

## **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MICHAEL FORSYTH IN SCOTTISH EDUCATION**

*Walter M. Humes*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Even Michael Forsyth's sternest critics would be unlikely to dispute the proposition that his impact on Scottish education has been very considerable, not only during the period when he had ministerial responsibility for it, but also subsequently, through the legacy of policies which he initiated. Forsyth raised education on the Scottish political agenda, introduced a raft of new policies, many of which ran counter to existing orthodoxies, and challenged the assumptions of the professionals and bureaucrats who made up Scotland's educational 'policy community' (McPherson and Raab 1988). The sheer pace of change in the period 1987 to 1992 in itself marked a new situation, and when that is coupled with other developments, such as the increased role given to parents and industrialists (evident in their appointment to a whole range of educational bodies), and the reduced role of local government in educational provision, the perception of Forsyth as a powerful catalyst is strengthened. Of course, to make this point still leaves open the question of whether the Forsyth-inspired reforms have been beneficial, and it is likely to be some time before a considered verdict on that issue can be offered. Reactions to Forsyth so far have, in the main, been long on judgement and short on analysis. What this article attempts to do is first to explain the significance of the Forsyth period by looking at his ideological positioning within the Conservative party; secondly, to consider the various ways in

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which he sought to transform both the policy agenda and the policy process; thirdly, to examine the extent to which his programme represented an assault on Scottish cultural values; and, finally, to assess whether, in the post-Forsyth period, the traditional 'leadership class' (Humes 1986) of Scottish education is beginning to reassert itself.

### **FORSYTH'S SYMBOLIC IMPORTANCE**

Michael Forsyth entered parliament in 1983 and became a junior Minister at the Scottish Office in 1987. His own background was modest - he was brought up in a council house in Arbroath - but his attendance during the 1970s at St. Andrews University, which became a centre for New Right thinking, was crucial in the formation of his political views. He subsequently moved to London where he became an elected member of Westminster City Council. During this time he wrote a pamphlet (published by the Adam Smith Institute) entitled **Re-servicing Britain** (Forsyth 1981), in which he expressed views that were to become familiar Conservative orthodoxies of the 1980s. For example, 'everywhere the public sector is perceived as failing the nation' and 'the public service ... tends to operate in the interests of those who administer it'. Westminster became, for a time at least, a flagship Conservative council, pursuing policies aimed at reducing costs, selling public assets and privatising a wide range of services. Forsyth's London experience no doubt contrasted sharply with his perception of local government in Scotland. Arnold Kemp observes that:

Forsyth had a true hatred for what he saw as the enfeebling impact on Scottish life of the socialist consensus and tried to transform the comfortable, gentrified old Tories into a group of hard-nosed professionals who ideologically would take no prisoners. (Kemp 1993, p. 180)

This statement makes two key points, one about ideology, the other about style. Forsyth saw the dominance of the Labour party in Scotland, most evident at local government level, as profoundly damaging. In his view, paternalism was coupled with inefficiency - evident, for example, in housing policy - and the result was a social malaise in which citizens had little opportunity to exercise choice or take on responsibility. A 'dependency culture' had developed which was harmful both to individuals and to society as a whole.

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To break this pattern required a different political style from the consensualist tradition which had characterised most of the post-war period. Forsyth quickly demonstrated that he possessed considerable drive, energy and initiative. In this he revealed similar qualities to those of Mrs Thatcher, to whom he was zealously loyal. He took the view that 'radical policies do pay dividends. Being weak-kneed will neither achieve our objectives nor win us support' (quoted in Kemp 1993, p. 203). This brisk, no-nonsense style, with its emphasis on action, on getting things done, on seeing policies through to the point of delivery, often working to tight time-scales, was to be a feature of his approach to educational reform. In the longer term, however, it served to antagonise not only the policy community in Scottish education, but also important sections of the Conservative party, especially after he was appointed party Chairman in Scotland in July 1989. One leading Conservative (Bill Hughes) was subsequently reported as saying that Forsyth had shown 'immaturity, impatience and poor judgement' (Kemp 1993, p. 197). But after he was relieved of the party chairmanship in 1990 he was promoted from junior minister to Minister of State and resumed responsibility for education. He continued with that remit until the general election of 1992, after which he was transferred to the Department of Employment in London. The fear - most strongly expressed by members of the 'left-wing' Scottish Tory Reform Group - that he might become Secretary of State for Scotland in the July 1994 government re-shuffle did not materialise. He was transferred to the Home Office, still with the rank of Minister of State.

