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A climate of fear? The Scottish universities and the question of devolution, 1974–1979.

Abstract

This article seeks to examine the debate in the Scottish universities during the 1974 – 9 period when the Labour government proposed to create a devolved Scottish Assembly. An anti-devolution consensus among university leaders will be analysed and the arguments for and against devolution will be considered. The article discusses the way in which the perceived result of devolution would be 'parochialism', while the advantages of the *status quo* were seen as 'internationalist'. Nationalist critiques of the 'Anglocentric' universities are discussed. The arguments for devolution centred on bringing the Scottish universities into an integrated system of post-16 education in Scotland. Student opinion, as well as the views of senior academics, is noted. The debate is contextualised as part of the discussion of the merits of devolution but also as part of wider debates about the governance of the university system in Britain in the 1970s. The operation of the University Grants Committee was coming under severe stress as a result of wider economic conditions, and the Scottish debate is seen as part of a wider series of questions about the autonomy of universities from the state. The apparent paradox between the veneration of the British UGC and the emphasis on the traditions of higher education in Scottish culture and identity are also discussed.

Ewen A. Cameron

School of History, Classics and Archaeology

University of Edinburgh

Teviot Place

EDINBURGH

EH8 9AG

United Kingdom

e.cameron@ed.ac.uk

A climate of fear? The Scottish universities and the question of devolution, 1974–1979.¹

This article seeks to examine the debate about higher education in the Scottish devolution schemes of the 1974–9 Labour government. It is reasonably well-known that the Scottish universities argued against such devolution and that, in the words of one journalist in 1979, they ‘successfully dodged’ it.² The underlying reasons for that position, the nuances of the debate and the wider significance of the issue have not been explored. The place of the universities in Scottish political debate in the 1970s has not been a feature of the literature. Arguments about devolution were not merely technocratic – whether this or that function of government should be devolved or not – there was also a deeper level of argument that touched on culture and identity. This was especially the case where higher education was concerned. The debate exposed questions about the place of the universities in modern Scotland – their role in studying, teaching and disseminating material about Scottish culture; the attitudes of staff and students to the Scottish context regardless of their

¹ I am grateful to this journal’s referees and to my colleague Professor Lindsay Paterson for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article. University Archivists at Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Heriot-Watt, St Andrews and Stirling went to great lengths to identify material for me and I am grateful to them for their diligence and assistance.

² John Carswell, *Government and the Universities in Britain: Programme and Performance* (Cambridge, 1985), 150–2; the words of Julie Davidson, *Scotsman*, 26 Feb. 1979, 9.

background or subject of expertise – and highlighted the distrust of the universities by Scottish nationalists. This touched on some key debates in Scottish educational circles that had been active since the nineteenth century, but were enlivened by the publication in 1961 of *The Democratic Intellect* by the Edinburgh philosopher, George Elder Davie. Davie's book was, ostensibly, a history of what he interpreted as Anglicising attacks on the general philosophy-based Scottish university curriculum in the nineteenth century. The context in which his book emerged, however, meant that its ideas were taken up by those who perceived the Scottish tradition to be under threat in the 1960s and 1970s.³ Although there were few explicit references to Davie's book, the general thesis that the Scottish universities were anglicised in their staffs, student bodies and general outlooks was central to the nationalist critique of their approach. During the nineteenth century, of which Davie wrote, the universities were largely staffed by Scots, but he argued that they had lost

³ George Elder Davie, *The Democratic Intellect: Scotland and her Universities in the Nineteenth Century*, (Edinburgh, 1961); Davie drew heavily on Laurance J. Saunders, *Scottish Democracy, 1815–1840: The Social and Intellectual Background* (Edinburgh, 1950), 307–71; the phrase 'democratic intellect' is adopted from the 'democratic intellectualism' cited in a chapter by a leading Scottish Conservative politician of the inter-war period, Walter Elliot, 'A Scotsman's heritage in politics' in duke of Atholl, *A Scotsman's Heritage* (London, 1932), 53–65; his interpretation has been countered by Robert D. Anderson, *Education and Opportunity in Victorian Scotland: Schools and Universities* (Edinburgh, 1983), 358–61; Lindsay Paterson, 'George Davie and the Democratic Intellect', in Gordon Graham (ed.), *Scottish Philosophy in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Oxford, 2015), 236–69; the book was also encountered in Scotland in the 1960s in a period when nationalism was growing, my copy of the Edinburgh University Press first edition has been annotated by a previous owner with nationalist views.

confidence in their ability to influence Scottish culture, a point that was also taken up in the discussion in the 1970s.⁴ This argument challenged the academic premise that knowledge and enquiry was not confined by national boundaries and contributed to the fearful approach to devolution that was evident in Scottish academic life.

