	Shetland Isles
Moray	North Ayrshire	South Lanarkshire	Stirling	West Dunbartonshire	Western Isles
	South Ayrshire		West Lothian		

*Table 3-1 The sampling spread based on LTS 'Area Groupings'*

As the study progressed, I became aware that being ethical requires more of the researcher than seeking permission to proceed and requesting consent to participate, particularly where human subjects are concerned. Homan (1992) illustrates the difference between observing the spirit and the letter, for he asserts that codes of ethics offer only guidance on ethical conduct and that this kind of advice is insufficient. Some researchers may be tempted to act unethically and he suggests (1992: 331), 'statements of ethics invite the individual to surrender the moral conscience to a professional consensus'.

Small (2001) and Pring (2001) present a similar argument that codes are powerless. Pring suggests (2001: 418) that 'moral virtues' are required. These include honesty 'when the consequences of telling the truth are uncomfortable' and concern for the wellbeing of those who are being researched. Together, he argues, these are more demanding than right

<sup>48</sup> These points have been paraphrased from the message sent on behalf of the Permanent Secretary, 2006. A copy of this message is attached as Appendix 3(a) on page 225.

action and require a moral bond between researcher and researched. The moral bond is far more demanding of right action than merely gaining informed consent.

I was very conscious of the need to acknowledge special vulnerabilities in any ‘research that seeks to interpret the meanings and implications of human practices’ (Pendlebury and Enslin, 2001: 361) and Pring’s (2001: 419) ‘respect for others’ became my benchmark for showing duty of care to interviewees. All participants in this study were working in a political environment and, although three held senior positions within their LAs, none was likely to be completely autonomous. Therefore, before any direct approach to potential interviewees, contact was made with heads of service<sup>49</sup>, informing them of the nature of the research and seeking their permission.

Cohen et al (2004) advocate conscientious attention to ensuring participants are not abused. Before seeking informed consent, they argue, researchers need to clarify for themselves who they will be interviewing, for whom the research is being conducted, and why the research is being undertaken. Like Pring (2001), they advocate due consideration not only to confidentiality but to potential consequences of the research, and to the impact this might have. Since Scotland is a small country and, as the study was located in the micro-political context of local government, I recognised the need to protect the source of my information. Had the investigation been captured in a questionnaire, respondents could have remained anonymous but, while I could give assurances of confidentiality, the chosen research instrument prevented anonymity.

To protect the privacy of interviewees, LAs involved in this study are referred to simply as LAA-G in chapter 4. As some may be interested to deduce the identity of the seven participants, pseudonyms will be assigned in chapters 5 and 6. At no time are links made between participants and respective LAs, and references have been removed which may enable connection. Participants were not told the names of others interviewed.

Participants may have been less concerned than I was regarding anonymity, for their responses appeared to be remarkably frank. Taped interviews reveal a number of indiscretions punctuated by light-hearted phrases like, *‘I’m aware of your tape so don’t put this in ...’* or *‘Make sure you scrub that’*. Remarks like these are only made where

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<sup>49</sup> A sample letter is included in Appendix 3(c) on page 227.

there is the ‘moral bond’ indicated earlier and because I believed such a bond existed, neither these asides nor the remarks they referred to were included in the analysis, for their inclusion would have been a breach of trust.

Because I believed that interviewees have ownership of data they generate, I shared interview transcripts with respective interviewees, offering them the opportunity for amendment before analysis was undertaken. This would appear to be consistent with the concept of respect for persons (Office of Human Subjects Research, 1979) and acknowledges participants’ agency as Pring (2001) suggests, by giving interviewees their place as active participants in the research process rather than treating them as objects of research.

‘Research’, suggests Pring (2001: 419) ‘requires a very special sort of virtue, both moral and intellectual’ which should be demonstrated throughout the investigation. This includes the researcher’s commitment to ethical practice while gathering, interpreting and presenting the evidence. The next section describes the process.

### 3.6 Gathering and interpreting evidence

Evidence was gathered through examination of five policy documents and seven unstructured interviews, the rationale for which was set out in section 3.4. The sections which follow describe the approach I adopted at each stage of the analytical process.

#### 3.6.1 Government publications

Although the design of the study was essentially interpretive, I adopted a research method commonly used by those with a critical perspective. In doing so, I am acknowledging that those working to influence policy seek appropriate language in which to frame their argument, and ‘the struggle for power is a struggle for setting the discourse’ (Parsons, 1995:152). This meant exploring the language used in five assessment policy documents, ‘[s]tarting with the full text, working down to individual word level, [to] peel back the layers to reveal ... the profoundly insidious, invisible power of the written and spoken word’ (McGregor, 2003: online).

Because of my involvement in AifL, I was already very familiar with the five policy papers, but had previously read them through a policy lens. For the purpose of this study, I began to read them with a more critical eye, considering the features of the genre (Fairclough 2001) and reflecting on how the documents had been constructed.

The following aspects of the genre were considered for the information sheets examined:

- the register adopted;
- the choice of photographs and how they had been placed to illustrate a point or attract attention;
- headings and keywords given prominence in the text;
- persuasive language
- connotations

In Circular 02/05 (SEED, 2005), I considered the following in addition to features outlined above:

- the use of topic sentences to influence perceptions;
- sentence construction, nominalisation of verbs and the use of the passive voice as indicators of power relations;
- tone;
- use of insinuation.

Together these contributed to an interpretation of the documents which was quite different from my earlier understanding. However, whilst I found it helpful to analyse visual images, signs and symbols in the analysis of the policy documents, the need for rigour meant I restricted analysis of the interviews to the spoken word captured in the interview transcriptions as they were more likely to stand up to independent verification. Body language as a means of discourse (Fairclough, 2002) was not included. The next section provides detail of the coding and sorting of information from the seven interviews conducted.

### 3.6.2 Interview data

The first five interviews took place in September 2008 and, as a result of delays in securing permissions, the last two in June 2009. Each interview lasted around 90 minutes,

conducted in most cases within the participants' workplace. Two participants who worked outwith the central belt met me in a mutually convenient place: one confidently suggested my workplace whilst the second meeting took place in the café bar of a hotel. The latter venue was less suitable because background noise affected the quality of the recording, but it did not appear to detract from the data.

Each interview was conducted as a conversation and, while there was no formal structure, the following aspects were included in all conversations:

- perceived reason for having the assessment remit;
- outline of AifL activity in the LA;
- what seemed to have worked;
- what might have been tackled differently.

After each interview, I completed an interview contact summary sheet as advised by Miles and Huberman (1994). This summarised the main issues or themes arising from interview, any information which I thought would help to answer the research questions I had set out to answer and anything interesting which I had not previously considered. Despite the summary sheet, the information gathered seemed almost overwhelming and, as Miles and Huberman (1994: 55) suggest, 'If you don't know what matters more, everything matters.' However, they advise being 'explicitly mindful of the purpose of your study and of the conceptual lenses you are training on it. They suggest the importance of resist[ing] 'overload – but not at the price of sketchiness'.

Even more troubling than the volume of data was the fact that each contact summary sheet revealed that each interview produced information which seemed to me to have little connection with the focus listed above. This issue will be explored in more detail in chapter 6.

Data were analysed using a grounded theory approach, described below. This involved pursuing significant features and recurring or variant themes in the data, a form of analysis Cohen et al (2000: 147) say Partlett and Hamilton (1976) call 'progressive focusing'. This allowed me to identify key themes arising from the interviews.

The verification process represented an opportunity for a further, e-mailed response on the subject. Richer data did not emerge from this, but additional prompts were included in the

last two interviews: *'I wonder if you think you've learned anything from involvement in the AifL?'* and, if affirmed, *'I wonder if this has affected your approach to supporting change'*.

With each interview providing around 25 pages of transcribed information, analysis involved a large amount of data. In studies such as this one, a grounded theory approach to analysis is advocated (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Martin and Turner 1986, Strauss and Corbin 1990). An ethnographic approach, it is considered useful in studies of organisational culture where the outcome is dependent on interrogating quantities of information accommodating a range of perspectives. This made it particularly suitable for this study.

In grounded theory, Dick (2005) suggests that researchers should search for common themes, noting instances of agreement and of disagreement and seeking possible explanations. Corbin and Strauss (2008: 81) further advise that, if disparities occur, 'we want to know why'.

Exponents of the grounded theory approach originally proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) recommend early data reduction based on two sets of information, before further collection of data is undertaken (Calloway 1988, Dick 1999, Corbin and Strauss 2008). However, the close timing of the interviews made it difficult to refine prompts for any but the last two interviews, so initial analysis included the data from all five of the first set of interviews.

Fontana (2001: 166) suggests that interviews are concerned not simply with collecting answers, but with noting how participants structure their responses, taking the 'helter-skelter fragmented process of everyday life' and creating a cohesive account of the reality they represent. She advocates (2001: 162) attention to the 'fragments' in conversation, recognising their potential and seeking multiple meanings.

Corbin and Strauss (2008) argue (2008: 70) that '[a]sking questions and thinking about the range of answers helps us to take on the role of the other'. The task was to tune into interview information, make comparisons, and consider the direction the data appeared to be taking.

Gradually, I was able to reflect on how participants revealed their perceptions through their stories. Again, the literature (Calloway 1988, Dick 1999, Dick 2005, Corbin and Strauss 2008) was helpful. For example, Corbin and Strauss (2008) advise reviewing the



vocabulary, focusing on particular words and phrases, listing possible meanings and looking for clues elsewhere to reveal intended meanings and rule others out. They also suggest searching for words indicating time, or changes in perception or interpretation.

Beginning with the assumption that theory is concealed in the data and the task of analysis is to make theory visible, Calloway (1998) advises qualitative evaluation of whole sentences to extract word sequences. She argues that counting word occurrences is less appropriate in research concerned with exploring perspectives and, while Corbin and Strauss (2008) do suggest a focus on words, their principal concern is to establish context and process to support understanding of individuals' interpretations of events. They argue analysis should lead to explanation, not a count of lexical items and, for this reason, I decided that manual coding was more likely to support the analysis of interview information than computer software, such as NVivo.

Initial steps in the grounded theory approach involve identifying common threads or emerging themes and, given that the purpose of qualitative research is not to quantify the data but to understand its meaning, a coding scheme is advocated (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 56): 'To review a set of field notes, transcribed or synthesised, and to dissect them meaningfully, while keeping the relations between the parts intact, is the stuff of analysis'.

Before attempting to make sense of the data collected or picking out aspects which appeared relevant to the research questions listed in section 1.5, I made additional copies of each page of transcribed comment. Next, I referred to the research questions and decided on the terms 'enactment' and 'implications' which I could use as units of analysis. Within each unit of analysis sit the 'codes' Miles and Huberman (1994: 56), labels which 'assign units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled'. As the research questions related to enactment of AifL, I firstly scanned transcriptions in turn and decided on 'descriptive codes' (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 57) denoting enactment, such as understanding, reading, training, LA policy, leadership and, as each of the interviewees had explained how they had come to be in post, I added another 'descriptive code' entitled 'background'. For 'implications' I found it difficult to assign codes to large sections of transcription, but I coded these with a question mark, cut out them out and placed them in an envelope for perusal later.

Later, I copied the extracts into a database; at that point I found it useful to highlight different codes with different coloured pens and, under each excerpt, I noted the name of

the person interviewed and the transcript page number to facilitate retrieval when it came to writing up the data. Then I cut out the coded excerpts with scissors. Some of the excerpts appeared to relate to more than one code, and I was able to include these using the duplicate copies made earlier.

Each extract was then laid out on a large table according to its colour code. Once every one of the extracts had been allocated, each pile of extracts was clipped together and placed in a labelled envelope. At this stage, I made no attempt to look for patterns within the same code; the purpose of the exercise was to ascertain that all extracts could be accounted for in one category or another. I undertook this exercise twice using the second copy to check my coding.

Together, the envelopes contained the ideas which I thought would answer the research questions, as well as the quotations which would be used to support my argument. To try to structure the argument I took the labelled envelopes and attempted to sort them, looking for connections between the titles on the envelopes. In the process of doing this, I began to appreciate that the codes related in different ways to the concept of building capacity, and I realised for the first time that the envelope labelled with a question mark because the quotations did not appear to fit contained references which inferred continuing concerns with accountability. These were issues I had first identified on the contact summary form.

According to Dick, (1999) '[coding] makes visible some of the components'. From this exercise, 'core categor[ies]' (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: 104) had emerged, each of which appeared to link several themes. The first core category was 'building capacity'. This will be explored in chapter 5. The second core category was 'addressing accountability' and this is presented in chapter 6.

As the mist cleared, I repeated the process for those extracts which had not been assigned a code. Altogether, this was a prolonged process as it involved interrogating the data and not simply paraphrasing: what Corbin and Strauss (2008: 66) describe as 'mining the data – digging below the surface to discover hidden treasures'. This time, the codes were more 'interpretive' (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 57) than descriptive. Having a better appreciation of what was required, I reconsidered the excerpts originally assigned descriptive codes and some of these were also given interpretive codes.

Initially, I made no reference to literature, acknowledging Dick's (2005: online) advice to allow the codes to emerge from the data itself so that 'progressive accessing and reading of relevant literature ... become[s] a part of ... data collection procedures'. For this reason, literature in chapter 2 provides the background for the study, but is augmented in chapter 7 with more recent literature which offers additional insights.

The themes were then grouped. Miles and Huberman (1994: 69) argue that 'Just naming or classifying what is out there is not enough. We need to understand the patterns, the recurrences, the plausible whys'. 'Pattern coding', state these authors (1994: 69), allows for grouping of the data into sets. They list four functions of 'pattern coding', and whilst the authority of this is undisputed, the fourth seemed particularly relevant: 'it lays the groundwork for cross-case analysis by surfacing themes and directional processes'.

I was searching for phrases which recurred in different interviews and for contradictions. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that this is particularly important in an inductive study. Essentially, I was asking myself:

- what does this mean?
- is what is happening happening elsewhere and does that matter?
- if so, why?
- if not, why not?

A simple database was constructed to assist with collation of data and facilitate identification of chronological sequences of interviews and events. Once coded, as Miles and Huberman (1994: 58) suggest, sections of text from the interview transcripts were copied into the database, both to ensure salient information was accurately recorded and to facilitate its later retrieval. This enabled word searches, verification of patterns, and sorting of themes. It simplified cross-checking, and enabled me to identify double entry.

Following the extraction of information on personal and professional backgrounds, it became apparent that the strategies employed - questioning, differentiating and evaluating - were akin to skills I had developed as a teacher and, as analysis proceeded, what had originally seemed like an 'alpine collection of information' (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 56) gradually became more manageable. I began to feel more confident in this task, identifying the connections and making sense of the data.

## Conclusion

This chapter began by establishing my own standpoint, the purpose of the study and how this had influenced its design. I also distinguished between quantitative and qualitative research and justified my decision to collect qualitative information through unstructured interviews. Issues related to bias, reliability and validity in this qualitative study were considered and the steps taken to address these were outlined.

Details have been provided of my own interest in the topic, of the sample construction, procedures for securing permissions and of how data collection was undertaken. Finally, in keeping with the social constructivist orientation of the study, I explained the grounded theory approach to analysis and described the different stages of the process.

Issues of rigour led me to consider documentary sources in order to clarify how policy was communicated, to contextualise responses and provide evidence of triangulation. These sources include the policy circular (SEED, 2005a), government information sheets (SEED 2005b, SEED 2005c, SEED 2007, Scottish Government 2007), and reports of HMIE inspections of local authorities 2002-08, all of which are examined in the next chapter.

#### 4. Vehicles for communicating information

*The world does not contain any information. It is as it is. Information about it is created in the organism (a human being) through its interaction with the world ... We move the problem of learning and cognition nicely into the blind spot of our intellectual vision if we confuse vehicles for potential information with information itself (Illich, 1973).*

##### Introduction

In outlining the context for the study in chapters 1 and 2, I described social, economic and political demands for change and the education policy response to this in Scotland.

Literature reviewed in chapter 2 explored studies on both assessment and change, with particular emphasis on the tensions threatening ‘a streamlined and coherent system of assessment’ (SEED, 2005a) and the kind of professional understanding needed to achieve this. Important aspects of the policy process were considered, such as the role of central government in formulating policy and local government’s responsibility for facilitating its adoption.

In this chapter I will examine policy communications and reflect on the role of HMIE in reinforcing government policy. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first contains a brief analysis of notes I kept previously. The second, major, section contains analysis of five government documents:

- SEED Circular No. 02 June 2005: Assessment and Reporting 3-14;
- information sheet on AifL background, structures and progress to date;
- information sheet on the SSA;
- information sheet on communities of practice;
- information sheet for parents as partners in AifL.

The documents listed have been selected from a range of resources published to support AifL for, while other materials promote theory and practice, these are government publications and between them they illustrate how policy was communicated through official channels, thereby contributing to participants’ understanding of policy.

The final section considers HMIE reports of inspections of the local authorities (LAs) participating in this study. Although government legislation does not extend to curriculum and assessment, HMIE as an agent of government, has a statutory responsibility for informing and securing policy direction in Scotland. To this end, HMIE have conducted inspections of the function of local authorities (INEA) since legislation required LAs to demonstrate continuing improvement in the quality of education they provide (SEED, 2000). These INEA reports were selected in the expectation of finding reinforcement of national assessment policy through feedback identifying strengths and recommendations for action.

#### 4.1 My notes

The references in this section come from notes kept while I was working as professional adviser in the Scottish Government. I have previously explained the dilemma of my insider status, describing my work in a policy environment as being at different times beneficial and detrimental to my research role for, whilst I have endeavoured to preserve the integrity of the research, it has been impossible to disregard knowledge and insights gained while working in policy. Written between 2004 and 2005, these notes chart my own perception of local contextualisation when LAs were first delegated responsibility for AifL<sup>50</sup>, and which I acknowledge could have coloured my interpretation of information gathered in the interviews with assessment co-ordinators years later. Conscious of this, and as evidence of care to ensure the integrity of the study, I am making reference to these notes to illustrate what I understood at the start of the study.

As professional adviser, my task was to use my experience in Scottish education to help ensure alignment of policy and practice in schools and LAs, and to challenge and support LA officers as they firstly shared AifL's key features with staff in schools and then assimilated and prosecuted national policy in assessment. Quarterly assessment seminars promoted the policy agenda and provided a forum for discussion but, in the early days of AifL, it was difficult to distinguish how policy messages were received so meetings were arranged with individual co-ordinators to discern resistance and allow local issues to emerge which might not be raised in a public forum.

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<sup>50</sup> The AifL pilot phase 2002-04 was orchestrated by central government. From 2004, core grants were paid to LAs to enable local contextualisation of national policy. Core grants continued until session 2006-07.

The notes made on scheduled visits to all 32 LAs provide a snapshot of the issues I identified at the time and which subsequently formed the basis for a report<sup>51</sup> to the APMG, the group which informed AifL's strategic direction. With the passing of time, it is uncertain whether the notes contain verbatim accounts, or my own interpretation of what was said. Because of this, they are offered only as insight on my early perspective of activity in LAs.

Among the many positive references to AifL and its approach are several welcoming the greater autonomy and trust it fostered, although the notes indicate that few co-ordinators had begun to adopt AifL's collaborative action research model.

Information produced centrally for Associated Schools Groups (ASGs) from 2004 onwards emphasised the importance of empowering staff at all levels. However, whilst one note contains implicit reference to shared leadership: *'Money distributed to schools and finance managed by the cluster chairperson'*, others had adopted a centralised approach: *'LA funding had covered twilight INSET from [external consultancy]. Resources purchased for all clusters. Pack of FA materials for all schools had been compiled by DO – considered very comprehensive starter pack'*. Expressions such as *'pack of ... materials compiled by DO'* and *'starter pack'* reflect traditional transmissive approaches, rather than an emphasis on enquiry and engagement.

The notes also indicate a focus on formative assessment at the expense of other aspects of an 'AifL school'<sup>52</sup>. The note from one visit states *'Action plan had taken account of 10 discrete aspects of assessment, though main focus had been formative assessment'*. Others indicated a perception that formative assessment concerned the development of effective learning and teaching. For example:

- *AifL coincided with [council's] learning and teaching policy, 'Learning for All' and emphasis on improving methodology...;*
- *AifL is integral to authority's policy on Development of Effective Teaching and Learning – commended in INEA;*
- *Strong links perceived between formative assessment and authority's learning and teaching policy.*

<sup>51</sup> Available on request.

<sup>52</sup> The AifL triangle is included as Appendix 2(a) on page 212. It is also available from the archived AifL website: <http://wayback.archive-it.org/1961/20100625100025/http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/assess/aiflschool/index.asp> (last accessed 30/04/11).

The notes indicate that the education community may not have grasped the complexity of AifL, for improvement plans also emphasised formative assessment:

- *... formative assessment... in all improvement plans;*
- *The authority had been committed from the beginning to development in FA - it was in all DPs [development plans];*
- *Formative assessment in all DPs.*

The importance of leadership in schools was also raised. For example: '*Greater awareness in secondary schools and greatest benefits for all when PT and SMT recognise the value*' and '*... possibly a need to educate HTs about their role*'.

I cannot be certain if the reference to '*educate*' is the speaker's own. It is an interesting lexical choice and I appreciate that the word may have been my translation of what was said, for this snapshot of perceptions includes my views as well those of assessment co-ordinators. The repeated reference to formative assessment rather than assessment for learning also illustrates how the terminology of AifL changed over time.

Against the background of these notes, I will now examine government publications communicating different aspects of the policy position. The next section begins with an analysis of the policy document (SEED, 2005a) followed by examination of government publications (SEED 2005b, SEED 2005c, SEED 2007, Scottish Government 2007) which communicated aspects of policy.

## 4.2 Government publications

Throughout AifL's funded period, its key messages were communicated by LTS, which was tasked by government to publish newsletters, produce resources and provide online support for AifL. This promotional material was intended to influence and support practice but while, for example, the 12 AifL newsletters (LTS, 2002–2008) trace progress, achievements and prevailing priorities, they have not been included in this review because they represent a large body of resources requiring a separate study. Having worked in the organisation, I am aware that LTS does not present information which might contradict or step beyond government policy, so I have regarded literature emanating from LTS as supplementary to the government documents analysed. I anticipated that, if the impact of



promotional material were considered significant, reference would be made to this in the interviews, and the aims of the study were more likely to be served by analysing the narratives of the LA co-ordinators than by examining support materials.

The principal policy document was Circular 02/05 (SEED, 2005a), published three years after the introduction of AifL. It sets out the roles and responsibilities of LAs and school managers in a new system of assessment and, supported by the information sheets (SEED 2005b, SEED 2005c, SEED 2007, Scottish Government 2007), it contains the policy text discussed in the next section.

#### 4.2.1 Policy text

Circular 02/05 (SEED, 2005a) takes the form of a letter addressed to Chief Executives of Local Authorities and Directors of Education, and copied to directors of finance and assessment co-ordinators. It outlines the national assessment system and includes a three-page annex locating the circular in the context of other government papers (SEED 2003a, SEED 2004c).

It is formal in tone, greeting the reader *'Dear Sir/Madam'* and ending *'Yours faithfully'* although the communication begins in the first person: *'I am directed to...'*. The gravity of the document is conveyed as a ministerial instruction, although the discourse which follows illustrates the Scottish policy preference for advice and expectation rather than edict: phrases like *'to advise'* (SEED, 2005a: 1), *'should'* (2005b: throughout) and *'expect'* (2005a: 7) illustrate the advisory nature of the document. There are also references to LAs being *'expected to support the SSA...'* and *'encouraged ...to make use of SSA information'* (SEED, 2005a: 6).

Lack of legislative force is also apparent in the paragraph entitled *'Implementation'*, although the last sentence could be interpreted as a thinly-disguised threat: *'It is expected that the new procedures outlined can be introduced without regulation'* (2005a: 7). This sentence is interesting: the word *'can'*, implying capability, is used rather than *'will'* and the first person in the introduction is replaced by the passive voice. The tone is that of a stern guardian. Although the detail of *'regulation'* is not made clear, appearing as it does at the end of the document, it appears to pre-empt potential dissent. What might be interpreted as an intimidating tone continues in the next paragraph where, after expressions

of gratitude for progress and achievement to date, the last words are '*we will continue to monitor the situation*'. Whilst this could imply that the situation will be kept under review, it implies unwelcome levels of supervision.

The main body of text explains the new system of assessment. An introductory paragraph states the policy intention is to '*capture what is best in Scottish schools*', locating this in existing practice and policy documentation (SEED, 2004a): '*build upon the work undertaken through AifL – Assessment is for Learning since 2002*'. This might be interpreted as an appeal to national pride, or as eliciting support for the new policy by referring to the impact of AifL; but it could also be construed as legitimization of policy given a ministerial commitment '*to introducing AifL into all Scottish schools by 2007*' (2005a: 1).

Under the statement of policy intention, the first heading in bold type is '*A streamlined and coherent system of assessment*' (2005a: 1), an expression which recurs in this and other documents, reiterating the demand for assessment reform (SOEID 1999, Hayward et al, 2000). This is followed (2005a: 2) by an explanation of how a more coherent system might be achieved: '*For the new arrangements to operate effectively, three main strands of activity need to be secured*'. The implication is that the new assessment system cannot work without concerted action. This message is reinforced through repetition of the sentence '*Each of the various partners has an important role to play*' (2005a: 1), with one word difference: '*each of the main partners has an important role to play*' (2005a: 2).

The document then illustrates how the system can work, acknowledging the value of both formative and summative assessment within schools and classrooms, as well as external evaluation. The 'quadrant diagram'<sup>53</sup> on page 106 illustrates that feedback for improvement should be inherent in LAs' analysis of information from their schools and in HMIE publications following subject or thematic reviews, although this is not explained in the text of the document.

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<sup>53</sup> The illustration of how assessment for learning and assessment for accountability might be aligned (SEED, 2005b: 2) was often referred to as the 'quadrant diagram' when working with staff in schools and LAs.

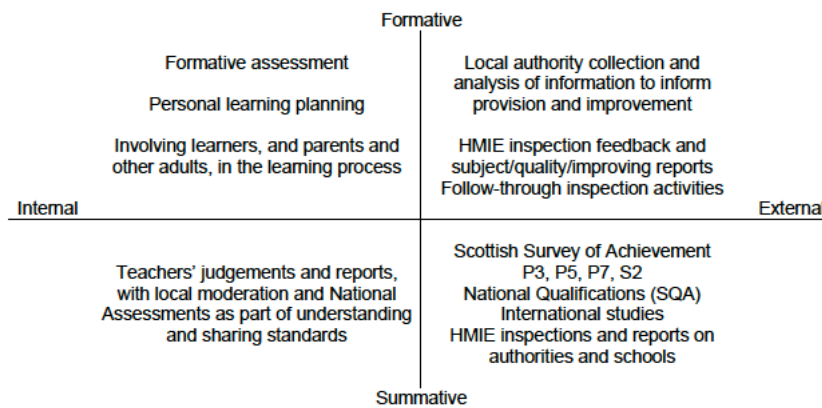


Fig. 4-1 The 'quadrant diagram' illustrating the national system of assessment (SEED, 2005a: 2)

Three strands of activity are outlined in the circular:

- *Good assessment to support children's learning as part of classroom practice, so that parents, other staff and the children themselves can confidently rely on informed professional judgments about children's progress and achievement* (SEED, 2005a: 2);
- *Sound quality assurance of teachers' assessments in schools and local authorities, so that all can share a common understanding of the outcomes and standards expected of children at different stages of their education* (SEED, 2005a: 3);
- *A robust national monitoring system, that provides accurate information about overall standards in achievement without over-burdening schools or distorting classroom practice* (SEED, 2005a: 4).

Within these strands, words like '*rely*' and '*informed*' stress that assessment information needs to be dependable if it is to lead to improvements in learning. The words '*share*' and '*common*' emphasise the need for consistency and the reference to '*national*' and '*overall*' clarify that the third strand concerns national accountability. The description is of a system intended to stand up to scrutiny.

Numbered statements explain each strand in turn, with implications for practice in LAs, schools and early years establishments highlighted in boxed text. The first two strands listed relate to internal assessment practice, corresponding to the key features of an AiFL school, outlined in chapter 2, and building on current development activity in schools.

The assertion underpinning Strand 1 (assessment as part of learning and teaching), '*Many teachers have been changing...*' (2005a: 2), can be supported by evaluations of the

programme (Hallam et al 2004, Condie et al 2005a) although the source is not attributed. As the description moves into personal learning planning, repeated reference to *'arrangements'* (2005a: 2) define personal learning planning as a planned process of review and target-setting, rather than compilation of a planning document.

Strand 2 highlights the need for greater rigour and consistency in teachers' professional judgment, but explicitly acknowledges that teachers working in isolation need to discuss their judgments with others in order to achieve consistency. In the new system, LAs and school managers have a *'responsibility to enable teachers to "share the standard" with other professionals'* (2005a, 3) and *'should make sure'* that staff have *'regular opportunity to discuss the quality and standard'* (2005a: 4). However, the document states that these professional discussions *'should as far as possible be incorporated into existing arrangements for staff meetings and professional discussions rather than being additional formal process'*. This may imply that professional discussions are regarded as integral to professional activity; but it may also be an attempt to pre-empt funding requests.

National assessments are described as confirmatory instruments, just as 5-14 national tests were intended to be (Scottish Examination Board, 1992). The assessments are described as *'another way for teachers to check their judgement'* and *'a good tool for use to confirm their own judgements against the levels'* (SEED, 2005a: 4). The boxed text explains that *'school managers should agree with their teachers and with their local authority how national assessments might be used'* (2005a: 4). The repetition of 'judgement' indicates the importance attached to teacher assessment, and the active role assigned to *'school managers'* indicates an intention that decisions should be taken by school staff then authorised by LAs, not driven by LA requirements and imposed on schools.

A convoluted statement at the end of the paragraph outlines one implication of the policy: *'It is unlikely that widespread reliance upon standardised tests will be a common feature within the new arrangements'* (SEED, 2005a: 4). Whilst the intention may have been to discourage the use of standardised tests, the sentence construction leaves this unclear. However, I am aware of LAs' increasing use of standardised tests and, given the national preference for policy agreement (Harlen, 2007), the ambiguity may have been deliberate.

