

SCOTTISH HIGHER EDUCATION REGAINED: ACCIDENT OR DESIGN?

Peter Scott

Until last year Scottish higher education was a fractured system. Its universities, which had played such a celebrated role in the assertion and definition of Scotland's national identity from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries, were subordinated to an English-dominated quango, first the University Grants Committee (UGC) in London and more recently the Universities Funding Council (UFC) in Bristol, both of which in turn were responsible to the (English) Department of Education and Science (DES). The rest of Scottish higher education, the central institutions (CIs), were directly accountable to the Scottish Office Education Department (SOED), without the benefit of the dubious protection of a buffer agency like the UGC/UFC.

Last year, following the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, the pattern of British higher education was restructured. The binary system - the separation between universities and polytechnics or colleges - was abandoned in England and less decisively so in Scotland. All the English polytechnics and two former colleges of higher education, Derby and Luton, became universities. In Scotland four CIs (Napier, Robert Gordon, Paisley and Glasgow Caledonian) also became universities. Equally significant was the decision to establish separate funding councils for England, Scotland and Wales. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) inherited responsibility for the 35 English universities and all the institutions previously accountable to the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council (PCFC). The HEFCE sector now comprises 68 universities and 49 colleges. In addition the council funds higher education courses in 77 further

*Peter Scott is Professor of Education at the University of Leeds. He was Editor of The Times Higher Education Supplement from 1976 to 1992. His books include **The Crisis of the University and Knowledge and Nation.***

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education colleges. The same Act removed FE and sixth-form colleges in England from the control of local education authorities, and established them as free-standing institutions responsible to the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC).

The Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC) inherited responsibility for the eight Scottish universities, previously funded by the UFC, and 16 CIs and colleges of education up to then directly funded by the SOED. The SHEFC sector now comprises 12 universities and 10 other institutions, including three colleges of art and three of education. FE colleges in Scotland, unlike England, are now directly responsible to central government in the shape of the SOED (except in Orkney and Shetland). The Funding Council for Wales (FCW) is responsible for both higher and further education institutions. The FCW sector comprises 2 universities (the federal University of Wales and the University of Glamorgan), six colleges of higher education and 30 FE colleges. The pattern of higher education in Northern Ireland has remained unchanged.

The establishment (or should it be re-establishment?) of a separate Scottish higher education system is an ambiguous event. Two distinctive, although not necessarily mutually exclusive, interpretations of its significance are possible. For some the decision to create the SHEFC to oversee a unified system of universities and central institutions was an after-thought, almost wholly contingent on the independent and prior decision to abandon the binary system in England. According to this first account the establishment of the SHEFC is a secondary phenomenon, an outcome of the movement towards a mass system of higher education in which the privileged status of the once-dominant traditional universities has been heavily qualified. What matters is that a unified system of higher education has been created, not whether it is run from London/Bristol or Edinburgh.

For others, last year's changes open up the possibility of a recovery, or reinforcement, of 'Scottishness', in particular as a result of a long but ultimately successful campaign to transfer responsibility for Scotland's universities from the DES in London to the SOED in Edinburgh. According to this second account, the key change is this so-called repatriation of the universities. The hope, whether articulated or implicit, is that the universities, now firmly reincorporated in the pattern of Scottish government, will be able to resume their once central role in Scottish culture. George Davie's thesis about the distinctiveness of Scottish university education in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, so eloquently expressed in his resonantly titled books **The Democratic Intellect** (Davie 1961) and **The Crisis of the**

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Democratic Intellect (Davie 1986), has acquired, for some, a new relevance now that a separate Scottish higher education system has been created, insulated, they imagine, from Anglicising influences.

A straightforward choice between these two interpretations is difficult. Should massification or repatriation be regarded as the key phenomenon? They are not necessarily rival or alternative interpretations. Time-scale is important. Policies which have banal administrative origins can have profound cultural consequences. So it may be with the establishment of a separate Scottish higher education system. A convincing account of its significance is likely to need to incorporate elements from both interpretations. In the rest of this article the background to the decision to create the SHEFC will be examined, the council's initial policies reviewed and the longer-term consequences of these changes will be discussed. Finally an assessment of their significance both for the institutions themselves and for the government and culture of Scotland more broadly will be offered.