The period in 1989-90 when Forsyth gave up the education portfolio to act as party Chairman is significant because it serves as a test of the extent of Forsyth's personal impact on policy. Ian Lang was responsible for education during this time. One important piece of evidence which suggests that there was a brief return to the old consensual style which Forsyth had attacked arises from the composition of the Howie Committee, set up by Lang to make recommendations about the reform of upper secondary education (SOED 1992b). The committee was recruited from the traditional policy community in Scottish education and, in particular, contained no representatives of business or industry. Had Forsyth not returned as Education Minister in 1990, the impetus of his reform programme may have been seriously weakened.

During his time at the Scottish Office, Forsyth became a symbol for various groups. For opposition parties he developed into a 'hate figure', Mrs Thatcher's representative in Scotland, an Anglicizer and purveyor of an alien

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cultural importation. For young radical Conservatives of the New Right he was a hero, the one person who had the courage to take on the Labour-controlled local authorities and put market thinking into practice. Indeed Arnold Kemp attributes Forsyth's 'downfall' as party Chairman in part to the over-enthusiasm of some of his young supporters - otherwise described as 'Mr Forsyth's sinister brotherhood' (Kemp 1993, p. 195). To moderate opinion within the Scottish Conservative party, Forsyth seemed a dangerous reformer, advocating economic and social policies which ran counter to the 'one nation' Toryism of the past (MacKenzie 1989). Particular fears were expressed about the likely effect, given the low level of electoral support enjoyed by the Conservative party in Scotland. Against this, however, Forsyth and his supporters could point to his own electoral success in both 1987 and 1992 in the marginal seat of Stirling.

An interesting problem of interpretation should be noted at this point. It concerns the precise nature of Thatcherism and Forsyth's relation to it. For some commentators (e.g. Gamble 1986), the economic element of Thatcherism - with its emphasis on market principles - was paramount. For others (e.g. Marsh and Rhodes 1992) the central thrust of Thatcherism had to do with its challenge to traditional policy-making networks dominated by self-serving officials. Others again (e.g. Kavanagh 1990) emphasise the personal role of Mrs Thatcher as an example of the strong leader with a clear vision of the sort of reforms required to transform the nation. Yet others (e.g. Jessop et al. 1988) point to seeming contradictions within Thatcherite ideology, between neo-liberal and neo-conservative strands, the former stressing personal freedom on moral and social issues and the latter stressing the importance of family, law and order, and loyalty to traditional values.

Giving a precise location for Forsyth in relation to these various interpretations is not easy, partly because some of them at least are by no means mutually exclusive - it is a matter of relative emphasis. That Forsyth greatly admired Mrs Thatcher on a personal level is indisputable: he was one of the few ministers to urge her not to resign (Letwin 1992). Her strength of character in the face of sustained opposition may have served as a model for his own approach when he was appointed to the Scottish Office. His dislike of bureaucratic obstruction was soon in evidence and he acquired a reputation for being quite prepared, if necessary, to be disagreeable to senior officials who sought to thwart or modify his plans. As for the economic dimension of Thatcherism, Forsyth's commitment to it had been a consistent thread in his career from his St. Andrews days onwards. Indeed one of his misjudgements was to argue that the earlier introduction of the poll tax in

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Scotland would demonstrate its advantages to the rest of Britain (Letwin 1992). Again, traces of the tension between neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism can be seen in Forsyth's invocation of a rhetoric of freedom to justify his educational policies but at the same time employing strong central control to ensure that they were implemented.

The key questions to arise from these interpretative issues can be put quite simply. Was 'Forsythism' just the same as 'Thatcherism', only located in a Scottish context? Or is it meaningful to speak of Forsythism as a distinct sub-species of Thatcherism? If so, what were its distinctive characteristics? These questions will receive further attention later in the paper.

