In this edition of the *Scottish Educational Review*, we have again aimed to highlight the connectivity of Scottish education with the wider international context of educational research, policy and practice. Each of the topics presented in this edition of the journal resonates with international debates and studies. In seeking to make the connections between particular concerns in Scottish education and wider discussions, we have also sought to maintain a broad base to the edition reflecting different aspects of research in Scottish education. The articles include different sectors of education and also include very different approaches to educational research: qualitative research sits alongside a larger quantitative analysis in this edition. Field research is complemented by two pieces offering a critical perspective.

In the first article we continue with the tradition of publishing articles based on keynote lectures at the annual Scottish Educational Research Association Conference. Menter in the last edition reflected on the status and future of educational research in England and in Scotland. In this edition we look at research in Australian education. Ninetta Santoro presents the findings of an empirical study on the impact of ERA, Excellence in Research for Australia, which is the Australian equivalent of the Research Excellence Framework in the UK. This is a timely piece particularly as the Universities across the UK await the outcome of the latest Research Excellence Framework assessment. The audit culture that is increasingly characterizing higher education is having an effect on research and also on the work and lives of academics. Santoro demonstrates the significant impact of this research assessment as an example of the intensifying of the audit culture of higher education. As the outcomes of the Research Excellence Framework are announced and universities again begin to ‘gear up’ for the next assessment exercise, Santoro’s article provides us with much to reflect on especially on the way such mechanisms might impede the building of authentic research cultures.

We continue with higher education in the next article by Wilson *et al.* from another perspective. The authors report on a project aiming to support young people from disadvantaged backgrounds as they work to enter higher
education. This article demonstrates clearly the proportion of young people from skilled manual, partly skilled or unskilled backgrounds has changed little in recent years. This article has important messages about the continuing inequalities in education and how these problems might be tackled. Wilson et al. provide a detailed analysis of the experiences of mentors and the young people they mentored. In this they illustrate the power of mentoring in supporting young people. However, what stands out in this discussion is the commitment of the mentors to the young people and the narratives of the young people as they build their skills and confidence.

This study on mentoring draws on qualitative data and contrasts with the next article by Francis et al. which presents the findings of a large-scale quantitative study. This study investigated attitudes to religious diversity and compared the attitudes of pupils in faith schooling and non-faith schooling. In this article Francis et al. draw from a wider UK study to present the data from the Scottish sample. This study raises the question of whether faith schooling prepares pupils for a diverse society. The findings presented challenge commonly held assumptions of the impact of faith schooling - which in Scotland is primarily comprised of Catholic schools – on the young people and their attitudes to religious diversity. This article reaffirms the importance of large-scale studies in questioning assumptions that often underlie different positions on faith schooling.

Challenging assumptions is also a key feature of the final two articles where both authors provide a critical commentary on a current area of development in Scottish education. Humes reviews current policy ambitions around teacher learning and change while Maclellan raises important questions about the quality of learning. Teacher learning has been positioned as a central strategy in realizing systemic reform across many educational systems. Humes examines critically the Scottish response to the imperatives around improving education particularly the developments related to Professional Update and the increasing emphasis on practitioner enquiry as a means of improving practice. Humes revisits the work of Lawrence Stenhouse and considers why his ideas have taken so long to filter through and illustrates the lengthy nature of educational change, an important message as education faces unprecedented demands in taking policy initiatives forward.

A concern for pupil learning is the focus of Maclellan’s article. She also provides a critical analysis of current policy, this time looking at mathematics education within the context of the Curriculum for Excellence. Maclellan provides a detailed and closely argued discussion of the importance of developing understanding. Although Maclellan’s focus may be specific to policy and guidelines in Scottish education, the implications of this discussion are wider. She makes a clear case for mathematics education to move beyond a narrow focus on skills development to developing understanding which has implications for mathematics curricula across different systems. In her analysis Maclellan
illustrates the importance of metacognition which again has a relevance across different areas of the curriculum.

We are very pleased to include the regular contribution from Morag Redford that is focused on the activities of the Scottish Parliament’s Education and Culture Committee. We consider this regular feature to be of vital importance for academics and researchers. This edition concludes with book reviews on: classroom-based research and evidence-based practice; education and international development: theory, practice and issues and educational leadership and Foucault.