The first task is to explain why the Government decided to establish the SHEFC to which the universities, old and newly designated, and the remaining CIs would be accountable. There is little evidence to suggest that the Government had been persuaded of the merits of removing the Scottish universities from the control of the UGC/UFC. On many occasions ministers, both Conservative and (when in office) Labour, had resisted nationalist demands for repatriation. The Conservatives' 1992 general election victory, combined with a modest electoral recovery in Scotland after fighting a pro-Union campaign, reinforced the Government's distaste for the principle of devolution. There was no further need (if there ever had been) for the Government to pander to devolutionary sentiment, although it might be possible to regard the repatriation of the universities as a sop to such sentiment, an insignificant concession in the context of otherwise solidly unionist policies. But John Major and his Cabinet were under no serious political pressure to establish a free-standing Scottish higher education system. The only reasonable conclusion, therefore, is that the creation of the SHEFC and repatriation of the Scottish universities owe almost nothing to the imperatives of high politics.

SCOTTISH AND ENGLISH BINARY SYSTEMS

Nor can these changes easily be attributed to the internal dynamics of Scottish higher education. Although it was argued that the two halves of the system, the universities and the CIs, should be better co-ordinated, there was

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little pressure to abandon the binary system which was much more stable than in England. The division of roles between Scottish universities and CIs was clearer and more logical than that between English universities and polytechnics, largely because the SOED through its direct control over CIs was able to prevent the large-scale development of arts and social science courses which had taken place in the polytechnics in the 1970s and 1980s and which had destabilised the binary structure of English higher education.

The multi-faculty CIs were more vocationally focused than the polytechnics. Because the SOED had been able to exercise tighter control over their development than local education authorities and later the PCFC over that of the polytechnics in England, the CIs had not been able fully to emulate the polytechnics' progress from specialised vocational institutions to all-purpose mass higher education ones. Nor was the SOED, although denied oversight of the Scottish universities, tempted to build up the CIs as a counter-weight or rival. The Scottish universities had remained the dominant sector in terms of student numbers. At the end of the 1980s there were still more university than CI students, while the English universities were overtaken by the polytechnics in the mid-1980s.

The pre-1993 Scottish system, therefore, was much closer in spirit and organisation to higher education systems in continental Europe. Comparisons with the relationships between Dutch or German universities and the HBO colleges and *fachhochschulen* respectively are not entirely out-of-place, although through the agency of the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) the CIs (like the polytechnics) were able to offer higher degrees and had been able to build up respectable (applied) research portfolios.

Nor was non-university higher education in Scotland dominated by large, comprehensive, multi-faculty institutions, with the same potential to develop into dangerous rivals to the universities. The SOED's lack of enthusiasm for polytechnic-style mergers (as its indifference to the decades-long on-off courtship between Dundee Institute of Technology and Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art made plain) had led to the survival of a significant number of monotechnic CIs. Some, such as the colleges of education or agriculture, had clearly defined missions which complemented those of the universities, while others, notably the colleges of art and the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, enjoyed a prestige which rivalled that of the universities. In neither case was there significant incentive to compete.

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As a result of the survival of smaller monotechnics, the large multi-faculty CIs never achieved the hegemony over non-university higher education enjoyed by the English polytechnics. When smaller CIs searched for academic partners, the SOED was also largely indifferent about whether they choose universities or larger CIs. In contrast in England, with very few exceptions, the DES vetoed mergers between colleges of higher education and universities, preferring instead to strengthen the polytechnic sector. A good example is the contrast between the successful partnership between Heriot-Watt and the Scottish College of Textiles and the failure to achieve a merger between the University of Bath and the Bath College of Higher Education.

These differences between Scottish and English variants of the binary system were widely acknowledged, and generally approved. In its 1985 report the Scottish Tertiary Education Advisory Council (STEAC) described the role of the CIs in these terms:

A non-university sector which is for the most part funded, and in which the range of courses is controlled, by central Government; which does not contain polytechnics; and where course provision is essentially complementary with that of the universities (e.g. liberal arts courses are provided only in the universities and, where the same subjects are offered in both the university and non-university sectors, the approach is different.
(STEAC 1985)

The council included this description of the CIs' role in its list of distinctive features of Scottish education which it wished to see preserved.