Further, the debate also raised issues of whether Scottish universities could continue to participate in international collaborations; in big scientific projects, for example. The prospect of devolution prompted thought about the best way of maintaining the autonomy of universities from the government, a fundamental question in any system with public universities. Since 1919 this was achieved in Great Britain by the device of the University Grants Committee. The principle of the UGC was that it sat between – as ‘buffer’ or ‘coupling’ – the government, as the provider of public money to fund the university system, and the individual institutions, who made the decisions on how their allocations should be spent.⁵ The UGC was

⁴ See the editorial in *Question*, May 1976, 2.

⁵ Margery Fry, ‘The University Grants Committee: an experiment in administration’, *Universities Quarterly*, 2 (1948), 221–30 (Fry was a member of the UGC from 1919); Robert O. Berdahl, *British Universities and the State* (Cambridge, 1959); Christine H Shinn, *Paying the Piper: The Development of the University Grants Committee, 1919–1946* (Lewes, 1986); Michael Shattock, *The UGC and the Management of British Universities* (Buckingham, 1994); Brian Salter and Ted Tapper, *The State and Higher Education* (Ilford: Woburn Press, 1994); M. Shattock and R. Berdahl, ‘The British University Grants Committee 1919–83: Changing relationships with government and the universities’. *Higher Education*, 13 (1984), 471–99; Graeme C. Moodie, ‘Buffer, coupling, and broker: Reflections on 60

seen as the guarantor of autonomy and, by implication, academic freedom. This perceived quality was central for those who defended its role and who saw devolution as a threat to that much-guarded autonomy.⁶ Thus, devolution was not just a matter of assembling a new tier of political representatives in Edinburgh, but about setting a new relationship with the state that, in the view of many in the universities, would be disadvantageous compared to the *status quo*.

Also underlying the debate were issues of funding. The position of the Scottish universities as part of the UGC system is important in this analysis. Prior to the creation of the UGC in 1919, the Scottish universities were funded by student fees, modest endowments and a series of state grants. Indeed, in the late nineteenth century, the Scottish universities had greater access to state funding than those south of the border. After legislation of 1858 and 1889, new grants were made to the

years of the UGC', *Higher Education*, 12 (1983), 331–47; for a *precis* of the way that the UGC operated see a report of remarks by the then Chairman, Fred Dainton, *TESS [Times Educational Supplement, Scotland]*, 9 Apr. 1976, 4.

⁶ The National Archives of the UK [TNA], UGC7/1088, J.P. Carswell (UGC) to Martin Fearn (SED), 21 Aug. 1975, the slightly patronising tone used in this letter to lay out the purposes and *modus operandi* of the UGC was a source of irritation to SED civil servants; National Records of Scotland [NRS], ED26/1697, J.F. McClellan to Secretary (of SED), 26 Aug. 1975; Fearn to Carswell, 29 Aug. 1975. I.M. Robertson to McClellan, 25 Sep. 1975; after his retirement from the Secretaryship of the UGC Carswell published *Government and the Universities*.

Scottish universities. These amounted to £72,000 by 1892.⁷ With the formation of the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland in 1901, many Scottish students had their fees paid by that philanthropic institution (which also invested in infrastructure). The fee structure was consolidated in 1910 and additional government funding provided.⁸ After the foundation of the UGC a system of quinquennial funding evolved. This involved grants to universities being settled for five-year blocs, with significant autonomy for the universities in how to spend that money on activities such as research and teaching. This was done on a deficiency basis: money was provided to bridge the gap between the other sources of income of institutions and the UGC's judgement of its general need. Although the UGC issued general guidance, this was very far from the modern culture of audit and accountability that pervades the contemporary scene. Indeed, there was even a long running debate about whether the Public Accounts Committee of the House of Commons and the Comptroller and Auditor General could have access to the 'books' of the UGC. This was granted only in 1965.⁹ As a result of financial pressure and inflation affecting a much-grown system, quinquennial planning was brought to an end in 1975. The austere atmosphere of the 1970s was, for the universities at least, a singularly unpropitious moment in which to contemplate devolution and it was unsurprising that worries about autonomy would figure in their response.

⁷ Robert D. Anderson, 'The state and university finance in modern Scotland', *Scottish Affairs*, no 85 (Nov. 2013), 44.

⁸ *Report of the Committee on Scottish Universities*, 1910, Cd 5257.