Strand 3 relates to external formative and summative assessments. The new Scottish Survey of Achievement is assigned an important role and it is introduced over two pages. Although the SSA was one of the original ten AifL projects, the national monitoring

system would have been unfamiliar to those involved in school enquiry projects, and its scope might well have been contentious. The explanation of this strand also includes reference to '*robust*' and '*accurate*' (SEED, 2005a: 4). The introductory statement links national monitoring to evaluation of policy '*and what needs to be done to improve the standards for all children*' (2005b: 4). The sentences convey a moral imperative for the survey's introduction, followed by potential benefits for teachers as the existing system of capturing national data has reported disadvantages: '*perceived as putting pressure on teachers...*' (2005b: 5). The new survey describes the survey's worthy outcomes '*more considered assessment judgements*', '*range of concepts and skills*', '*based on individual's learning needs*', '*sharing*', '*improving learning and teaching*' (2005a: 5).

Key words '*quality*' and '*dependability*' (defined as valid, reliable and comparable) are repeated several times in different paragraphs (SEED: 2005a: 5). Readers are advised that the purpose of the SSA is not simply to collect information, summarise it and use it in a considered way, but to align rigorous summative assessment with dialogue and discussion focused on learning. Information gathered should be '*relevant and of good quality*' (2005a: 5) and staff need to be trained and supported. Implicit in this is a formative twist: '*teachers will act as field officers and external assessors*' thereby having opportunity for professional development in assessment; and '*questionnaires [will seek their views] about their teaching and learning experiences*', teasing out issues in learning and teaching as part of the drive for improvement.

The section on the SSA begins with a seemingly innocuous statement: '*National monitoring will not use information from individual children*' but this is another phrase open to interpretation. One meaning is that national monitoring through the SSA is based on the results of an anonymous representative sample, illustrating performance across a cohort, but I am also aware that the Circular was intended to signal the end of the annual central uplift of national test results for individual pupils. As the latter interpretation is possibly contentious in the context of LA data collection, the obscurity may be deliberate, for even the veneer of consensus is not achieved by provoking unrest. However, by including the policy intention, however obliquely, it is given legitimacy and lays a foundation for policymakers to consolidate in later documents.

It is possible that policy-makers anticipated adverse reaction, for remaining paragraphs urge LAs to set targets for improvement as usual. The most explicit reference appears in a short paragraph (SEED, 2005a: 7) entitled '*Benchmarking*', emboldened and underlined,

indicating its potential importance for the recipients of the document or for those like HMIE with a monitoring role. There is reference to work '*currently underway*' to develop tools for interrogating data, perhaps to reassure but possibly reflecting different influences on policy communication.

In essence, Circular 02/05 (SEED, 2005a) communicated assessment policy in Scotland following three years of AifL activity. The language emphasises the aim of improving assessment practice, and the structure and content demonstrate how assessment can improve learning. Yet the tone of the document, the ambiguities at key points and apparent effort to allay concerns about accountability, convey continuing tensions in assessment.

#### 4.2.2 Information sheets

The government policy document analysed in the last section was issued to LA leaders only. Although it concerned assessment of pupils aged 3-14, distribution did not extend to schools or early years establishments and it may be useful to remember that, while Scottish Government has legislative control over education, responsibility for schools and teachers in Scotland is devolved to LAs. Scottish Government staff do not make contact with schools, which may help explain the role of LTS as a non-governmental organisation in supporting implementation. Nevertheless, in 2005 and 2007, Scottish Government published its own information sheets (SEED 2005b, SEED 2005c, SEED 2007, Scottish Government 2007) promoting aspects of policy to a wider audience.

##### 4.2.2.1 Assessment is for Learning information sheet

The four page information sheet entitled *Assessment is for Learning* (SEED, 2005c) was published in the same year as Circular 02/05, under Crown copyright. Post-dating the circular, an illustration of the quadrant diagram (SEED, 2005a: 2) appears on the back cover. However, if intended to promote policy, its description of Circular 02/05 as a document which provides '*further information about developments proposed*' may diminish the role of the Circular.

Unlike the formal policy document, the information sheet is printed on glossy coloured card and features the AifL logo. The URL provided is the government's 'www.scotland.gov.uk', and the badges of Scottish Government, LTS and SQA appear along the bottom edge. The text is less formal than that in the circular, the language more accessible.

The sheet begins with a 'Background' section whose introductory paragraph alludes to previous government publications (SEED 2003, SEED 2004c) which I recognise from working in the policy environment at that time, although the latter document is not referenced. Neither predates AifL but instead are forerunners of Circular 02/05. Inclusion of these references may be an attempt to conflate AifL with emerging assessment policy or represent a deliberate attempt to bring together different but concurrent initiatives<sup>54</sup>.

As in Circular 02/05 (SEED, 2005a), AifL's aim is stated as '*a streamlined and coherent system of assessment*'. Three objectives are listed which appear to be severely reduced versions of the three strands in the policy circular. This summary version may indicate a perceived need to simplify the strands for public consumption: i.e. for staff in LAs and schools. The second column concentrates on support structures: '*Assessment Action Group*', '*10 projects*', '*funding*', '*support events*' and this block of text continues into a third column with an interpretation of the progress of AifL so far:

*The outcomes of these initial projects and feedback from formal evaluations and consultation were used to review AifL and to bring the various aspects investigated back together into a streamlined and coherent system, in which assessment for learning and assessment for accountability are complementary, rather than in opposition.*

The use of complementary conveys the idea of mutual benefit.

The next paragraph refers to '*three strands*', but these are not the three strands of Circular 02/05 (SEED, 2005a). Instead they refer to the three kinds of assessment represented on the AifL triangle: '*assessment FOR learning*', '*assessment AS learning*' and '*assessment OF learning*'. The next sentence refers to '*key features*' of assessment which introduces further potential for confusion. The last paragraph states: '*National monitoring is carried out by means of a sample survey rather than blanket national testing, so that*

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<sup>54</sup> References to Assessment is for Learning and to the main ideas in Circular 02/05 appeared in Ambitious Excellent Schools, one of the suite of documents published under the banner of Curriculum for Excellence (SEED 2004a, SEED 2004b, SEED 2004c, SEED 2004d)

*accountability no longer directly drives classroom activity*'. Two aspects are worthy of discussion. Firstly, while the Circular 02/05 contained, as indicated in section 4.2.1, an oblique statement about information on individual pupils and a message which could well have been overlooked, this document clearly communicates the cessation of *'blanket testing'*; and secondly, the use of the present tense towards the end of the sentence may reveal an assumption that policy leads to immediate change in practice.

Sections entitled *'Principles'* and *'Next steps'* appear in the inside pages. The text of the former explains the alignment of research, policy and practice – gathering evidence, using evidence, supporting practitioners and schools to *'build informed communities of practice'* (SEED, 2005b). The reference to communities of practice is repeated in the last paragraph.

Three significant influences are noted in the *'Principles'* section, although the first two contain inaccuracies:

- reflections on the 5-14 policy initiative; but the reference date is that of the policy itself (1991) rather than the subsequent reflections on that policy (SOEID 1999, Hayward et al 2000);
- Black and Wiliam's research (referenced as 1988 rather than 1998);
- the work on transformational learning *'in particular Senge and Scharmer's analysis of community action research approaches (2001)'*.

The section then outlines conditions where *'Learners learn best'* followed by a statement that these underpin *'the three strands'*. These contain a further reference to assessment *as, for and of* learning (LTS, 2004), not the three strands in the circular.

The *'Progress'* text box references LA reports, indicating that involvement in the programme has grown from 195 schools in the pilot phase to 1581. The precision is remarkable, the number indicating that around half the schools in Scotland are already involved in AifL. Reference is made to the SSA and the online national assessment bank, and to the relationship between them. There is also an *'Assessment Online Toolkit'* containing case studies aimed at classroom teachers and school managers but *'of interest'* (SEED, 2005b) to LA, researchers, trainee teachers and pupils.

The following section, *'Next steps'*, returns to the idea of ownership, communities of practice and *'action research approaches'* (SEED, 2005b) and refers to other forms of



support from the '*AifL team*'. However, of the three paragraphs purporting to describe next steps, only one looks to the future. The first paragraph uses past tense to describe collaborative enquiry related to assessment *for, as and of* learning, while paragraph two is written in the present tense explaining AifL's '*philosophy*' of giving '*considerable freedom to schools and teachers to develop practice within their own context at a pace and in a manner that suited local needs*' (SEED, 2005b). Words like '*freedom*', '*own pace*' and '*local needs*' communicate AifL's approach to change.

The third paragraph does refer to the future: by working with LAs and school managers, '*the AifL team*' will continue with '*the creation of a single coherent assessment system to promote assessment for learning and to provide assessment information for monitoring/measurement*'. There is no explanation of what will be monitored or measured, but support is detailed: newsletters, events, resource pack, as well as human resources such as consultants, academics, development officers and government officials.

There is a further reference to the ministerial commitment (SEED, 2004c) to ensure widespread involvement in AifL by 2007. Clearly seen by policy-makers as an important message, the repetition is open to multiple interpretations: it may be intended to reassure, or to pressurise schools or, given that those producing the document have responsibility for policy delivery, the wording might communicate an assurance that the ministerial commitment will be met or betray anxiety that it might not.

The second paragraph offers a partial definition of an AifL school, followed by further reference to support and resources. A further reference to a toolkit including '*self-evaluation*' and '*performance indicators in HGIOS*' indicates to that this is a different toolkit from the one referred to above, but it may be '*the "AifL school" resource pack*' in the main section. Despite my close association with the programme I am unclear, which suggests that others less familiar with the policy may also have been confused by this.

The last page concerns '*The national assessment system*'. It includes the quadrant diagram from Circular 02/05 (SEED, 2005a), referenced in section 4.2.1 but, without the accompanying text from the circular, the illustration may offer little but visual relief. Readers are directed to three policy documents (2004c, 2004d and 2005a) but no reference or source details are provided. The document closes with the opening words of Circular 02/5 '*These developments capture what is best in current practice in Scottish schools and build upon the work undertaken through the AifL-Assessment is for Learning programme*'

(SEED, 2005a: 1). Like '*a streamlined and coherent system*' (SEED, 2005a: 1), this expression is given legitimacy through its inclusion in successive documents.

At first glance, this information sheet intended for wider circulation is more accessible than Circular 02/05 (SEED, 2005a), the formal policy document. However, as demonstrated in this section, the text is repetitive, confusing and inaccurate in part. It is a mediated account of AifL, yet this may have been the only government-produced assessment document to reach the profession in 2005, as policy (SEED, 2005a) was officially communicated only to those in LAs considered responsible for ensuring government policy was enacted.

#### 4.2.2.2 SSA information sheet

The publication examined in the previous section refers to assessment practice in schools. The second information sheet published in 2005 concerns the national survey which, as explained in section 4.2.1, was outwith the scope of school development activity. Like the previous document, this one is also Crown copyright and refers to the government website but the banner heading is '*Scottish Survey of Achievement*', not '*AifL*', and SSA branding replaces the AifL badge. Across the centre spread, running through the distinctive chevrons normally found in CfE documents, are words which appear to be variations of phrases from Ambitious Excellent Schools (SEED 2004c) or Circular 02/05 (SEED, 2005a): '*dependable evidence*'; '*shared standards*'; '*intelligent accountabilities*'; '*helpful feedback*'. Yet, despite the differences, the layout is similar. The '*Background*' title is the same as before and the 'quadrant diagram' appears on the back cover.

The timing of the SSA sheet (SEED, 2005c) is likely to have coincided with the introduction of the SSA, which may explain the detail on the purpose of the survey, the role it plays in '*the overall pattern of assessment in Scottish schools*', and the rationale for its timing '*when pupils are close to completing their programmes of work for the year*'.

The remaining introductory paragraphs list the focus of planned surveys (English language, social subjects (enquiry skills), science and mathematics) and state the assessment items will be '*more generally available through the National Assessment Bank*'. Of three statements which follow, the first and third references indicate intention: '*it is likely to be extended in the future*' and '*may be produced*' but the second is definitive:

results '*are [to be] published in December of the year of the survey*'. However, the timescale was never realised, and the scope of the SSA has since been revised to take account of CfE.

As in Circular 02/05 (SEED, 2005a), substantial space is devoted in this document to describing the '*benefits of the SSA*', providing information about levels of attainment in Scotland as a whole and at local authority level for half the LAs in Scotland. However, there is evidence (Boyd and Hayward, 2007) that LAs continued their own annual uplift of national assessment data.

The document appears to explain the SSA as a research tool. Longitudinal studies are explained as '*direct comparisons ... over time*' and supported by the illustration '*a group of pupils in p3 [who] will be in p7 in the next survey in the same area of the curriculum four years later*'. The document also explains the concept of sample in the SSA: '*a random sample of pupils in a representative sample of schools*' with painstaking clarity: '*it is not necessary to test every pupil in every school to obtain reliable data to report on pupils' attainment*'. Implicit in this is a criticism of national monitoring which encourages testing of individual pupils, yet I can recall that the profession found the concept of survey, random sampling and representative samples difficult to comprehend. It may also have failed to grasp that '*sampling also enables better coverage of the curriculum, as different pupils can tackle different tasks.*'

The word '*tasks*', however, introduces the concept of practical activities as well as pencil and paper tests. The page includes a large photograph of children sitting at computers looking active and interested so that image and the language communicate the message that evidence of learning can be generated through pupils' classroom experience.

The last section acknowledges the role of SSA in providing meaningful opportunities for professional development, a role suggested first in Circular 02/05 (SEED, 2005a). It emphasises that assisting with the delivery of the national survey benefits schools and LAs as well as the survey organisers: '*teachers who take part make a valuable contribution... and value the experience*'.

The third column outlines the logistics for a school involved in the study whilst the fourth, under a photograph of a boy smiling with pen in hand, explains what is involved for pupils. In the last column of the centre spread, are two paragraphs describing how the information

from the survey might be used. The first paragraph describes *'useful information about the strengths and weaknesses...'* because it can *'provide detailed information on pupils' performance of different aspects of mathematics or science'*: a focus on learning as a whole rather than on the individual learner. The second paragraph refers to *'a snapshot of teaching... the classroom organisation, resources, methodologies... as well as the wider social environment'*: possibly avoiding the impression that the results will be used to monitor teachers' performance.

The content and tone of this document (SEED, 2005c) is different from the one discussed in section 4.2.2.1. Although its author is anonymous, the text indicates it has been written by someone with a comfortable understanding of the message conveyed. The content ranges across background, benefits, logistics of involvement, use of information and the locus of the survey in the new assessment system. It is written to be accessible and, although brief reference to words like *'sampling'*, *'random'*, *'representative'* and *'pupil identifier'* appear to assume that these will be readily understood, the SSA information sheet (SEED, 2005c) overall seems to provide a sound introduction to the new national monitoring system.

#### 4.2.2.3 Collaborative enquiry information sheet

A third information sheet (SEED, 2007) focused on AifL's approach to change. Promoting collaborative enquiry, it was published in the final year of central funding. Like the AifL background sheet, it bears the AifL logo and contains the government URL, but there is no reference to the earlier publications (SEED 2005b, SEED 2005c) explored in sections 4.2.2.1 and 4.2.2.2. It opens with a reference to transformational change, although the expression is not clearly explained, and argues that the programme promotes the involvement of all stakeholders in the Scottish education system. It asserts that everyone should own the change process and includes an espoused wish that everyone will learn together. Echoing Circular 02/05 (SEED 2005a), it confirms that all stakeholders must contribute to sustainable change.

In establishing its research base, the information sheet refers not to Senge and Scharmer (2001) whose work had been referenced in the first information sheet (SEED, 2005b), but to feedback from internal research studies and AifL evaluations 2004-06 which suggested key features of design and management underpinning sustainable transformational change.

It lists the critical factors identified by Hayward et al (2005: 50-55): *'the integrity of the change ... building informed communities ... and real involvement'* but does not attribute these findings. Hayward's study is more recent and, with a Scottish research base, was perhaps perceived as more relevant to teachers in Scotland, but the omission of a reference to Senge and Scharmer (2001) which underpinned AifL planning highlights the discontinuity.

The sheet places particular emphasis on the second of Hayward et al's (2005) prerequisites for successful implementation, with repeated reference to *'communities of practice'*. The leaflet indicates that these had been built into the structure of AifL, overseen by the APMG, *'the main forum for liaison and co-operation amongst partners and networks, and intended to encourage the building [of] informed communities of practice'* (SEED, 2007). The reference to APMG membership may be intended to portray AifL as a collaborative venture rather than a government directive but it is interesting that HMIE is named as a stakeholder, one whose needs must be met, and not a policy partner like LTS and SQA.

Further detail is provided on the programme's wider management structures stating that, between 2004 and 2006, AifL evolved a programme management framework which:

*Involve[d] key partners in forming and supporting a number of interacting networks with the overall aim of achieving sustainable change by building informed communities of practice in assessment for learning. Each network ha[d] a distinctive role but underst[ood] that it depend[ed] for its effectiveness on communication and interaction with the others* (SEED, 2007).

Words like *'networks'* and *'partners'*, *'interactions'* and *'interacting'* indicate an appreciation of the role of collaborative activity in building capacity and managing change. However the descriptions of partners' distinctive roles are inconsistent, most obviously in relation to collaboration and partnership. Whereas the information sheet asserts the importance of collaboration and partnership, the order in which stakeholders are listed suggests a hierarchical rather than collegial relationship, reinforcing the issue raised in sections 4.1 and 4.2.1, and explored further in 4.3 and again in chapter 6. First listed is Assessment Division in the Scottish Government, followed closely by HMIE. Their roles are assigned strategic importance, with Scottish Government described as the organisation which develops, advises and manages. It:

*develops assessment policy; advises the Minister on assessment policy; advises authorities and schools about assessment policy framework; chairs AifL*

*Programme Management Group (APMG); manages AifL programme budget; manages professional advisers to AifL [and] SSA consultants; manages associated research/evaluation contracts and projects (SEED, 2007).*

The role of HMIE is described as '*inspect[ing] standards, quality and attainment in Scotland's schools and report[ing] to Scottish Government*' which may refer to HMIE feedback from inspections on strengths and priorities for action. The assignment is interesting given the analysis of HMIE reports in section 4.3 to follow.

Finally, the document explains that those in Scottish universities have a responsibility to: *provide 2 or 3 staff to meet together regularly with staff from SEED, embed AifL practice in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and CPD (continuous professional development), support groups of schools to use research and adopt action research methods, and [almost as an afterthought] conduct small-scale research based on schools' activities (SEED, 2007)*

The leaflet states that '*members of the HEI network will attach themselves to nearby ASGs, providing advice on background reading and research, and on action research approaches*' (SEED, 2007). University staff are therefore assigned an important and wide-ranging role with significant responsibilities to support teachers' learning and develop informed communities of practice. Yet I know from my involvement that grant funding to universities was a fraction of the funding awarded to LAs or to LTS to support development work. There is therefore an interesting dichotomy between the value of research input espoused in the document and its worth in terms of the funding allocated. Phrases like '*will attach themselves*' and '*providing advice*' also communicate, intentionally or not, an unequal power relationship between researchers and teachers.

Although significant in terms of workload, most of the responsibilities assigned to LAs are operational or administrative. According to the sheet, they are to '*support delivery of national assessment policy in schools; appoint an assessment co-ordinator, appoint authority development officers where relevant; nominate and support ASGs to undertake funded AifL projects; provide relevant CPD; nominate field officers and moderators for the SSA*' (SEED, 2007).

The Scottish School Board Association is described '*as providing a representative to suggest ways in which parents and the wider school communities can become involved and*

*better informed about assessment to support learning as it affects their children'* (SEED, 2007). This is the first reference to students' learning, arguably the end goal of professional enquiry in education. It states that representatives from this group may '*suggest ways ...*' but the sentence seems inconclusive, implying no commitment to respond. The involvement of a single parents' representative on APMG and the word '*suggest*' may also indicate the limitations of their influence.

The expression, '*communities of practice*', appears frequently in the document, but these are allusions rather than descriptions. True, there is reference to a joint interest in developing assessment practice through AifL but, with the exception of proposed HEI interaction with ASGs, the role for each organisation is described as discrete and disconnected, undermining the message about collaborative working.

The entries for LTS and SQA are also interesting for they are each assigned an operational function and each organisation's entry is preceded by the words '*Under programme contract to SEED*', delivering an unequivocal message that SEED is in charge. Whilst this is not disputed, the emphasis on contractual responsibilities indicates a tension between SEED as a body directing activities and one participating with others in a genuinely collaborative environment. It is not the language of partnership, promoted in research literature (Senge and Scharmer, 2001) and reinforced in Circular 02/05 (SEED, 2005a).

It may be worth noting that there were changes in personnel at this time. During 2006-07 the head of division, the signatory in Circular 02/05 (SEED, 2005a), moved on and the assessment team leader, prominent in AifL since its inception, was replaced. After a period of relative stability, there were new influences on AifL at national level. The new staff may not have been responsible for the nuanced changes, but their arrival offers one possible explanation.

The final paragraph on partnership networks is also problematic. Far from achieving consistency between espoused theory and theory-in-use (Argyris and Schon, 1974), what is espoused in the document itself is contradictory. The reference to Associated Schools Groups (ASGs) indicates '*they have been the main focus for driving AifL developments*'. The word '*driving*' signals a managerial approach, but it is not clear from the sentence if ASGs have been proactive in the development, or if it communicates that they have been exposed to the full force of policy drivers.

The next sentence states:

*They have allowed practitioners to be involved from the outset of a project in planning, developing and reflecting on real classroom practice in their own local context and school setting, based on established research findings and principles and in collaboration with peers and other schools.*

The initial pronoun could refer to ASGs, but different interpretations are possible:

‘allowed’ could be taken to mean either ‘enabled’ or ‘permitted’. Again the ambiguity is interesting, especially as it is repeated in the description of the benefits of practitioner action research:

*Working in this action research way has allowed professionals to take ownership of developments in assessment, to build informed communities of practice locally, and to make significant and sustained changes in their own practice* (SEED, 2007).

Adjectives like ‘significant’ and ‘sustained’ may be exaggerations in the light of the evaluation published that year (George Street Research, 2007), but it is the repetition of the word ‘allowed’ which merits explanation. The most generous interpretation relates to professional autonomy, but the word could also suggest relaxation of control.

Like the first information sheet, this sheet conveys mixed messages with potential to undermine rather than enhance clarity. In reviewing the document, I was able to identify issues related to politics and policy communication, a perspective I brought to the final government information sheet (Scottish Government, 2007a). It focused on partnership with parents, promoted as co-educators with shared responsibility for pupils’ learning.

#### 4.2.2.4 Parents as Partners information sheet

The final information sheet, intended for parents, may have been produced to complement legislation<sup>55</sup> passed earlier in the same year. While the *Parents as Partners* information sheet bears the AifL logo, it reveals the passage of time. Published in December, the badge indicates the devolved administration has changed its name to Scottish Government.

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<sup>55</sup> The Parental Involvement Act, passed by Scottish Government in August 2007, aimed to achieve greater involvement of parents in their children’s education.



Under the title '*What is an AifL School? Parents as Partners*', there is an explanation of the role of AifL in reconciling the two uses of assessment:

*AifL is about better learning and achievement in Scottish schools. It encourages everyone involved – pupils, staff, parents, the wider school community – to talk about learning and to use the information from assessment as feedback to inform planning for improvement* (Scottish Government, 2007a).

The word '*achievement*' is used rather than attainment, perhaps indicating policy shift (CfE refers to achievement), or a perception of parents' interests, or an attempt to shift attention from a narrow focus on exam results to a broader, more holistic picture.

Photographs throughout illustrate adults interacting with young people at different stages in their lives. The first column lists the conditions where '*learners learn best*', which also appeared on the first information sheet (SEED, 2005b), while the second column links to the parental involvement agenda: '*In the AifL community, everyone is learning together in this way*', encouraging parents to consider themselves '*as learners too*'. Reference is made to pupils spending 86% of their time in their parents' care, and although the evidential source is not referenced, the message communicated is that '*the bulk of responsibility for their children's learning lies with the parents themselves*'. Three statements follow, outlining the nature of parents' involvement. The first statement is not disputed: '*they are central to supporting their children's learning*', but descriptions of children as '*fully aware of how assessment supports learning...*' and '*increasingly able to contribute actively to the assessment process*' are either presumptive or communicate an expectation intended to prompt parents to be drivers for change in schools.

A similar assumption of embedded assessment practice is conveyed in the advice to parents to work with their children in ways which will allow them to '*mirror*' what '*children are experiencing in the classroom*'. The description of pupils' learning experiences implies active involvement: '*they are encouraged to think about...*', '*they agree with their teacher...*', '*and they then choose*' and, although I might question whether this was widespread practice at the time, there may have been a policy assumption of universal practice, given that the AifL deadline (SEED, 2004c: 15) had passed.

Another paragraph appears to make reference to the legislation providing for increased parental involvement: '*the school must look at ways of assisting parents to support their children's learning and become more involved*'. Reference details are provided: the AifL

site, the Parents as Partners in Learning site and the Scottish Government's Parentzone site. Together they are said to provide a range of supporting information.

While the document begins in the abstract, later information is communicated in second person, seeming to talk to the reader. It contains an outline of a paired activity, modeling self-evaluation for parents using two stars and a wish and suggesting a technique to facilitate wider discussion. The word '*together*' is used three times, reinforcing the notion of partnership, whether between pupils and their parents or between parents and staff in schools and LAs.

The sheet communicates the information suggested by the title. The AifL triangle provides an answer to the opening question '*What is an AifL school?*' while the activity is based on supplementary criteria developed for an augmented 'parents' triangle' detailing how parents can be partners in their children's learning. This information sheet was not, however, published until December 2007, only three months before the end of the centrally-funded period. Few hard copies were printed and it was not initially published online, perhaps because AifL was perceived by policymakers to have run its course or because of further changes in personnel.

No further assessment policy documents were published until those promoting assessment in *CfE* (Scottish Government 2009a, Scottish Government 2010a). Those discussed in this section promote different facets of AifL, with the apparent intention of communicating policy more widely. However, as previously indicated, the quality is variable and, while the information in the second and fourth sheet (SEED 2005c, Scottish Government 2007a) appears to reflect the policy intention, the first and third (SEED 2005b, SEED 2007) mediate policy and may have obscured rather than clarified policy objectives.

### 4.3 Reports from inspections of local authorities

Previous sections have referred to HMIE's statutory responsibility for informing and securing policy direction since legislation passed in 2000 required LAs to demonstrate continuing improvement in the quality of education they provide (SEED, 2000). In the absence of legislation relating to curriculum and assessment, HMIE is generally regarded by schools and LAs as a policy enforcer, and strengths and recommendations for action in

inspection reports are known to relate to current policy initiatives<sup>56</sup>. With HMIE having a stated role to ‘inspect standards... and report to Scottish Government’ (SEED, 2007), it seemed likely that HMIE reports on the inspections of LAs and schools might provide a medium for policy reinforcement. For this reason, reports of inspections of LAs participating in this study were analysed for comments which appeared to reinforce national assessment policy, either by reference to AifL activity or, from 2005, to the policy as set out in Circular 02/05 (SEED, 2005a).

As explained, in chapter 2, assessment policy direction was first established by the Scottish coalition administration (SEED 2004a, SEED 2004b, SEED 2004c, SEED 2004d). The policy agenda included an expectation that ‘all schools [would] be part of AifL by 2007’ (SEED, 2004c) and consolidation of assessment policy in Circular 02/5 (SEED, 2005a) confirmed that ‘each of the main partners has an important role to play’ (SEED, 2005a: 2). Whilst I noted in section 4.2.2.3 that HMIE is referred to as a stakeholder, not a partner (SEED, 2007), Circular 02/05 (SEED, 2005a: 3) had previously indicated that HMIE was a partner with a specific role: *‘The Scottish Executive and its partners in the AifL programme, Learning and Teaching Scotland, HMIE (since some of the guidance may come from inspections)’*. Named as a partner in LTS newsletters (LTS, 2002-08) and in Circular 02/05, HMIE had a place on the Assessment Action Group and on the Assessment Programme Management Group (SEED, 2007). Therefore, although HMIE no longer had an official policy-making role (SEED, 2000), there were reasons for assuming HMIE inspections would refer to the policy imperative.

On this assumption, I set about analysing INEA reports on the seven LAs in this study, seeking references to assessment in terms of strengths and priorities for action identified in the inspection process. Analysis of these reports, however, revealed issues not anticipated at the outset. These related to the timing of the reports and the reporting focus.

#### 4.3.1 Timing of the reports

The first challenge to my assumptions arose from the timescale for reporting. The reports spanned the entire period of AifL development, from 2001 until 2008. One LA had

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<sup>56</sup> Although this view is widely held by teachers in school, there is no supporting evidence, but two of the interviewees did describe how they supported schools by scrutinising recent HMIE school reports to discern the policy interest currently promoted in school inspections.

undergone inspection in 2000, so only the follow-up report (HMIE, 2003) fell within the period of the programme but, in order to analyse the follow-up report, I also consulted the initial report. This exercise confirmed no reference to AifL, presumably because the inspection had pre-dated the development programme. There is, however, reference to improvement in approaches to quality assurance and data management which reflects an inspection focus on accountability procedures.

There is no reference either to assessment or to AifL in the report on a second LA (HMIE, 2004). Because there are no recommendations for action, the follow-up report, as expected, contains no associated reference to assessment.

A follow-up report for a third LA, originally inspected in 2004, again contains no reference to assessment procedures, but it does name AifL:

*... staff, working closely with schools, were leading effectively important authority projects and developments in response to national initiatives Assessment is for Learning and A Curriculum for Excellence (HMIE, 2007: 5).*

A footnote defines AifL, linking it with central government policy:

*Assessment is for Learning (AifL) is a Scottish Executive Education Department development programme which outlines key principles which connect assessment with learning and teaching (HMIE, 2007: 5).*

This definition indicates an understanding that the development programme is concerned with a single aspect of assessment. It emphasises formative approaches rather than AifL's declared intention of reconciling the tension between assessment for learning and assessment for accountability. In omitting to clarify AifL's wider purpose, the report has potential to reinforce the misconception identified in notes I had kept previously and which were reviewed in section 4.1: that AifL equated with good learning and teaching.

Later in the same report (HMIE, 2007: 14), there is a reference to '*extensive and high quality staff development*' and '*a high degree of satisfaction with the quality of support provided in key aspects of their work such as the implementation of ACE [Curriculum for Excellence] and AifL*'. There are no details about the nature of this support, nor is there reference to progress towards the 2007 target that 'all schools will be part of Assessment is for Learning by 2007' (SEED, 2004c:15), despite the report's publication in the year of the deadline. Given ministerial support for the initiative - 'AifL is the quiet revolution in

Scottish classrooms' (speech by Peter Peacock at the AifL conference, 2004) - and the public funds committed, these are significant considerations and raise issues about HMIE understanding and its role as a partner in AifL.