The reasons for these crucial differences between the Scottish and English binary systems are complex. Some arose from different administrative traditions of the SOED and the DES. The SOED's was more authoritative; lines-of-command were much shorter and, in the case of the CIs, the department had direct hands-on experience of responsibility for institutions. The DES's tradition, on the other hand, was more tentative; its influence was indirect and oblique, exercised at arm's length through intermediary agencies like the UGC or the former National Advisory Body for Public Sector Higher Education (NAB) which managed the polytechnics as a central-local government condominium between 1983 and 1987. As a result the growing competition between universities and polytechnics in England, which the DES was unable or unwilling to control and which in the end destroyed the

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binary balance, was prevented in Scotland by the vigilance of the SOED. These differences in administrative culture, of course, persist. The SHEFC's relationship with its sponsoring department is different from the HEFCE's.

Scale is also important. The leadership class of Scottish higher education is much smaller and more cohesive than its English equivalent. More practically the prejudice against small institutions in a nation with 5 million people is naturally less strong than in one with 50 millions. Other reasons reflect deep-rooted differences between the educational cultures of Scotland and England. Or, at any rate, popular perceptions of these differences. Scottish universities, it is asserted, have maintained a more generalist orientation than English universities which had succumbed more thoroughly to disciplinary and professional specialisation. In Scotland the CIs were perceived as specialist institutions while universities were seen as committed to the arts and sciences more broadly, and so to a wider intellectual and professional culture. The binary system appeared to be justified by this balance. In England it was the other way round. Because of the universities' concentration on specialised single-subject honours degrees, the polytechnics were able to present themselves as mainstream institutions offering higher education which was both broader and more relevant. As a result the rationale for the binary system was progressively undermined.

Whether these perceptions are accurate or not is a secondary matter. The belief in Davie's 'democratic intellect', in the intellectual openness and social accessibility of the Scottish universities, has remained strong despite evidence marshalled by Robert Anderson which suggests that the differences between university cultures in Scotland and England have been greatly exaggerated (Anderson 1983 and Anderson 1992). The more extravagant claims made by English polytechnic directors in the 1980s perhaps deserved to be treated with similar scepticism. But there can be little doubt about the persuasiveness of these claims to ministers and civil servants in the DES.

FROM STEAC TO SHEFC

During the 1980s a series of inquiries into the future pattern of higher education in Scotland were held. Their major preoccupation, however, was not with the repatriation of the Scottish universities - the latter's relationship with the UGC was not regarded as an anomaly outside the ranks of nationalists and radical devolutionists - but with the need to modernise (liberalise?) the relationship between the CIs and the SOED. The Council for Tertiary Education in Scotland (CTES), the forerunner of STEAC,

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recommended in 1981 (shortly before the NAB was established in England) a national authority to oversee Scottish non-university tertiary education, embracing further as well as higher education courses. The council further recommended that the proposed authority, although its members would be appointed by the Secretary of State, should take over from the then Scottish Education Department (SED) responsibility for allocating funds to and approving courses in the CIs (CTES 1981).

These recommendations were not accepted. Instead the Secretary of State established yet another advisory council, STEAC. The publication of the STEAC report in 1985 has often been regarded as marking a milestone on the road to the repatriation of the Scottish universities and the creation of a separate and unified Scottish higher education system. The council recommended that a Scottish Higher Education Planning and Funding Council (SHEPFC) be established, in terms which seemed to foreshadow the creation of the SHEFC. In fact the council's approach was cautious and tentative. It outlined a series of options, ranging from the status quo to a unified planning and funding council which would be responsible for the universities as well as the CIs. Although the latter option was nervously endorsed by a majority of STEAC members, the council seriously considered compromise options such as establishing a joint planning body for both university and CI sectors while preserving the funding link between the universities and the UGC.

Two features of the STEAC report deserve particular emphasis. Both tend to qualify the claim that it wrote a recipe for repatriation. First, the council, like the CTES before it, was far more concerned to free the CIs from the control of the SED than to remove the universities from that of the UGC. The latter was seen as a price which had to be paid to achieve the former. After the rejection of the earlier CTES report it was clear to the members of STEAC that the SED would not agree to give up control over the CIs unless it was compensated by being made responsible for the Scottish universities. Secondly, the council, aware of the Scottish universities' own grave reservations about repatriation (and, in particular, possible subordination to a dirigiste SED), recommended elaborate safeguards to protect their post-repatriation position. These were that a satisfactory UK-based peer-review system for teaching and research should be maintained, that the Scottish universities' access to research-council funding should be guaranteed, and that agreement be reached between the relevant Government departments about the transfer of funds from the DES to the SED.