⁹ Shattock, *UGC*, 15–16; Carswell, *Government and the Universities*, 11–12, 86–8.

Although the UK-wide context was – obviously, given the operation of the UGC – important, the Scottish context is also relevant. Even prior to the devolution proposals the relationship between the universities and wider Scottish politics, culture and identity had been debated and nationalist critiques had emerged. These views, and the advance of the SNP in the elections of 1974, created a sense that an Assembly could provide a threat to the much-vaunted autonomy of the universities.

The word ‘autonomy is relevant in another sense, however. Most interpretations of the government of Scotland during the period before 1999 emphasise areas of significant Scottish autonomy in the administration of many areas of Scottish life, including most aspects of the education system. The universities, at least from 1919, stood apart from this edifice.¹⁰ This helps to explain why there was such strong feeling against devolution in some university circles, especially among Principals and other senior managers, and why the modest devolution proposed in the 1970s created such fears.¹¹

¹⁰ James Mitchell, *Governing Scotland: The Invention of Administrative Devolution* (Houndmills, 2003); James G. Kellas, *The Scottish Political System*, 4th edition (Cambridge, 1989), 51–2; Lindsay Paterson, *Scottish Education in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh, 2003), 73–87, 155–75; Lindsay Paterson, *The Autonomy of Modern Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1994).

¹¹ TNA, UGC7/1088, Fred Dainton to Sir William Pile (DES), 18 Dec. 1974; C. W.L Bevan (V-C of the University of Wales) to Dainton, 29 Nov. 1974; *TESS*, 21 Feb. 1975, 3; Hugh Robson, the Scottish Principal of Edinburgh, who had worked for most of his career outside Scotland, tried to address this issue in an article in *THES*, 4 Feb. 1977, 15.

This article will explore the debate about devolution in the Scottish universities, it will seek to analyse the arguments used for and against the devolution of higher education. A fear of 'parochialism' was used by denigrators of devolution and a desire for integration of the administration of Scottish education was referred to by its advocates. Underlying the debate, however, was concern about autonomy and the wider context was characterised by financial pressure. The 'threat' – as the universities saw it – of devolution meant that these concerns were particularly concentrated in Scotland. Prior to this analysis, however, some basic points about the devolution process and the structure of Scottish higher education require to be established.

Devolution

In October 1974 the Scottish National Party won 31.4 per cent of the vote in Scotland, took eleven seats, came second in a further 42 seats and initiated a wave of panic in the Labour party, which had been in the ascendant in Scotland since the 1959 election.¹² During that period, the party placed little emphasis on devolution as an answer to the economic and social problems of Scotland, a country in the early stages of the process of de-industrialisation that would accelerate in the 1980s. Leading figures in the Scottish party – especially the Secretary of State for Scotland and close associate of Harold Wilson, William Ross – were hostile to ceding any ground to the SNP. In the aftermath of an SNP surge that culminated with victory at the Hamilton by-election in 1967, Harold Wilson appointed a Cabinet Committee,

¹² Ewen A. Cameron, *Impaled Upon a Thistle: Scotland since 1880* (Edinburgh, 2010), 263–88.

which did not favour the creation of a devolved parliament.¹³ In April 1969 he established a Royal Commission to examine the Constitution. In confirmation of the Wilsonian aphorism about Commissions ‘taking minutes’ but ‘wasting years’, the Crowther-Kilbrandon Commission did not report until October 1973, by which time Edward Heath’s Conservative government was in office. Its main recommendation was in favour of devolved assemblies for Scotland and Wales, although a Memorandum of Dissent signed by two members reduced the clarity of the report. The 1970 General Election seemed to indicate the passing of the SNP moment, the government was more concerned with EEC entry and had little appetite for Scottish devolution legislation. The October 1974 result, however, changed the landscape and it was clear that the SNP had the potential to displace Labour as the main party in Scotland.¹⁴ Party strategists took the decision that a devolution scheme was necessary to respond to the SNP challenge.¹⁵

The fact that the Labour party was divided on the principle of devolution, as well as its details, is central to explaining the tortuous parliamentary progress of devolution legislation and the ultimate failure of the scheme. A Scotland and Wales Bill failed to

¹³ Duncan Tanner, ‘Richard Crossman, Harold Wilson and devolution, 1966-70: the making of government policy’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 17 (2006), 545–78; James Mitchell, *Hamilton 1967: The Bye –election that Transformed Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2017); TNA, CAB130/390, CAB151/45, CAB164/393, CAB 164/658, CAB164/298–9; there is also correspondence in T330/185.