From analysis of the four reports above, I began to appreciate that any reports published earlier than 2005 were unlikely to include reference to AifL, to its approach to change, or to progress towards the 2007 target (SEED, 2004c: 15). Changes to the inspection procedure and the different reporting formats introduced a further challenge.

#### 4.3.2 Reporting formats

The reports referred to in the previous section, whether arising from initial inspections or from follow-up visits, were based on a model for inspection undertaken until 2005<sup>57</sup>. In 2006, a 'second cycle of inspections' was introduced, based on a published framework of Quality Indicators said to 'embody the Government's policy on Best Value' (HMIE, 2006: 2). More recent inspections of the LAs in this study were conducted according to this revised<sup>58</sup> model, and the INEA reports reflect this but, while the later reports do refer to AifL, no overall pattern emerges from the review.

One report from this 'second cycle of inspections' (HMIE 2006: 4) contains specific reference to AifL:

*Schools had made very good progress in taking forward the national Assessment is for Learning Programme. In primary schools, pupils demonstrated an understanding of their targets for learning and were increasingly involved in self-evaluation and peer-assessment.*

The AifL footnote described in section 4.3.1 is included, once again emphasising its connection with learning and teaching. Later in the report (HMIE, 2006: 5), reference to cluster working is cited as good practice. This time, the expression 'action research' is included, although the connection with AifL is not specified. Cluster working:

*... was characterised by an action research approach aimed at improving pupils' learning experiences. Staff at all levels across the sectors were involved in working groups to take forward developments.*

<sup>57</sup> HMIE had conducted inspection of the educational function of all 32 LAs during the period 2000-2005.

<sup>58</sup> Further changes to the inspection model were introduced in 2009.

Yet, despite this cross sector working, only the primary schools are named as making very good progress and, although the report might have been expected to include a recommendation that good practice in the primaries be extended into associated secondary schools given the policy requirement (SEED, 2004c: 15), it does not. The areas for improvement in secondaries are related to presentation for national qualifications: ‘*more appropriate pathways for pupils ... to ensure that all pupils were presented at the most appropriate level and achieve success*’ (HMIE, 2007: 13), this time reinforcing misconceptions that assessment in secondary schools concerns qualifications and that other aspects of assessment being addressed through AifL do not apply.

The report on the sixth LA participating in this study, published three months later, makes no specific reference to AifL and, whilst there is reference to assessment, it is concerned with analysis of attainment data, emphasising accountability: ‘*helpful analysis of attainment patterns and trends*’ (HMIE, 2007: 5). There is praise for ‘*[c]ontinued implementation of personal learning planning [which] had encouraged pupils to take responsibility for aspects of their own learning and development*’ (HMIE, 2007: 5) but no link is made to AifL development activity.

The final report (HMIE, 2008) was published within AifL’s funded period and six months after the target date for all schools to be part of AifL (SEED, 2004c). This time, there are several specific references either to AifL or to related activity. For example:

*Learning and teaching officers have provided productive support to teachers in developing approaches to assessment for learning* (HMIE, 2008: 5),

and

*Teachers had used the principles of enterprise well, harmonizing with other major influences on learning and teaching such as formative assessment* (HMIE, 2008: 6).

Yet again, AifL is portrayed as a strategy for good learning and teaching, its wider purpose neglected. The connection with learning and teaching is repeated later with no obvious link to the earlier references:

*There had been considerable improvements in the provision of CPD and most of these were focused on the authority’s priority to support effective learning and teaching. A number of innovative initiatives had been introduced, including Assessment is for Learning (AifL)...* (HMIE, 2008: 12).

The report revives the AifL/learning and teaching footnote used in previous reports. The positioning of AifL in a sentence about initiatives, following immediately after one on learning and teaching, conveys the same misconception evidenced in other reports reviewed in this section.

In this section and the last, I have described how review of HMIE reports relevant to LAs in this study challenged my assumption of finding evidence of policy reinforcement through inspection. The exercise, however, provided insights different from those anticipated and these are outlined in the next section.

#### 4.3.3 Revelations and insights

Analysis of INEA reports enabled me to recognise possible connections between the earlier notes about LAs' preoccupation with formative assessment and references by HMIE to AifL as part of learning and teaching. This led me to wonder if, instead of being a force for change as its website indicates, HMIE might have helped to communicate a message that AifL was simply about formative assessment and that formative assessment was synonymous with good learning and teaching.

Reports also reveal an emphasis on results and data for improvement, reinforcing the original tensions and lending weight to the concerns aired in interview which are explored in chapter 6. This preoccupation with attainment and the misrepresentation of AifL may have fostered wider misunderstanding. Importantly, whilst there is occasional reference to AifL there is nothing, even in reports compiled in 2007 or later, to signify HMIE's commitment to ensuring 'all schools are part of AifL by 2007' (SEED, 2004c: 15).

The reports did, however, confirm that the sample of LAs I had selected reflected the diversity I sought in this study and this information helped to contextualise the interview responses discussed in chapter 5.

#### 4.3.4 Demographic information

Each HMIE report begins with an outline of the geographical and demographical context for inspection, derived principally from census information. This information was used to

contextualise participants' responses. LAs are referenced below as LAs A – G to preserve participant anonymity.

Local Authority A (LAA) is described as a small council with a comparatively high population density and increasing pupil roll. Pupils are drawn from catchments which include urban villages and city suburbs, with some schools in areas of significant deprivation. Ethnically, this LA is described as having one of the most diverse populations in the country.

Local Authority B (LAB) has almost twice the population of LAA. The population in this area, and the pupil roll, is increasing. Levels of unemployment have been falling, but there are still areas of significant deprivation.

Local Authority C (LAC) covers a large and diverse area which includes both urban and remote communities. Its population is twice the size of LAB, and growing steadily, though population change varies across the LA and the area generally attracts an older population. The population is scattered and there are areas of urban and rural deprivation.

Local Authority D (LAD) is an area where the traditional industry is in decline and unemployment is higher than the Scottish average. It is said to face significant challenges in tackling social and economic deprivation and there is a reported issue with drugs misuse although, in contrast, some parts of the council are considered prosperous and thriving.

Like LAC, Local Authority E (LAE) is experiencing population change with growing numbers of people aged over 65 and European immigrants moving into the area. The size of LAE is comparable to LAA, though the families of armed forces personnel account for around a fifth of the population. Unemployment is lower than the national average.

Local Authority F (LAF) is considered one of the largest, most densely populated councils in Scotland. It is divided into four main areas, each of which is geographically and demographically distinct, resulting in a diversity which reputedly poses challenge in terms of educational provision. Unemployment is lower than average but some communities are in areas of deprivation and the LA is said to be challenged to provide appropriate educational provision in rural communities.



The majority of the population in Local Authority G (LAG) lives in an urban area though a higher than average percentage lives in rural communities. Population size is similar to LAA. Like LAA, its schools are full to capacity. Unemployment is considered lower than the Scottish average but, even within this small LA, there are still pockets of high unemployment.

From the information provided, I concluded that the interviewees selected did, as I had intended, represent LAs facing different concerns likely to impact on decisions and account for distinctive priorities. I understood the necessity of appreciating context, given that the study sought to explore the impact of local contextualisation on central policy.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I reviewed my own notes, analysed five Scottish Government documents and made reference to 14 HMIE reports on the inspection of LAs. With the exception of one HMIE report compiled in 2001, all were written or published during the AifL's centrally-funded period, 2002-2008.

The notes written prior to formal communication of policy are provided in order to make transparent any preconceptions I might have had arising from my close involvement in the topic of the study. Principally, the notes revealed early identification of insecure understanding and, in particular, a preoccupation with formative assessment practice.

The government publications were analysed to identify how policy messages were communicated by central government. The seminal policy document Circular 02/05 (SEED, 2005a) outlined the policy position encompassing both assessment for learning and assessment for accountability, and reasserted the role of professional judgments in the new national system of assessment. Crucially, it confirmed that procedures for national monitoring would henceforth be separated from classroom assessment and it modelled a way of reconciling tensions between assessment for learning and assessment for accountability. However, the tone is formal, the register impenetrable in places and the message complex. Significantly, it had a restricted circulation.

Government-published information sheets were also analysed for evidence of policy communication to a wider audience. While the language is more accessible and the

presentation more attractive, two of the publications (SEED 2005b, SEED 2007) mediate policy and, although the others (SEED 2005c, Scottish Government 2007a) seem to be an accurate representation, for reasons outlined in sections 4.2.2.3 and 4.2.2.4 their focus may have resulted in a narrower readership.

Finally, INEA reports published by HMIE 2001-2008 were analysed in the expectation of finding evidence of policy reinforcement. However, the timing of the reports, the changing focus of inspections and apparent inconsistencies meant there was little evidence that HMIE had conscientiously promoted AifL or the new assessment framework. The reports did provide useful background information on the LAs in the study, which enabled me to confirm that the sample reflected the range I desired.

## 5. Exploring perspectives and practice

*Words differently arranged have a different meaning and meanings differently arranged have different effects (Pascal, 1932).*

### Introduction

In the previous chapter, I made reference to a number of documents: personal notes maintained 2004-2005, five documents emanating from Scottish Government (SEED 2005a, SEED 2005b, SEED 2005c, SEED 2007, Scottish Government 2007a) and HMIE reports published 2002-08 on inspections of the LAs participating in this study. I also explained the reasons for their inclusion in this study:

- My own notes were re-examined to contextualise my understanding that a number of different interpretations existed of AifL's key messages;
- Policy text was analysed through Circular 02/05 to reveal how policy was presented and through AifL information sheets to discover how policy was communicated to a wider audience;
- HMIE reports on local authorities were scrutinised for evidence of reinforcement of policy through HMIE inspection processes.

In this chapter, I begin the analysis of raw extracts from the unstructured interviews conducted in September 2008 and June 2009. These are the principal source of data, informing the findings of the study.

Throughout this dissertation, I have sought to be open about my involvement in assessment policy formulation and development and explained my standpoint in chapters 1, 3 and 4. I have also acknowledged that multiple perspectives on the same circumstances are possible. To understand better why this might be the case with AifL, seven co-ordinators were interviewed reflecting those who had this remit across the country. They were selected from a group who had indicated<sup>59</sup> that they felt able to support their staff without continuing input from national development officers.

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<sup>59</sup> Following a request to LAs for an evaluation of their status, AifL team discussions took place to help ensure available support was targeted at LAs with restricted capacity to support their own staff. Criteria related to human resources and perceived levels of understanding of the programme. This information is, for obvious reasons, not in the public domain but I hold a copy and can present it for scrutiny if requested.

The following factors were also taken into account when selecting interviewees:

- attributes, such as gender and role;
- demographic circumstances of respective LAs.

The demographic range was confirmed by information gained from the HMIE reports examined in chapter 4. This chapter explores the views revealed by the interviewees.

In the section which follows, I will endeavour to illustrate how participants came from a range of backgrounds. Thereafter, the chapter is devoted to analysis of responses which were categorised as ‘building capacity’. Within this theme, I will explore references to:

- individual capacity;
- ASG capacity;
- LA capacity.

A second theme will be explored in chapter 6. Categorised as ‘addressing accountability’, it indicates how concerns with performativity may inhibit endeavours to build capacity.

To signify the divide between practice promoting learning and procedures addressing accountability, the latter are included in a separate chapter.

## 5.1 Perspectives

Early analysis of interview transcriptions confirmed my belief that AifL co-ordinators were not a homogenous group and, as I explored their words more deeply, a mini-ethnography emerged of the people whose accounts are analysed later. To preserve their privacy, none of the participants are named in this section and, to protect their identity, pseudonyms are used in the remainder of this chapter and in chapter 6.

One of the participants thought she was applying for a post with a CPD remit which she considered would be *‘just right for me: probationers, students, chartered teacher, SQH, that sort of thing, and developing CPD around that’*. Nevertheless, *‘assessment ended up on my remit’*. She described how, as a headteacher, she had worked on formative assessment but that had been only *‘the beginning of my understanding and knowledge of the whole thing - I did know a wee bit about it but not a huge amount’*.

Another had been asked to assume the AifL remit because he understood the citizenship agenda. He considered he *'had both sides of the coin in terms of the internal aspects and a very strong external assessment background'* and that his skills profile may have led to the assessment remit. He stated that AifL hadn't been entirely unfamiliar, because he had been involved in devising diagnostic assessments in the '70s and in developing criterion referenced assessment. For him, AifL was: *'something different, and tackling things that were out of the ordinary was something I quite enjoyed doing, to be honest'*.

A third participant explained that the aims of AifL resonated with a personal interest in developing thinking skills: *'the capacities came in on page 12<sup>60</sup> ... confirmation of the links between AifL and thinking skills. Maybe, just maybe, we were going to take those seriously ... page 12 was about fostering autonomous learners.'* He had been attracted to what he described as *'the rigour of the approach'* adopted by AifL.

The fourth assumed he had been given the AifL role as others in the team were linguists and historians and *'because I was a scientist, you can answer questions through numbers, you can do this stuff you know ... And so when AifL came in first and the request was to send an assessment co-ordinator... by that time I was dealing with the number side of this, [so it was a case of] you can go'*. He explained his involvement as *'that's what assessment meant'*, indicating that, for him, assessment implied numerical data. He considered his role to have been strategic: *'trying to work out the general direction ...'* and that he was *'probably less involved in the nitty gritty of the staff development'*.

In contrast, a fifth confessed to delight at being given the remit for AifL as this had been critical to establishing credibility within the authority: *'without a budget line you can't really do anything; you're disempowered.'* He claimed his background had been helpful in taking assessment development forward: *'the other thing that was critically important for me was that I had this fantastic set of contacts which allowed me to hit the ground running with that particular remit so I came in with that sort of capital'*. He considered it *'an advantage to bring that action research knowledge into that particular area'* as he appreciated there were no prepared answers and, while he *'wasn't so prescient that [he] knew exactly what [he] was going to do in 05/06, there was a sense of direction there'*.

Other two participants had assumed the AifL remit more recently. The sixth participant

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<sup>60</sup> Reference to A Curriculum for Excellence: the curriculum review group (SEED, 2004: 12) available online at [www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk).

attributed her understanding of the programme to her predecessor's practice of keeping the other officers informed: *'We always attended Curriculum Assessment Co-ordinators' meetings within the authority so we were aware of what was being shared with schools'*.

However, the experience of the seventh interviewee had been quite different. My intention had been to interview the previous post-holder, but her early retirement had forced a change of plan. Given that membership of the co-ordinator group was constantly changing, I recognised the value of exploring LA activity through the eyes of someone who was comparatively new to AifL. Although she had limited experience of AifL, she had been willing to participate but confessed she was still coming to terms with her remit and had been apprehensive about what she might be asked:

*I thought I'm just going to show my ignorance here and I feel as if that's possibly what's coming through. I am still learning but I do feel as if I'm still learning what's going on here'.*

This section outlines different perspectives held by the seven participants who found themselves assigned responsibility for AifL for a variety of reasons. Their backgrounds and interests are summarised in the table below. Even in such a brief summary it is possible to detect the differences, and this is explored further in the sections which follow.

Post	Sector	Linked interest
Education Officer	Primary	Professional development
Development Officer	Secondary	Thinking/learner autonomy
Quality Improvement Officer	Secondary	Personal learning planning
Quality Improvement Manager	Secondary	Citizenship
Performance Manager	Secondary	Data analysis
Support Services Manager	Secondary	Formative assessment
Quality Improvement Officer	Secondary	No linked interest noted

*Table 5-1 Summary of AifL co-ordinators' background extracted from interview transcripts.*

## 5.2 Practice

This section explores how co-ordinators interpreted AifL. As indicated earlier, each has been assigned a pseudonym to preserve their real identity.

Although participants were asked simply to describe their experience of AifL, their responses contained common features. The first overarching theme to emerge was a shared perception of the importance of building professional capacity, particularly in the context of the new curriculum for pupils aged 3-18<sup>61</sup>. Rosemary identified these qualities as important for CfE:

*... we cannot expect staff to support young people in developing those capacities<sup>62</sup> if they don't have them themselves. And we probably have a lot of staff in our schools who would quite openly say that they don't have some of those characteristics.*

She appears to acknowledge the purpose of CfE, known as the four capacities (SEED, 2004a: 12), and she recognises that, to help young people develop, teaching staff themselves need to embody 'those capacities' and some will need support.

Other comments indicate that the concept of deep learning was not universally understood: '*some schools just wanted the handy hints*' (Peter) and '*I think people had selected techniques that they thought would be a quick fix, and they didn't understand that it's not a quick fix*' (Rosemary).

Here Rosemary is alluding to Black and Wiliam's conclusion (1998b: 15) that: 'the improvement of formative assessment cannot be a simple matter. There is no "quick fix" that can be added to existing practice with promise of rapid reward'. Their message is clear: achieving improvement requires reflective action and sustained effort.

Despite this, other interviewees also noted a widespread emphasis on techniques: '*what we were noticing initially was, as you'd expect, that teachers were just picking up on a couple of strategies*' (Clive).

<sup>61</sup> Curriculum for Excellence: the draft experiences and outcomes (Es and Os) were available to staff at the time of the interviews. A revised version of the Es and Os was published in April 2009 and is available online at [www.ltscotland.org.uk/understandingthecurriculum/howisthecurriculumstructured/experiencesandoutcomes/index.asp](http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/understandingthecurriculum/howisthecurriculumstructured/experiencesandoutcomes/index.asp).

<sup>62</sup> Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Responsible Citizens and Effective Contributors (SEED, 2004: 12).

The parenthetical '*as you'd expect*' suggests that the focus on teaching strategies might have been anticipated. A further comment indicates misinterpretation of key messages from the formative assessment pilot: '*just the kind of tricks and techniques that, you know, formative assessment kind of started out as*' (Jean).

Peter's comments indicate he also had noted this misunderstanding:

*... one of the best days for example was when [name of academic] articulated the principles. In fact, I specifically said to him, "Please do not talk about strategies at all" ... two principal teachers then went back to the headteacher and said it was the first time that formative assessment had been portrayed as something other than a box of tricks.*

His words may be interpreted in different ways. Firstly, they demonstrate his experience of professional development encouraging certain practical techniques, perhaps accounting for wider failure to internalise the principles, but his plea to the academic also demonstrates that he himself has deeper understanding.

Phrases like '*as you'd expect*', and '*that, you know, formative assessment kind of started out as*' and '*it was the first time that formative assessment has been portrayed as something other than a box of tricks*' from people with different perspectives indicate this issue was not confined to specific areas. While responses suggest most of the interviewees had arrived at a deeper understanding over time, Joanne's response reveals that she has not yet developed this understanding. Referring to courses on co-operative learning she had organised, she indicates these focus on techniques: '*I would like to build on [co-operative learning training] in terms of giving them more strategies for formative assessment within the classroom*'.

Reference to a preoccupation with practical strategies in five of the seven interviews is indicative of the difficulties Black and Wiliam (2006b) anticipated in translating theory into classroom practice. However it is clear that, for some, the early messages were clear, for both David and Peter reflect on how they had communicated AifL as principles as opposed to techniques:

*... I think that we also grasped onto it's not about techniques, and we looked at how can we make a difference. So we actually broke down the formative assessment much more clearly ... with lots of statements around the four kind of key big areas, and we let staff experiment with that, in the terms of what are you doing at the*



*moment that you think you're good at, in terms of learning intentions? What are you doing and you think you're good at in terms of questioning, and asking questions... it wasn't a techniques approach, and I think that's the strength of it. It wasn't about lots of wee things like traffic lights; it's why you're using the strategy that you're using (David).*

David seems to be suggesting that he has been conveying the importance of understanding the rationale. Peter also indicates his appreciation that professionalism demands deep understanding. Recalling a presentation given by a consultant engaged to support schools, Peter says:

*The guy made it into engage with others: why would you want to do this? And they liked that whereas others had thought, 'Oh we'll just give them the handy hints'. You think, well, actually you're insulting me. You know, I can go and read that strategy. I want to know why would I want to pick up the strategy booklet. That might be a more interesting question.*

However, while both David and Peter indicate their appreciation of the need for understanding, the approaches they describe are quite different, possibly influenced by their previous experience. In the first response above David, a Quality Improvement Manager (QIM), refers to the centrality of principles as opposed to techniques. This had prompted him to undertake an evaluation of existing practice in the light of Black and Wiliam's findings (1998a, 1998b), identifying strengths and developments needs. Staff development had then been tackled in-house, focused on sharing learning objectives with pupils and developing questioning skills.

The extent to which this activity led to deeper learning is unclear, for David describes attempts to simplify concepts. Here he implies that Black and Wiliam's summary document (1998b) needed further clarification. The expression '*we let staff experiment*' is also open to interpretation for, whilst David may be seeking to convey professional freedom, his words also suggest dependency.

Peter, on secondment from his teaching post, also speaks of principles and considers that changed practice is only likely if staff understand better how their practice can impact on pupils' learning. Having accessed AifL-funded consultancy, he insists that professional development should lead to greater understanding. Reflecting on his interpretation of AifL, he says '*it was meant to be challenging*', contrasting with David's '*we broke down*

*the formative assessment much more clearly*'. Peter also indicates his desire to avoid dependency: *'we can't just turn round and say to people, "Oh, by the way, we've actually worked out a conception for you"'*.

Although David depicts a professional learning environment quite different to the one Peter describes, he indicates he understands the importance of reflection on action in professional development. Referring to the framework provided by the central team to support staff to plan and evaluate action research projects<sup>63</sup>, David says: *'I think the documentation that you developed, I think it was very helpful 'cause it did make people think about what they were doing'*.

Joanne's views of AifL were quite different. Although I knew that schools in her LA had participated in collaborative enquiry projects into all three aspects of AifL<sup>64</sup> Joanne understood this as: *'Every teacher's now been trained in it'*.

She also stated that there was now:

*[an] expectation that it's in schools. Whether they'll revisit again a year after implementation to see if it is being used and how it's being used or if anyone's extended it or if it's fallen back, I don't know.*

It is unclear whether these comments reflect the LAs position or Joanne's understanding of it, based on her short time working within the LA, but expressions like *'trained'* and *'rolled out'* reveal a particular view of what makes for effective professional development. Despite expectations, *'we kind of assume that these formative assessment strategies are kind of built in. They're embedded now'*, Joanne's impression of progress is not favourable: *'there's definitely a lack of understanding. That's something I need to address again. I don't know how'*.

Several points may be taken from Joanne's response. Having previously shared *'I'm just going to show my ignorance here'*, Joanne still feels able to evaluate the situation in her LA. Even if she is correct, it is unclear how the situation might be resolved, given her assertion of *'ignorance'* and her perception of professional development as training.

<sup>63</sup> See Reflection for Action and Reflection on Action templates included as 2(b) and 2(c) on pages 213 and 220 respectively.

<sup>64</sup> Assessment for learning, assessment as learning and assessment of learning, which together form an integrated approach to classroom assessment and, in the AifL triangle, illustrate practice expected in an 'AifL school'.

This section illustrates how different interviewees perceived AifL. It has revealed similarities and differences both subtle and explicit. These co-ordinators all indicated their concern that teachers' understanding was not sound, but their individual understanding of AifL varied: one saw it as training in formative techniques and, while others understood that more was involved, some were concerned that it had been presented as such at least in the early stages. Some, having seen beyond techniques, had arrived at their own understanding and recognised staff would have to do the same, but they had adopted quite different approaches. These differences also emerge in their descriptions of how they each tried to build the capacity of individual members of staff.

### 5.2.1 Building individual capacity

To build the capacity of individual staff, co-ordinators had distributed professional literature to enhance understanding. Some referred to reading as a form of CPD: *'we've provided some CPD materials that schools can have, that they can refer staff to, to refresh or to focus staff back into what we would hope they would be doing'* (Rosemary).

Rosemary makes no reference to specific literature but, as with David in the previous section and those quoted below, the phrase *'we've provided'* conveys the impression of a benevolent employer and expressions such as, *'they can refer staff to'* and *'focus staff back into'* reveal a mindset which prescribes professional reading when a need is identified.

Others were specific about the nature of reading material purchased with core funding. They named a number of publications, especially *Inside the Black Box* (Black and Wiliam, 1998b) and subsequent publications (for example, Black et al 2002, Black and Harrison 2004, Hodgson and Wiliam 2006, Marshall and Wiliam 2006) which contextualise key principles in different subject disciplines:

*the "Black Box" stuff, ... all the different versions of that we bought them and put them into schools so they all had access to that all that kind of stuff* (Clive).

David also indicated he had provided reading material:

*we encourage them to go to read ... we've bought all the materials, we've bought all the things, "Technology in the Black Box", "History in the Black Box", all of the things as they came out, got them out to the schools, and got them to think in that way, and also highlighted as much as we could of the materials that we were getting.*

*We bought in a lot of the managers' guides, and the wee teachers' guides, you know stuff from the ARIA people, distributed a lot of that.*

In referring to the '*managers' guides*' and the '*wee teachers' guides*' and '*stuff from the ARIA people*', David demonstrates his knowledge of the resources available. The managers' guides (AAIA, 2008a and 2008b) illustrate formative assessment from the differing perspectives of teachers, managers and parents'. Other literature ascribed to the '*ARIA people*' defines the assessment obligations for all partners (Gardner et al, 2008) although in referring to 'stuff' David may be referring to other publications, including one published (ARG, 2005) within the period of the programme and promoted by the national assessment team.

Once again, David's words suggest two interpretations. In using phrases such as '*we encouraged them*', '*we've bought*', '*we got them to think*' and '*highlighted as much as we could*', he unconsciously reveals how staff are being directed, reinforcing the dependencies suggested in section 5.2. The reference to '*wee teachers' guides*' is also open to interpretation: the use of the diminutive may, for example, refer to format, or to simplified versions, or convey that he is dismissive of the simplicity.

Apart from David's obvious knowledge of available resources and his description of the action they were used to prompt, other responses were less clear about the purpose of distributing resources. Rosemary saw these as documents '*on a shelf*', reference books available for consultation should the need arise. Clive also indicated they were there for '*access*', implying a similar use, although he concedes the two development officers '*did [read] and therefore they were able to talk quite knowledgeably about what was happening elsewhere and pass that information onto teachers to think about ...*'. It is worth noting that he uses '*stuff*' twice in the same sentence. This may indicate the importance he himself attached to professional reading, or, given the role of development officers and his less direct involvement, he may be seeking to cover his comparative lack of knowledge.

The comments generally indicate interviewees' acceptance of their role in disseminating what are perceived to be important messages. Peter's comments reveal school staff may expect resources to be supplied. He describes how staff wanted copies of slides used by an external presenter and his response that the slides are meaningless if staff do not engage with the ideas:

*the very next day the senior managers had said it would be great to take some of [name of consultant]'s slides ..., they wanted to use some of his work, and it was evident they couldn't. First of all they weren't in [name of consultant]'s head. ... I remember saying categorically ... we need this in-house dialogue and debate but you can't just take his [slides].*

Despite his concern to support individual reflection, Peter makes no reference to encouraging reading, although browsing the council's online resource reveals extensive reference to research findings. Other interviewees were quick to refer to the reading materials distributed but, with the exception of David, were less forthcoming about their encouragement to staff to engage with the texts. Indeed Clive and Rosemary indicate no active involvement beyond ensuring distribution.

Both David and Andrew had purchased the same commercial resource to help staff make connections between research and practice. One of the two had committed LA core funding to purchase the resource for school 'clusters' and then used the ASG grant to provide supply cover for staff to attend 'train the trainer sessions' and subsequently facilitate school-based professional development:

*... we trained that cohort for 2004/05. I think it was about twenty seven or twenty eight teachers. And then in 2005/06, we doubled the cohort ... (Andrew).*

It is interesting that Andrew, who was involved in the AifL pilot prior to taking up his post, and who had previously referred to action research projects, should use the word '*trained*' just as Joanne with no prior knowledge had done (see section 5.2). It is difficult to know how to interpret this, given AifL's emphasis on action research and collaborative enquiry. It may be that Andrew had never fully subscribed to practitioner action research, although this seems unlikely given his later comments. Perhaps it is the result of enculturation in his new LA role which had caused him to abandon one of AifL's key elements; but it is also possible that the expression was simply shorthand between two parties who had close association with AifL, with Andrew assuming I understood his meaning.

Whatever his understanding, Andrew now reflected that his original approach had enjoyed mixed success:

*Where that worked, it worked really well, and to this very day, it's been refreshed. So to a certain extent you have got a certain amount of sustainability there without direction from the centre because these arrangements are continuing and*

*[resources] are actually still being used. Whereas at the opposite end of the spectrum, at the most pessimistic end of the spectrum, the [resources] would disappear, the trainers would deny responsibility that they ever had been trained in the first place, and when you ask them about the [resources] you would meet with a blank stare, and you had all the kind of variegated responses in between.*

He observes that professional learning can take place without central direction, but also observes that his approach has had minimal impact in some schools. There is an interesting irony in the reference to ‘trainers’ and ‘trained’ in the account of staff amnesia and, in retrospect, Andrew concludes his was a traditional transmissive approach: ‘*I suppose when you get down to it, it was a cascade model ... it had varying success*’.

As a result of his experience, his second attempt to build capacity was based on referring staff to reports written by their peers who had undertaken action research projects:

*This is basically the teachers’ narratives from 2006/07. ... I thought that having this in schools might have a significant impact on the seven AifL working groups that exist within the seven secondary schools. ... I got forty copies for each school, and ... it went to the Staff Development Co-ordinator and the covering letter basically said could you please distribute these as follows: a copy to the head teacher and a copy to the members of the Senior Management Team ... each of the main faculty areas were to have copies ... and copies to the people who are working on the assessment working groups within the schools. My hope and my expectation from this was that because it was teachers that they knew, and it was their story, ... that it would have credibility and impact ... (Andrew).*

The sentence is unfinished, but Andrew appears to convey his belief that staff are more likely to be influenced by the experience of their peers. The past tense appears to relate to the thinking behind his ‘*hope*’ and ‘*expectation*’ as distribution of the case studies was still underway. It would be interesting to discover if his hopes were fulfilled and his expectations met.

Although Joanne’s responses are, in general, at odds with the others involved in this study, she also describes staff involved in producing a booklet for their peers:

*I know one of my secondary schools has been trying to work on numeracy across the curriculum, and one of the promoted maths teachers has come up with a set of guidelines for every department ... they’ve actually worked at it and they have a*

*booklet now of methods that can be used across all the departments and they've got everybody trained in that, they distributed the booklet.*

Expressions such as '*a set of guidelines for every department*', '*a booklet of methods*' and '*they've got everybody trained in that*' suggest that, unlike the action research reports produced by teachers in Andrew's LA, the booklet describes teaching techniques. In describing the booklet, the speaker's tone is complimentary which reinforces my initial impression of her perspective.