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Of course it is wrong to underestimate the impact of the STEAC report. It identified an administrative context in which it became possible to envisage the repatriation of the Scottish universities, previously regarded as a pseudo-nationalist (and nostalgic) pipe-dream, and the creation of a unified higher education system. It was also, incidentally, in the STEAC report that the phrase 'funding council' was first employed. A dubious achievement, perhaps, because higher and further education in Britain is now littered with funding councils!

Nevertheless in 1985 the Secretary of State, George Younger, was not prepared to accept the STEAC proposals, although they were clearly attractive to SED officials. It is interesting to speculate about which new factors emerged to make what was politically unacceptable in the mid-1980s, the establishment of Scottish higher education funding council and the repatriation of the Scottish universities, the Government's own policy in the early 1990s. And it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the main impulses came from England. As Scottish university principals, like English vice-chancellors, observed with dismay the replacement of the universities-friendly UGC by Government-friendly UFC and the increasing influence of first the NAB and then the PCFC over the general direction of higher education policy, they began to look on the STEAC scenario with greater favour. Even before the STEAC report the treatment of Aberdeen by the UGC in the 1981 cuts had begun to undermine their faith in the status quo. Unlike the English universities, the Scottish universities had somewhere else to go. The collapse of the UGC system had a decisive impact on Scottish university leaders, although they were also perhaps influenced by the apparent drift of public opinion in Scotland in the late-1980s towards firmer support for devolution.

But developments in higher education in England were a more decisive factor. Two years after the STEAC report the new Secretary of State for Education and Science, Kenneth Baker, announced in the 1987 White Paper on higher education that the English and Welsh polytechnics would be freed from the control of local education authorities and established as free-standing institutions, and that the NAB would be replaced by the PCFC. However the division between universities and polytechnics was maintained, and two separate funding councils were created rather than one (DES 1987). The English binary system enjoyed an Indian summer between 1987 and 1991. In many ways these four years marked its most glorious, and most adversarial, phase. The establishment of a unified higher education system in Scotland, based on contrary principles, would clearly have undermined these

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efforts in England to maintain a binary structure. In effect an English veto applied to developments in Scottish higher education.

In 1991 the binary system was finally, and suddenly, abandoned. Baker the activist had been succeeded as Secretary of State for Education and Science in England by John MacGregor the consolidator, who in turn was succeeded by Kenneth Clarke the iconoclast. As has already been explained, the UFC and PCFC were merged and the polytechnics became universities. Now that England had embarked on the creation of a unified system of higher education, the stalled STEAC agenda could be resumed in Scotland. The English veto was removed. Or, rather, a new requirement was imposed. For a mixture of reasons, political and administrative, Scotland had no choice but to conform to the new English pattern. The maintenance of a binary system in Scotland would not have been feasible - or, perhaps, allowed. Because STEAC had produced a blue-print for a unified system six years before, and because the creation of such a system required the repatriation of the Scottish universities, a long-cherished nationalist ambition, it is easy to overlook the fact that these changes were 'made in England'.

At issue was not simply the overall need for symmetry between Scottish and English systems. Their structures were intimately entwined. Once it had been decided in the 1991 White Paper to create a unified system in England and to abandon the formal distinction between universities and polytechnics (DFE 1991), the position of the Scottish universities become an anomaly. They could hardly be left in the charge of a merged UFC/PCFC in more intimate association with the English polytechnics within a unified sector but cut off more categorically than before from their natural post-binary partners, the CIs. A unified system would have been established in England at the cost of imposing an even more rigid binary division in Scotland. Nor could the CIs be treated less favourably than the polytechnics. Both sets of institutions, under the aegis of the CNAA, had made similar progress towards academic maturity. So, if the polytechnics were to become universities, the same status and title would have to be bestowed on, at any rate, the large multi-faculty CIs.

One way to resolve this anomaly might have been to remove the CIs from the control of the SOED and make them responsible to a Britain-wide higher education funding council. But this was a purely theoretical possibility. Until last year the SOED had direct administrative and financial responsibility for the CIs. No buffer agency protected the latter from the department's scrutiny. Neither the CTES nor the STEAC had been able to ease the department's grip. In the circumstances it was inconceivable that the SOED would

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abandon its stake in higher education entirely to a Bristol-based funding council predominantly influenced by the DFE in London.