¹⁴ Iain McLean, ‘The rise and fall of the SNP’, *Political Studies*, 18 (1970), 357–72; Dean Jaensch, ‘The Scottish vote 1974: a realigning party system?’, *Political Studies*, 24 (1976), 306–19.

¹⁵ Mark Stuart, *John Smith: A Life* (London, 2005), 74–8

reach the statute book after the government were unable to secure a guillotine motion in 1976. A new Scotland Bill was passed in 1978. These bills 'reserved' higher education to the Westminster Parliament. The latter had a provision for a referendum and a further amendment, tabled by a Labour MP, stipulated that if the overall Yes vote did not reach the threshold of 40 per cent of the entire electorate, the Government was compelled to propose the repeal of the Act. The referendum duly took place in March 1979, the 40 per cent hurdle was not surmounted, the Labour government fell and the new Conservative government repealed the Scotland Act. The referendum campaign was the occasion for visible divisions among Labour MPs on the question of devolution. By 1978, as shown by three Labour victories in by-elections, the SNP threat had possibly passed its peak. At the 1979 election the Scottish voters, fatigued by the debate, punished the SNP, who lost nine of their eleven seats.¹⁶

Scottish Higher Education

¹⁶ James Mitchell, *Devolution in the United Kingdom* (Manchester, 2009), 111–26; Peter Dorey, *The Labour Party and Constitutional Reform: A History of Constitutional Conservatism* (Houndmills, 2008), 203–40; Adam Evans, "Far reaching and perhaps destructive'? The 1974–79 Labour Government, devolution and the emergence, and failure, of the Scotland and Wales Bill', *Parliaments, Estates & Representation*, 41 (2021), 42–61; the failure to think through the political implications of rushing into devolution can be seen clearly in the diaries of Bernard Donoughue, *Downing Street Diary: With Harold Wilson in No 10* (London, 2005), 156–7, 169–70, 491–5; *Downing Street Diary: With James Callaghan in No 10* (London, 2008), 120–1, 276, 453,

The eight universities north of the border were often seen as quintessentially Scottish, with distinctive histories, curricula and governance, but they were also part of a wider British network of higher education. These two contexts were not, however, in separate spheres. The Scottish institutions were quite well represented on the UGC, although there was no formal quota, and a number of UGC Chairs had Scottish connections. Although the universities were not a Scottish-Office responsibility, the Scottish Education Department sent an assessor to UGC meetings. UGC business touched on other aspects of the Scottish education system in a number of respects and the Secretary of State had accrued responsibilities for universities in an incoherent way.¹⁷ The SED assessor during this period felt that the UGC worked well for the Scottish universities and that the crucial sub committees for the different subjects 'paid no attention to the border'. It is notable, however, that the Scottish universities were regarded by the UGC as a discrete group, this was true in printed lists of UGC-funded institutions – the Scottish and Welsh universities were listed separately – and it could extend to decision making. For example, in 1974, as the financial pressure on the UGC grant increased as a result of 15-per-cent inflation, the UGC felt that, given building projects at Aberdeen, Strathclyde and Glasgow, 'due provision had been made for the needs of Scotland'.¹⁸ There was

¹⁷ TNA, UGC7/1088, Gillender (SED) to Timms (DES), 4 Nov. 1974

¹⁸ TNA, UGC1/59, Minutes of meeting of UGC, 17 May 1974; NRS, ED26/1344, J.M. Fearn to Frank McElhone, 16 Feb. 1976.

some ambiguity in the apparent clarity of participation in the UGC system that its defenders articulated during the debate over devolution.¹⁹

There is another vital background point: the emerging sense of crisis about university funding in the 1970s. Central to the positive view of the UGC was their system of quinquennial funding. The Committee collated information – about student numbers and other matters – from the individual universities, and made an overall bid to the government for a grant, which it then distributed to the institutions. They saw many virtues in this system, not least that it provided a long planning horizon and that it was a participative process. This came to an end in 1975, as the Committee was planning for the 1977–82 quinquennium, inflation soared and eroded the grants. The Committee sought to avoid an annual budget process, arguing for a system that would retain the five-year plans but with more frequent opportunities for review.²⁰ The economic situation, however, dictated the implementation of an annual

¹⁹ The senior Edinburgh Theologian, John MacIntyre, argued that the UGC was no longer strong enough to assert its independence from government, *TESS*, 20 June 1975, 15; for a more conventional view see the letter from the Aberdeen physicist, R.V. Jones, *TESS*, 13 Jun. 1977, 1–2