Forsyth's significance can be seen to have ideological, political and cultural components. He was undoubtedly the most committed advocate of Thatcherite ideology, however defined, in Scotland. His high-profile political activities produced shock waves not only for the Labour party but also within the Conservative party. And he had symbolic value as a cultural marker - whether viewed negatively, as an example of the 'working class boy made bad', or positively, as the man who was prepared to promote a new self-image for Scotland. All three components - ideological, political and cultural - were to be important in relation to the educational policies which he introduced.

### **A NEW EDUCATIONAL AGENDA**

Prior to Forsyth's arrival on the scene, political input into the policy process in Scottish education had been relatively weak. Forsyth's predecessors - Alex Fletcher, Allan Stewart and John Mackay - had, in the main, relied heavily on advice from officials within the Scottish Education Department (SED) - later renamed the Scottish Office Education Department (SOED) - who, in turn, took regular soundings from the wider policy community. This included directors of education, principals of colleges of education and key figures in Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) such as the Consultative Committee on the Curriculum (CCC) - later to become the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum (SCCC) - and the Scottish Examination Board (SEB). Official descriptions of this process (e.g SOED 1993) have emphasised consultation and partnership as hallmarks of Scottish education, with a concern to arrive at a policy consensus broadly acceptable to the system as a whole. Critics (e.g Humes 1986) have suggested that it was an incestuous, self-regarding arrangement in which consultation was

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often stage-managed, counter-voices were excluded and the educational decisions that were arrived at often served the interests of professionals and bureaucrats rather than pupils, parents or the community.

Forsyth quickly disturbed the complacency of the operation, and over the next few years established a strong reforming agenda: school boards, opting out, national testing, teacher appraisal, devolved school management, the removal of further education colleges from local authority control, the restructuring of higher education. Underlying the reforms were certain recurring themes: consumerism, choice, accountability, standards, value for money. These themes had, of course, already been developed in England via NHS reforms and the privatisation of public services. Forsyth, unlike his colleagues at the Scottish Office, sought to advance swiftly and boldly along similar lines. Parents were to be regarded as central actors in the reform programme, though, as will be shown, Forsyth somewhat miscalculated their attitude. His intention, signalled in the School Boards (Scotland) Act (1988) and The Parents' Charter in Scotland (1991), was that parents should act as a counterweight to the professionals.

The origins of the 1988 Act are not without interest. In 1980 a Glasgow University research project published a report on the operation of school councils set up under the Local Government (Scotland) Act of 1973 (Macbeth, MacKenzie and Breckenridge 1980). These councils had very limited powers, and the report recommended an extended and strengthened role for them. One of the co-directors of the project, Malcolm MacKenzie, writing in 1988, observed that the report 'remained comparatively dormant for years' but:

On reaching his desk at the Scottish Office, Mr Forsyth found our report in his file. Committed to bringing consumerism and parent power to his fellow countrymen, whose alleged cultural dependence on bureaucratic paternalism has been the subject of much criticism, he found in our report academic legitimacy for what is essentially an ideological stance. Thus the report was miraculously raised from obscurity to the status of some academic and political bible. (MacKenzie 1988, p. 12)

This comment offers a revealing illustration of the uses to which research can be put. It was an issue that surfaced controversially again later in Mr Forsyth's period of office when a research contract was put out to tender for the continuation of the Scottish Young People's Survey, an important longitudinal study which had been pioneered by Professor Andrew

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McPherson at the Centre for Educational Sociology (CES) at Edinburgh University. Some of Professor McPherson's earlier work was regarded as unpalatable by Mr Forsyth because its conclusions represented a challenge to New Right ideology. The new contract, with a much more circumscribed remit than the earlier surveys, was awarded to a London-based research organisation, despite the fact that the CES bid was said to be the best in terms of quality. Professor McPherson was reported as saying:

The decision to put this funding to a body which has no comparable interest in educational research or in Scotland shows the indifference of the Scottish Office to the health of Scottish educational research. (TESS 1992)

Scottish Office sources insisted that the Minister had taken no part in influencing the outcome but officials had presumably come to understand his preferences. Such examples provide ammunition for those who take the cynical view that much educational research is designed to tell policy-makers what they want to hear.