Despite the Government's lack of sympathy for devolution, Scottish Office ministers were aware of the political disadvantages of abandoning without a struggle responsibility for the whole of Scottish higher education. Acquiescence in such root-and-branch Anglicisation was never on the cards. Persuasive educational considerations reinforced these administrative prejudices and political imperatives. With all Scottish higher education handed over to a British (i.e. English-dominated) agency it would become almost impossible to ensure the adequate co-ordination of policies for schools and further education with those for higher education. The only feasible solution, therefore, was to create a separate funding council for Scotland to which responsibility for the Scottish universities would be transferred from the UFC

Paradoxically Scotland has 'recovered' control over the whole of its higher education system, including the universities, largely because such an arrangement had become not only convenient but essential in terms of England's move from a binary to a unified system. The influence of England was also felt in a more detailed sense. The example of the polytechnics was infectious, particularly in their last and most dynamic phase. Several CIs, most notably Napier, sought from the late-1980s onwards to emulate the polytechnics' upwardly-mobile 'success', increasingly defined in terms of competition with the universities. Their efforts had become to undermine the older traditions of complementarity which has characterised the Scottish binary system. The objections raised by SOED officials to Napier's request to be re-labelled a polytechnic, although overruled by the Secretary of State Malcolm Rifkind, were symptomatic of their unease about the 'polytechnicisation' of the non-university sector in Scotland. To the extent that this creeping polytechnicisation had begun to make the dynamics of the Scottish binary system more like those of the English system, it too must be regarded as an aspect of Anglicisation - even if it increased the pressure to establish a unified system, which in turn required the repatriation of the Scottish universities.

'SCOTTISHNESS' AND ANGLICISATION

In practice the interplay between Anglicisation and Scottish distinctiveness is highly complex. Historically the latter has more often been realised in a wider British context than against the, perhaps mythic, template of ancient

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autarchy. The dominant characteristics of Scottish society, derived largely from its urban and industrial experience, post-date the Union of 1707. Much the same can be said of Scotland's intellectual culture. The golden age of Scotland's universities occurred half a century or more after the Union (and, arguably, owed a great deal to the galvanising effects of the Union). The Scottish university tradition celebrated by Davie and allegedly prey to rampant Anglicisation from the mid-19th century onwards was forged within a British context. To the extent that a university 'system' can be said to have existed before the 20th century (which is highly dubious) it was the product of regulation by successive British Governments. Even the Church of Scotland, although a pre-Union institution, was formed in the context of intensive Anglo-Scottish exchanges - Elizabethan realpolitik, the struggles of the Civil War, the 1689 establishment. Certainly the administrative apparatus of New St Andrews House, and its attendant agencies, is a product of the British State.

This does not mean that Scottish distinctiveness is a myth. Rather, after almost three centuries of Union with England, such distinctiveness is necessarily complex and even ambiguous (McCrone et al 1989). Take away the English connection and much that is distinctive about Scotland disappears too. So the fact that the present arrangements for funding, and planning, higher education in Scotland have been deeply influenced by, if they are not the by-product of, events in England should not be regarded as cause for dismay. But equally it would be wrong to regard these arrangements as representing the fortuitous recovery of Scottish 'independence' in the sphere of higher education, although the repatriation of the Scottish universities may encourage such a conclusion. It is naive to imagine that now Scotland can 'go it alone' in higher education. The English influence and/or the British context (the two are often difficult to tell apart) will continue to be decisive, not least in terms of resources.

It is against this background that the role played by the distinctiveness of the Scottish university tradition in bringing about the most recent changes in its funding and administration, and the likelihood that its peculiarly 'Scottish' characteristics will be re-emphasised by these new arrangements, must be assessed. The 'Davie thesis', to adopt a convenient short-hand, is two-fold. First, it is argued that Scotland's native intellectual culture emphasised first principles, broad philosophical interpretation, and a unified approach to knowledge (even in the case of the apparently specialised natural sciences). During a long war of attrition which occupied much of the nineteenth and early twentieth century the Scottish universities fought a rear-guard action

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against the remorseless advance of Anglicisation, in other words fragmentation, specialisation, reductionism. The process began with the 1826 Royal Commission, in the dusk of the universities' golden age, and ended with the arguments over Ordinance 70 in the 1920s, which were ostensibly about the place of Latin but were really about the growing power of the SED.