²⁰ TNA, UGC7/1388, Review of the Quinquennial system, no date, but early 1974, paper (74)1 in the UGC internal series; memo by N.P. Thomas, 2 Sep 1975; memo by J.P. Carswell 8 Sep. 1975; memo by Fred Dainton, 2 Sep. 1975; Dainton's circulars to the Universities, 28 Nov. 1975 and 27 Jan. 1976; *THES*, 1 Oct. 1976, 14; 8 Oct. 1976, 14; Robert O. Berdahl, *British Universities and the State* (London, 1959), 117–35; M. Shattock, *The UGC and the Management of British Universities* (Buckingham, 1994), 15–16; Maurice Kogan and Stephen Hanney, *Reforming Higher Education* (London, 2000), 84–6.

system. The narrative of the 1970s increasingly became one of how to manage universities in an era of 'cuts', which were frequently referred to in the specialist press. This contributed to the nervousness of Scottish universities over devolution.²¹

This structure meant that the universities were the only part of the post-16 education system in Scotland that was not the responsibility of the Scottish Office. In 1973, the minimum school-leaving age was increased to sixteen and most Scottish students who aspired to university sat the Scottish Certificate of Education 'Higher' exams at the end of the fifth year of secondary education. Passes in three subjects, although many students took four or five, provided qualification for application to university and most Scottish students stayed in Scotland, where the undergraduate honours degree was of four year's duration. Scottish Universities – despite the UGC connection and the absence of significant local authority funding, present in England – retained close links to their local communities through their student bodies. This was especially true for Glasgow and Aberdeen, although it declined in the 1980s.²²

²¹ *THES*, 26 Jul. 1974, 6; 11 Jul. 1975, 2; 5 Dec. 1975, 1; 12 Dec. 1975, 2; 18 Jun. 1976, 2; 23 Jul. 1976, 5; 1 Oct. 1976, 14; 8 Oct. 1976, 14.

²² *THES*, 23 Jul. 1976, 2; 28 Oct. 1977, 11; 11 Nov. 1977, 9; 16 Dec. 1977, 9; Lindsay Paterson, 'Regionalism among entrants to higher education from Scottish schools', *Oxford Review of Education*, 19 (1993), 231–55; see also Guy Neave, 'The University of Stirling and the central region of Scotland: the adaptation of university to regional needs', *Paedagogica Europaea*, 11 (1976), 15–39.

The structure of Scottish tertiary education was composed of universities, 'Central Institutions' and further education colleges, effectively a 'ternary' system.²³ There were eight universities divided into two groups distinguished by length of history and form of governance. In the first group were St Andrews, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Edinburgh, governed by the Scottish Universities Acts, the latest in 1966. In the second was Strathclyde, Heriot-Watt, Dundee and Stirling, governed by Royal Charters granted on their establishment as universities in the 1960s. Within this second group there were distinctions: Stirling was established as a new university following the Robbins Report, opening its doors in 1967; Strathclyde and Heriot Watt achieved university status in 1964 and 1966, respectively, but had long institutional histories. Strathclyde was a merger of the Royal College of Science and Technology and the Scottish College of Commerce. Both institutions had been on the UGC list for many years, so their university status did not mean an abrupt shift from 'Scottish' to 'British' funding.²⁴ Dundee was founded as a University College in 1881, later merged with St Andrews before its independent status was restored as the University of Dundee in 1967. This distinction between the newer, chartered, universities and those whose governance came through the Universities (Scotland) Acts was important to the debate in the 1970s. One politician used the 'awkwardness' of this difference as an argument against devolution of responsibility

²³ *THES*, 4 Jan. 1974, 10; *TESS*, 16 May 1975, 20.

²⁴ John Butt, *John Anderson's Legacy: The University of Strathclyde and its Antecedents, 1796–1996* (East Linton, 1996), 140–68; Callum G. Brown, Arthur J. McIvor and Neil Rafeek, *The University Experience, 1945–1975: An Oral History of the University of Strathclyde* (Edinburgh, 2004), 111–44

for the universities. An SED official also used the word at the same stage of the debate. He noted that there would be ‘manifest awkwardness’ in devolving responsibility for the Universities (Scotland) Acts, since it would give the Assembly powers over the ancient universities that it would not have over the newer institutions. This was not merely a matter of potential meddling with the constitutional provisions of the Acts but raised the threat of the extension of the scope of the Acts that could compromise the autonomy and academic freedom of the universities. The SED also worried that the ‘threat of being delivered into the hands of the Assembly’ could be the motivation for the ancient universities to exercise their rights under the 1966 Act to seek charters. This could raise contentious issues, at a time when the internal structures of the older universities was a matter for debate.²⁵

As well as the eight universities there were the ‘Central Institutions’. There was complexity, however. Three groups existed. The first was composed of: Dundee Institute of Technology, Paisley College of Technology, Queen Margaret College (Edinburgh), Queen’s College (Glasgow), Robert Gordon’s Institute of Technology.