Forsyth's initial tactic, as has been noted, was to appeal 'over the heads' of the professionals to parents as consumers. But he found that Scottish parents were not enthusiastic about some of his proposals, most notably his very formal and traditional conception of national testing: what eventually emerged was a more limited exercise relying heavily on the judgement of teachers. Both parents and teachers were in favour of improved assessment and reporting procedures but regarded the Minister's ideas as crude and unhelpful. This episode was seen as an indication that parents in Scotland had more confidence in teachers as professionals than the politicians supposed, a view that gained further currency as a result of two further developments. First, Scottish parents showed a lack of enthusiasm for the second round of school board elections, thereby suggesting that they were generally satisfied with what teachers were trying to do for their children. And secondly, there was very little take-up of the provisions of the Self-Governing Schools Etc. (Scotland) Act (1989) which enabled schools, if a majority of parents wished it, to opt out of local authority control. This contrasts with the position in England and Wales where a large number of schools have opted out.

The lukewarm response of parents to some of Forsyth's proposals might have been seen by him as additional evidence of the passivity and unwillingness to take on responsibility which he was trying to challenge. But there is another

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interpretation which again highlights the importance of the cultural dimension in Scottish education. Most Scots subscribe to a view of the 'Scottish tradition' in education which, although romanticised in many ways, nonetheless remains potent in the national consciousness. This tradition - perhaps 'myth' would be a more accurate term - places emphasis on democracy and equality as fundamental principles informing educational provision (Cowper and Pickard 1993). A history of relative poverty has meant that Scottish people have inherited a communal consciousness which stresses fairness to all as a guiding concept. By contrast, consumerism stresses the individual instead of the collective. It focuses on individual action rather than the common good.

The argument can be taken further. Educational consumerism might be regarded as discriminatory. In the economic sphere people do not have *equal* rights as consumers because they do not have equal spending power. Similarly in education the range of 'choices' open to parents will vary according to a number of conditions: family income; the parents' own educational background; their aspirations for their children; their knowledge of how the educational system works; the amount of time they have to provide enhanced educational experiences outside school. In other words, the capacity of parents to exercise their 'rights' as educational consumers is likely to depend on social class factors. It may well be that a realisation of this, and a recognition that schools as social institutions have to try to operate on the basis of fairness to all, led to scepticism on the part of many parents about the more extreme elements in Forsyth's vision of a brave new educational world. To put it another way, the risk inherent in educational consumerism - that it might encourage selfish individualism where parents pursue the interests of their own children at the expense of others' - has been met with a degree of cultural (and moral) revulsion in Scotland.

Nevertheless, although Forsyth did not manage to push his policies as far as he had hoped, his impact on educational thinking was considerable. For example, Frank Pignatelli, Director of Education for Labour-controlled Strathclyde Region, the largest education authority in Scotland, has written about the benefits, as well as the dangers, of the market model as applied to education (Pignatelli 1994). He would no doubt maintain that Strathclyde's initiatives in devolved school management (McDowell 1994) and, more recently, its Charter of Parental Expectations (Bradley 1994) were conceived independently, but the very fact that they emerged at all is indicative of a changed set of assumptions about the relationship between the providers and the recipients of education. Such developments can be seen as part of

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Pignatelli's attempt to alter perceptions of the region from a 'controlling' to an 'enabling' authority. Strathclyde wisely recognised the strength of the ideological shift that had taken place in central government and sought to mitigate its potentially damaging effects by pursuing strategies that took account of the new rhetoric while trying to remain true to its own policies designed to tackle social deprivation. Labour party politicians would, of course, prefer to see this as an example of sensible modernising rather than an acceptance of watered-down Forsythism.

What has been said in this section relates principally to the *substance* of Forsyth's educational programme - its guiding principles and the particular policies which he sought to advance. Equally important was his effect on the *process* of policy making and it is to this that attention will now turn.