Overall, co-ordinators described building individual capacity by providing assessment literature, practitioner guidance and case study reports. Their accounts indicate different approaches which may be mapped onto a continuum, from Joanne's commendation of the practical strategies booklet at one end to Andrew's continuing search for ways of engaging secondary school staff at the other. In the middle, lie those who purchased resources and ensured their distribution but appeared to offer no further encouragement to engage with the texts.

For most, certain literature (for example Black and Wiliam, 1998b) was regarded as 'core' reading, supplemented in some cases by commercial interpretations of this seminal text. In several instances, teaching staff also produced resources for their peers: some to share their learning journey and others to share teaching tips. These ranged from a booklet of methods for colleagues in the same school, action research reports compiled for the LA and distributed to a range of staff in other secondary schools, and teachers and consultants collaborating to produce resources to facilitate others' professional learning.

### 5.2.2 Building ASG capacity

Just as most interviewees spoke of efforts to build individual capacity, most also referred to professional networks, for example though ASGs. Joanne did not refer to this at all, possibly because she was unfamiliar with development activity in her LA.

Although David's description of practice in section 5.2.1, lent credence to the impression that school development was controlled centrally, he espoused a belief in staff empowerment through collegiate approaches:

*... we've got a lot of talented people in our schools. Let's use these talents together*

*in a collegiate way of working and it's walking the talk at every level, I think, so we're trying to work together and it's a much less top down approach than it ever was. I think there's no doubt about that. Schools are being able to become more empowering themselves and in turn we hope that if the schools are empowered, their staff are empowered, and in due course the children are empowered.*

His use of 'Let's', suggests collegiate working as does his reference to 'walk the talk', but coming before the reference to collegiality, the words 'we've got' continue to indicate local authority control, even though he argues 'it's much less a top down approach than it ever was'.

Others also refer to collaborative working as a source of professional development. Clive indicates his perception of ASG activity as professional development:

*I was discussing where they [seconded development officers] were heading and trying to work out the general direction in how they would take forward the ASGs. I was probably less involved in the nitty gritty of the staff development they were involved in 'cause that was up to them.*

In the context of the debate in chapter 2 about professional development and professional learning, it is interesting that Clive should refer to 'staff development'. His comment, followed by an allusion to his lack of involvement in the 'nitty gritty' has Tayloresque undertones. He also indicates networks have been formed, but explains how he had deployed central funding differently. His was manifestly a managed model:

*We always do things differently in [name of LA] ..., and I didn't like the idea of giving one cluster six thousand pounds, and saying to one cluster go away and develop whatever that was, you know the formative assessment strategies or whatever. Because I knew that as, a relatively small authority, we couldn't give the other clusters the same amount of money to take that forward themselves. So, because of that, we tended to control things a wee bit more and we used the funding to develop things across the authority so that all clusters were broadly going forward at the same pace because otherwise you would've had one cluster with a lot of money and time to develop something and then we would have to say to the other clusters, "Right that's what they've found. Use that model and further develop it yourselves but I'm sorry we can't give you any money" and that wouldn't have been fair (Clive).*



LA direction is explicit in Clive's description: '*we tended to control things a wee bit more*'. The repeated use of '*I*' and '*we*' and the detail in his explanation may also indicate that his own outlook influenced the LA's strategy. He speaks of '*broadly go[ing] forward at the same pace*' indicating his is a behaviourist approach based on a linear view of learning which ignores any prior knowledge and understanding.

Clive does acknowledge, though apparently without regret, the disadvantages of an approach involving broad, uniform dissemination. He accepts that depth of learning was sacrificed for breadth and coverage, but he still rationalises his decision:

*One of the things that people made a lot of in Assessment is for Learning was the fact that practitioners were getting involved in doing some research. I don't think many of our practitioners got involved in doing research ... If you're giving six thousand pounds to a cluster or a school to take something forward, there would be a lot more time available for individuals who could've researched things very thoroughly but there was no way we could've afforded that across the authority so the practitioner research bit was probably the weak link.*

By dismissing collaborative enquiry as '*the practitioner research bit*' Clive indicates he has not been persuaded of the merits of this model whereas, in contrast, Peter observes uniform instruction is ineffective: '*I stopped behaving like a DO in terms of going out and giving wee insets 'cause I thought there was a limited use to that*'. There is a pejorative tone in Peter's use of '*wee insets*' while the allusion to '*behaving like a DO*' suggests development officers generally deliver training, which fits with Clive's description of the '*nitty gritty of the staff development*' undertaken by his two seconded development officers.

Jean recognises the benefits which come from sharing with others in an ASG:

*I thought long and hard about the funding for ASGs and how much difference that has made ... I think probably for the majority it was really worthwhile because it gave them time to get together to form their wee groups and to talk with each other and share their ideas.*

and

*the learning and teaching group that I had working with me, which were representatives from our clusters or ASGs ..., they've been really helpful because they worked together to go into schools and share what they were doing.*

Despite this recommendation, the phrase ‘*wee groups*’ in the first of the paragraphs above could be interpreted as patronising, yet Jean attests to the fact teaching staff have been eager to continue, without funding, in what she describes as a ‘*learning community*’. Given the structure of the sentence, it is possible that Jean is reporting how group members now see themselves:

*... although we actually don't have funding for them any more, we had a session just before summer about what they thought their role was etc, and they came to the conclusion that really there wasn't a set role for them any more, but they wanted to stay together as a learning community, because the actual sharing ... had been absolutely fantastically valuable for them.*

Jean's words indicate teachers themselves value professional collaboration but while she is able to offer evidence of self-sustaining networks, Andrew considers it unlikely that staff will continue to participate without direction now that funding has ended:

*The role of the authority is to sustain teacher networks ... They won't sustain themselves. Working groups within schools will sustain themselves, but the broader picture will not sustain itself and the best fit you'll get to that in terms of spontaneity would be those cluster arrangements that were spontaneously taking place in the primary sector.*

He argues strongly that networking capacity depends on central direction but, at the same time, concedes that networking has evolved spontaneously across schools in the primary sector whereas secondaries have difficulty in networking more widely than cross departmental working groups. His expression ‘*the best fit you'll get to that*’ suggests that, without central intervention, networking falls far short of the ideal.

Rosemary describes how her LA had assumed responsibility for sustaining the ASG model after the period of central funding:

*We certainly chose to continue with the funding beyond the point where we had government funding. We extended it by a year to support the ASGs and gave them it as an additional year of funding.*

Her commitment to professional networks was continuing through the promotion of teacher learning communities (TLCs), the origins of which lie in research (Black et al, 2002, Black et al, 2003, Wiliam, 2006). In Scotland, the model has been adopted by a

professional consultancy<sup>65</sup>. In Rosemary's considered view, the benefits of TLCs lie in their emphasis on professional reflection, self-awareness and peer support:

*I was thinking about the TLCs and ... the sort of discussions that they have when they come back and really how engaged some members of staff are in the sort of self-reflection .... But I think what's also come in through the TLCs is the teacher as the learner ... I mean they're actually quite reluctant around the peer observation, you know, even though they're there as a group ... everyone assumes that teachers are quite confident in what they're doing, and in fact they're not. ... one of the things that I've learned is the power that there is of peer support.*

These TLCs appear to be funded through the LA budget, although '*the whole process is badged up and it all belongs to [name of consultant] and whatever else in his support notes*'. Her words indicate TLCs operate according to a pre-established format and have a formality precluding the spontaneity Andrew would like to see encouraged.

In outlining their approach to building ASG capacity, David refers to talented people working in a collegiate way under LA direction, Jean refers to learning communities continuing at the request of staff but calls them 'wee groups'. With Rosemary's LA continuing to fund organised TLCs, and Andrew hoping for 'spontaneity' but arguing that central organisation is necessary, there are a number of interpretations of what constitutes a learning community. Clive, who had consciously dismissed action research models, observes that schools which assumed responsibility for their own learning appear to have moved further in their learning than was possible with LA direction: '*...schools have taken it forward themselves and have probably got further ahead than what we might have managed to take them*'.

His '*good practice networks*', however, indicate outsider direction:

*...we've put together seven groups of schools where the schools are from some other social economic groupings. So the headteachers will meet with the heads in their own cluster, which is going to feed to the secondary but they're also meeting with headteachers who are in very similar schools, and there's a lot of good work going on with sharing and discussing and all sorts of things.*

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<sup>65</sup> Tapestry.

While it is still possible for schools within the same cluster to meet together, schools are also assigned to these ‘*good practice networks*’ by sector and circumstance. Thus, primary headteachers can meet their peers from schools which have been identified as having similar features to their own<sup>66</sup>.

Although Clive comments on ‘*good work... and sharing and discussing*’ which indicates professional dialogue, membership of networks is restricted to headteachers so it is possible that discussion will concern administrative matters rather than learning and teaching. The reference to ‘*feed to the secondary*’ may suggest small tributaries flowing into big rivers but a less generous interpretation is of primary schools performing a service function by preparing pupils for their secondary school education. His words reveal a similar outlook to those referring to staff development above, and seem neglectful of pupils and their learning. Overall, these networks fit with Clive’s previous description of a top-down model, reinforcing my impression of a managerial approach where professional learning is not the first priority.

In contrast, both Peter and David agree that the benefits of ASG working lie in opportunities for staff to reflect on their practice and discuss possible improvements:

*‘the question is what kind of things would we do? What are we currently doing, and what could we do a bit more of?’* (Peter)

and

*‘the [LA] model has been one of trying to encourage people to do things within their own context ... That model was a good model and it allowed people to really come together to think through what the issues were’* (David).

Both statements link thinking and doing, and suggest ASG activity allows for contextualised learning, based on reflection and action and focused on change and improvement.

The extracts included in this section suggest that interviewees adopted different approaches to building capacity through networks. Again, evidence suggests a continuum of practice, ranging from recognition of their potential for critical reflection and ownership (as with David and Peter) to Clive’s ‘*good practice networks*’ based on a statistical analysis of their circumstances. Once again, while co-ordinators used similar language and talked of

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<sup>66</sup> Off interview, Clive demonstrated the data collected and how it was analysed. It is a numerical calculation with schools allocated to quartiles and deciles.

building capacity through collaborative working, there were differences in approaches adopted. All six who referred to ASGs focused on structures, describing how they had formed their ASGs and outlining the benefits for staff but, notably, none referred to the ultimate aim of professional learning and impact on children's progress and achievement.

### 5.2.3 Building local authority capacity

The third subsidiary theme was the building of local authority capacity. Reference to leadership emerged in several interviews. Almost all participants felt it important to secure the co-operation of school leaders in taking developments forward. David speaks of the importance of involving school leaders from the outset:

*I always did things through the model of let headteachers, let the senior management team know what was involved. Then you would take it to the teachers after that as a model of working.*

In this, David appears to acknowledge established hierarchies, observing associated courtesies by informing headteachers before attempting to introduce new ideas more widely. Andrew also recognises the importance of informing senior managers before approaching teaching staff. His reasons are less to do with protocols and more about establishing the support structure:

*I mean [those teachers engaged in action research] have to know that in the background there's an awareness of what they're doing, there's an interest in what they're doing, and there's support for what they're doing. They need to know that the headteacher and the staff development co-ordinator, the specific DHT, that they're fully signed up to this, there's an expectation from the headteacher that something's going to come out of this, and that when they go to the staff development co-ordinator and tell them that they're going out of school for the day that it's all arranged and so on. They need to know that that infrastructure is in the background supporting them. So if you say that it's "bottom-up", it's only half the story.*

Andrew also observes that, if these foundations are not laid, senior managers may, deliberately or inadvertently, block innovation:

*... the first thing was to allocate funding and resources and time to getting to the senior managers. So the headteachers were targeted in terms of overall policy and direction because without them nothing was going to happen of any substance.*

His pessimism is evident in *'nothing was going to happen of any substance'*. This could imply a disregard for teacher endeavour, but his later comment, below, suggests that this is more likely to stem from his time as a development officer, witnessing headteachers exercising their autonomy by blocking innovation, either through negligence or outright resistance. However, echoing his previous comment about ASGs, he argues for active intervention:

*[Previous national involvement] gave me the idea that a robust headteacher was necessary to take the vision forward within the school. You would always get zealots, you would always get what you call the cognoscenti in various pockets across a school, but it was never going to go further than that unless there was an overall strategic direction from the headteacher .... you need that strong direction from a headteacher.*

David's views of the role are more aspirational. Although he speaks of high expectation of leadership and shared responsibility, development is still directed by the LA.

*We sent strong messages out to the headteachers that they have got a strong role in their school about consistency, about taking it forward and ensuring that it's not as patchy.*

The word *'patchy'* appears to relate to the consistency the LA wishes to achieve. In urging headteachers' involvement to ensure it is *'not as patchy'* he reveals inconsistency is an issue within the LA and that headteachers are expected to help resolve it.

Both Andrew and Jean express their concern that support will be ineffective if headteachers' understanding is weak and they agree that building professional capacity needs to include headteachers' engagement in reviewing policy and practice:

*One of the things that's absolutely crucial is for the senior managers and the heads of establishment to have a knowledge of national policy developments and what that means for pedagogy within their establishment and to keep that on the boil on some kind of perpetual basis so that you have to revisit it in some way ... and keep senior managers on that track (Andrew).*

However, while Andrew's concern is to ensure policy objectives are communicated and senior managers are kept *'on track'*, Jean's comments reveal a concern to improve the quality of leadership by developing headteachers' understanding and skills:

*...headteachers have got to be able to guide and to work with their staff and to make*

*sure that they are able to take risks ... So I think a lot more kind of practical work with headteachers [is needed] and almost insisting that they come and share and know and listen to each other, 'cause I think we don't yet have all our headteachers with the right skills or understanding or at the same level.*

'Almost insisting' is an interesting phrase, implying headteachers may not appreciate their own need for professional learning. This point was raised by Jean who had already introduced development opportunities for headteachers to build the shared understanding required:

*... the headteacher really, really was the crux of the matter and if they did not have the understanding, then you know they did not know that their school was moving forward in the right way. So we have towards the end of last year and this year, we've done kind of AifL for headteachers update.*

Andrew is more specific about the impact of headteachers' disposition and commitment to educational reform, and how this affects their ability to support their staff:

*... it's going to vary wildly from one headteacher to another. They have radically individual profiles and characteristics and some of them are very strong in terms of the resource, budget, logistical administration side of things, and that's where their strength lies. There are others who are deeply interested in pedagogy, and really keep their finger on the pulse in terms of what's happening in classrooms, trying to get into classrooms, trying to give supportive feedback to teachers, and there are others who acknowledge the importance of AifL, but it's simply not where their interest lies. Their interests may lie, for example, in 'values education' and they may say, for example, the purpose and function of schools in society is the rounded development of the whole individual, and they're looking at schools to impart unequivocal clear values to pupils and that's where their interests lie, rather than particular interests of pedagogy. So you've got these wildly different profiles and therefore, because you've got that, you've got big differences in the extent to which they will absorb anything that you directly transmit to them as a piece of information, such as a circular or a draft policy or whatever, and that's just a fact of life.*

In this, Andrew reinforces Jean's point that local authority capacity is dependent on the capacity of school leaders to take their schools forward, and his words indicate that mere information transmission is similarly ineffective at that level. He suggests that secondary

school leaders have particular preoccupations, which may account for slower progress of assessment development in secondary schools:

*... if I've got available funding and I want to take something to the primary sector ... it will be relatively unchallenging and they will be eager to take that up. In the case of the secondary sector, if I have available funding and I want to take something to them, I've got to get involved in some really quite intense horse-trading and one-to-one discussions before I can get any kind of consensus on that. So that's quite a challenge for a QIO. [What] I've spent a huge amount of personal time on is to negotiate with headteachers on a one to one basis, prior to them discussing what they want to do with their own informal network arrangements, and that lobbying to me has been absolutely central, particularly in the secondary sector where, if you don't get that strategic agreement from the secondary heads, and it isn't an easy process, it absolutely is not an easy process to get your secondary heads to buy into your programme because they've got other competing demands. And in many instances, they largely become administrators because they're not overly concerned [with learning] but they're hugely concerned with budgets, they're hugely concerned with budgets rather than directly with pedagogy as such. So it's necessary to invest a huge amount of time and actual interacting and lobbying with those secondary heads in particular.*

Andrew's comments describe the range of pressures on secondary headteachers whose many, and often competing, responsibilities can divert their attention from learning and teaching, allegedly the core business of schools. While ostensibly arguing that strong leadership in schools is essential, his description includes words like 'horse-trading', 'lobbying', 'negotiate', 'interacting', 'strategic agreement' and 'buy in', suggesting that LA staff need highly-developed interpersonal and negotiating skills in their dealings with headteachers.

Rosemary also suggests that senior managers in secondary schools have different priorities, but while Andrew referred to administrative preoccupations, Rosemary indicates pedagogical considerations are subsidiary to their concerns with accountability:

*I think there is a concern out there around accountability ... in a fair number of our secondary schools, there is a recognition that assessment for learning and formative assessment is a keystone to everything that's going on. But there are concerns out there about summative assessment and what's going to happen with the sort of recognised manner in which schools formally assess young people. And so there is*



*... quite a tension between your telling us on the one hand that we should be you know moving forward with formative assessment and so on, but, we know that somebody at some point is going to come along and say, "Well, now you have to assess in a formal way at a particular time", so there are those tensions there and [LA] does gather the data from the national assessments. We understand that that will stop in the summer of 2010 but the big concern at the moment for schools is what will be there in its place.*

Here, Rosemary argues that, although secondary school headteachers can recognise the potential of formative assessment, they are concerned to avoid criticism and so are reluctant to encourage changed practice for fear of undermining the school's performance in any comparator tables.

Peter's very different outlook is perhaps influenced by his work as a development officer, working with middle rather than senior managers in schools. In supporting curriculum groups to reflect on their practice through an action research approach, he had acknowledged teachers' concern for good results, but did not now allow this to predominate:

*Some of these were hard edged principal teachers, faculty heads. Attainment was a big agenda for them, and they engaged [in the action research project].*

In arguing '*and they engaged*', Peter is suggesting that not all managers prioritise assessment for accountability over assessment for learning, but his views are not universally held.

Apart from acknowledging headteachers' preoccupation with accountability, Rosemary appeared less concerned than others about the need for quality leadership in building LA capacity. The TLCs she was promoting required minimal input from headteachers:

*... we've actually said to them, "You know your senior management team shouldn't actually be part of this group unless they are classroom teachers". It's something that's there for the practitioner and it's really in their hands how they take it forward.*

Rosemary's expression '*... it's really in their hands how they take it forward*' contrasts with Andrew's argument that change needs top-down direction. Rosemary emphasises that any headteacher support should be purely practical:

*What we've said to them or to the senior managers would be, "Could you find a bit of time within your collegiate time? Could you make sure that there's somewhere where they can have their meeting and the janitor's not going to throw them out at half past five? To be supportive and to help with any photocopying that needs doing and so on?" We do have some schools where the senior managers are involved because basically they do a bit of teaching and they themselves want to improve on what they're doing. But in others it's just down to the group of staff themselves.*

Requests to headteachers such as '*Could you find a bit of time within your collegiate time? Could you make sure that there's somewhere where they can have their meeting?*' seem timorous compared to Andrew's '*lobbying*' and negotiation to secure '*strategic agreement*', but reflect the respective standpoints of the two speakers. Rosemary's responses reveal a light-touch approach, built on trust and co-operation, arguably more in tune with collaborative approaches recommended in the literature explored in chapter 2, while Andrew's comments reflect his more managerial outlook.

Together, these accounts illustrate the continuum of approaches adopted. In the descriptions of building LA capacity, only Rosemary appears to hold to the view that this is dependent on encouraging teacher autonomy, albeit funded by the LA and with light-touch support requested from senior managers. Andrew, however, says that '*bottom-up*' is only '*half the story*' and both he and David are relying on headteachers to share responsibility for developing practice across the LA. Jean recognises that those in leadership positions may themselves require support before they are in a position to support developments across the LA, and both Andrew and Rosemary observe that their ability to do so may be inhibited by other responsibilities and preoccupations.

In this chapter, Rosemary makes reference to headteachers' fear of being held accountable for falling standards and is clear that this can act as an inhibitor. Because this theme emerged in several interviews, it is explored as a potential influence on LAs' contextualisation of AifL. To symbolise the divide between approaches with potential to enhance professional learning and those which inhibit, the theme of accountability is explored separately in the next chapter.

## 6. Conflicts and priorities

*Never ignore, never refuse to see, what may be thought against your thought.'*

*(Nietzsche, date unknown)*

### Introduction

The previous chapter outlined one theme to emerge from interviews and, within this broad theme, the three sub-themes which emerged. In each case, similarities in interviewees' responses were identified and their distinctive approaches described.

The study revealed that levels of concern to build capacity in assessment were matched by anxieties about performance and accountability. This theme is explored further in this chapter, where the following will be considered:

- underlying insecurities and concerns;
- emerging systems and structures.

It is worth recalling that the starting point for the study had been the review of assessment (SOEID, 1999) and the response to the consultation on assessment and reporting (Hayward et al, 2000). It was prompted by the last evaluation to be commissioned (George Street Research, 2007) which referred to inconsistent approaches to AifL. To discover what accounted for differences between LAs, I sought to probe LA contextualisation of AifL more deeply. However, I was unprepared for similarities in one aspect of LA activity.

From its inception, AifL had promoted approaches based on professional learning through collaborative enquiry, with the intention of achieving sustainable change. Much of my time had been devoted to devising support for action research projects which had resulted in my anticipation that the interviews would reveal detail of how LAs had established and supported professional learning. However, whilst a large part of each interview did refer to building capacity, I was surprised to discover interviewees also wanted to discuss accountability and the approaches they had adopted to address this.

I acknowledged the need to report all findings, not only those which confirmed my assumptions, in order to demonstrate that interviews had been conducted in an open and transparent way and that all data had been considered. However, to make the distinction

and symbolise the continuing disconnect between assessment to support learning and assessment serving purposes of accountability, I have intentionally separated the two data sets and the second theme is set in a chapter of its own.

## 6.1 Accountability aired

Considerable reference was made to accountability in the course of six of the interviews. Referring to potential gaps between schools' self-evaluation and the evidence gathered by LA officers, Jean conveys her concern:

*It's very worrying if a head teacher says to you ... their self-evaluation of learning and teaching is that this percentage of their teachers are actually excellent teachers ... That is a huge worry if there's a huge gap, which is why I think to work with them in sharing the standard in this way and to get the dialogue going about ... why they think that and what are the elements that are good.*

Her comment betrays a belief that headteachers have an exaggerated sense of the capability of their staff. Repetition in the phrases 'very worrying' and 'huge worry' indicates Jean's concern and she reiterates her belief that the answer to inconsistency lies in the professional reflection which she has been trying to promote.

In contrast to Jean's approach, Joanne has been contemplating extending the use of standardised tests:

*We've talked about [name of test A] in primary and there is some [name of test B] testing going on in the secondary. One of the things we've spoken about from that side of it is actually making some sort of planning for continuity of information so you can track pupils. So one of the things I need to look at is [name of test B] work in the primary. At the moment people use the [name of test A] testing, but [name of test producers] have a different secondary system. So I kind of wonder... is it compatible with the [name of test B]?*

Joanne's main concern is that one externally-produced test, widely used in primary schools, may be incompatible with another preferred by secondary schools. She describes her uncertainty about the extent to which information passed on by primary colleagues is reliable and useful to secondary school staff. Neither test A nor test B is curriculum-based, but the validity of the instrument does not appear to concern Joanne. Rather, in

commenting on the possibility that schools may not be making full use of the information '*How much use is made of it within the classroom, we're not entirely sure*', she seems to be critical of teachers' neglect rather than the quality of the information arising from the test. The failure more generally to appreciate the importance of validity may suggest one reason for the continuing tension between assessment for learning and assessment for accountability which appeared to concerned most participants.

## 6.2 Insecurities and concerns

Several interviewees indicated they were trying to reconcile assessment for learning and assessment for accountability by focusing on improvements in pupils' learning as part of monitoring school performance. However, it became clear from their responses that the tensions identified a decade earlier (SOEID, 1999) remained unresolved.

Jean and Rosemary raised concerns about assessment practice in the context of the new curriculum, with its broad learning outcomes and emphasis on skills development. Rosemary recalled teachers' initial resistance to using national testing as confirmation of professional judgment of progress in '5-14' reading, writing and mathematics. She also noted that resistance diminished and use of tests increased, coinciding with increased demands for accountability during the 1990s. With the introduction of *Curriculum for Excellence*, she recognised a need for innovative assessment to capture the range of learning embedded in the curriculum experiences and outcomes and to gather evidence of pupils' achievements in a range of contexts. This new focus may require more than a mark or a grade and Jean appears to understand school managers' disquiet at having to evaluate the quality of learning and teaching without referring to levels:

*They have to be absolutely clear though that there is some way of measuring progress and saying that pupils are progressing. And that's really where we are just now.*

It is interesting that Jean uses the word '*measuring*' rather than '*assessing*'. It may be a semantic distinction, reference to words used by school managers, but they reveal concern to find a system which will help senior staff in schools and LAs to monitor progress. Rosemary confirmed that information about pupils' progress was still used to measure school performance and that, as a result of current reform, school managers believed they would no longer have the information that they needed to gauge quality:

*It's coming from headteachers. It is coming from headteachers. I think in the past, headteachers saw national tests as a way of checking up on teachers. You know ... that will confirm for me that my teachers are doing exactly what they should be doing. Now primary schools fought that for a long time but even primary headteachers began to see this as, "This is great because it's a facility that I have. It's a mechanism that I can use to say yes, my teachers have got this right".*

The repetition of '*It's coming from headteachers*' appears to emphasise Rosemary's desire to explain that pressure for quality assurance mechanisms is coming from schools themselves. Phrases such as '*a way of checking up on teachers*' and '*yes, my teachers have got this right*' echo Jean's words and indicate lack of trust at all levels. Rosemary explains that headteachers use test results to confirm teachers' judgments which are considered unreliable:

*It got to the point that headteachers in primaries in particular liked it because it was an external validation of what their teachers were telling them.*

Her later remarks indicate the source of their anxieties:

*...the number of headteachers that I've heard say that they have been, not quite berated, but really put on the back foot because they haven't had the depth of understanding around the analysis of that data. You know that they have their own systems where they do track children ... They are then questioned because they haven't used the sort of statistical analysis that's available to them to draw out, "Is it a member of staff that I need to be chasing up?" ... And headteachers, they know that their school's going to be evaluated in that way and they're really quite concerned about it.*

The expression '*chasing up*' is a further reference to distrust, this time within schools and, in reporting claims from headteachers that they '*have been, not quite berated, but really put on the back foot*', Rosemary exposes the poor relationship between schools and those who monitor schools' performance. Jean confirms that pressure from those monitoring performance can encourage a focus on accountability: '*I know as a headteacher you push them through because if you don't have your percentage you're in trouble*'.

These remarks suggest that school managers can be more focused on achieving targets than in monitoring what makes for effective learning. In referring twice to data analysis and commenting that '*they know that their school's going to be evaluated in that way*',

Rosemary acknowledges that statistical data is the preferred evidence of school performance. It is not clear who is evaluating the school *'in that way'*, but she acknowledges later that:

*We are still in the position that the first thing the HMI ask for when they go into a school is about attainment and if you're not using National Assessments, you have the additional task of convincing them that the assessments that you are using are robust.*

Faced, therefore, with having not only to justify assessments of pupils' progress, but also defend the basis of that judgment, schools appear to have little appetite for replacing assessments thought to enjoy general confidence.

Jean's commentary on the role of QIOs illustrates how practice within LAs is also affected:

*... if they've got to collect the data, that's what they've got to push onto their schools. You know, "Why have your percentages dropped?" and "Why hasn't this child ...?" I mean there's some sort of system that we have, which is our district inspector ... his 'flight paths', right. A child reached level A<sup>67</sup> in June 2007, then in June of 2008 they should definitely have achieved level B and, if not, they go red, and then once you're red, I think you stay red forever, I don't know. And I think how can any sensible person think that pupils learn like that ... That's what puts the panic on headteachers, on teachers, you know we've got to get them through level B or they'll turn red [laughs] ... but we're talking about right at the top saying, "Right we don't actually want these figures anymore".*

Jean is clear where the pressure comes from and how pre-determined *'flight paths'* can result in staff trying to protect children from *'going red'* by ensuring their trajectory of progress is maintained. While she indicates by her laughter her opinion of *'flight paths'* for pupils, she communicates her powerlessness to change the situation and argues that instruction needs to come from *'right at the top'*.

In Clive's LA, performance monitoring also involves forecasting of pupils' progress. This includes regular *'performatory meetings'*:

*[Headteachers] have a termly tracking meeting with every teacher where they'll sit*

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<sup>67</sup> National Guidelines for the Curriculum 5-14 (SOED, 1990) presented outcomes at six levels A-F, which informed what was taught in primary schools and the first two years of secondary.

*down with a teacher, they'll look at where the children are at individually, they'll discuss individual children's progress and they'll work out where they would expect them to be by the next tracking meeting.*

Both Jean's account of 'flight paths' and Clive's statement that 'they'll work out where they would expect them to be by the next tracking meeting' reveal that linear views of progress still prevail and that performance monitoring takes poor account of the impact of assessment, the individuals involved or the circumstances and interventions which might lead to barriers to or improvements in learning.

Coming from a different viewpoint, Peter is critical of preoccupations with attainment:

*We also tried the attainment agenda, targets and all the rest of it but, you know, when the QIOs say to us "What about the impact?" my question seems to be, "You know, Pontius Pilate would get a job with you guys, you know. What did you do? I mean you've had twenty years of this agenda". You know, maybe it's missing from research but I can't see any great raising in attainment. I mean what we still have in Scotland is one of the worst fall-out rates once they get to college or university anyway. So their learning wasn't that robust. So even when you can say look we've got so many As and Bs like some authorities are obsessed by, well you know.*

His reference to Pontius Pilate conveys his irreverence for the system which has evolved, and his criticism of those who continue to promote attainment targets in the face of evidence to the contrary. In his reference to 'fall-out rates', Peter reiterates this view, arguing that schools are failing many pupils because the emphasis is on results rather than secure learning. Importantly, the connotation is betrayal: of learners and their parents, of teachers, or perhaps of the Scottish education system as a whole.