Secondly, it is argued that Scottish universities were, and are, more open institutions than English universities. Entry, although never egalitarian, was not restricted to a narrow élite, as it was in England until recently. This assertion of Scottish higher education's more democratic character was most powerfully expressed by writers of the so-called 'Kailyard School' who emphasised the social stability, as much as mobility, of nineteenth-century rural Scotland, and through the literary myth of the 'lad o'pairs', the invention of a late-Victorian minister in Perthshire (Forrester 1992).

The 'Davie thesis', it should be emphasised, has reverberations far beyond the immediate context of universities and higher education. It is part of a tradition which stretches back to Hugh MacDiarmid's 'A Drunk Man looks at the Thistle' (MacDiarmid 1987), a poetical assertion of the claims of radical Scotland over imperialist Britain - and much else. The St. Andrew's Cross on the Red Flag perhaps. It was, and is, a vigorous tradition whether expressed in scholarly-polemical terms, as in Tom Nairn's **The Break-Up of Britain** (Nairn 1977), or in rhetorical terms, as in Neal Ascherson's assertion in the John Mackintosh lecture that Britain in decline has become 'a country filled with anxiety and ill-feeling' (Ascherson 1988). The idea (ideology?) of a democratic intellect was especially attractive to radical intellectuals because it combined their two most fundamental beliefs, in democracy and the power of ideas.

Both parts of this thesis of Scottish exceptionalism have important elements of truth, the second more perhaps than the first. Eighteenth and nineteenth-century Scotland had an exceptionally high proportion of university students compared to its population by European, and certainly by English, standards. The participation rate is still higher than in England, although the gap has narrowed as a result of the rapid expansion of student numbers in the former polytechnics in the late 1980s and early 1990s. But access to Scottish universities cannot be described as democratic. Young people from social class I are still 12 times more likely to go on to higher education than those from social class V, an inequality gradient almost identical to that in England (Anderson 1992).

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The distinctiveness of Scotland's intellectual culture can also be questioned. Common-sense philosophy did not invariably occupy the central position in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century university curriculum accorded to it by Davie. The pressures for greater specialisation and the tendency towards reductionism, which he attributes largely to English influence, reflected the growing sophistication of science and technology and professionalisation of scholarship, international phenomena which have reshaped all higher education systems in the twentieth century. Less than a third of Scottish university students in arts faculties take ordinary degrees, which far from representing the intellectual high-ground of the Scottish university tradition have become a safety-net for students who cannot cope with honours degrees. Finally, in an age of global exchanges, the very idea of a specifically Scottish intellectual, literary and cultural community, staffed by the graduates of Scottish universities, has become an anachronism.

This is not deny that important differences persist between Scotland's and England's 'public doctrines', to borrow a suggestive phrase from Maurice Cowling. In the former there is much closer identification between the ideas of State and Nation than in the latter. This is reflected in what is regarded by impatient right-wing Conservatives as the unfortunate persistence of corporatism in Scottish politics. In the context of higher education it is also reflected in the dirigisme of the SOED and in the unambiguously public character of the Scottish universities. The contrast between the cerebrality of the Church of Scotland and the banal, even philistine, politesse of the Church of England is also suggestive, and cannot be explained solely in terms of a contrast between Presbyterianism and Anglicanism. A similar distinction can be drawn between the academic good-manners encouraged by Oxbridge and the more austere intellectual values typical of the Scottish university tradition (Stone 1983).

THE WAY FORWARD

However intriguing such contrasts, their relevance to the new arrangements for funding and administering Scottish higher education is slight. As has already been argued, there is almost no evidence to suggest that a concern to protect or enhance the 'Scottishness' of the system by a deliberate strategy of university repatriation played any serious part in the decision to establish the SHEFC, even if it had been possible to agree the parameters of this 'Scottishness'. Nor is it clear that the new arrangements are likely to have that effect, by retrospective accident if not by prospective design. The decline of the ordinary degree, or its future revival within new modular and credit

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frameworks, are the products of larger secular forces which reflect logistical imperatives (more students, less money), consumer preferences (drop-in, drop-out), or employer demands (for a 'flexibly employed' post-industrial workforce?) rather than the persistence of particularist historical traditions. The same forces are at work in England.