#### **REDEFINING THE POLICY PROCESS**

Reference has already been made to the function of the policy community in Scottish education, that network of professionals and bureaucrats, not only within the SOED but extending to the local authorities and Non-Departmental Public Bodies, who collectively make up the 'leadership class'. McPherson and Raab (1988) have described in illuminating detail their backgrounds, their 'assumptive worlds' and their characteristic modes of conducting business. Their style has traditionally been marked by respect for hierarchies (in particular, a willingness to defer to senior SOED officials), mutual trust and a preference for confidential discussion rather than open debate. Furthermore, their perception of themselves has been as disinterested stewards of the educational system, acting in the public interest and proceeding by a series of compromises (Jones 1992).

It soon became evident that Forsyth regarded the existing policy community in 1987 not as the means by which his reform programme could efficiently be put in place but as part of the problem, a self-serving group of people who had had things their own way for too long. This was entirely consistent with New Right distrust of 'experts' who peddle philosophies that serve their own ends rather than those of the public. However, Forsyth faced a strategic problem. He could not dispense with the services of the policy community entirely. Any educational programme depends on the efforts of many people, especially at the development and implementation stages of the policy process (Humes 1994a). It is not enough simply to produce radical policy documents: unless they are followed through and translated into effective

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action at the point of delivery they will be unsuccessful. What then did Forsyth do? First, he used his powers of patronage to appoint different sorts of people to NDPBs, not just more parents and industrialists and fewer professionals but also more politically sympathetic individuals. Secondly, he altered the constitutional position of some NDPBs so that their function was more clearly defined and more closely tied to government policy. The Curriculum Council, for example, became a company limited by guarantee in 1988, and the Scottish Community Education Council (SCEC), for a time threatened with closure, had its sphere of activities curtailed and was required to operate on a more commercial basis. And thirdly, he introduced a note of managerial urgency into the activities of the SOED which disturbed relationships between the Minister, career civil servants and HMIs (school inspectors).

In any government department the relation between Minister and officials is important. Within the SOED the position is complicated by the fact that there are two groups of senior officials with largely separate career tracks: administrators and members of the inspectorate. Traditionally HMIs have been seen as key players in informing policy, well connected throughout the educational system and, in most cases, with practical credibility as successful teachers prior to joining the inspectorate. For Forsyth, this very credibility tainted them as 'experts'. He sought to reduce their input into the policy process and make them much more managerially accountable to the administrators. The revised function of HMIs was not so much to generate ideas as to ensure that politically-inspired policies were carried through as the Minister wished. In turn, they were expected to ensure that teachers operated not as autonomous professionals, acting on the basis of judgement and experience, but as agents of centrally-imposed policies. Whereas, previously, managerial and policy considerations had informed each other, now they were separated. Politicians determined policy: the task of officials was to attend to operational matters. This dislocation of policy and management has been seen by some observers as part of a strategy aimed at the deskilling of education professionals (Humes 1994b).

Perhaps the most powerful demonstration of Forsyth's redefinition of the policy process can be seen in the introduction of the Development Programme of the new curriculum for the age range 5-14. Brian Boyd (1992; 1994) has shown how the Curriculum Council's 10-14 Report, published in 1986, was set aside by Forsyth 'as being too slow and too teacher dependent' (Boyd 1994, p.27). Its demise was signalled in **Curriculum and Assessment in Scotland: A Policy for the 1990s** (SED 1987). Boyd comments:

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In order to understand the rationale for 5-14 and the national approach to the management of this initiative, it is necessary to appreciate why the 10-14 report failed ... the political climate had changed. The ideas of the New Right, personified by the new education minister, Michael Forsyth, left no room for the slow, consensual, 'classical' model. The lessons for the government of the teachers' industrial action of the 1980s was that never again would curriculum development be left in the hands of teachers . . . The 'Policy for the '90s' paper was in its final draft before senior members of the Establishment had sight of it. This was a paper written by civil servants on the orders of the Minister. A new era had begun. (Boyd 1994, pp. 20-21)

The 5-14 Development Programme which followed was very tightly controlled by central government. A former HMI and Chief Adviser to Lothian Region has referred to this as indicative of a 'new authoritarianism' featuring 'mandatory guidelines' enforcing 'a totalitarian curriculum' (Gatherer 1989, p.125). The apparent contradiction between these centralist tendencies and the rhetoric of increasing freedom and choice for consumers was not something that seemed to trouble the Minister. He pressed on with the reforms, and the 5-14 Programme remains the centrepiece of primary and early secondary education.