At the opposite end of the continuum, Clive's role was to gather evidence of improvement. He described mechanisms he had devised to support schools to produce robust evidence, including input from colleagues, seconded periodically to work alongside HMIE:

*One or two of our Quality Improvement Officers are Associate Assessors so they've got an understanding of how the HMI would deal with situations and they've got a kind of an idea of broadly what we're looking for in each school.*

He indicates here that schools are encouraged to meet HMIE expectations. His use of the word 'we're' in 'what we're looking for in each school' suggests that Clive sees his role as



not dissimilar to HMIE. This is reinforced in his description of LA officers' activities:

*We're not in every primary school every year, but we try to get into the primary school in the middle of the HMI cycle so that there'll be an inspector. You leave a wee bit of time for them just to settle down after that then we'll try and go in and do a review. And there might be a bit of follow up with the authority and that should tee them up for their next inspection.*

Clive indicates his perception that the LA team is providing strong support for schools. Following HMIE inspection, schools are given 'a wee bit of time to settle' before a quality improvement visit 'in the middle of the HMI cycle', then 'there'll be a follow up', which suggests schools can expect this level of scrutiny every second school year. His reference 'to tee them up for their next inspection' indicates the primary focus of LA support is to ensure schools are prepared for HMIE inspection.

This concern to achieve positive inspection outcomes is reiterated by Andrew:

*... the other weapon, not weapon sorry but tool, that we would also use is, and we used it when we were preparing for the INEA inspection, was basically to collate what was taking place in AifL through inspection reports, and we would continue to undertake that approach as well. Particularly since it's one of the arms of the Concordat<sup>68</sup> ... it's one of the measures that you look at, the quality of favourable inspection reports.*

Practice in Andrew's LA involves collating the findings from recent HMIE reports on school inspections and extracting from this what appears to be the current agenda. This information is then used to appraise schools anticipating imminent inspection.

In what might be interpreted as a Freudian slip, 'the other weapon, not weapon sorry but tool' Andrew makes reference to the same uneasy relationship that Jean and Rosemary suggested earlier. It is an analogy with war, with schools the enemy. Andrew's words also highlight the importance attached to positive outcomes from HMIE inspection. In his LA, the education target agreed with Scottish Government appears to be related to the number of schools confirmed by inspection to be performing well.

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<sup>68</sup> The agreement drawn up between Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) (2007). This removed central-government ring-fencing of funding to LAs, allowing LAs greater autonomy over spending. In return, COSLA agreed LAs would set targets for improvement, in consultation with Scottish Government.

From this account and those of other interviewees, it became clear that systems and structures had been developed with the specific purpose of ensuring that schools and LAs receive a clean bill of health from HMIE.

### 6.3 Systems and structures

The interviews revealed that building capacity could be inconsequential in a culture which emphasised the desirability of gathering objective measurement. For example, at the time of interview, Andrew was considering how best to measure the impact of AifL, because the only evidence available had come from teachers themselves:

*... how are we going to systematically measure the impact of AifL on teacher practice? Because there's a lot of subjective evidence. If you look at these narratives, you get a lot of subjective evidence of positive impact from teachers themselves.*

Twice he repeats '*a lot of*' evidence, but he also repeats '*subjective*'. Despite an apparent plethora of evidence, he suggests this is unreliable and seeks further proof of impact. His assumption seems to be not only that teachers' evidence cannot be trusted, but that reliability can be guaranteed by '*systematically measure[ing] impact*'. The obvious question is why it should be deemed necessary to '*systematically measure impact*' when teachers have clearly stated that their practice has changed, but this reference to methodology reveals a positivist perspective, assuming there is an objective truth and a need for an approach requiring the kind of controls which might be more appropriate in a laboratory experiment.

Rosemary, who had recently added a quality improvement role to her support remit, also expressed concerns, but hers were related to the reliability of the quality assurance practice itself and inconsistency within the monitoring and evaluation process:

*We have the sort of formal paperwork and we have formal meetings and we're sort of talking through what the authority expects ... I mean there's a new performance profile that schools are expected to complete. It's been updated to accommodate "How good is our school<sup>69</sup>?" and so on, and we do have meetings. The team of 21 meets, but it tends to be a meeting where what we actually do is just circulate*

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<sup>69</sup> Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (2007) *How Good is our School?*, from <http://www.hmie.gov.uk/documents/publication/hgiosjte3.pdf> (last accessed 02/01/11)

*paperwork, and ask where you are with this, and not a lot of this business of peer support and sort of moderation exercises. Are we getting it right? Because at this moment in time there are no guarantees that my evaluation of what a school is saying is the same as anyone else in the team.*

Jean, in her support role, was less apprehensive, possibly because of the emphasis on dialogue in her LA. She and her colleagues in the support service had each been paired with a QIO in order to make active connections between perceived development needs and support:

*We go in and do the quality audits as well so we have that sort of dialogue about learning and teaching a lot. And we each have a QIO that we're discussing learning and teaching with anyway and how everything links together and that's what we're trying to do at the moment, to make links between leadership and what I'm doing, the formative assessment or collaborative learning ... the links are all there but we're trying to make closer links.*

The expression 'quality audits' was used in a number of interviews. It became clear that this practice, even with a different name, was common among LAs in this study. In Andrew's and Clive's LAs, these often had a thematic focus, such as citizenship or enterprise or inclusion. A review of AifL, as Andrew imagined it:

*would've involved officers, DHTs and possibly principal teachers who would be organised into teams. There would be briefing meetings and then they would go out to a sample of schools.*

Andrew indicated he considered his LA the exception in including classroom visits:

*Now this is one of the authorities where that cycle was ingrained. Whereas, in other local authorities, a QIO doesn't go into classrooms, but in this authority they do.*

However, David reported classroom observations were an integral part of school monitoring procedures in his LA:

*...when we do our standards and quality review, when we talk about going into a school for about four days, five days. We would be talking about a team of at least three or four you know, no less than three, sometimes even four or five ... but it'll be QIOs, it will be a peer head teacher and it will be one of our consultants. We're in classrooms a lot. The focus of a lot of what we're doing is in classroom observation.*

*We don't go in and sit at the back with a clipboard. We do go in and we work in the classroom with the teachers in an active way.*

Interviews with Joanne and Clive showed that classroom visits were common in their LAs also. For example:

*I was thinking of my principal teachers where there's an expectation of classroom observation (Joanne).*

and

*We're asking the school to arrange class visits so that people will be sitting in observing lessons (Clive).*

Clive described a recent literacy audit. As in David's LA, the team included a range of staff:

*We're looking at it in quite a lot of depth. Typically there'll be [name], I'll be there, the school's Quality Improvement Officer, there'll be a peer Quality Improvement Officer from another cluster there, there'll be a peer literacy co-ordinator from another primary school and there'll be a secondary PT.*

He detailed the process:

*We also do quality audits and they're sometimes in secondary schools, sometimes in the primary schools, so there'll be a quality audit on a rota basis in to each of the secondary subjects ... There is a specialist in that subject and a Quality Improvement Officer will go in, observe a few lessons, talk to the PT, discuss resources and discuss other aspects with the headteacher and then we'll have a report on the subject in that school, an authority report, a subject across the authority [report], and, if you're picking up similarities, [a report] on schools across the authority, maybe. That's an issue for staff development ... There are different ways of getting in and about folk.*

Apart from Andrew who uses the expression 'going out' to schools, several others referred to 'going in'. The phrase has menacing connotations, conjuring images of unwelcome visitors. The same expression was used by Rosemary earlier to describe HMIE inspection, lending weight to the impression that QIOs may behave 'like mini inspectors'<sup>70</sup>. Clive's description of 'different ways of getting in and about folk' has connotations of a sheepdog

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<sup>70</sup> Maggie Allan, Executive Director of Education Resources in South Lanarkshire at Association of Headteachers in Scotland (AHTS) conference, May, 2007.

rounding up wayward sheep. The impression may be undeserved, but these images reiterate the concerns raised in the last section that the drive for quality improvement may have created a climate of fear and stifled professional creativity.

Practice in Jean's LA contrasts with that in Clive's. She indicates that observers are not necessarily LA officers, and classroom observations may be conducted by a member of the school staff:

*The observations will have somebody not necessarily centrally, but from a team and somebody from within the school observing the lesson, the dialogue afterwards, kind of moderation, sharing the standard of what a good lesson actually is.*

The word '*observing*', used by several interviewees implies an unequal power relationship, but Jean clearly feels the review is collegiate, given that it concludes with '*dialogue focused on learning and teaching*'. Her phrase '*sharing the standard of what a good lesson actually is*' is possibly a hybrid of two expressions used in AifL: in assessment for learning, 'show them what a good one looks like' to explain modelling; and in assessment of learning, 'staff talk and work together to share standards' to illustrate one of the benefits of local moderation. The expression '*good lesson*' could apply to good teaching or good learning or both, which raises questions about criteria for 'good' and interpretation of the evidence. Jean's words are open to further interpretation. They may indicate a predetermined, externally imposed standard, or describe staff engaged in genuine debate, negotiating and agreeing the standard and applying it consistently.

However, David's description of classroom observations suggests the willing participation of staff because:

*... at the end of the day we offer the teachers, on a voluntary basis, feedback. And that is pretty well taken up by everybody. They're desperate for feedback and it's professional dialogue.*

Here, David describes feedback as a conversation with a focus on pupils' learning, rather than teachers' behaviour, and where teachers give reciprocal feedback on the observation process. The image conveyed is of professionals focused on improvement, although '*desperate for feedback*' could infer a need for positive reinforcement in a climate of control.

The dialogue Clive describes is different. It takes place among those conducting the

evaluation; there is no discussion between observers and the observed:

*... at the end of the day you're sitting having a conversation of what you have seen in classes, what did you take from the meeting you had with teachers, what information did you get from the meeting you had with the class assistants, this kind of thing. And at the end of the day we just write a brief report for the headteacher on areas of strength, good things, any wee developments we think should be taken forward, this kind of thing, and then the headteacher will get that report.*

His description illustrates how power is exercised. Phrases like ‘*what you have seen in classes*’, ‘*what did you take from the meeting you had with teacher*’ and ‘*what information did you get from the meeting you had with the class assistants*’ suggest spying but also indicate the subjective basis of the evaluation, a corollary of Andrew’s earlier concern about teachers’ ‘*subjective evidence*’ and his desire for something more reliable. Only Rosemary queried the reliability of officers’ conclusions. In Clive’s words, the reference to ‘*wee developments*’ is open to interpretation: it may simply be a colloquial expression, or it could be intended to convey minimal pressure on schools. Coming after a detailed description of formal audits resembling inspections, the image it creates is of sledgehammer and nut. With the LA emerging as power broker, the process does not appear to promote collaboration among equals for, throughout the evaluation exercise, the team maintains its detachment and the process culminates not in dialogue but in a written report for the headteacher.

## 6.4 Building bridges

The previous chapter indicated that building capacity was one theme to emerge from the interviews while, in sections 6.2 and 6.3, I have explored preoccupations with accountability as a second overarching theme. This section explores the extent to which interviewees were seeking to reconcile the tensions between these two issues.

It is clear that interviewees felt the systems and structures provided reassurance that they were carrying out their statutory role but some LAs were attempting to develop practice which aligned the statutory requirement for accountability with the moral imperative to support pupils’ learning. For example Jean, already quoted in sections 5.3 and 6.2, had organised opportunities for staff to work together, assessing pupils’ work, discussing the learning demonstrated and agreeing standards:

*Actually, this year I put out to all English departments in secondaries four pieces of writing. ... I said to them, "... Have a look at the criteria and discuss with your staff and put them in order of least developed, most developed, and then maybe a wee bit about what are the next steps for each of these". The number of headteachers who said, "This is really, really, hard. We've had a huge amount of discussion about it but it's really, really, hard".*

In seeking to support reliable professional judgments, she demonstrates her understanding that improved professional understanding of assessment can contribute to LA capacity and help reconcile the requirement for accountability with schools' responsibility to support learning. Clive also had plans to align assessment for learning with assessment for accountability:

*... my proposal for next session is that we still broadly ... use the standards of 5-14 but teachers won't use national assessment tests. Through professional discussion and moderation they [will] arrive at the levels that they think their children should be at. That's our plan for the coming session, to get them used to the idea for professional discussion and moderation, with the headteacher having a more important role in setting the standards within the school or suggesting that, if they have a moderation meeting within the school, that they should invite a couple of teachers from other neighbouring schools in the cluster, and that kind of helps to set the standards within the cluster, and then as an authority.*

However, while the LA is now seeking to gather evidence from classroom based activities rather than tests, the description of headteachers taking on '*a more important role ... in setting the standards within the school*' not only fails to acknowledge the importance of dialogue and discussion in agreeing a standard, but assumes that headteachers have the understanding and capacity to set a definitive standard. In contrast, Jean's account indicates that headteachers found this '*really, really, hard*' and her experience suggests that Clive's confidence may be misplaced.

Jean also acknowledged that, despite the pairing of support staff with improvement officers, there is still a divide between staff with different remits so, despite her own efforts to align assessment for learning and assessment for accountability, competing priorities reinforce the tension:

*Our authority still wants the 5-14 data, which is totally unreliable data. We do have some way to go simply because that's the culture that they're in. It's quality*

*assurance. It's "Let's look at your attainment data, and let's see if we can make it better by putting more children through".*

Peter acknowledged similar issues in his LA: *'There is still an issue of the QIOs and that tension there'* but, like Jean, he indicates his hope that the development work he is engaged in to build individual capacity will help resolve this issue:

*There were frictions there in terms of certainly the QIOs. But the one reason we were able to offset that was because of the work that we were doing, the CPD.*

Others were tackling the tension between assessment for learning and assessment for accountability by building capacity among QIOs. David and Andrew described how they aimed to ensure that quality assurance procedures did not undermine efforts to build capacity across the LA:

*At the beginning I found that there was very few of our QTs [quality teams] had a working knowledge of AifL till about maybe last year it built up to probably 80% of them now do have ... What we found was quite useful was to bring them up to a kind of common level of understanding, and then let them discuss issues and we can say at least they know some of the key ideas behind it. They know the research basis, the King's College background. They know some of these fundamentals (David).*

Without his intervention, David maintains that LA staff monitoring school performance would have limited understanding of what makes for good assessment practice; without this appreciation, their evaluation of practice could be unreliable and the evaluation process itself invalid. Even now, after input on *'the fundamentals'*, David's description suggests one fifth of the officers in his LA could be evaluating schools using invalid indicators, thereby defeating the purpose of monitoring performance in its schools.

Andrew indicated he also was trying to address the issue by including QIOs in development work so that they understood the focus of classroom observations:

*... all the QIOs opted into the ongoing in-service in AifL that was taken forward because that was raising the consciousness of the QIOs themselves. That would hopefully increasingly become a focus in their classroom observations when they were looking at learning experiences [and] teaching for effective learning.*

Four of the seven interviewees were seeking ways of aligning assessment for learning with assessment for accountability but, whereas Jean and Peter in a support role were more



focused on building capacity among school staff, Andrew and David, with a quality improvement remit, had included QIOs. Jean described how collaborative practice was helping to ensure judgments about schools' performance were underpinned by an understanding of what constitutes quality. She credited her head of service:

*He's trying very hard ... to change the whole culture and I think it is beginning to happen, making sure that they (QIOs) know what good learning and teaching is because they're the ones who go in and do these quality audits.*

Reflecting on his own lack of involvement with the QIO team, Peter commented:

*... It would be worth considering, could I have spent more time trying to bring on the QIOs? The importance would've been that they could've helped disseminate this in the schools.*

This suggests two possible benefits from improving QIOs' understanding: fewer tensions between the two streams of work, supporting learning and assuring quality; and achieving a more effective distribution of workload where QIOs help schools to recognise and resolve tensions between assessment for learning and assessment for accountability.

David, Andrew, Jean and Peter highlight in different ways the need to ensure that staff with a monitoring role understand the principles of sound assessment practice; if they are to be charged with evaluating the work of schools, they need to understand how assessment impacts on learning. Without this level of understanding, efforts to drive up standards are sterile because they fail to take account of learners and learning in realising school improvement.

## Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the evidence related to the second of the two overarching themes emerging from the seven interviews conducted. As in the previous chapter, substantial reference has been made to extracts from interviews conducted with assessment co-ordinators in seven LAs. The evidence included here is evidence of continuing tensions between assessment for learning and assessment for accountability.

The seventh interview followed a different course. The participant, recently in post, had a different perception of what AifL had set out to achieve, but her response illustrated what

can happen when staff move on. This will be discussed further in chapter 7.

Among the other six, one noticeable difference was that only Andrew alluded to Circular 02/05, referring to it as '*a seminal document*'. Although he was no longer working at national level, his earlier involvement may have influenced the relative importance he attached to the document whereas other interviewees neglected to mention it at all. This may suggest limited awareness of the document or a narrow understanding of its purpose. Heightened awareness might have reassured Jean that her request for instruction to come from '*right at the top*' had been already granted although, as I explained in chapter 4, the instruction was not unambiguous.

Whilst, in chapter 5, I suggested participants were still seeking clarity on how to build capacity, they were clear about structures and systems for accountability which appeared to be well established and bore a similarity across different LAs. Perhaps because LAs are themselves judged by HMIE, and because their relative autonomy depends on a successful inspection, this increases pressure on LA officers to find ways of protecting themselves. In the context of these established systems, more innovative approaches, involving a range of evidence, interpretation of qualitative information, and increased use of teachers' judgments struggled to find acceptance and few queried the validity or reliability of current school evaluation procedures.

There was some cause for cautious optimism. While the interviews seemed to contain overwhelming reference to accountability, some co-ordinators reported attempts to reconcile competing priorities by adapting accountability procedures to help build capacity. Some were ensuring that those with a 'quality' remit knew of the research findings while others appreciated that, without intervention, systems and structures for accountability would simply perpetuate tensions. One example of such intervention is the refinement of the quality audit process to include peer observation and discussion, enabling a shared understanding of what might be expected of pupils and teachers.

## 7. Airing the issues

*In writing a problem down or airing it in conversation, we let its essential aspects emerge. And by knowing its character, we remove, if not the problem itself, then its secondary aggravating characteristics: confusion, displacement, surprise.'*

*(De Botton, 2000)*

### Introduction

This interpretive study set out to explore how assessment co-ordinators in different LAs led assessment development under the auspices of the centrally-funded AifL programme. Chapters 1-3 outlined the background to the study, reviewed relevant literature and offered a rationale for the research design. Chapter 4 explored policy messages by analysing policy text (SEED, 2005a) and policy discourse in the four information sheets (SEED, 2005b, SEED 2005d, SEED, 2007, Scottish Government 2007) that were used as the basis of communication with stakeholders. INEA reports on the seven LAs involved were also examined for evidence of policy reinforcement through HMIE inspection and feedback. Finally, chapters 5 and 6 provided an analysis of interviewees' responses presented as recurring themes.

In this chapter, I will reflect on this analysis, drawing conclusions by referring both to the policy communicated and the descriptions<sup>71</sup> of AifL enactment within seven Scottish LAs. I will suggest that AifL met some of its aims and, just as it built on the partial success of the '5-14 programme', it has also provided a strong foundation for further assessment development in Scotland, including the development of the assessment skills required by *Curriculum for Excellence*, set out in the framework for assessment (Scottish Government, 2010a) and its supporting papers (Scottish Government 2010b, Scottish Government 2010c).

Current policy documents (Scottish Government 2009a, Scottish Government 2010a) assert that the purpose of assessment is to support learning and engage learners, which may be said to reflect AifL features of assessment *for* learning and assessment *as* learning. These documents emphasise the need to ensure quality in assessment but there is the danger in the culture identified that this is interpreted solely as moderation for quality

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<sup>71</sup> Quotations from interviews are distinguished by italics in the text.

assurance purposes, so it will be important to ensure it applies to all assessment practice.

It may be that current policy is seeking to address what has remained unresolved: removing the tension between assessment for learning and assessment of learning by recognising the centrality of teachers' judgments both in improving students' learning and in providing information which enables schools and LAs to satisfy themselves and other interested parties that pupils are progressing as they should. It would make sense therefore for ongoing assessment reforms to build on progress to date and take account of lessons learned from AifL. These would include acknowledging possible reasons for continuing difficulties in achieving a coherent system of assessment.

The findings provide an insight into the perspectives of staff in LAs, the issues which concern them, and the pressures they experience. The remainder of this chapter will outline these findings, returning to the four questions which were central to this study:

- How was AifL enacted within different LAs?
- Were there any differences and, if so, what might account for these differences?
- Does difference matter?
- What implications might there be for future policy initiatives?

Reference is made in this chapter to literature published since the interviews were undertaken and which provides additional insights on implications of the issues raised.

## **7.1 How was AifL enacted locally?**

In chapter 1, I explained that local contextualisation was considered crucial to sustaining AifL beyond the period of central funding. I also explained that, although Scotland is comparatively small, its 32 LAs have different priorities, some of which undoubtedly arise as a result of their demographic and social circumstances. Some variation in approach to implementation might therefore have been expected. Less clear was what local contextualisation of national policy meant in practice.

This study confirmed differences in approach to implementation of AifL, but also revealed that individual co-ordinators had distinctive understandings of what the programme aimed to achieve. This was surprising given a consistent policy agenda, an acknowledged

research base, stakeholder involvement, and central support with specific purpose: resolution of recognised tensions in assessment and achieving sustainable change country-wide.

Most interviewees spoke of their efforts to disseminate national policy, although it was unclear how far they had endeavoured to achieve teachers' deeper understanding of the relationship between research findings and assessment policy and practice. Four described communicating key messages to certain staff, examples of Hayward's (2010: 86) 'selective dissemination strategy' where important information is shared with specific individuals expected to lead developments in their own establishment or community. It does not require active engagement with the ideas and because of this, it is considered unlikely to lead to professional learning or the changed mindsets which AifL required.

Distribution of assessment literature was also a common feature of LAs' implementation strategies. This approach is also critiqued by Hayward (2010: 86) who terms it the 'saturation strategy' where a plethora of resources considered useful is distributed to schools to support innovation. This approach may also have limited impact unless staff access and engage with the materials, assimilate the ideas and use the resources in their own classroom.

The language of one interviewee, in particular, suggested her understanding of professional development was transmission. Words like '*rolled out*' and '*trained*', Hayward (2010: 86) argues, are a legacy of the 'large-scale cascade models' of the 1980s which regarded change as something which is done to staff. This approach can result in discrepancies between intention and response depending on the message received, which is then further interpreted as part of the wider implementation process. Hayward (2010: 95) suggests that words like 'roll out' are 'not in the vocabulary of learning'. This model may therefore be seen as the antithesis of 'learning as participation' ... alongside ... 'learning as acquisition' of knowledge and skills and understanding (James and Pedder, 2006: 29).

The reference to an '*expectation that it's in all schools*' is also at odds with James and Pedder's (2006: 41) argument that new practice 'can only be embedded if teachers actively engage with the ideas and if the environments in which they work support such engagement'. From a managerial perspective, the cascade model may seem to be an efficient way of reaching all staff, but the weakness of the model, argues Hayward (2010: 89), 'lies in the layers of the cascade'. Even if those initially involved have opportunity to

learn, those in subsequent phases are likely only to receive instruction.

In addition to the sharing of information with key staff and distribution of resources, development officers had been seconded in one LA to assist with dissemination. The description of their role suggests training. In this LA, all three approaches, selective dissemination, saturation and cascade, had been adopted. The effect is qualitatively different from Sarason's (1971) 'universe of alternatives' which Harlen uses (2010: 104) to illustrate her case for a combination of approaches to implementation selected for their suitability in a given context, taking account of factors such as extent of implementation, comparative novelty, target group, timescale and available resources. Harlen (2010) suggests this range of factors needs to be considered when planning professional learning. She contends (2010: 100) that changing practice involves changing understanding 'rather than a superficial change in teaching techniques'. Her argument (2010: 101) reinforces the concept of teachers as learners with an 'active role' in learning, whereas the transmissive approaches described above are less concerned with effective learning than with instruction and efficient delivery.

Kennedy (2007: 160) places models for professional development on a transmissive - transitional – transformative continuum but asserts that transmissive models support only replication and compliance. If deep learning is required, Fullan (2003b: online) warns against 'shortcuts' and advocates sustained interaction and engagement. This point is also made by Harlen (2006: 16) who suggests it is 'false economy to take the quicker route of providing answers'.

Models which are transformative, as opposed to transmissive, are considered by Kennedy (2007) to be capable of supporting considerable autonomy at individual and profession-wide levels. As such, they are most likely to lead to understanding at the 'commitment' end of Rudduck and Kelly's (1976) awareness – commitment continuum (Harlen, 2010: 101). However, interview evidence indicated that limited attention had been paid to ensuring teachers engaged with the principles and interpreted them in the light of their own practice.

Where active engagement was encouraged, staff had revealed themselves able to lead developments, not merely responding to LA or national directives. Where staff were involved in exploring a common concern (for example, the impact of formative intervention on students' results in national qualifications), they appeared to be taking

‘collective responsibility for managing the knowledge they need’ (Wenger, 2006: 4), a prerequisite, Wenger argues, in a genuine learning community.

The support documentation provided centrally for associated schools groups was commended for helping to prompt reflection<sup>72</sup> for action and evaluation<sup>72</sup> of impact. However, some LAs had also used these support materials to deflect responsibility, encouraging schools to believe that the LA was simply passing on directives from central government:

*... schools being schools if we're honest, they tend to not want to use the money the way you intended the money to be used so that's this battle, constant battle I think would be the word, where eventually the way to overcome it by the second year was simply to send all the legal documentation out to them saying, "There it is, that's the way it happened. You know it's not me that's saying that." We started to get the strong message over.*

The reference to ‘schools being schools’ and the repetition of ‘battle’ provide further illustration of the power relationship referred to in chapter 6. It depicts LA staff as mediating forces portraying themselves as innocent conduits of messages from central government. The references to ‘legal documentation’ and ‘you know it’s not me’ suggest a deliberate attempt to deflect criticism. It seems disingenuous to suggest LA and school staff are both victims of government control given the level of stakeholder involvement, communicating what Gardner (2010a: 137) describes as ‘the requirement for compliance with a top-down policy’. This kind of deception, he argues, can be counter-productive to the change process.

Most of the interviews revealed LAs had endeavoured to establish networks, although the networks had taken different forms and few seemed to have been directly focused on improving pupils’ learning experiences. The concept of network was interpreted differently by interviewees, only one of whom referred to associated schools groups as a model for professional learning likely to lead to sustainable change. Another had acted against advice on collaborative enquiry and had distributed to individual schools the funding intended to support networks. In other instances, the intended purpose of networks was unclear beyond a convenient means of distributing funding for development activity but, generally, they were seen as a vehicle for peer observation and sharing good practice.

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<sup>72</sup> The AifL ASG planning and reporting templates produced by assessment branch in the Scottish Executive have been included as Appendices 2(b) and 2(c) on pages 213 and 220 respectively.

According to Hayward (2010:86) ‘sharing good practice’ is a model promoted by those in positions of power seeking to advocate particular approaches but it also assumes a shared definition of ‘good’. Widespread encouragement of teachers to share their practice may have been the source of the preoccupation with techniques referred to in chapter 5, if the invitation to practitioners to share did not include encouragement to share their insights and understanding as well as the techniques they were using.

Composition of networks also varied. Even where these comprised traditional clusters with a secondary school and its associated primaries, different models of leadership were evident. Leadership was mostly assigned by the LA, and network leaders were commonly senior managers. Except in the few reported cases where staff were leading developments, there was reputedly poorer uptake from secondary schools, even where volunteers were invited to participate.

The extent to which networks had been sustained also varied. In two LAs, staff had assumed responsibility for their own professional learning and were continuing to work together without funding, because they found professional discussion beneficial. Other interviewees recognised the value of networks but did not consider them to be self-sustaining. One LA had assumed responsibility for networks by providing funding to enable continuation while, in another LA, the co-ordinator was resigned to networks falling away unless they were financially supported or he himself intervened. The interviewee who had sought to develop deep learning had enjoyed greater success but now faced the challenge of scaling up (Thomson and Wiliam, 2007) and where the co-ordinator had chosen to distribute the funding for communities of enquiry to individual schools, networks had now been formed, but these were administered by the LA on the basis of demographic composition.

Where authority capacity was concerned, in-service opportunities appeared to focus on teaching practice rather than pupils’ learning. James and Pedder (2006: 39) suggest that, ‘promoting learning autonomy is the ultimate goal’ and, without a focus on learning, and support for teachers and feedback for improvement, the efforts described in most LAs may amount to little more than ‘issuing them with ring-binders containing information and advice, showing examples of “best practice”’ (James and Pedder, 2006: 29).

To achieve changes in assessment, AifL also took account of advice on change, recommending what James and Pedder (2006: 39) describe as: ‘increased opportunity and



encouragement to teachers to engage with and use research relevant to their classroom interest'. The deep learning which should result is essential, argues Fullan (2003a: 58):

If ... techniques [are taught] without conceptions, the techniques will fail.

Techniques are tools that must serve a set of conceptual understandings. When conceptions and techniques go hand in hand, we create breakthrough.

It was clear from their responses that, while most co-ordinators had a common appreciation of the importance of certain concepts in AifL, such as building capacity, action research and professional networks, these had been interpreted differently by those responsible and introduced differently within LAs.

## 7.2 What might account for the difference?

The researcher's notes of her meetings with LA staff in 2004-05, summarised in chapter 4, indicated that local ownership of change was welcomed by LAs. The third government information sheet (SEED, 2007) discussed in the same chapter confirms that local contextualisation through communities of practice was regarded by both research and policy bodies as important to long-term sustainability. LAs were therefore not only encouraged to assume ownership of AifL, but were expected to shape developments to take account of local plans and resources.

I have also explained that the seven co-ordinators involved in this study were drawn from a group of LAs considered by the central team<sup>73</sup> to be providing effective support for schools. Those interviewed were not representative, as I explained in chapter 3, but they did reflect the range in the co-ordinator group, in terms of age, gender, background, experience, and demographic circumstances.

Of the seven participants, three had previous experience of national assessment development and, of these, two had been involved in shaping AifL's strategic direction<sup>74</sup>. Their strategic involvement meant they had opportunity to assimilate policy intention and interrogate policy communications. Perhaps because of this, they spoke confidently in terms I was familiar with, adopting AifL discourse and appearing comfortable with

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<sup>73</sup> Information was drawn from an informal audit conducted by Scottish Government staff in June 2007 to help establish areas of priorities and target limited resources effectively.

<sup>74</sup> Through membership of either the development team or the Assessment Programme Management Group.

abbreviations and acronyms others might perceive as jargon. They spoke of '*the three sides of the triangle*' and made reference to aligning assessment for learning and assessment for accountability. Their familiarity with the national picture is perhaps the reason why these two alone referred to government documents although only one of the two made reference to the government circular (SEED, 2005a), demonstrating the importance he attached to it by including it five times in his extended response.