Two further points are worth emphasising. First, the DES, through the UGC and latterly the UFC, was always careful to respect the particularities of the Scottish universities, notably their longer degree courses and higher participation rates. Despite occasional infelicities (the best examples are the notorious UGC circular which invited Scots to make 'appropriate substitutions' for A levels and other English terms and the complaint by Sir Peter Swinnerton Dyer, then UGC chairman, in **The Glasgow Herald** that Scottish universities indulged in too much whinging) English ministers and civil servants on the whole were determined not to be stigmatised as agents of an unwelcome Anglicisation. If during the Scottish universities' long exile, their seven decades of subjection to the UGC in London, there was convergence between Scottish and English university traditions, this was due to larger and more anonymous forces which influenced both systems alike not to a policy of harmonisation. It is possible that the SOED and the SHEFC, immune from charges of Anglicisation, may show less reverence for 'Scottishness', in particular for practices which seem to inhibit flexibility, adaptability and productivity.

Secondly, the distinctiveness of Scottish higher education is grounded in the distinctiveness of Scottish schools. The differences between Scottish and English educational traditions can be attributed to, and are reflected in, the differences between Highers and A levels, although the presence of large numbers of English students in Scottish universities tends to reduce the contrast. So long as these differences in post-16 examinations and upper secondary education are maintained, the two university traditions will remain distinct. However, as more young Scots take two years to complete their Highers - a process encouraged by the SOED's proposals for reform of the Highers in response to the Howie report (SOED 1994) - and as more young people in England take alternative courses to A levels, these differences may be reduced. The average age of entry to Scottish university has already crept up close to the English norm. Also it is difficult to believe that Howie and Higginson will be the last word on Highers and A levels respectively. Changes in schools, and increasingly in further education, will determine whether the Scottish and English higher education systems converge or diverge more than the respective policies of the HEFCE and SHEFC.

THE ROLE OF THE SHEFC

Some divergence between the policies of the two funding councils is inevitable. But its causes are more likely to be administrative than educational, still less ideological. For example, the SHEFC has adopted a different approach to assessing the quality of teaching - by design and because of circumstances. The council has bravely attempted to lay down a framework for quality assessment, and even to define what is meant by quality (SHEFC 1992). The HEFCE, in contrast, has adopted a *laissez-faire* approach. It is difficult not to detect in these different approaches something of the SOED's *dirigisme* on the one hand and the UGC's arm's-length tradition on the other.

The SHEFC has also decided to have four assessment categories rather than the HEFCE's three. This has proved to be an astute move. The English council, with nothing between 'satisfactory' and 'excellent', has been overwhelmed by claims of excellence. The SHEFC's policy is to visit all institutions to assess the quality of teaching department-by-department - which is feasible because there are only 22. The HEFCE with seven times as many is only able to visit the best and the worst, and a sample in between. But this divergence on secondary matters, issues of implementation, should not conceal the convergence of primary policy goals. In assessing the quality of teaching both councils have the same mandate. The Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Education wrote to their respective councils in identical terms.

In many other areas the SHEFC and the HEFCE have either been obliged, or chosen to pursue, broadly similar approaches. A key area, of course, is research which is still effectively regulated on a UK basis, in two respects. First, research assessment, the grading of university and college departments on a five-point scale (from 5, the highest grade, to 1, the lowest), has continued to be the responsibility of the HEFCE, as a heir to the UFC/UGC which originally embarked on research selectivity in the mid-1980s. It is not yet clear how far and how quickly the detailed distribution of research funds by the SHEFC is likely to diverge from the HEFCE distribution. The SHEFC issued a consultation paper on research in September 1992 which laid down the principles on which funds would be distributed and noted that the council's detailed methodology was 'unlikely to be identical to those used by the other Funding Councils, since distinctive territorial factors would have to be taken into account' (SHEFC 1993).

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In practice its methodology for distributing research funds in 1993/94 was broadly similar to that used by the HEFCE, although the spread of the weights attached to each grade (from 1 for a '2' grade to 2.744 for a '5' grade) was less in Scotland than in England. Arguably some universities were disadvantaged by the SHEFC's less selective distribution of research funds. But the Scottish universities' major concern has been to maintain a common system of research assessment, UK bench-marks. How these assessments are used to determine funding allocations is seen as a secondary question. Perhaps this view will change if there is significant divergence between the SHEFC and HEFCE distributions over the next decade.