One way of conceptualising the policy process in Scottish education is in terms of five components: ideology, people, institutions, issues and culture (Humes 1993; 1994a). The importance to be attached to each of these components and the nature of their interaction will vary over time. If they are related to Forsyth's period of office as education Minister, what emerges? It has already been shown that ideological conviction was critical in explaining the motivation behind Forsyth's programme of reform. Faced with what he saw as the soft consensus of the policy community, he sought to challenge it head-on with a different set of values and beliefs. In doing so he invoked a discourse of liberation - choice, freedom, responsibility, rights, etc.. All ideologies, however, whether of the left or the right, have a sub-text of control. Patrick Corbett, a philosopher, has wisely observed that 'the social function of ideologies is to condition men intellectually to obedience' (Corbett 1965, p. 57). The control function of New Right ideology as far as Scottish education is concerned can be seen in the drift to greater centralisation, particularly evident in the case of the 5-14 Programme, in the assault on professionalism, and in the cult of managerialism which was used as a lever to translate theory into practice.

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With regard to the second element of the policy process, people, Forsyth demonstrated how the balance of power between the various players could be altered. Most obviously, he showed how determined political input could serve to weaken the role of the traditional policy community. Moreover, he provided an object lesson in what a strong-minded politician could achieve which contrasted with the limited impact of his predecessors. He also shifted the balance of power between administrators and professionals. Administrators, bolstered by the cult of managerialism, became more powerful in relation to professionals but at the cost of having to follow ministerial directives very closely. This power play between administrators and professionals remains a feature of the post-Forsyth period.

Institutions represent the third component of the policy process. Here, as has been noted, Forsyth made some significant changes but perhaps fewer than he might have wished. He redefined the function of some bodies (such as the Curriculum Council) and altered the balance of membership of Non-Departmental Public Bodies, but he certainly did not proceed to dismantle the whole structure. Indeed some bodies, notably the General Teaching Council (GTC), survived relatively unscathed from policy reviews (SOED 1992a ; Humes 1994c) - perhaps in the GTC's case because it was a self-financing organisation. Any large-scale public service depends on the structural support offered by a range of institutions, and it may be that Forsyth initially overestimated his capacity to initiate reforms without the active cooperation of NDPBs and underestimated the nature of the contribution they make to the running of the educational system. As he came to appreciate their function, especially in relation to the development and implementation phases of reform, his hostility to them seems to have reduced though it was by no means extinguished.

There is a further point to be borne in mind. Whereas the careers of Ministers are usually relatively short, the shelf-life of institutions is normally longer. Forsyth has moved on, but most of the NDPBs remain intact. They have survived to fight another day.

In the five-dimensional model of the policy process, issues are seen as unplanned items that find a place on the policy agenda simply because of the force of circumstances: e.g., falling school rolls resulting from demographic changes. In this sense, issues had limited importance in the Forsyth period because most of the items on his policy agenda were politically inspired and driven. He adopted a proactive rather than a reactive stance to the making of policy. The unexpected had to be dealt with - e.g., problems arising from the

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decay of school buildings - but it was not allowed to deflect attention from the main priorities.

Finally, there is the cultural component. It is here that Forsyth's greatest errors of judgement can be seen. The strength of his own convictions led him astray. His unshakeable belief in the rightness of what he proposed made him a poor listener, and he failed to pick up the clear signals from a variety of sources that there was considerable cultural unease about many of his reforms. To him they were rational and self-evident. To many others they represented an attack on the democratic and egalitarian tradition of Scottish education, an attempt to make Scots accept English values and disregard the experience of their own history. In neglecting these deep-seated (if not entirely justified) feelings about what constituted Scottish identity, Forsyth ensured his own lasting unpopularity.