Both indicated an intention to support widespread understanding of the primary purpose of AifL but their individual approaches differed. As they had been similarly involved in the programme's strategic direction, it is unlikely that the difference lay in their personal understanding, but their role in the LA (one led a quality team whilst the other was a newly appointed QIO) and the LA culture might have had some bearing on their respective approaches.

One interviewee with no experience of strategic involvement was able to demonstrate that he also understood AifL's wider aims, arguing the need to persuade staff to look beyond strategies and develop practice which empowered learners. He could articulate that, while assessment was the medium, AifL was concerned to achieve sustainable, transformational change. He had a long-term interest in developing pupils' capacity for thinking and recognised the potential for empowering learners through assessment *for* and *as* learning. Although, he made no reference to AifL's aim of creating a coherent system of assessment, his views revealed a clarity of understanding not obvious in the response of the third co-ordinator with national experience.

That interviewee's previous experience had involved developing assessments for accreditation purposes, which may have influenced his particular interpretation of AifL. His later career had focused on attainment data which possibly explained his interest in AifL as a means of gathering robust information for monitoring purposes. Unlike the others, he placed greater emphasis on AifL's assessment *of* learning than on assessment *for* or *as* learning, responsibility for which he had delegated to the seconded development officers. He also defended the development model he was familiar with: '*...that was very much a top-down model ... and that worked*' and, while he spoke of the three AifL strands, he was principally concerned to improve the quality of data available.

The remaining interviewees concentrated on teachers' practice, possibly assimilating the messages in the light of their own support role. Some interviewees made reference to

formative assessment alone, their remarks indicating a perception that assessment development was about improving teaching practice but, again, their previous experience may have influenced this understanding. Two of these co-ordinators had come from a teaching post while the third had been a subject adviser supporting learning and teaching, both their background and current remit suggesting a possible reason for their interest in teachers' practice. Two of the three suggested that assessment *for* and *as* learning were synonymous with good learning and teaching and all three referred to AifL as having been included in LA learning and teaching policies, indicating that this interpretation was widely held.

The interviewee recently appointed spoke in abstract terms, unable to describe assessment development prior to her appointment. This led me to consider the impact of staff turnover, an issue which will be discussed in section 7.4.4.

Constructivist theories of learning confirm that subjective representations are formed as a result of pre-existing attitudes, experiences and knowledge (Dewey 1938, Vygotsky 1971), a condition which Swann and Brown (1997: 91) found to be an issue in previous curriculum initiatives which did not take account of 'where the teachers are'. Hayward et al (2004) suggest that AifL acknowledged this in the way the programme was promoted in Scottish schools. However, the interviews suggest that those responsible for contextualising AifL locally were also building new knowledge in the light of their past knowledge or current experience, and that AifL may have failed to recognise that co-ordinators were on their own learning journey. There may have been connections between the approaches adopted and, interviewees' perceptions of AifL as a result of their previous experience and this aspect is worthy of further exploration.

### 7.3 Does difference matter?

The penultimate research question sought to establish whether or not the differences observed were so significant as to have impacted on the outcome of the programme. Evidence, however, suggested that similarities rather than difference were more likely to have influenced how AifL had been taken forward.

The similarities related to interviewees' concerns with accountability. Five interviewees articulated sensitivities surrounding the monitoring and evaluating of school performance,

revealing shared insecurities related to support for schools' self-evaluation activities and preparation for HMIE inspection. Required to validate the account schools gave of themselves, it seemed their primary concern was to ensure school self-evaluation procedures were sufficiently robust.

The importance of positive school inspections was established in chapter 6 with one interviewee revealing that good school inspections were taken to be a measure of the LA's effectiveness. As continued funding for LAs is currently dependent on meeting agreed government targets, the concern is not without foundation.

One interviewee expressed concern that HMIE expectations of pupils' progress can be based on a linear view of learning and a rigid trajectory of progress. While she acknowledged that undue focus on targets can constrain learning and teaching, she recognised that staff adopt what they consider to be safe approaches in order to avoid recrimination. She also described how efforts to encourage robust assessment were often interpreted by schools as indirect encouragement to use national test<sup>75</sup> results, confirming the findings of other recent studies (Boyd and Hayward 2007, Hayward 2010).

Boyd and Hayward (2007: 2) note an anticipation that 'this negative washback on classroom practice would disappear' when the national collection of assessment data ceased following the publication of the government circular (SEED, 2005a). They also acknowledge that this expectation was never realised, despite the policy guidance. The interviews conducted for this study confirm Boyd and Hayward's (2007) findings that, despite policy advice (SEED, 2005a), LAs were still collecting schools' attainment data. Interview responses also provide a recent illustration of what Hayward (2010: 91) suggests is 'the misinterpretation of the actions of others' in the context of '5-14' assessment. Hayward's contention (2010) is that HMIE requests for information on the proportion of pupils achieving at each level resulted in 'a received message that was more powerful than the intended policy message' and teachers 'responding to what they perceived to be the dominant ... policy drivers'.

While Boyd and Hayward (2007) also suggest that those who were AifL co-ordinators recognised the tension in promoting assessment for learning in a culture of accountability, one of the interviewees perceived no tension, arguing the results were used formatively in

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<sup>75</sup> National Assessments 5-14 were discontinued on 2 July 2010.

his LA. It is not clear whether the information is used formatively by the LA or if schools are expected to do so, but I am mindful of Harlen's repeated warnings (2007, 2010) that the criteria for summative assessments are not sufficiently detailed to allow their use as formative feedback to individual students. If used formatively at LA level, the process of providing formative feedback to schools may illustrate what Hopkins et al (1997: 163) term 'evaluation *for* school improvement', so defined because it facilitates action. Whilst Hopkins et al (1997) do not question the validity of evaluation for school improvement, they argue that evaluation *as* school improvement, action prompted by self-evaluation, is more likely to be effective because action with reflection can lead to change.

Some interviewees argued it was possible to militate against negative impact by using information gathered for accountability purposes as feedback for school improvement. However, the quality audit process described, involving classroom observation by visiting LA officers, was arguably more hierarchical than collegiate and likely to preclude evaluation *as* improvement (Hopkins et al, 1997).

Nevertheless, improvement procedures were portrayed by one as a formative tool, welcomed by staff and trade unions:

*[The] unions are ... not opposed to a lot of what we're doing. They're actually quite pleased that we can lead in into collegiality, and we can actually demonstrate it as about genuine empowerment of staff within the school. So we've won them over...*

However, in using expressions like 'genuine empowerment' and 'we've won them over' in the same context, his words are self-contradictory.

Repeated reference was made to performance management, although there were different perceptions of what this meant in practice. Two interviewees expressed their frustration with LA improvement practice, a third voiced her 'cynicism' regarding the role she had in the new quality improvement structure, and a fourth was openly critical of the tensions created by demands for improvement. For these four, the issue was the contradiction between their support role and the culture of accountability in which they worked.

Although improvements in results are, arguably, achieved by better learning, tensions were apparent between LA activities intended to support teaching and learning and those related to monitoring and evaluation.

Issues of validity arose when interviewing the co-ordinator with least experience of AifL.

She was concerned that standardised tests used in primary schools might be incompatible with those commonly used in secondary. Yet Harlen and Gardner (2010: 17) contend that there is a ‘lack of construct validity in current means of monitoring performance of a cohort’ and that ‘the aim ought to be to conduct assessment for summative purposes in a way that supports the achievement of all learning goals and does not limit attention only to those learning outcomes and processes that are easy to assess’ (2010: 19). Their criticism is likely to apply to the paper and pencil-based tests discussed, but the co-ordinators’ brief reflections suggested she saw the tests as being separate from AifL, thereby revealing her limited understanding of the AifL concept.

Evidence of insecure understanding of assessment in Scotland, identified by George Street Research (2007) and Boyd and Hayward (2007), emerged almost as frequently in the interviews in this study as references to building capacity. Concern to address the demands of accountability had resulted in the introduction of ‘improvement’ structures and systems in LAs, reported by Boyd and Hayward (2007) and Croxford and Cowie (2005) whose studies highlight a culture of performance management in Scottish education.

One interviewee sought to dismiss any suggestion of a testing regime in his LA:

*... we’ve tried to demonstrate that it’s not all about attainment and we’ve done a lot of work on wider achievement. And the last INEA report will give you a rich tapestry of wider achievement ... it’s not about five H passes, it’s about the wider experience.*

Despite the rhetoric about wider achievement, these words reveal a desire to meet HMIE expectations which others referred to earlier. Yet Boyd and Hayward (2007: 20) report: ‘There is now a significant body of research evidence to suggest that current conceptualizations of accountability are militating against effective learning and teaching’.

Conversely, AifL may have been regarded by those in an accountability culture, as militating against established data collection procedures. Asked to comment on what the programme meant for him, one interviewee responded:

*Assessment is for Learning was a subversive movement ... and I feel proud and privileged to have been associated with this development.*

Despite the satisfaction of being involved in AifL, his application of ‘subversive’ to a programme seeking to improve the quality of pupils’ learning experience, indicates the

tension between AifL's aims and LA priorities. The focus on improving results is illustrative of Croxford and Cowie's (2005) identification of undue emphasis on the measurable and, while one interviewee admitted to being impressed by the impact AifL had had in classrooms, his words revealed that data was all-important:

*I'll be honest, I was a bit cynical to start with ... but my cynicism was more that I could see that Assessment is for Learning would very much benefit the interaction in a classroom.... Maybe cynicism is the wrong word, but I always felt that the bit that was being ignored was the need that a headteacher and authority would have for data.*

In contrast, O'Neill (2002) argues that professionals should be accountable to their public which, in education, would be to learners and their families rather than, for example, elected councillors in LAs. Accountability in its current form, therefore, may breed less trust, as professionals strive to improve their ratings. Boyd and Hayward (2007) refer to Croxford and Cowie's (2005) assertion that '[p]rofessional accountability, based on trust, has been compromised over the last 15 years' (2007:8). At the heart of this culture, they argue, is a preoccupation with STACs<sup>76</sup> which is inconsistent with self-evaluation or O'Neill's (2002) 'intelligent accountability' which, she asserts, is the only way to achieve appropriate focus and balance. Boyd and Hayward (2007: 8) suggest that this will imply 'trust in professionals; a focus on self-evaluation; measures that do not distort the purposes of schooling; and measures that encourage the fullest development of every pupil'.

Details of accountability procedures, presented in chapter 6, indicate the emphasis several interviewees placed on this aspect of their remit and, although approaches to building capacity varied across LAs, the preoccupation with accountability was remarkably similar. Although some interviewees acknowledged that accountability was impacting negatively on the work of schools, references to lack of trust in teachers and schools permeated all interview responses. This demonstrated that, whilst I had previously considered different approaches to AifL might have impeded progress, I gathered from this small sample that, despite co-ordinators espousing the need to build capacity, their preoccupation with accountability united them and this was more likely to have implications for curriculum and assessment reform.

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<sup>76</sup> Acronym for Standards Tables and Charts.

## 7.4 What are the implications for future policy initiatives?

In summarising reflections on the themes arising from interviews, I suggested that the concerns which led to the introduction of AifL, to align assessment for learning and assessment for accountability, had remained unresolved. Despite seven years of intense assessment development activity in Scotland, building on what had been learned from the experience of the '5-14' development programme, harnessing the energies of different stakeholder groups, and acknowledging current research on the management of change, identified tensions between assessment for learning and assessment for accountability continued to exist.

While I make no claims to the generalisability of my findings, the study provides insights which may have wider applicability. In particular, in answering the final research question it highlights issues relevant where national policy depends on local contextualisation. As a result of this study, I suggest the following are worthy of further consideration:

- enhancing assessment literacy;
- improving policy communication and reinforcement;
- critiquing consensus and compliance;
- minimising the influence of individuals.

### 7.4.1 Assessment literacy

While interviewees expressed concern to improve understanding of assessment, the literature they described and activities they organised revealed that, despite their distinctive approaches, their focus was predominantly on a single aspect of assessment. While there had been concerted efforts in one LA to engage all staff, the focus had been assessment for learning; in another, the second cohort of ASGs had been engaged in action research, but again the focus was assessment for learning; and, in a third, the newly formed Teacher Learning Communities – described in section 5.2.2 - were again focusing on assessment for learning. Whereas a coherent system of assessment acknowledges different functions of assessment and allows these to work in harmony, the assessment focus described was concentrated on internal formative assessment, the top left quadrant of the diagram



illustrating the framework for assessment 3-14 (SEED, 2005a: 2), reproduced as Fig. 2-1, which essentially addresses only the right-hand side of the AifL triangle<sup>77</sup> (LTS, 2004).

Hayward et al (2005) have identified the perceived integrity of formative assessment as one reason why it might have received undue focus. Seen as ‘consistent with teachers’ personal professional values’ (Hayward, 2005: 50), it would appear to have what Gardner et al (2008: 4) suggest is professional ‘warrant’. The enthusiasm expressed in ASG case studies and at networking seminars indicates that formative assessment was a popular innovation, whereas moderation, in the words of one interviewee, was considered ‘*hard, very hard*’.

Despite this focus, there was a commonly held belief that the principles of formative assessment were not yet embedded, and responses indicated that formative assessment was not well understood by some of those responsible for leading the development. The reason is unclear but in several cases the teachers’ role had been emphasised at the expense of the pupils’, perhaps as a consequence of the focus in LA learning and teaching policies being developed at the time. This illustrates what Gardner (2010b: 5) suggests are subtle changes which take the focus away from pupils’ learning ‘to one in which the delivery of teaching is the prime beneficiary – teacher driven activities in which pupils play a largely passive roll’. Harlen (2010: 119) recalls that in AifL teachers may have ‘maintained a prescriptive grip on the lesson objectives’, thus limiting their own professional learning to ‘being satisfied to do what “works” without wanting to know why’ (2010: 122) and Harlen and Gardner (2010) conclude improved learning is unlikely if staff merely adopt procedures in a mechanistic way. They argue (2010: 21) the importance of ‘distinguish[ing] between bringing about change in assessment practice and bringing about change that is consistent with improving engagement in learning’: a qualitative difference. The former focuses on teaching, whereas the latter puts learning at the centre.

In one LA where the focus had included local moderation, the LA had set expectations and standards rather than encourage contextualised professional dialogue and discussion, principally because moderation was seen as a means of providing robust data for the LA. As such, the focus had shifted from internal summative assessments which would have engaged staff in decision-making.

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<sup>77</sup> Available as Appendix 2(a) on page 212.

Gardner (2010a) contends that if the agent of change is different from the operational subject of change, it is a top-down model and Harlen (2010: 103) argues that top-down models, are based on a behaviourist view of learning. This approach to moderation therefore appears to be inconsistent with the social constructivist approach promoted by AifL where local moderation was intended to build staff confidence in assessment and help achieve consistency. As such, it is more complex than instruction, involving staff in a form of knowledge creation. Hayward (2010:131) credits Senge and Scharmer (2001) with describing this as ‘an intensely human, messy process of imagination, invention and learning from mistakes embedded in a web of human relationships’.

Harlen (2010) suggests that the comparative neglect of assessment of learning may have been the result of an assumption that teachers were already engaged in summative assessment. Referring to findings that teachers tend to use the same evidence for formative and summative purposes, Harlen (2010) concedes that the exigencies of the classroom make it difficult to separate the two, but contends that staff need to understand that different success criteria must apply. She argues that summative assessment by teachers requires attention to ensure validity and reliability, and that this demands as much effort and commitment to professional learning as the improvement of formative assessment.

In the LAs where information from quality audits was said to be used formatively, initial steps had been taken to support consistent professional judgments. Some groups were self-sustaining which meant that they had potential to develop capacity for self-evaluation and gather increasingly dependable information. However, Hayward et al (2004) suggest that this is likely to take time and Maxwell’s (2004) description of the Queensland experience of developing school-based moderation indicates this could take as long as 30 years. The development of assessment literacy will therefore take sustained effort and is most likely in a stable national policy environment and where all parties are working toward the same goal. Harlen and Hayward (2010: 158) argue, ‘what can be done to change the practice of individual teachers, or even schools, is not enough to maintain change in the whole system’ which implies that the system as a whole needs to change. This is echoed by Gardner (2010a: 137), who suggests that ‘if teachers represent anything other than a small proportion of the community being exposed to change, the change itself could be easily confounded’.

Improving assessment literacy will therefore require a sound understanding of both formative and summative functions, where all involved appreciate how to achieve

assessments which are 'fit for purpose' (Harlen 2006b, Harlen 2007, Mansell and James, 2009). Current data collection may be unduly concerned with reliability at the expense of validity, perhaps because those responsible for requesting and collecting data do not fully appreciate the need for validity as well as reliability. Newton argues (2007: 168) 'Stakeholders should be deprived of ignorance as an excuse for misuse' which means LA staff and others with a monitoring role need to attend to their own practice as much as to teachers', to ensure their evaluations are valid and that assessment for accountability does not undermine learning and teaching and assessment in the classroom.

The current assessment framework (SEED, 2010a) contains a supporting paper on the moderation process. Although it may be perceived by some to contain policy rhetoric rather than practical guidance, it does provide an outline rationale for change which may help to reinforce the need for sustained effort by all partners to ensure periodic assessment for summative purposes and assessment for accountability do not assume a disproportionate importance over ongoing assessment which is generally acknowledged as having the greatest potential to support learning. Harlen (2010: 127-128) identifies the need for wider understanding as a major issue, suggesting that those responsible for professional learning need to appreciate that 'teachers are not necessarily free to change their assessment practices, even if they so wish'. She further explains that:

even when teachers fully understand the techniques and reasons for any new practice, they may be restricted in implementing the necessary changes by school, local or national policies and by the expectations of those involved as users of assessment.

Hayward (2010: 167)) illustrates this point with retrospective insight on the '5-14' experience in Scotland, where teachers continued to believe that test results were more important than their professional judgment and that school performance had priority over improvements in pupils' learning. She claims that despite policy statements to the contrary, '...teachers almost perversely continued with testing.' Reasons may have been related to teachers' background and previous experience which, Harlen (2010: 128) suggests, can 'transform, perhaps unconsciously, the messages to be conveyed.' This argument may apply to officers in LAs as well as staff in schools.

A sustainable assessment system, claim Harlen and Hayward (2010: 170) depends on open acknowledgement of competing interests and values, and on all stakeholder groups recognising it is their 'moral responsibility' to work together to increase their own

understanding of assessment and to build awareness more generally of its ‘uses and misuses’. This suggests that the manifestation of improved assessment literacy is action which mirrors rhetoric.

#### 7.4.2 Policy communication and reinforcement

Given the perceived importance of ensuring action matches rhetoric, the study also highlights implications for communication and reinforcement of national policy. In expressing her frustration at working in a data-driven environment, one interviewee stated that strong messages needed ‘*to come from the top*’. I understood ‘*the top*’ to mean central government yet, as I sought to demonstrate in the review of policy literature in chapter 2, my own perception is of policy messages which were largely consistent throughout AifL’s development period.

However, as I indicated in chapter 4, the seminal policy document (SEED, 2005a) was circulated only to chief executives in LAs and, although I know that assessment co-ordinators received an electronic copy, only one interviewee made reference to the document. It is possible that, given the restricted circulation, other LA staff may not have known of the existence of this important document far less its content.

Although two interviewees described steps to ensure other LA staff ‘*had the basics*’ and were sufficiently well-equipped to advise schools, this reference appears to relate to research literature rather than policy. The promotion of assessment research is admirable, but it must be remembered that the policy document conveyed government expectations for practice. One interviewee suggested that LA staff were ill-informed until his intervention but, as he himself did not refer to the circular (SEED, 2005a), it seems possible that the document was not shared within the LA.

As I observed in chapter 4, the formal language of the circular could have led to lack of clarity, although the obscurity was possibly deliberate, enabling the publication of potentially unpopular messages without attracting criticism. The ambiguity in the reference to data collection and the allusion to standardised tests may have been intended to maintain peace, allowing for regrouping among affected stakeholders, before the issues re-emerged in future policy documents and debates.

Unlike other sections of the circular, the expectations for local moderation are clearly expressed, but the laudable aims are immediately followed by a statement that no financial support would be available for this activity. There is evidence (George Street Research 2007, Boyd and Hayward 2007) that this aspect of AifL received limited attention, one reason for which may be lack of value attached to an activity which attracted no funding. Harlen and Hayward (2010: 159) acknowledge that teachers have a history of associating what is valued with what receives central funding, and lack of financial support for moderation practice may well have ‘served to tell teachers that the results of the external testing programme were prioritized<sup>78</sup> over teacher assessment’: an illustration of the mismatch between rhetoric and action.

I argued that the language of the four information sheets discussed in chapter 4 is more accessible and the presentation more attractive than the official policy document (SEED, 2005a). However, in these sheets (SEED 2005b, SEED 2005c, SEED 2007, Scottish Government 2007a), policy appears to be mediated in pursuit of accessibility and, while the information sheets deal with different aspects of AifL, none deals specifically with local moderation. Harlen and Hayward (2010: 167) argue that ‘it is important ... that these widely used documents are consistent in the values they espouse and in the ways in which they are put into practice’ but, although local moderation was a policy priority, this aspect of AifL was neither promoted in policy texts nor reinforced in HMIE inspection.

Scrutiny of the INEA reports from 2002-08 illustrate Daugherty and Ecclestone’s contention (2006) that policy ‘voices’ can promote or silence policy. It might have been expected that HMIE would remind LAs of current assessment policy, especially after proposed arrangements were formalised in policy (SEED, 2005a). However, I noted in chapter 4 that, where INEA reports include reference to AifL, the development programme was linked only to learning and teaching with no indication of its other aims. I observed that this could have perpetuated the myth that AifL was concerned only with assessment for learning, instead of having a wider purpose. Although Hayward et al (2005: 52) find in their exploration of programme success a ‘perception of consistency across communities, this study queries HMIE commitment to AifL and suggests the ‘silence’ in reports could indicate lack of support either for AifL as a development programme, or for the coherent system of assessment (SEED, 2005a) it sought to create.

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<sup>78</sup> Spelling as in the original text.

The research voice was also silenced in earlier policy documents, although it is not clear whether this is simply an omission or deliberate neglect. Annex 1 of the circular (SEED, 2005a) referred only to the ‘policy framework’; the reference section, of Building the Curriculum 3: a framework for learning and teaching (Scottish Government, 2008) included only documents published by Scottish Government or HMIE; and, while two AifL information sheets (SEED 2005b, SEED 2007) make brief reference to research in addition to previous policy documents, one reference (Hayward et al, 2005) is not credited and the citation of another is wrong (Black and Wiliam, 1998a). In marked contrast, and perhaps indicative of the legacy of AifL, Building the Curriculum 5: a framework for assessment (Scottish Government, 2010a) lists assessment research among the references, and this apparent acknowledgement of the contribution of research to policy presents a case for cautious optimism.

In addition to inconsistencies in policy texts, I found obstacles related to culture and understanding. Political timescale is an issue: the time needed to work through change is often at odds with the political imperative to demonstrate impact within the life of the parliament whereas Gardner (2010a: 136) argues that ‘[w]here change requires new skills, the problems associated with confidence, competence and *time to develop the skills*<sup>79</sup> can all conspire to act as counter agencies’.

Political ideologies dictate policy and Harlen and Hayward (2010) suggest this can stifle rather than encourage innovation: fledgling practice may never get off the ground if policy changes. Although assessment policy in Scotland has been comparatively stable for over a decade and current policy documents perpetuate previous policy messages, these messages can be ambiguous or expressed inconsistently. If professional practice were grounded in research which reinforces the relationship between assessment and learning, staff might be better informed and be better equipped to withstand political change.

This is particularly important in the context of *Curriculum for Excellence*. As indicated in chapter 2, politicians appear to be looking to education as the means of ensuring prosperity in the global economy and Gardner (2010b) acknowledges growing recognition that teachers are best placed to provide a rounded picture of the learning needed in the knowledge economy. Harlen and Gardner (2010: 21) conclude that ‘this means that assessment, which is used to help learning, plays a particularly important part in the

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<sup>79</sup> My emphasis.

achievement of the kind of goal of understanding and thinking valued in education for the twenty-first century'. This would suggest it could be politically expedient to remove any impediments. Harlen (2010: 127) argues that 'school management, local authorities and policymakers need to understand the rationale for changes, what they involve and what support the teachers need'. The argument is not new as Harlen (2010) highlights: 'this has been underlined in almost every case discussed'. If teachers are to use assessment to help pupils develop the skills and capacities embedded in *Curriculum for Excellence*, a range of stakeholders will need to understand both the need for change and how they can support teachers to make these changes in classrooms across the country.

### 7.4.3 Consensus and compliance

Another issue identified was the tacit acknowledgement of hierarchies in the Scottish education system and the professional deference and compliance this encouraged. In chapter 1, I referred to Harlen's (2006) observation of the Scottish preference for consensus and, in chapter 2, Daugherty and Ecclestone's (2006: 163) comment on Scotland's 'distinctive political ideology'. These references appear indicative of outsiders' interest in the absence of curriculum and assessment legislation in Scotland. However, also in chapter 1, I cited the 'strong, if not uncontentious, relationship' arising from the interdependence of local and central government (Hayward, 2007: 252). From an insider viewpoint, the lack of legislative force can find compensation in the deference encouraged by established hierarchies.

Analysis of the policy document (SEED, 2005a: 7) in chapter 4 illustrated how these hierarchies operate. The circular asserts the supremacy of central government, and the information sheet on communities of practice (SEED, 2007) reinforces the hierarchy. Scottish Government is named first, followed closely by HMIE. The reference to LTS and SQA indicates neither is an autonomous organisation but subject to government approval and LAs and HEIs appear even further down the list. Policy references to collaboration and partnerships seem hollow in this context.

Hierarchies are also apparent within LAs, as revealed in interviewees' responses. In conversation, three interviewees appeared to accept the demands of accountability and the structures and systems in place, while two more were endeavouring to use these formatively. Two who expressed their frustration perceived that those with statutory

authority for improvement (SEED, 2000) enjoyed certain status within their LA and this increased their own sense of impotence.

These hierarchies extended into assessment development. Although most interviewees understood AifL to be about formative assessment, they revealed their preoccupation with accountability. Their accounts indicated this received greatest attention in LAs. The hierarchy was particularly noticeable where the co-ordinator, in a substantive management post, had assumed responsibility for assessment *of* learning but had delegated development of assessment *for* and *as* learning to seconded staff, indicating these aspects were of lesser importance.

From the descriptions of LA activity, assessment *for* learning seems to be regarded at the first level in the assessment hierarchy, the focus of intense, but sometimes misdirected, activity, perhaps because it appears to demand superficial changes in practice. At the next level, assessment *as* learning is perceived as more demanding as it involves a change in the locus of control if pupils are to take greater responsibility for their learning. The aspect accorded greatest importance but least well-embedded, was assessment *of* learning, perhaps because of a widespread view that teachers' judgments are unreliable. However, Harlen and Gardner (2010) report that the evidence for this comes from contexts where no opportunities exist for moderating professional judgments.

In spite of weak evidence supporting this low opinion of teachers' judgments, LAs concerned about reliability are, according to Harlen and Gardner (2010), making increased use of fixed response questions aimed at reducing the possibility of inconsistency caused by human judgment. However, the narrow coverage, poor range of tasks, and the use of information which creates anxieties associated with high stakes tests all serve to undermine validity. I believe that weak understanding of validity and reliability in assessment, and of the potential impact of any assessment, played a part in the failure to realise a coherent system which aligns formative and summative, internal and external, assessment and evaluation for improvement.

The fact that none of the interviewees referred to their role as helping to create a coherent system of assessment indicates the challenge of penetrating and changing existing habits and mores, an issue identified by Hayward et al (2004: 405):

One can infer that ... socio-political trends are more conducive to assessment for measurement, than to the participative and social constructivist thinking that



underpins the work of Black and Wiliam (e.g. 2002), and upon which Assessment is for Learning is predicated.

It also illustrates that local contextualization was still largely focused on ‘teachers instructional adjustments’, the first of Popham’s (2008: ix) four levels of transformative assessment referenced in chapter 2, and that limited attention had been paid to ‘students’ learning tactic adjustment ... classroom climate shift ... [or] school-wide implementation’.

It may be argued that assessment hierarchies do not emerge of their own accord but, rather are the result of tacit acknowledgement of the needs of stakeholders perceived to have greatest influence. O’Neill (2002) argues that this should be pupils and their parents, as ultimate beneficiaries of education and, although this view was implicit in some interview responses, co-ordinators’ accounts revealed a preoccupation with inspection. Equally, although it may be argued that preoccupations with accountability indicate concern to ensure quality of educational provision, the study suggests that accountability procedures were often an end in themselves and, if not, were related to inspection.

Listed as second in the system’s hierarchy, HMIE enjoy considerable respect in Scottish education and are potential role models for schools and local authorities. Because the feedback HMIE provide sends a message of what matters, individual inspectors have an important role in ensuring actions match rhetoric and especially in supporting schools and LAs to understand that authentic accountability is to pupils and their parents. The issues raised are unlikely to be resolved until all stakeholders give priority to pupils and their learning, and work collaboratively to realise this aim.

#### 7.4.4 Influence of individuals

The study highlights the influence individuals are able to wield. For example, it illustrates the issue highlighted by Daugherty and Ecclestone (2006) when actors move on or are replaced. Key staff can move on during the life of an initiative, and staffing turnover and an incomplete policy picture may offer one explanation for the mixed messages in the third information sheet (SEED, 2007) explored in chapter 4.

The impact of staffing changes was also apparent in one of the LAs, where a new co-ordinator knew little about development work undertaken prior to her arrival. Moreover,

what was planned in that LA had potential to undermine work already undertaken. The participant's response illustrates how quickly organisational capacity can change when a post-holder leaves and corporate memory is lost. It demonstrates the importance of succession planning when long-term goals are at stake, whether local or national. This has particular significance for current assessment development, for few interviewees are still in the post they held at time of interview.

The potential for individuals to influence the direction of travel is evident in the nuanced changes noted in the communities of practice information sheet (SEED, 2007) examined in chapter 4 and in interviewees' responses explored in chapter 5. If individuals have different perspectives based on their background, experience and disposition, they bring their own perceptions to their role. From this range of perspectives different interpretations can arise which, in turn, communicate different messages or devise different strategies.

AifL sought to learn from the past by sharing responsibility among the partners, but as this study indicates, responsibility was often devolved to individuals. The evidence indicates that, in a hierarchical context, individuals can be either restricted in what they do, or allowed to enjoy undue influence by dint of their standing or status within their organisation.