²⁵ TNA, ED188/311, Ministerial Committee on Devolution Questions, Education Functions, Note by Lord President of the Council, (Ted Short), 27 Jun. 1975; NRS, ED26/1695, J.F. McLellan to H. Robertson, 9 May 1975; the DES file, at TNA ED188/213, contains the background papers for the introduction of the Bill in 1966; the papers in NRS, ED26/1702 contain the technical legal discussion about devolution of education functions; since there was no suggestion of devolving the power to amend Royal Charters, there was a very strong recommendation not to devolve the functions contained in the Universities (Scotland) Acts; the *Report of the Review of Higher Education Governance in Scotland* (2016), 4 provides a concise overview.

They were funded largely by the SED, and much degree-level work carried out by their students. Their curricula was less broad than the English polytechnics, especially in the absence of arts and humanities. The second group was composed of specialised institutions, such as the teacher-training colleges, the art schools, the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, the Scottish College of Textiles, the agricultural colleges, again largely funded by the SED (although the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland played a role in the agricultural colleges). The final group – Glasgow College of Technology and Napier College of Technology (Edinburgh), funded by local authorities – were closer to the model of English polytechnics. From the Central Institutions, part of the CNA system (about which there was some grumbling in Scotland), emerged the new universities after 1992.²⁶

The Central Institutions were in an interesting position, quite different from the polytechnics in England. Most were not creatures of local government and many were 'monotechnic'. In addition, they had independent Boards of Governors with powers vested in them by the Secretary of State for Scotland. Some had aspirations to develop into something like the polytechnics by developing social-science courses, but they were determined to retain their distinctive educational philosophy, based on applied and practical studies. During the devolution debate there was a

²⁶ H. E. Cowper, 'The Scottish Central Institutions: A study of their origins and growth and their effect on technical education in Scotland', University of Edinburgh, MEd thesis, 1970.

vigorous debate about the identity and function of the Scottish Central Institutions.²⁷

The significance of this is that there was limited potential for the Scottish Central Institutions to take the pressure of student numbers off the universities – especially in the Arts and Humanities, because they had fewer cognate courses than the polytechnics. Nevertheless, as was demonstrated after 1992, they contained the foundations of an alternative system in Scotland. In the 1970s, if a Scottish Assembly had been established, this could have been developed in a significant way and there would have been little that the Scottish universities or the UGC could have done about it.²⁸ After some discussion, the Scotland Bill of 1978 did not touch on the activities of the CNAA, which validated the degrees of Scottish Central Institutions, although there was some discussion of the establishment of a separate Scottish committee of the CNAA.²⁹

There was more awareness of the nuance of this issue in the SED than in the UGC, the former had to try to deal with the relationship between the Colleges (both FE and

²⁷ NRS, ED26/1858, 'The future role of Paisley College of Technology', produced in May 1973 by the Academic Staff Association of the College and laying out the philosophy of a Central Institution; Roy Sinclair and Alan Roach, 'No "gimcrack degrees" from Scottish Colleges', *Glasgow Herald*, 8 Apr. 1975; *THES*, 4 Apr. 1974, 10; 24 Jun. 1977, 10; 8 Jul. 1977, 14; 14 Oct. 1977, 13; 21 Oct. 1977, 10; 29 Sep. 1978, 31; 27 Oct. 1978, 31; 10 Nov. 1978, 26;

²⁸ NRS, ED26/1162, SED paper, 'The Further education system in Scotland', 2 Dec. 1971; ED26/1259, Report of the Expansion of Higher Education Working Party [of the SED], c. Mar. 1974

²⁹ NRS, ED26/2144 contains material from 1978 on this point; see also Neil Munro, 'Just another committee?', *Scotsman*, 19 Jun. 1979.

of Education), the Central Institutions and the universities. The SED was well aware of the veneration for the UGC among university leaders. The SED diagnosis was that what the universities feared was a loss of autonomy as much as a loss of resource or devolution itself. This was perceptive but, understandably, the SED underplayed the extent to which the universities were hostile to the SED, a point of view that was very close to hostility to devolution.³⁰

Under the devolution proposals the Central Institutions and Colleges would have been devolved, an unproblematic process as their administration and funding was largely Scottish. The universities' separateness, one of the main themes of their critics, was confirmed by the fact that they would have been the only part of the tertiary sector not related to the Assembly – creating a problem of integration in the Scottish education system – one of the principal arguments in favour of devolution of higher education.