In this he has suffered a similar fate to Mrs Thatcher in Scotland, a comparison which again raises the difficult issue of the precise relation between Forsythism and Thatcherism. The evidence that has been considered does not give grounds for making a clear distinction between the two. Forsyth was more directly involved at an academic level in the intellectual debates, promoted by such agencies as the Adam Smith Institute and the Centre for Policy Studies, that served as a background to the New Right agenda of the 1980s. To that extent he might be described as 'even more ideological' than Mrs Thatcher, a strength of commitment that may go some way to explain his misreading of the importance of cultural factors within Scotland. But it would be unwise to push this argument too far. The similarities between the two were very strong, both in terms of personal style and political aims.

Interestingly, however, Forsyth's approach has been less hard-edged since he moved to London. Both at the Department of Employment and at the Home Office he has been careful to avoid the kind of stridency that sometimes marked his public utterances at the Scottish Office. His ideological commitment to New Right thinking remains strong but he is also an astute politician and he knows that Mrs Thatcher will not return. Moreover, he has for the most part managed to avoid being associated with reports about right-wing attempts within the Cabinet to undermine John Major's authority as Prime Minister. This suggests that Forsyth may have learned from his experience at the Scottish Office of the dangers of making too many enemies. A relatively young politician needs to look to the future. The irony of this development is that it might be seen as an example of precisely the

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kind of traditional Tory pragmatism which Forsyth's ideological commitment, in his earlier days, sought to challenge.

## **SCOTTISH EDUCATION IN THE POST-FORSYTH ERA**

The present Minister with responsibility for education in Scotland is Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, a man with a very different style from Michael Forsyth. He possesses the sort of charm which appeals to the 'comfortable, gentrified old Tories' referred to by Arnold Kemp (Kemp 1993, p. 180) and, indeed, is well-liked by politicians of all parties. His approach is emollient rather than confrontational and he seems prepared to listen, not only to officials within the SOED but also to representatives of outside bodies. For example, he met a deputation from the General Teaching Council in March 1993 to consider a range of matters (GTC 1993) and gave assurances that specifically Scottish concerns about educational proposals - most notably the proposal to set up an Education Lead Body similar to the Lead Bodies dealing with industrial and commercial training - would not be overlooked.

Style, however, is not the same as substance, and it is important to consider whether the change of Minister has involved a change of policies. Here the broader political context should be borne in mind. John Major's premiership has involved a softening of some of the hard-edged policies which characterised Mrs Thatcher's government but it has not led to widespread abandonment of the underlying principles. Similarly, it can be argued that the lessons of Forsyth's over-zealous approach have been learned but without any radical change of direction. What shifts there have occurred have been at the margins rather than at the core. The central items on Forsyth's policy agenda remain in place and the brisk managerial strategy which he favoured has received recent endorsement from Her Majesty's Senior Chief Inspector of Schools (Gallacher 1994).

It is, however, possible to point to certain decisions which might be interpreted as representing a retreat from a hard Forsyth line. For example, the Scottish inspectorate has not suffered the same fate as its counterpart in England and Wales, which has effectively been privatised. This might be seen as showing some sensitivity towards majority Scottish feelings about the privatisation of public services, evident also in relation to water and health. Again, the revised arrangements for teacher education in Scotland (SOED 1993), although they have been subject to trenchant criticism (Carr 1993), have not provoked the bitter debate that characterised more extensive

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changes in England and Wales. Lord James recently confirmed that the main responsibility for teacher education would continue to lie with the colleges of education (some of which are now part of or linked to universities), though schools will have a larger part to play than hitherto. This might be viewed as further recognition of the distinctive character of the Scottish educational system although one commentator has suggested that, compared with the way in which attempts to improve the quality of teacher education were managed in the past, especially in the 1960s following the Robbins Report, the revised pattern of the 1990s is unimpressive:

As far as one can see, the recent changes have been based neither on research nor on any strategic plan for teacher education. In that respect, the policy process has changed - and not for the better. (Marker 1994, p. 49)

The implication here is that political expediency has been more important than any carefully thought out set of educational principles. This point can be linked to other developments.

One legacy of the Forsyth era which Lord James is having to face is the cumulative resentment of teachers who have had to respond to all the new developments. Reports of increased workload, innovation fatigue and teacher stress abound in the educational press. There are signs of revived militancy, with Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) delegates at the 1994 annual conference voting in favour of a renewed boycott of national testing. Even the normally mild Association of Head Teachers in Scotland (AHTS), representing primary heads, has complained of impossible demands being placed on them and of the prescriptiveness of the 5-14 Programme. Such complaints are likely to encourage the post-Forsyth tendency to temper ideological conviction with political expediency.