The study highlights the issue of relying on individuals to contextualise national policy and suggests that development in LAs, as in schools, would benefit from increased collaboration. While AifL supported a national network, quarterly meetings were possibly not sufficiently frequent to prevent individuals feeling isolated when they returned to their LA. Local networks could increase capacity intellectually as well as operationally and implementation of change locally might well benefit from the insights provided by different perspectives and lead to new knowledge being generated.

## Conclusion: AifL - a curate's egg?

The starting point for AifL was, arguably, the lessons learned from the '5-14' developments, 'influenced by assessment research ..., research on what matters for change to be successful ... and the outcomes of the consultation' (Harlen and Hayward, 2010: 166-7).

AifL sought to build on what had been identified as the best of the previous assessment development programme (Hayward et al, 2000). The programme's approach to managing change was acknowledged by government itself when the central team received a Scottish Executive Excellence Award in the category 'Putting the People of Scotland First'. The nomination, which was published in the programme for the event, read:

This is a major change programme in education but one which has really had to bring about change through influencing and supporting, not by imposing policy. I have first hand experience of talking to teachers who have been involved in AifL and it is clear to me that the impact on their teaching practice and enthusiasm for the job they do has been tremendous (SEED Excellence Awards, 2006).

Formal evaluations commissioned by Scottish Government (Hallam et al 2004, Condie et al 2005a), to which I referred in chapters 1 and 4, contained indications of impact which were equally positive.

During the funded period, LTS was tasked by the government to communicate key messages and support assessment development. Practitioners were invited to share with others at AifL seminars how the programme had affected them; their reflections were also published in AifL newsletters as illustration of the impact of the programme. In particular, AifL Newsletters 11 and 12<sup>80</sup> contain comments which appear to confirm the evaluation findings and suggest the power of AifL. Published reflections indicate that it had:

- put teachers at the heart of policy delivery and enabled ownership of change
- promoted understanding of assessment as part of learning
- encouraged networks and collaborative enquiry through ASG working
- built national capacity through involvement in the SSA
- established connections between different policy areas to assure sustainability
- aroused international interest

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<sup>80</sup> Newsletter 11 published summer 2007 and Newsletter 12, published in spring 2008, available on the archived AifL site: <http://wayback.archive-it.org/1961/20100625100947/http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/assess/about/publications/index.asp>.

One statement, from a teacher seconded to support others in his LA, suggested:

AifL has placed teachers very firmly and publicly at the top of government priorities (AifL Newsletter 12, 2008: 7).

An academic explained how AifL's change management approach had helped him appreciate the need to ensure participation and engagement in managing change:

Engagement with AifL ... has emphasised for me the value of working with others to construct new understandings of complex professional issues. I embarked on my odyssey with a notion that inculcating change was somehow about convincing people of its merits; I am now convinced that real change can only come about through the active and collaborative engagement of practitioners with a change initiative (AifL Newsletter 12, 2008: 4).

In the same newsletter a secondary teacher, recently returned to school after a two-year national secondment, referred to AifL's focus on learning:

AifL encourages people to talk about learning – supporting development for staff and pupils alike. For many teachers, myself included, AifL has become an integral part of their thinking and, more than simply becoming part of what they do, it begins to define the way they work and even the way they are. The impact can be as profound as that (AifL Newsletter 12, 2008: 6).

Later in the newsletter, the emphasis on networking across schools and sectors is acknowledged by an acting depute headteacher:

... our learning community ... has given me an idea of how the school might continue ... via the model of a 'learning group', discussing research, trying out and reporting back on methodology and sharing practice (AifL Newsletter 12, 2008: 8).

A principal teacher of English in a different LA stated:

... the theoretical background we have studied has been valuable, but what has been most helpful has been the opportunity to 'talk shop'. Funding has facilitated rare opportunities for colleagues from schools in different islands to meet together and talk at length and in a relaxed setting (AifL Newsletter 12, 2008: 16),

and a local authority officer is quoted, also commending this aspect of AifL:

... the most powerful drivers have been practitioners themselves. Where staff have had the opportunity to plan, implement, reflect on and evaluate practice together, the progress and improvements are self-motivating and infectious (AifL Newsletter 12, 2008: 16).

These reflections reiterate the views of an unpromoted teacher working with pupils with additional support needs, published in the previous newsletter:

Through my ASG work I have been given a tremendous opportunity to develop my professional practice through collaboration with colleagues from various authorities. I would endeavour to further develop the work we have done in promoting AifL with pupils who have severe and complex learning difficulties (AifL Newsletter 11, 2007: 8).

As well as collaborative school-based projects exploring formative practice, AifL endeavoured to build teachers' confidence in their own professional judgments through ASG working and involvement in the SSA. Although the final evaluation concluded that assessment of learning had been the subject of more limited attention, where staff had worked together to develop this aspect, feedback was positive. For example a Gaelic medium teacher commented on how he and colleagues had endeavoured to establish a common standard for the assessment of talk:

The ASG is made up of primary and secondary teachers from different local authorities ... There has been the opportunity for discussion and reflection which has allowed us to come to an agreement on evidence of a shared standard (AifL Newsletter 11: 9).

More formal training was undertaken by SQA for those participating in the SSA national moderation exercise. Again, evidence suggests that staff experienced the benefit of arriving at shared standards through professional discussion, instead of having them imposed by an external source:

Moderation of levels has always been difficult ... However, discussion with other teachers is the only way this can be achieved and I now view this as a learning experience rather than a threat (AifL Newsletter 11, 2007: 11).

Another teacher suggests the approach is empowering:

...despite the fact that there were around 70 teachers in the room, it was democratic rather than anarchic, interesting and empowering. Debate was welcomed. It was a necessary part of the process ... By building a cogent argument ... we clarified and articulated our own understanding of the levels (AifL Newsletter 11, 2007: 21).

The quotations above illustrate the range of AifL's influence and how the programme was perceived by professionals in education. They offer a persuasive account of what AifL meant for those involved: raising awareness of the role of assessment in learning and

teaching, establishing a structure for collaborative enquiry in supportive networks, empowering staff through enabling shared ownership of the change process, and providing opportunity to build the confidence and capacity for arriving at sound professional judgments.

In its efforts to achieve sustainable change AifL recognised that, unfamiliar with the policy environment, few teachers understood policy direction. Moreover, the links between different policy initiatives were often lost on staff who perceived funded initiatives as discrete and disconnected. To address this and help ensure sustainability, connections between AifL and *Curriculum for Excellence* were made explicit and the AifL team developed a planning framework which supported practitioners not only to develop their assessment practice but to make explicit links with the objectives of *Determined to Succeed*, a government programme with funding ring-fenced until 2011, three years beyond the funded life of AifL. This planning framework has been included as Appendix 2(b) on page 213.

The programme also attracted international attention. Working in LTS, I received frequent requests from overseas visitors<sup>81</sup> to present on the programme's main messages and explain its approach to change. Two development officers came from outwith Scotland, attracted by the programme to make a contribution to Scotland's assessment development. One, from QCA<sup>82</sup> in England, described how the idea of a coherent assessment system had caught her attention and led to her own professional learning:

I ... was intrigued by the fusion of formative and summative assessment within a national assessment system. This is significantly different from England with its statutory externally marked tests for year 6 and year 9 pupils. One aspect of AifL that I particularly admire is the emphasis on self-reflection and meta-learning ... (AifL Newsletter 12, 2008: 9).

Another, seconded from the New Zealand Ministry of Education suggested her interest had been aroused by the emphasis on professional learning:

AifL comes across as a programme that has provided opportunities for schools to participate in classroom-based, collaborative enquiry, in and across schools (AifL Newsletter 12, 2008: 18).

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<sup>81</sup> There were several delegations for Singapore and from Norway as well as individual visitors.

<sup>82</sup> Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

Together these quotations constitute powerful testimonials for AifL and indicate how the programme impacted in different ways on those involved. Yet this study describes variable quality of official communications, missed opportunities for policy reinforcement, and general lack of clarity about AifL's wider aims and, as I indicated in sections 7.1 and 7.3, the continuing emphasis in local authorities on performativity meant that the ambitious aims of AifL have yet to be fully realised. Any future assessment development will need to begin where AifL ended, building on what appear to be its significant strengths and learning from lessons learned. If not, curriculum reform through *Curriculum for Excellence* could be at risk.

Several interviewees in this study referred to the challenge of helping pupils develop the attributes and skills described in *CfE*, when staff themselves might not possess these qualities and skills. This implies that staff need to be creative, flexible and autonomous. Boyd and Hayward (2007: 12) cite of Ernest Boyer's (2005) assertion that 'over-accountability is the enemy of creativity and risk-taking', which is a reminder of the imperative to tackle issues arising from accountability as part of ongoing assessment development.

Others (Stobart 2008, Mansell and James 2009, Harlen and Gardner 2010) argue that some existing assessment practice could pose a risk to pupils' development and progress across the whole curriculum and *CfE* policy guidance (Scottish Government, 2008: 5) also states:

the intention must be to avoid driving young people through the levels as fast as possible. This arrangement of experiences and outcomes is intended to give teachers ... the flexibility and scope ... so that the young person is secure at a level before moving on.

Increased emphasis in *CfE* on developing the knowledge, skills and attributes underpinning successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens<sup>83</sup> (SEED, 2004a: 12) would appear to demand a reconsideration of what numerical data can and cannot do and a reconceptualisation of accountability.

An issue with the *CfE* learning and teaching framework (SEED, 2008) is that, as with AifL, it advises '[n]ational guidance needs to support a flexible approach which meets local needs and changing circumstances'. The reference to 'local needs' suggests that,

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<sup>83</sup> Known as 'the four capacities'.

once again, the context for change will be important. While local contextualisation might be perceived by policymakers as an effective means of managing change, the experience of AifL reveals that existing practice in LAs may inhibit reform.

Even within AifL, a policy context supportive of learning and teaching, Boyd and Hayward (2007: 15) report:

perceived lack of confidence in teachers' professional judgments coupled with a lack of public understanding of issues of reliability and validity made [questionable] use of data acceptable.

It is worth remembering that the AifL programme was the second attempt in 10 years to achieve assessment reform in Scotland. The third is underway. Given what Ball (1999: online) calls 'a concern with aggregate performance', assessment of pupils' progress in broad *CfE* outcomes within levels spanning three years and with no in-built criteria may prove to be the ultimate challenge for those who prefer predetermined benchmarks against which to measure performance.

'Perhaps', Hayward (2010: 96) concludes, 'we need to learn through the narratives and critical analyses of individuals and groups involved in learning to change'. The narratives and their analysis in chapters 5 and 6 of this dissertation are offered as a small contribution to that learning.



## Limitations of the study

In this dissertation I have attempted to convey the complex, multi-faceted nature of AifL. As I have demonstrated, the programme adopted an innovative approach to change, promoting new and imaginative ways of assessing pupils' progress and aiming to build professional confidence in arriving at sound judgments. It also introduced the concept of a sample survey to evaluate pupils' learning at national level. To represent AifL's main messages and their local contextualisation for others, I have referred to AifL's twin aims: exploration of local management of change and the development of effective assessment practice.

The study is offered as a further contribution to understanding the complexity of local contextualisation. One of its strengths lies in its representation from an insider viewpoint of what is generally regarded as a successful educational initiative. At this point, however, I must also acknowledge the limitations of the study.

Firstly, to convey the complexity of AifL, I found I had to adopt a broad focus. For similar reasons the literature review contains an eclectic range. However, in attempting to capture the scope of the programme as a whole, I have given limited attention to discrete aspects of the programme, such as teacher-led approaches to local moderation, which would benefit from deeper exploration.

Another limitation was the size of the sample. In section 1.5, I explained that my investigation was confined to specific activities in specified areas within a defined timeframe: that is, assessment development in seven Scottish LAs during the centrally-funded period of AifL from 2002 to 2008. Although the sample was intended to achieve a reflective range, it did not claim to be representative and the same criteria for selection might well have produced a different sample, possibly generating quite different data, leading to different conclusions.

The insights gained from this study have been developed from an 'insider's' perspective and reflect what I deemed to be important based on my involvement in the programme and my understanding of relevant literature. However, it is clear from the findings that others had different perspectives and priorities. Those who are innately conservative or who think, like David quoted in chapter 7, that AifL was 'subversive', may be critical of my findings and argue the study presents a subjective view to which they are unable to relate.

Also, because I was an insider, I sought to avoid asking leading questions or eliciting answers which participants thought I might want to hear. This led to me to gather information through unstructured interviews, as a means of enabling participants to direct the course of the interview through the responses they offered. Had I been more experienced, I might have scheduled interviews more effectively allowing for initial analysis of two interviews. This would have enabled deeper probing in later interviews of initial findings. True, several common themes emerged which provided insights into the workings of LAs and the thinking of those involved, but these findings were dictated by the data available and the chosen research instrument meant data were de facto constrained by what participants chose to share. On a different day, at a different time or in different circumstances, the data might have been different, and as suggested in an earlier paragraph, other participants might have led to different findings.

Only one type of data was analysed. My background in language and linguistics meant I was comfortable analysing written and spoken text, yet I am conscious of Fairclough's (2001) caveat that our individual perspective influences our interpretation of discourse. My insider knowledge of AifL and my experience of working in a policy environment may have meant I attached unintended meanings to responses.

Throughout this dissertation I have explained and justified decisions and choices. Nevertheless, these choices have necessarily imposed limitations in terms of the design and outcome of the study: for example, the breadth of the topic, the size of the sample, the methodology adopted and, not least, my own insider status. Because continued assessment development is imperative to supporting pupils' learning generally and to ensuring realisation of the promise of the new Scottish curriculum, further investigation, in the ongoing quest for deeper understanding and clarity, will be necessary to probe more deeply some of the issues raised by this study. Aspects which would merit further attention are outlined in the next section.

## Recommendations for future research

While the previous section set out the limitations of this study, the findings suggest several threads which would be worth pursuing in future studies.

Firstly, the small sample has been sufficient to highlight issues associated with the local contextualisation of policy in seven LAs and, although common themes emerged across all seven, without reference to the remaining 25 LAs, it would be wrong to assume that these issues are widespread. With continuing high profile assigned to assessment development as part of local implementation of *Curriculum for Excellence*, there is merit in further exploration to reveal whether the issues raised by this study are representative in order to help inform resolution.

The study also indicates there are issues at policy level where dissemination is synonymous with publication of government guidelines. A study of current policy documentation for *Curriculum for Excellence* might explore how teachers interpret policy discourse, check for clarity of understanding of the message intended, or evaluate the extent to which the principles have been adopted in practice.

I have suggested that, despite eight years of intensive assessment development activity and first-hand accounts of positive impact on pupils and teachers, the tensions between assessment for learning and assessment for accountability remain unresolved. One reason may be LAs' preoccupation with accountability, evidenced in this study. There are also indications that teachers and managers in Scottish schools find the concept of 'tough, intelligent accountabilities' difficult to practice, perhaps because of its emphasis on sound moderated judgment of classroom-based assessment. Future studies might probe for reasons why teachers are prepared to place greater reliance on externally-produced tests than on their own professional judgments.

The study found that different stakeholder groups have competing priorities and that these can introduce conflicts and tensions, especially where policy delivery is dependent on local contextualisation. Established hierarchies and deep distrust appear to exist at different levels in Scottish education. For the benefit of individual students and of the country as a whole, further investigation is required to discover the source of this tension and explore reasons for apparently uneasy relationships between HMIE and LAs and between HMIE, LAs and schools. In view of the sensitivity of the topic, it is recommended that future

studies be undertaken by researchers who have no personal or professional involvement in the case and that findings include suggestions for resolving any issues identified.

Central funding and support for AifL may have ended in 2008 but, in my experience, the ambitious aims of the programme continue to be a source of interest nationally and internationally. Part of the fascination lies in the range of interests it represented and the various perspectives of those involved. Local contextualisation meant that those on the AifL journey chose their own path. Some arrived at different destinations and some are still en route. My own journey is summarised in the next section but others also have a story to tell and future studies might seek out their perception of curriculum and assessment development in Scotland.

## Epilogue: my own journey

*To learn from experience is to make backward and forward connections between what we do to things and what we enjoy or suffer from things in consequence. Under such conditions, doing becomes a trying, an experiment with the world to find out what it is like; the undergoing becomes instructions – discovery of the connections of things (Dewey, 1916).*

This study has had a profound effect on my understanding of assessment policy and practice, of large-scale change in general and on the nature of professional learning in particular. The journey has lasted eight years and has taken me down different roads with both personal and professional diversions. The destination is still uncertain, but the insights provided along the way have enriched my understanding and hopefully enhanced the experiences I have helped to provide for others on their own learning journey.

What have I learned in carrying out this study? Undoubtedly, I have increased my understanding about assessment and change, and my learning has enabled me to carry out different remits more effectively than I might have done. Initial reading and discussion made clearer the demands of the knowledge economy and its relevance to proposals for curriculum reform in Scotland, while insights on policy and policymaking helped me to make sense of my role in central government. Reading relevant literature helped me to unpack issues associated with change generally and introduced me to the concept of professional learning to achieve change in education. This has helped me understand the nature of my own learning, been useful in devising ways of supporting others to embrace change and in appreciating that this approach is valued by others with different roles in Scottish education (for example, Alcorn 2007a, Alcorn 2007b, Scottish Government 2009c, Menter et al 2010).

Before, I had a perfunctory understanding of research principles and practice; I now have a better grasp of ontological and epistemological issues. Yet, while a qualitative study seemed the most appropriate, the methodology was not without challenge and, initially at least, required me to justify my approach against a positivist worldview. Issues related to my insider status meant particular rigour was necessary in order to represent participants fairly and to address issues relating to validity and reliability in this study. I have also learned from experience that information overload can render data analysis even more

complex than it necessarily has to be, and the experience has resulted in heightened awareness of planning and manageability. There have certainly been lessons for the future.

Most importantly, whilst I genuinely believed I was approaching the investigation with no preconceptions of what I might find, I now recognise assumptions I had never acknowledged. The realisation that others did not attach the same level of importance to professional learning and the recognition of the impact of individuals and what they bring to, or detract from, the experience we provide for pupils have been salutary lessons. Most of the participants have moved on or given up their assessment remit since the interviews were undertaken. I and my AifL colleagues have also moved on. Only time will tell if AifL's legacy will last or if the new developments will benefit from fresh insights.

I learned that, in Scottish education, status counts: that what you are in the system can carry more weight than what you know or understand. Although one participant demonstrated a clear understanding of the importance of professional learning (his understanding confirmed by Hayward, Boyd and Spencer, 2008), his influence was limited in his LA; in contrast, the most senior postholder by his own admission was able to ignore policy advice, focusing on data to the comparative neglect of professional learning.

This investigation has enabled me to appreciate the complexities of change. For example, I have learned that the time needed for professional dialogue and collaborative activity to realise change in schools can conflict with the political imperative to demonstrate measurable impact within a short timescale, and I now better appreciate reasons for the divide between policy and practice.

Overall, my findings, set against the insights offered by others with greater experience of assessment reform than me, have helped me come to terms with my professional frustration that AifL did not appear to realise its promise. From Gardner (2010a) I have learned that processes as well as people are change agents, acting as intermediaries promoting or inhibiting change. In this case, issues related to accountability were raised so frequently that it became clear that tensions could not be resolved by raising the profile of assessment *for* learning alone. Rather, I now understand why a revised system must take account of the interests of different stakeholder groups, and of the practices developed to promote these interests, but also that the current practice of some stakeholders is underpinned by limited understanding of assessment and the impact of assessment practice.

From Black and Wiliam (2006b) I have found consolation that AifL did not fail, but rather that its achievements can be the starting point for future reforms, as can the lessons learned; and the deep disappointment I felt prior to completing this study is countered by Harlen and Hayward's (2010) more optimistic view of the future.

Why should frustration and disappointment follow an overall positive experience? When I joined the AifL team in 2002, I did so because I wanted to play a part in a programme I genuinely believed could make a difference. Taking its cue from national consultations, it sought to build on what had been publicly acknowledged as the best of the previous assessment development programme and respond to the lessons learned. Underpinned by recent research on both assessment and managing change, with policy support and central funding, the programme had a strong foundation. When in 2004, ministers committed funding for AifL until school session 2007-08, well beyond what had originally been anticipated, it seemed the development programme could meet its aims. With hindsight, my belief that we could change the world was really quite naïve.

As a novice in the policy environment, I welcomed working as part of an extended team, relishing the sharing of perspectives and imagining this collaborative approach would deliver, but I did not at first appreciate the imperative of engaging all those likely to be affected by change. Year on year, AifL touched more teachers in more and more schools; newsletter by newsletter, practitioners testified to the impact on their practice; seminar by seminar co-ordinators vouched that the programme was becoming embedded.

Yet, by 2008, the brave new world I had envisaged seemed further out of reach. Although all schools were in some way involved in the programme by 2007, not all teachers were involved; although the programme aimed to create a coherent system of assessment and offered incentives and encouragement to staff to explore assessment as learning and assessment of learning, the focus remained firmly on teaching strategies partially addressing the requirements of assessment for learning.

During the funded period, demanding inspection schedules were cited in HMIE apologies for non-attendance at APMG meetings or assessment seminars, which meant this key group missed information about developments and priorities. Although HMIE as an organisation was a partner in AifL, time and again, teachers, school managers and LA officers related tales of inspection feedback which seemed to contradict AifL. It was

impossible to tell if staff, under stress, were misinterpreting what they heard or if individual inspectors were pursuing a different agenda.

Where the research community was concerned, the funding approach resulted in greater collaboration than before between staff in different universities, but academics explained the complexities of life in universities in general and in schools of education in particular, which created difficulties for them in sharing the programme's messages with others responsible for initial teacher education and ongoing CPD. Consideration of the research projects undertaken<sup>84</sup> reveals that the majority had a formative focus. This is understandable, perhaps, given the role of universities in initial teacher education, but it is possible that university staff may have communicated to their students that AifL was synonymous with formative assessment, thereby perpetuating the myth for a new generation of teachers.

The findings of this study suggest that, in seven LAs at least, the aims of the programme were acknowledged but perhaps not well understood and, certainly had a lower priority in the day to day work of these LAs than ensuring schools were meeting their targets.

From this, it is possible to conclude that conscientious efforts to ensure engagement and provide opportunities for shared ownership are insufficient if partners do not reflect on existing procedures and established priorities or consider how these fit with a genuine commitment to change. Based on their review of efforts to embed and sustain assessment development over the last decade, Harlen and Hayward (2010: 171) suggest: 'perhaps we are beginning to learn to live with the complexities of collaboration. There really is no alternative.' For me, the complexity of collaboration has been the hardest lesson of all, bringing with it the realisation that not everyone in Scottish education places pupils and their learning first.

In spite of this, my experience of AifL and in producing this dissertation has allowed me a glimpse into worlds beyond school, to gain insights on the policy world, local authority cultures and academic environments. This has helped me to appreciate others' priorities and preoccupations and better equip me to work alongside them in the future. The value of this is immeasurable.

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<sup>84</sup> Available on the archived AifL website: <http://wayback.archive-it.org/1961/20100626043757/http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/assess/research/index.asp> (last accessed 20/05/11)



## Appendix 1 - Education policy in Scotland

### (a) Thirty years in Scottish education alongside the UK and Scottish political situation

Scottish and UK policy context		Scottish educational context
UK General Election – Conservative/ Liberal Democrat coalition government	2010	Publication of <i>Building the Curriculum 5: a framework for assessment</i>
	2009	Publication of <i>Building the Curriculum 4: skills for learning, skills for life, skills for work/Assessment: strategic vision key principles</i>
	2008	Publication of <i>Building the Curriculum 3: a framework for learning and teaching</i>
Scottish Parliament elections – Scottish National Party form minority government	2007	Publication of <i>Building the Curriculum 2: active learning in the early years</i>
	2006	Publication of <i>Building the Curriculum 1: progress and proposals</i>
	2005	Publication of Circular 02/05 Assessment: 3-14
	2004	Publication of <i>A Curriculum for Excellence: the curriculum review group/A Curriculum for Excellence: the Minister's Response/Ambitious Excellent Schools/ Assessment Testing and Reporting: our response</i>
Scottish Parliament elections. Pre-election publication of <i>Partnership for a better Scotland</i> (PABS) outlining a Liberal/Labour party coalition manifesto	2003	Publication of <i>Educating for Excellence</i> Consultation – Assessment, Testing and Reporting
	2002	Introduction of Assessment is for Learning (AifL) programme
	2001	
	2000	Publication of <i>Standards in Scotland's Schools (2000) Act. Improving Assessment in Scottish Schools/The National Debate on Education</i>
Devolved Scottish Parliament – Liberal Democrat /Labour coalition administration	1999	Analysis of responses to consultation on assessment undertaken by University of Glasgow
	1998	Review of assessment in pre-school and for pupils aged 5-14 undertaken by HMI/Publication of results of King's College, London meta-research on formative assessment
UK General Election – New Labour government with Third Way policies	1997	
Decentralisation policy - formation of 32 unitary Scottish LAs	1996	Publication of <i>How Good is Our School?</i> 'Performance Indicators' for school self-evaluation, v1
General Election – Conservative government Neo-liberal policies	1992	Publication of Framework for National Testing
	1991	Publication of National Guidelines on Assessment: 5-14
	1990	Publication of National Guidelines on the Curriculum: 5-14
General Election – Conservative government with Neo-liberal policies	1987	Publication of <i>Curriculum and Assessment in Scotland: A Policy for the 90s</i>
General Election – Conservative government with Neo-liberal policies	1983	
General Election – Conservative government with Neo-liberal policies	1979	

**Appendix 1 - Education policy in Scotland**

(b) Summary of education policies and documents (1991-2010) referred to in this dissertation

National Guidelines on Assessment 5-14 (SOED, 1991) – These established a rationale for making assessment integral to learning and teaching. These were guidelines only and there was no statutory requirement for schools to adhere to the principles.

How Good is our School? (HMIE, 1996) – A quality tool published by HMIE to support the process of school self-evaluation in Scotland and intended to lead to improvements in the quality of experiences and outcomes for learners. The quality indicators were updated in 2002 and augmented in 2007 and are regarded as a reference point for judging the quality of performance and provision and shared by inspectors, teachers, headteachers and local authority staff.

Standards in Scotland's Schools, etc. Act (SEED, 2000) – Early in the life of the new Scottish Parliament, the ruling administration stated its commitment to prioritising improvements in education, outlining the structures for school improvement. These included benchmarking and target-setting based on 5-14 test results.

A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century (2001) – The tri-partite agreement following recommendations in the McCrone Report (2000). It represented a watershed in teachers' salary negotiations, linking salary with new professional structures and teachers' duties and responsibilities, including a commitment to professional development. Teachers' contractual hours now included designated CPD time, making possible collegiate reflection and discussion.

Educating for Excellence: the Executive's response to the national debate (SEED, 2003) – The Scottish Executive's response to the National Debate in Education (2000). It comprised an action plan identifying key national priorities in a vision for Scottish education to help ensure that every child reached his or her full potential. Theoretically, it assigned equal status to five national priorities: Achievement and Attainment; Framework for Learning; Inclusion and Equality; Values and Citizenship; and Learning for Life.

A Partnership for a Better Scotland: Partnership Agreement (PABs – SEED, 2003) – This set out commitment for education agreed by the Labour/Liberal Democrat coalition following the 2003 Scottish elections. It declared that schools had a key role in ‘unlocking potential’ required for economic growth. Several of the commitments related directly to AifL.

Ambitious Excellent Schools (SEED, 2004) – This set out the agenda for action for the life of the parliament. Development of human potential was linked to self-determination and prosperity. In 2006, an update was published describing progress in certain aspects: leadership, professional autonomy, pupil opportunity, support for learning and ‘tougher, intelligent accountabilities’.

A Curriculum for Excellence: The Curriculum Review Group (2004) - Although the document acknowledged strengths in Scottish education, this proposed radical reform of the curriculum. Values, purposes and principles formed the rationale for the revised curriculum which would cover all stages from early years through to the last year of secondary.

A Curriculum for Excellence ministerial response (2004) – This comprised ministerial acceptance of the principles and purposes for A Curriculum for Excellence, and set in motion a programme of work to address issues identified. These developments were to be part of the process of creating a single, coherent, Scottish curriculum 3-18.

Assessment, Testing and Reporting: our response (SEED, 2004) – This referred to practice developed through AifL and outlined actions to support assessment for, as and of learning. It included provision for annual progress plans, on-line randomly generated National Assessments, and a new Scottish Survey of Achievement to measure improvement in overall attainment.

Education Department Circular No.02 June 2005: Assessment and Reporting 3 -14 (SEED, 2005) – This provided advice on developments in assessment, testing and reporting policy for 3-14 year olds. It set out roles and responsibilities for teachers and senior managers, schools and local authorities. Full implementation was dependent on wide adoption and coherent application of AifL principles.

Scottish Government/COSLA Concordat (2007) – The agreement between Scottish Government and the Convention of Local Authorities. It acknowledged the position held by local authorities in the governance of Scotland and enhanced their role. It signaled the cessation of ring-fenced government grants. Henceforth, local authorities would be able to decide priorities according to local needs but in line with the overall direction of national policy, reporting annually on a single outcome agreed with Scottish Government evaluated against national indicators. From COSLA's point of view this introduced increased local autonomy and reduced bureaucracy. However, it also secured an agreement enabling central government to fulfill its election promise to cap council tax.