Under the devolution proposals the funding and administration of the universities was not to be devolved.³¹ During the debate some proponents of devolution thought that it might be possible to establish a Scottish UGC, but their opponents argued that

³⁰ NRS, ED26/1344, Memo by E.C. Davison (SED), 13 Jan. 1976, ahead of the UGC meeting of 15 Jan. 1976; TNA, UGC1/85, UGC Meeting, 15 Jan. 1976, 'Devolution of Scotland and Wales' (Paper 4/76); Draft Letter from Chairman of UGC to Permanent Secretary of the DES.

³¹ Cmnd 5732, *Democracy and Devolution : Proposals for Scotland and Wales*, 1974; Cmnd 6348, *Our Changing Democracy: Devolution to Scotland and Wales*, 1976.

the system was too small to replicate the virtues of the UGC, especially its perceived disinterestedness in regard to institutions and its independence from the Government. If the Scottish Assembly had relatively weak financial powers, as seemed likely, it would be difficult to find independent structures to determine the level of grant to universities in Scotland.³² The officials of the SED were aware of the problems with this idea and they gave much thought – more than the DES or the UGC – to the alternatives. They knew that the universities were wedded to the UGC and would not contemplate change. One senior official seeking to explain to an uninitiated Scottish-Office minister the basics of the relationship between the Scottish universities and the state, pointed out the possibilities. The Scottish Assembly could make direct grants to universities, but this would destroy institutional autonomy. There could be a Scottish UGC, but there would be ‘some danger of parochial attitudes in a committee that was concerned with only eight institutions’. A parochialism he felt was absent from the UGC, on which he had served as the SED assessor. The Assembly could be directed by the UGC, but this would involve

³² University of Edinburgh Archives, UGC/V/75(1), Professor J. D. B. Mitchell to Charles Stewart, 17 Feb. 1975; see the evidence of Scottish Education Department civil servants to the Royal Commission on the Constitution, *Commission on the Constitution, Minutes of Evidence, II, Scotland, 29–30 September 1969*, Questions 738–40; The Principal of Heriot Watt corresponded with a leading figure in the SNP about the matter and suggested that a Scottish UGC would set the Scottish Principals up in competition with each other for funds in a circumscribed Scottish system, Heriot-Watt University Archives, Box 21, Burnett to William Wolfe, 31 Jan. 1975.

formulae to ensure parity of resource, and this would render devolution 'pointless'. Or, finally, the *desideratum* of the Universities, the *status quo*.³³

There were problems here, however. First, there was a danger that at the highest political level the Scottish universities were somewhat invisible. Bruce Millan, Under-Secretary for Scotland responsible for education, remarked in 1974 that due to the UGC-DES link he had no experience of the Scottish universities. The following year Mrs Thatcher, former Secretary of State at DES, was, on a Scottish visit, criticised for her ignorance of university matters. This was all very well from the point of view of the autonomy of the universities but:

This has been one of the very serious troubles with the present system. The course of Scottish education has to a great extent been determined in recent years by party political decisions made in the south after discussions informed only by conditions in the south.³⁴

For devolutionists, this was the problem: for their opponents, it was a caricature.

³³ NRS, ED26/1703, Departmental Planning Committee, 'The Institutional Structure of Higher Education, Paper by Division III (of the SED), no date but c. Dec. 1973; ED26/1344, J.M. Fearn to Frank McElhone, 16 Feb. 1976.

³⁴ *TESS*, 8 Feb. 1974, 1; 28 Feb. 1975, 2.

Nationalism and Higher Education in Scotland.

Another factor in the fear created in the 1970s was the attitude of the SNP and a discussion about the place of the universities in Scottish culture and politics. There was a tendency amongst critics to make generalised accusations, but, in reality, the universities, even the four 'ancient' institutions, were a diverse group.³⁵ This problem predated the devolution debate. In 1970 the SNP candidate for East Lothian, David Simpson – an academic economist – argued bluntly that the problem with the Scottish universities was that the UGC was a centralist London-based institution that sought to concentrate resources in the English universities. Although Scottish-university leaders countered this argument, it continued to be articulated throughout the 1970s. The nuances of the way that the UGC worked were difficult to convey.³⁶ The extreme view was put by James Halliday, former leader of the party and a secondary-school history teacher.³⁷ In 1974 he argued:

The integration of Scottish Universities into Scotland's educational system cannot be indefinitely postponed. It is absurd to have universities staffed by sad exiles, laagered up in their campus compounds wistfully hoping for that

³⁵ For profiles of the institutions see *THES*, 4 Oct. 1974, 5; 21 May 1976, 6; 28 Oct. 1977, 11; 11 Nov. 1977, 9; 25 Nov. 1977, 8; 9 Dec. 1977, 10; 16 Dec. 1977, 9.