Forsyth was relatively unmoved by the protests of interest and pressure groups, however vocal. Lord James's tactics are, on many issues, more in line with the traditional Tory preference for limited compromise which allows minor concessions without giving way on fundamental issues. The plans to reform local government in Scotland can be viewed in this light. The present two-tier system will be replaced with single-tier authorities in 1996. At one stage it seemed as if education might be removed entirely from the sphere of local government. The legislation removes the statutory role of education committees, directors of education and teachers' representatives on committees, but councils will be allowed to decide what services they want

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and how they will organise them, thus making it likely that an amended form of current provision for education will be put in place. Whatever pattern finally emerges, however, it is highly doubtful whether education authorities will regain the position they held prior to the Forsyth-inspired reforms, a position which sometimes allowed them to act as a counterweight to central government. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), the collective voice of local government, has had its own internal problems recently, and its effectiveness as a vehicle for protest has been limited.

It is too early to offer any definitive judgement about the balance of continuity and change between Forsyth and his successor. To argue that things have returned to 'normal' - with the Forsyth period being regarded as an untypical inter-regnum - would be too sanguine. The current policy agenda would not have existed but for Forsyth's intervention. He has, moreover, provided a model of reform for future politicians to learn from. At the same time, to argue that the policy process established by Forsyth remains entirely intact despite his departure from the Scottish Office would be misleading. The policy community has had time to re-group and is beginning to reassert itself. There is evidence that the 'informal network' approach which had been so influential in the pre-Forsyth period is once more a feature of the exchanges that take place between individuals and institutions. One example is in the field of further education which has had to respond to the requirements of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act of 1992. Those involved in this process have drawn attention to the importance of informal channels of communication in developing strategies to meet the new situation (Howgego 1993; Leech 1994). The gradual reassertion of the policy community can be explained partly in terms of the relative permanence of its membership. Professional and bureaucrats enjoy - certainly in comparison with politicians - a high measure of security of tenure. They may be sidelined for a time but they are still around when the climate changes. No doubt many of them, during the least comfortable phases of Forsyth's term of office, simply decided to keep their heads down and wait for better times. It is rumoured that there was an almost audible collective sigh of relief when Forsyth left New St. Andrew's House to take on other - if not greater - responsibilities.

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## **CONCLUSION**

This article has attempted to offer a provisional appraisal of Michael Forsyth's significance in Scottish education. Its main findings can be summarised in eight propositions:

1. Forsyth demonstrated how strong political will, fired by ideological zeal and backed by managerial drive, could transform the educational policy agenda in Scotland.
2. The nature of the policy process changed under Forsyth with a redefinition of the respective roles of administrators and HMIs within the SOED, and of both in their dealings with outside agencies.
3. Reactions to the reform programme by the traditional policy community (as distinct from the new parental lobby) were, in the main, weak and ineffective, principally because the soft liberal orthodoxies which had served as their intellectual currency had been insufficiently tested by real debate and so offered poor resistance in the face of Forsyth's ideological onslaught.
4. The rhetoric of choice, quality and opportunity, which served to justify the reforms, sat uneasily alongside the degree of central control which was a feature of the Forsyth-inspired programme.
5. Forsyth seriously underestimated the degree of *cultural* resistance to his ideas and has, as a consequence, himself become a cultural symbol, with strongly negative associations, representing the antithesis of the Scottish myth of democracy and equality in education.
6. After Forsyth's departure from the Scottish Office the policy community began to regroup, a task made easier by the much less aggressive style of his successor, Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.
7. The policy agenda, nevertheless, visibly retains Forsyth's imprint, and the reform of local government in 1996 could pave the way for a further set of educational changes consistent with his vision of releasing schools and parents from self-serving officials.
8. Forsyth's removal from Scottish political office owed more to opposition within the Conservative party than to the effectiveness of the campaign

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against him mounted by teachers' organisations, local government and the Labour party.

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