Secondly, the balance between general base-line funding for research provided by the funding councils and targeted programme and project funding from the research councils has been tilted towards the latter. Research councils now pay for overheads as well as direct costs of research. More significantly, responsibility for the research councils has been shifted from the DES to the Office of Science and Technology, in effect a British Ministry of Science. These two changes help to explain why the most prestigious Scottish universities like Edinburgh and Glasgow, those institutions with the widest international reputations which might have been expected to object most strongly to being conscripted into a more narrowly based (and provincial?) Scottish university system, have acquiesced in the shift from UFC to SHEFC control.

These universities, if they are skilful, may be able to have the best of both worlds. On the one hand the SHEFC regime guarantees their status as Scotland's leading universities - in the top two or three rather than having to jostle with English universities to stay in the top ten or dozen. On the other they remain firmly locked into a British university system through research assessment, and into a UK-wide research system through the research councils and the OST. Indeed Edinburgh is a member of the small group of proto-research universities which includes Oxford, Cambridge, University College London, Imperial College and Warwick. These English universities remain Edinburgh's peers. Not only have the three safeguards recommended by STEAC in 1985 to reassure the universities been provided, additional safeguards have been built into the new arrangements.

In many other areas the funding councils have chosen to cooperate. These include the working group on postgraduate support, a joint working group on performance indicators, the joint funding councils' libraries review group, the joint information systems committee (of which a Scottish principal Professor John Arbuthnott of Strathclyde was appointed chairman) and so on. The

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pattern seems to have been established of the funding councils working closely together on technical and procedural matters, although in the case of the review of the academic year undertaken by Lord Flowers a special Scottish advisory committee had to be appointed because of Scotland's longer degree courses.

CONCLUSION

Two interpretations of the significance of the (re)establishment of a separate Scottish higher education system were offered at the beginning of this article. Massification or repatriation? In other words, should the new arrangements for managing and funding Scotland's universities and colleges be seen as a response to the challenge of building a mass system in which individual institutions pursue diverse missions within a unified structure, or in terms of a recovered 'Scottishness' after a century or more of Anglicisation, symbolised by the repatriation of the universities?

Most of the evidence supports the first of these interpretations. In the 1980s there had only been intermittent support for the repatriation of the universities and little enthusiasm for ending Scotland's own benign variant of the binary system based on a (fairly) clear division of labour between universities and CIs. Repatriation was brought about by a chain reaction of administrative and political imperatives set off by changes in the pattern of higher education in England, and once the binary system had been abandoned in England it could not be allowed to continue in Scotland. In that sense the repatriation of the Scottish universities and the creation of a unified system under SOED tutelage were the work of English officials not of Scottish politicians.

Furthermore that repatriation is far from complete, particularly in relation to universities' research missions. Nor has the binary system been abandoned as categorically in Scotland as in England. The different academic cultures of traditional universities and CIs (even those relabelled universities) are likely to persist much longer than the more histrionic distinction between the so-called 'old' and 'new' universities in England. The former were rooted in distinctive educational experiences and social constructions. The latter had become largely a political phenomenon. In England the prospect is of the emergence of a largely undifferentiated system of higher education, except for an élite group of universities (which, confusingly, is likely to include one or possibly two Scottish universities!). In Scotland a crypto-binary structure may survive within the framework of a formally unified system on the

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Swedish pattern (Scott 1991). On the other hand a unified system comprising 22 institutions will be much easier to make sense of than one with more than 140. Finally, it remains unclear whether the SHEFC will want, or be allowed, to pursue distinctive policies which diverge widely from those of the HEFCE. *Plus ça change, le plus c'est la meme chose* perhaps?

And yet... Scotland's universities have played such a decisive role in the past in contributing to Scotland's celebrated intellectual culture and shaping Scottish society that it is unwise to conclude that the (re)establishment of a separate Scottish higher education system will have no significant political, social and cultural reverberations. The Scottish universities will be brought once again into a more intimate association with the Scottish state, at a time when the post-imperial pre-global British state is passing through a period of great strain, pregnant with radical adaptation. The philosophical, literary, generalist ethos of the universities will be brought into closer association with the CIs' tradition of technical and professional education, which has always perhaps been closer to the realities of urban and industrial Scotland. Out of these twin-associations radical changes are likely to occur in definitions of 'Scottishness' inspired not so much by nostalgia for a lost 'democratic intellect' but by drawing up new maps, individual and institutional, of Scotland on the cusp of a new millennium.

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