Building the Curriculum (Scottish Government, 2006-2010) – a series of guidance papers to support the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence. Summarised<sup>85</sup> these are:

Building the Curriculum 1 (2006) - introduces the curriculum areas and their contributions to developing the four capacities of children and young people;

Building the Curriculum 2 (2007) - outlines practical ways to introduce a more active approach to learning and teaching in the early years;

Building the Curriculum 3 (2008) - explains the framework for planning a curriculum which meets the needs of all children and young people from 3 to 18;

Building the Curriculum 4 (2009) - contains key messages about how children and young people develop and apply skills as part of Curriculum for Excellence;

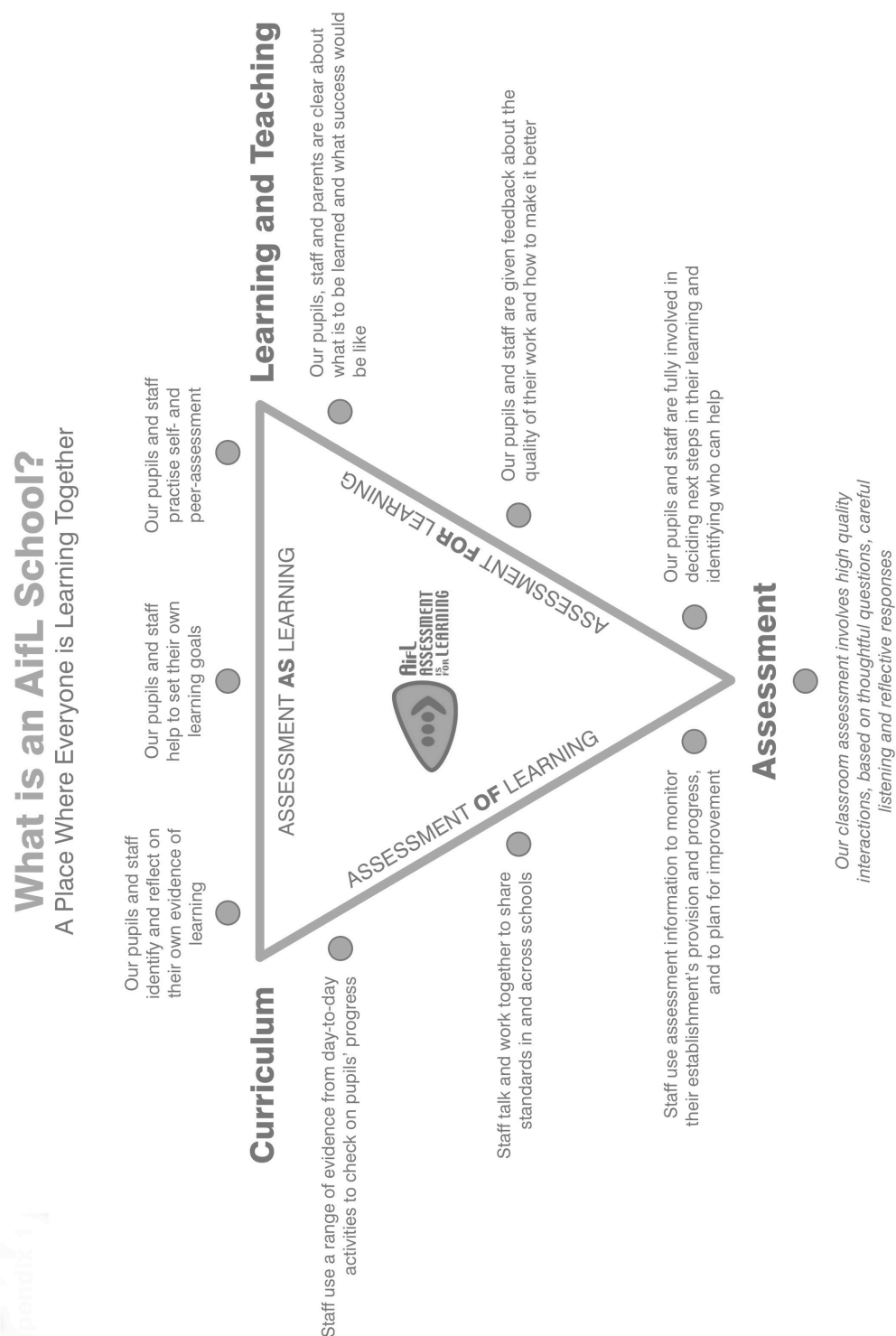
Building the Curriculum 5 (2010) – with its supporting papers, it provides guidance on the main areas of the assessment strategy for Curriculum for Excellence.

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<sup>85</sup> Source: Learning and Teaching Scotland website:  
<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/buildingyourcurriculum/policycontext/index.asp> (last accessed 1/4/11).

## Appendix 2 - AifL documentation

### (a) The 'AifL Triangle' (LTS, 2004)



## Appendix 2 - AifL documentation

(b) AifL planning template for associated schools groups (SEED, 2007)



### Reflection for Action 2007-08

**Proposed Plan for** *(Title of Project)*

**1a. Authority** *(please indicate the local authority in which the ASG is situated)*

**1b. Assessment (AifL) Co-ordinator**

*(Who in your authority has responsibility for AifL?)*

**1c. Curriculum for Excellence Co-ordinator & 1d. Determined to Succeed Co-ordinator**

*(Who in your local authority has responsibility for Determined to Succeed and Curriculum for Excellence?)*

**2. Establishment(s)** *(please list all schools and centres which are participating in this ASG)*

**3a. Composition of ASG** *(please tick only one)*

Cross departmental ☐

Cross establishment ☐

Cross sectoral ☐

Cross authority ☐

Other (please state) ☐

**3b. Stage(s)** *(please indicate the stage which will be the focus for development)*

Pre-school ☐

Pre-school/Primary ☐

Primary ☐

Primary/Secondary ☐

Secondary ☐

**4. Who will be the lead contact for the ASG in 2007-08?** *(Please give name and contact details)*

Name

Position

Establishment

Address

Postcode

E-mail

Tel. no.

Fax no.

**5a. Which key feature(s) of an AifL school does the ASG intend to explore?**

- ☐ Our classroom assessment involves high quality interactions, based on thoughtful questions, careful listening and reflective responses
- ☐ Our pupils, staff and parents are clear about what is to be learned and what success would be like
- ☐ Our pupils and staff are given timely feedback about the quality of their work and how to make it better
- ☐ Our pupils and staff are fully involved in deciding next steps in their learning and identifying who can help
- ☐ Our pupils and staff practise peer and self-assessment
- ☐ Our pupils and staff help to set their own learning goals
- ☐ Our pupils and staff identify and reflect on their own evidence of learning
- ☐ Staff use a range of evidence from day-to-day activities to check on pupils' progress
- ☐ Staff use assessment information to monitor their establishment's provision and progress, and to plan for improvement
- ☐ Staff talk and work together to share standards in and across schools

**5b. Through which curriculum area(s)?**

- ☐ languages
- ☐ mathematics
- ☐ sciences
- ☐ social studies
- ☐ technologies
- ☐ expressive arts
- ☐ health and well-being
- ☐ religious and moral education
- ☐ enterprise (Determined to Succeed- see separate insert)
- ☐ other cross-curricular / disciplinary (e.g. Eco Schools, Health-promoting Schools (please specify))

**6. Which aspects of the four capacities in *Curriculum for Excellence* will your group address in the project? (N.B. ASGs may add additional aspects. Those listed are not meant to be exhaustive.)**

Successful learners are able to:

- ☐ Use literacy, communication and numeracy skills
- ☐ Use technology for learning
- ☐ Think creatively and independently
- ☐ Learn independently and as part of a group
- ☐ Make reasoned evaluations
- ☐ Link and apply different kinds of learning in new situations
- ☐ Other (please give details)

Confident individuals are able to:

- ☐ Relate to others and manage themselves
- ☐ Pursue a healthy and active lifestyle
- ☐ Be self aware
- ☐ Develop and communicate their own beliefs and view of the world
- ☐ Live as independently as they can
- ☐ Assess risk and take informed decisions
- ☐ Achieve success in different areas of activity
- ☐ Other (please give details)

Responsible citizens are able to:

- ☐ Develop knowledge and understanding of the world and Scotland's place in it
- ☐ Understand different beliefs and cultures
- ☐ Make informed choices and decisions
- ☐ Evaluate environmental, scientific and technological issues
- ☐ Develop informed, ethical views of complex issues
- ☐ Other (please give details)

Effective contributors are able to:

- ☐ Communicate in different ways and in different settings
- ☐ Work in partnership and in teams
- ☐ Take the initiative and lead
- ☐ Apply critical thinking in new contexts
- ☐ Create and develop
- ☐ Solve problems
- ☐ Other (please give details)

**7. What impact does the group want to have on children's learning?**

What experiences are planned to enable staff and pupils to meet this objective?

How will staff know that the learning experiences provided have contributed to the purposes and principles of *Curriculum for Excellence* – and that learners have had the opportunity to develop the attributes the group identified in section 6?

How will children's family members be encouraged to contribute?

*(ASGs are expected to provide considerable detail in this section. Groups may wish to attach their answer on a separate sheet to enable these questions to be fully addressed)*

**8. Rationale for focus of project: what work (if any) will this project build on? *(Include any previous involvement in AiFL, Determined to Succeed or Curriculum for Excellence)*****9. What initial background reading and preparation do you plan to do around the focus of your work?**  
*(Please refer to all relevant literature – see note)***10. Who will be involved – and how?****11. What are the overall aims of your project in terms of learning for staff?**



**12. What are your success criteria?** *(These should relate to your learning objectives for children and staff)*

**13. How will you show that the project has made a difference to the learning of children and/or staff in your establishments?** *(What evidence, generated in the course of the project, would support staff impressions of impact?)*

**14. How does the group plan to use the ASG funding?** *(Please refer to the leaflet entitled Information for ASGs 2007-08, which outlines the parameters for spending)*

**15. Timeline: key milestones for project** *(AifL milestones have been inserted below. ASGs will have to add in milestones specific to their own project)*

Month	National milestones	Local/ASG milestones
June	ASG planning for 2007-08 begins	
August		
September	Final deadline for ASG action plans to SEED	
October		
November	First round of ASG networking meetings	
December		
January '08		
February	Second round of ASG networking meetings	
March	ASG headline report to be submitted to SEED	
April		
May	Third round of ASG networking meetings - peer review of headline reports	
June	ASG case study to be submitted to SEED	

## PLEASE READ THESE NOTES BEFORE DRAFTING YOUR PLAN FOR ACTION

### Notes for ASGs exploring links between AifL, Curriculum for Excellence and Determined to Succeed

For ASGs planning assessment development in the context of enterprise in education, it may be helpful to remember that Determined to Succeed details four main strands of entitlement for young people and that these are designed to support the values, purposes and principles of Curriculum for Excellence:

1. Develop enterprising skills, attitudes and creative approaches through learning and teaching across the whole curriculum
2. Experience and develop understanding of the world of work in all its diversity
3. Participate fully in enterprise activities, including those which are explicitly entrepreneurial in nature
4. Enjoy appropriately focussed Careers Education

*Determined to Succeed – A Review of Enterprise in Education (Scottish Executive, 2002)*

Below, under each of these **four strands**, there are several suggested **associated practices** for teachers to consider and reflect on when planning learning and teaching and assessment. Staff exploring links between AifL and enterprise will need to refer to specific points on the AifL triangle, identify the appropriate Curriculum for Excellence capacities (SL, CI, RC, EC) and indicate the aims they consider relevant.

<b>1. Develop enterprising skills, attitudes and creative approaches through learning and teaching across the whole curriculum</b>		
<i>Pupils are encouraged to develop 'can do - will do' 'be all you can be' attitude</i>	EC	
<i>Pupils use experiences in enterprise to reflect on other learning and skills development</i>	SL	
<i>Pupils can make relevant connections with other subject areas and the world of work</i>	EC	
<i>Pupils recognise the benefits of working independently, being self-motivated and accepting setbacks as learning experiences</i>	CI	
<i>Classroom practice enables pupils to be creative, flexible and resourceful in managing change</i>	SL, CI, EC	
<i>Pupils are empowered to take imaginative and informed approaches to problem solving involving calculated risk</i>	EC	
<i>Pupils have the opportunity to take the initiative and lead</i>	EC	
<i>Pupils are supported to take responsibility for and accept the consequences of their actions</i>	CI	
<b>2. Experience and develop understanding of the world of work in all its diversity</b>		
<i>Pupils have an understanding and appreciation of the world of work, the value of different occupations including entrepreneurship, and their contribution to the economy and society</i>	RC	
<i>Pupils have the opportunity to develop a knowledge and understanding of personal finance, wealth creation and wealth distribution, both nationally and globally</i>	RC	
<i>Pupils can reflect on the roles, rights and responsibilities of individuals as employees, managers, employers, entrepreneurs, investors, customers and global citizens</i>	RC	
<i>Pupils can recognise the positive and negative contributions of technology and business in society</i>	RC	
<b>3. Participate fully in enterprise activities, including those which are explicitly entrepreneurial in nature</b>		
<i>Pupils are actively encouraged to engage positively in school and community life, to the benefit of the school and the wider community</i>	EC	
<i>Pupils are engaged in challenging entrepreneurial projects which will allow them to generate and act on original ideas</i>	EC	
<i>Classroom practice aims to develop skills of planning, influencing, negotiating and teamwork</i>	EC, SL	
<b>4. Enjoy appropriately focussed careers education</b>		
<i>Pupils develop an awareness of opportunities at transition throughout life and are encouraged to be ambitious, and to make connections between past, present and future experiences</i>	RC	
<i>Classroom practice enables pupils to be self-aware and to reflect on their particular strengths, development needs, interests and aspirations</i>	CI	
<i>Classroom practice offers pupils experience of engaging with a wide range of people in society at a local, national and global level, generating a thirst for knowledge, and an interest in career planning and development</i>	CI, RC	

Scottish Executive (Determined to Succeed Division), April 2007

## PLEASE READ THESE NOTES BEFORE DRAFTING YOUR PLAN FOR ACTION

### 1a-d. Authority and Co-ordinators

Please give the name of the local authority, or authorities if you are working across LA boundaries. Give the name(s) of the local authority assessment (AifL) co-ordinator, the Curriculum for Excellence and Determined to Succeed co-ordinators, and any authority development officers directly involved.

### 2. Establishments

Name all the establishments working together in the Group. ASGs should return only one action plan.

### 3a. Composition of ASG

Groupings provided are the most commonly adopted, but you can propose others. Your assessment co-ordinator will discuss the composition of the group with you. It is important that you work together as a group.

### 3b. Stage(s)

You can include as many stages 3-18 as you wish, but you are advised to limit the focus in order to make the management of the project easier. Groups are recommended to look at transition points in particular.

### 4. Contact person

Please provide contact details for one person who will act as the contact for the whole group, to receive and disseminate general communications from programme teams in partner organisations, about ASG projects, networking meetings, support and CPD. This person also has responsibility for managing ASG funding or for working with the person appointed to do so and for ensuring all documentation is submitted to the co-ordinator.

### 5a. Key features of an AifL school

The 10 key features of an AifL school are illustrated by the AifL triangle [www.ltscotland.org.uk/assess](http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/assess). Please indicate which will be explored in your project but consider also how many would be manageable.

### 5b. Curriculum areas

Please indicate the curriculum area(s) in which the project will take place. Groups developing assessment outwith, or across, curriculum areas (for instance, in early years establishments, or with pupils who have additional support needs), or adopting a cross-curricular theme (such as Citizenship, Eco Schools or Health Promoting Schools,) should tick 'other cross disciplinary' and give brief details. ASGs wishing to develop assessment through enterprise should consult the Determined to Succeed insert outlining relevant key features.

### 6. Purposes and principles of Curriculum for Excellence

The purposes and principles can be found on pages 12–14 of *A Curriculum for Excellence The Curriculum Review Group* (SEED, 2004). We recommend that you read *A Curriculum for Excellence Progress and Proposals* (SEED, 2006) and *Building the Curriculum 1* (SEED, 2007), available online at ([www.acurriculumforexcellencescotland.gov.uk/buildingthecurriculum](http://www.acurriculumforexcellencescotland.gov.uk/buildingthecurriculum)), and other recently published material.

### 7. Learning experiences and evidence of learning

This section is key to the whole plan. It is intended to help ASGs think about objectives, success criteria and activities likely to deliver the aims identified. ASGs should also consider the kind of experiences (activities) that will promote consideration of the links between AifL, Determined to Succeed and Curriculum for Excellence, help pupils develop attributes identified, and afford opportunities for staff to gather evidence of learning. Assessment opportunities should be planned so that assessment shows clear signs of learning, and that the purposes and principles of Curriculum for Excellence are embedded in each child's learning experience.

### 8. Rationale for focus

Please outline the reasons for the ASG choosing the focus outlined in 5 & 6 above. You should refer to any previous involvement and AifL, Determined to Succeed or Curriculum for Excellence. Your involvement may be related to the improvement plan for the school or cluster.

**9. Background reading and preparation**

What reading does the group plan to undertake in preparation for ASG work? Preparation may include self-evaluation using the AifL toolkit, accessing resources on the AifL website and/or discussions with staff in other departments or establishments. Advice will be provided to ASGs on existing research or other related material.

**10. Involvement of everyone in the school community**

ASG development should involve all those with a role in children's learning. Consider the following:

- Which staff members will be involved?
- What contribution will pupils make to the enquiry?
- What contribution will families and members of the local community make to the enquiry?
- What links are you planning with university researchers/teacher educators?

**11. Overall aims for project in terms of staff as learners**

Please indicate here what staff hope to learn from:

- exploring issues related to children's learning
- working together as a group and focusing on staff as learners

**12. Success criteria**

What outcome would enable the group to consider the project successful, in terms of:

- ... pupils and their learning
- ... staff as learners, and the process of change
- ... involving adults and the wider community?

**13. Evidence of success**

Evidence to support the view that there has been an impact on learning and teaching should relate to the aims of the project. Evidence supporting the group's evaluation of progress, should be generated in the course of activities. This might include, for example:

- reflections noted in staff journals
- learning logs
- pupils'/parents' comments
- examples of work before, and after, feedback
- questionnaires
- feedback from others
- video footage and audio recordings

**14. Budget for project**

AifL funding should be used to buy time to facilitate reflection on the role of assessment in improving learning, to enable staff to talk with pupils about learning and to encourage staff engagement in peer observation and professional discussions. All ASG funding should be spent by the end of the financial year (31 March 2008). The following will be regarded as valid expenditure in supporting the learning process:

- supply cover to release teachers for development work and for attendance at ASG networking meetings
- cost of travel to, and from, networking meetings with colleagues, and staff from SEED and LTS
- payment for teachers to meet together outwith the school day
- payment for individuals to read and reflect in their own time

Please use these headings to indicate how the ASG intends to spend its funding allocation. Resources such as hardware and software or stationery and photocopying costs, should be met from other budgets. Further information on use of funding is available in the leaflet entitled *Information for ASGs 2007-08*.

**15. Timeline: key milestones for project**

Important dates in the ASG project cycle have been entered already, but ASGs should also enter dates which are key to their own project. Staff should consider the aims of the project, the roles of those involved and, as a group, agree key points where the group will evaluate the progress it has made, and identify next steps.

## Appendix 2 - AifL documentation

### (c) AifL reporting template for associated schools groups (SEED, 2008)



#### Assessment is for Learning – ASG Headline Report

In accepting funding for your associated schools group, your Director of Education has agreed that ASGs will provide the following at specified points in the session:

- plan for action – Reflection for Action
- headline report – Reflection in Action (by 31<sup>st</sup> March)
- final case study – Reflection on Action (by end of session)

Completion and submission of the 'headline report' enables the group to comply with the grant terms and conditions. However, AifL is about learning and the main purpose of the 'headline report' is to provide ASGs with the opportunity to take stock of their project to date; to reflect on their original plan and to consider the extent to which staff feel they have met the success criteria identified at the outset.

The term 'headline' reflects the nature of the report requested. Brief details, perhaps, 'bullet points', in each of the sections are sufficient at this stage. In turn, it is intended that these will provide a framework for the final case study.

The starting point for this 'headline report' is the original 'Reflection for Action'. The questions on the pages which follow are intended as prompts to help ASGs to jot down key actions, principal developments and important and significant outcomes - ASGs should concentrate on the main points that staff wish to convey.

This 'headline report' template should lead the group from recording factual information through reflection on the progress of the project, to an evaluative comment on the impact of the development work on both staff and pupils. In section 8, staff are invited to share their own experiences of learning, with other practitioners.

#### 1. Authority

#### 2. Establishment(s)

#### 3. Composition of ASG (please tick)

Cross sectoral ☐

Cross establishment ☐

Cross departmental ☐

Other (please state) .....

#### 4. Who is the lead contact for the ASG in 2006-07?

*This person would be happy to provide further details of the work of the group:*

Name

Position

Establishment

Address (including post code)

Tel.

e-mail

**5. What key features of assessment did the ASG decide to focus on? Which of the attributes of ACfE was the group hoping to develop? Why did the group select these?**

**6. What difference has this project made to learning?**

*At this point, what has been the impact on the staff and pupils involved?*

*At this point, what impact has there been in terms of ACfE?*

**7. How do you know that the project has made a difference to learning?**

*What does the evidence tell staff about the impact on learning and teaching? Consider, for example, staff journals, pupils'/parents' comments, examples of work before and after feedback, questionnaires, feedback from others, video footage, audio recordings, etc., etc.*

*What does the evidence tell staff about how AifL approaches can develop ACfE capabilities in pupils?  
Do you think you will continue to work in this way in the longer term, and why do you think this?*

**8. What did staff learn while working as part of the ASG?**

*What part did reading play in their developing thinking? How did reading affect the work of the ASG?  
What worked well? What was difficult or challenging? What would the group do differently next time?  
What advice would staff give to others thinking of undertaking a similar project in the context of ACfE?*

**9. How did the ASG spend the funding received from SEED?**

Amount of funding received £ \_\_\_\_\_

Details of expenditure

Supply cover £  
(including cover to enable attendance at networking days, writing report etc.)

Payment for hours outwith contractual time £

Travel costs £

Assessment texts directly related to the ASG focus £

Other (please state) £

Total £  
=====



## Assessment is for Learning - Associated Schools Groups Headline Report

### Notes to assist completion

Groups may find the following notes helpful. The numbers below refer to the sections in the headline report. In the notes below, reference is made to relevant sections from the original plan and ASGs may wish to *cut and paste* initial information from the plan, if they consider this appropriate.

- 1-4 Content will be similar to sections 1 – 4 in the original plan. Please highlight any changes (e.g. change of details of lead contact)
5. The answer should refer to initial information provided (see Reflection for Action sections 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10), at least some of which is likely to have changed as the project developed. This section should also be used to outline very briefly the nature of development. The 'big questions' (in bold) are intended to prompt reflection.
6. Again, the 'big question' (in bold) is intended to prompt reflection, this time on the effect on pupils and/or staff of development work undertaken and, in particular, the impact on learning. In this section and in the sections which follow questions in italics are intended to provide a framework for the brief answers to the 'big questions' (in bold). They should be addressed as staff feel appropriate, and are not intended to be restrictive or exhaustive.
7. This section asks groups to consider the evidence arising from the group's activities, and to reflect on what the group may learn from this. A short outline of the nature of evidence and potential conclusion is all that is required at this stage. The answer picks up on sections 7 and 13 of Reflection for Action.
8. This section was included at practitioners' request. It provides ASGs with the opportunity to share the highs and lows of the project, and to contribute to AifL's growing understanding of what works. It is intended to help staff articulate HOW they arrived at an enhanced understanding of assessment. Reading undertaken by the group should be included here (Reflection for Action section 12).
9. To comply with grant terms and conditions, the summary of actual expenditure must be completed. Groups provided an outline of expenditure proposed in section 14 of the original plan for action.

**The completed headline report should be sent, in hard copy to SEED, by 31 March, 2007.**

**Assessment Branch, QuAC, SEED, Area 2A South, Victoria Quay, EDINBURGH, EH6 6QQ**

**or by e-mail: [aifl@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:aifl@scotland.gsi.gov.uk)**

### Appendix 3 - permissions

(a) Copy of request for permission to undertake research, and reply received from the office of the Permanent Secretary, Scottish Executive.

#### Young M (Myra)

From: Watson AA (Andrew) on behalf of PS/Perm Sec

Sent: 06 October 2006 10:44

To: Young M (Myra)

Cc: Fenocchi L (Linda)

Subject: RE: Research Approval

Myra

Thanks for seeking clarity on this. I've had a discussion with HR and they agree with my view that there isn't a corporate policy constraint on you undertaking this work on the basis that:

- you make clear to those interviewed or otherwise approached for views that you are working in a private capacity rather than as a Scottish Executive member of staff
- the aim of the project is not contrary to the Executive's stated aims and objectives and your line manager(s) are supportive of the work, as something which might generate some useful findings, and are content for you to devote the necessary time to the project.
- the Executive actively encourages lifelong learning amongst its staff

Good luck with the research.

Andrew Watson

PS/Perm Sec

Ext: 44026

#### Original Message

From: Young M (Myra)

Sent: 06 October 2006 10 09

To: PS/Perm Sec

Subject: Research Approval

Dear Andrew

Thank you very much for agreeing to look at the papers attached. As Linda Fenocchi will have explained, I am in the last phase of a professional doctorate in education and would like to undertake research which has direct relevance to the remit of my secondment.

As required by the university, I have completed a draft application for ethical approval from the University of Glasgow's ethics committee, which I have attached. I have also included the ethics consent form proposed and the mandatory plain language statement. The last two of these (consent form and PLS) would be the only papers which would go with an accompanying letter to those invited to participate. I have shown these to my dissertation supervisor but have not submitted the application to the ethics committee.

I would very much value your comments and advice before finalising the papers for submission.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this.

Best wishes.

Myra Young

### Appendix 3 - permissions

(b) Copy of ethics approval

#### UNIVERSITY of GLASGOW

##### Faculty of Education

##### Ethics Committee For Non Clinical Research Involving Human Subjects

##### EAP2 NOTIFICATION OF ETHICS APPLICATION FORM APPROVAL

**Application No.** (*Research Office use only*)

E1133

**Period of Approval** (*Research Office use only*)

14 July 2008 to 09 OCTOBER 2008

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Date: 14 July 2008

Dear Myra

I am writing to advise you that your application for ethical approval, reference E1133 for ' An exploration of the ways in which different local authority officer have supported practice to meet the aspirations of the Assessment is for Learning programme (AifL)' has been approved.

Please ensure that copies of written consent from Directors of Education are sent to the Ethics Office, as soon they are received, for inclusion in your file.

You should retain this approval notification for future reference. If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me in the Research Office and I will refer them to the Faculty's Ethics Committee.

Regards

Terri Hume  
Ethics and Research Secretary

### Appendix 3 - permissions

(c) Sample letters to Heads of Service.



**UNIVERSITY**  
*of*  
**GLASGOW**

**Name of Researcher:** Myra Young

**Course Title:** Doctorate in Education, Faculty of Education

**Title of Project:** National policy, local cultures and individual perspectives

Dear ...

I am writing to you as a student of the University of Glasgow to ask for your help.

I am currently undertaking my Doctoral thesis. The research is concerned to explore how different local authorities implement national policy. The study is being carried out by me in a private capacity and in ways that are consistent with the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association.

As part of this work I would like to meet with and talk to up to six local authority assessment co-ordinators, including the person who has that remit in your Authority, in order to learn more about the role s/he played in supporting national policy. I would be very grateful if you would give your permission for me to talk with ...

I hope to carry out this research between 15 August and 10 October 2008. It should not be an onerous task for those involved. Participants will be invited to meet with me for around an hour. Their contributions will be anonymous. However, I will make a summary of findings available to all those who have contributed.

Thank you in anticipation for your help with this. If you require any additional information, please do not hesitate contact me at my university e-mail address: 0309793y@student.gla.ac.uk

Very best wishes

Myra Young

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### Appendix 3 - permissions

(d) Sample letters to local authority staff.



**UNIVERSITY**  
*of*  
**GLASGOW**

**Name of Researcher:** Myra Young

**Course Title:** Doctorate in Education, Faculty of Education

**Title of Project:** National policy, local cultures and individual perspectives

Dear ...

I have been in contact with your Director of Education who has agreed I may approach you. I am now writing to you to ask for your help.

I am currently undertaking my Doctoral thesis. The research is concerned to explore how different local authorities implement national policy. The study is being carried out by me in a private capacity and in ways that are consistent with the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association.

As part of this work I would like to meet with and talk to you and up to five other local authority assessment co-ordinators, to learn more about your role in supporting the national policy on assessment. I would be very grateful if you would agree to meet with me for 60-90 minutes to talk about this.

I hope to carry out this research between 15 August and 10 October 2008. I do not think it should be an onerous task. I can assure your contributions will be anonymous. However, I will make a summary of findings available to you and to the others who have contributed.

Thank you in anticipation for your help with this. If you require any additional information please do not hesitate contact me at my university e-mail address: 0309793y@student.gla.ac.uk

Very best wishes

Myra Young

---

## Appendix 3 - permissions

### (e) Plain language statement



**UNIVERSITY  
of  
GLASGOW**

**Researcher:**

Myra Young

**Course Title:**

Doctorate in Education

**Supervisor:**

Louise Hayward, Faculty of Education

**Title of Project:**

National policy, local cultures and individual perspectives – an exploratory study

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#### **Plain Language Statement**

##### **Invitation paragraph**

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear, or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

---

##### **What is the purpose of the study?**

The purpose of this study is to explore how officers in different local authority officers supported staff to meet the aspirations of the Assessment is for Learning programme (AifL). It will seek to explore how local culture and individual understandings influence implementation. The project will take place between August and October 2008

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##### **Why have I been chosen?**

Assessment co-ordinators form an interesting group, one which has played a key role in engaging with the programme's ideas. As member of this group your views and others' are important. The views from up to six assessment co-ordinators will be sought, to try to represent the diversity within the group, in terms of gender, geography, local authority demographics and length of association with AifL.

---

**Do I have to take part?**

Participation is voluntary and it is entirely up to you to decide if you want to take part. You are also free to withdraw consent at any time during the research and to withdraw any information previously supplied.

If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

**What will happen to me if I take part?**

- If you agree to take part you will be asked to: respond to open-ended questions asked in an unstructured interview situation – these conversations will last no longer than 60-90 minutes and will be audio taped
- respond by e-mail to any questions which arise as a result of the original conversations between you and the researcher
- treat information from other participants as confidential
- complete a consent form

**Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

All information, which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will be identified by an ID number and any information about you will have your name and address removed so that you cannot be recognised from it.

Information obtained will be confidential during the research and anonymous in the final report. All participants will be required to maintain confidentiality of participation and information. Confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations e.g. Freedom of Information legislation.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

Data collected will be confidential and stored in a locked filing cabinet, and will be shredded after satisfactory completion of the award. The results of the project will be written as a doctoral thesis and available to all participants, together with a summary report. You will not be identified in any report/publication.

**Who is organising and funding the research?**

The research is being organised by myself and will be supervised by Glasgow University. The research is self-funded.

**Who has reviewed the study?**

The proposal has been accepted by the University of Glasgow and, although the research is not being conducted on their behalf, the necessary approval has been gained from relevant personnel in the Scottish Government. The project has been reviewed by the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee.

**Contact**

For further information, please contact me at 0309793y@student.gla.ac.uk, which is my student e-mail address, or my supervisor Louise Hayward at l.hayward@edu.gla.ac.uk.

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of the research project you can raise these with the Faculty of Education Ethics Officer by contacting Dr George Head at g.head@educ.gla.ac.uk

Thank you for taking part in this study.

Myra Young, August 2008

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