³⁶ *Scotsman*, 5, 6, Jan. 1970; *Glasgow Herald*, 5 Jan. 1970; *TESS*, 24 Jan. 1975, 1;

<https://www.esri.ie/people/david-simpson>

³⁷ James Halliday, *Scotland: A Concise History* (Edinburgh, 1996); James Halliday, 'The Club and the revolution in Scotland, 1689–90', *Scottish Historical Review*, 45 (1966), 143–59; James Halliday, *Yours for Scotland* (Stirling, 2011).

posting to Sussex. As for students, the argument is simply about proportions. Ten percent English students in a Scottish university might be regarded as a defensible leaven in the lump. At 50 per cent they have taken the lump over, and detached it from the community around it. There is no reason why Englishness should be the norm in our universities, whether expressed in the beefy conformity of the past or the trendy arrogance of the present. English students, even when in a university, tend to be confident pace-setters. When they approach majority status all chance of a local character to the occupied university is gone. It is more than time that our universities ceased to be English provincial and became instead Scottish separate and international.³⁸

Worse still, from the point of view of many in the Scottish universities, was an SNP policy document from 1972 that proposed simplistic solutions to perceived anglo-centricity. It argued for a Scottish UGC, more Scottish staff, more Scottish studies and less funding for English students. Although the SNP produced more mature proposals as the debate proceeded, this document still circulated and it set the tone for academic perceptions of the Party. Indeed, it was sent to Fred Dainton, Chairman of the UGC, by one of his Scottish members, John Gunn (Prof of Natural Philosophy at Glasgow), in January 1975.³⁹ This argument allowed opponents of

³⁸ *TESS*, 22 Feb. 1974, 1.

³⁹ University of Stirling Archives, UA/A/8/5/1, SNP, Education for the New Scotland, approved by Nat Council, March 1972; Scottish Education: A unified approach?, Federation of Student Nationalists, Discussion Document; Discussion Paper prepared by the SNP on the Organisation of Scotland's

devolution to argue that the SNP were seeking to ‘pervert’ the education system to their own narrow ends.⁴⁰ Although the SNP view evolved – and, in the view of one Glasgow academic, moderated the ‘ethnic’ dimensions of their policy – they remained uninformed and out of touch with the operation of the Scottish universities.⁴¹ The SNP remained suspicious that the universities neglected their ‘obligations’ to Scotland.⁴² This reaction was evident at the level of individual academics.⁴³

As discussions of Scottish culture and identity warmed up in the 1970s, it was inevitable that the universities, as prominent and internationally prestigious Scottish institutions, would be scrutinised.⁴⁴ In May 1972 the magazine *Scottish International* asked: ‘What’s university for?’. The feature emphasised the power – economic and

Institutions of HE under a Scottish Assembly, March 1975; TNA, UGC7/1088, Gunn to Dainton, 23 Jan. 1975.

⁴⁰ Eg a speech by Francis Pym in Aberdeen in October 1977, see *Scotsman*, 4 Oct. 1977.

⁴¹ TNA, UGC7/1088, David R. Bell (President, Glasgow University AUT) to Tam Dalyell, 4 Feb. 1975.

⁴² *THES*, 3 Jun. 1977, 3 (Report of SNP Conference); 14 Oct. 1977, 4 (speech by Douglas Henderson, SNP MP, at Edinburgh University).

⁴³ Letter from Andrew and Judith Hook, *New Statesman*, 19 Mar. 1976, see also criticisms of the SNP from an AUT official, Dr Jennifer Birkett from the University of Dundee, *THES*, 17 Jun. 1977, 14, ‘Don’s Diary’ by John D. Hargreaves, *Gaudie*, 27 Oct. 1976, 2.

⁴⁴ Scott Hames, *The Literary Politics of Scottish Devolution: Voice, Class, Nation* (Edinburgh, 2020), 47–77; R. Scothorne and E. Gibbs, ‘Origins of the present crisis? The emergence of “left-wing” Scottish nationalism, 1956–81’, in Evan Smith and Matthew Worley (eds), *Waiting for the Revolution* (Manchester, 2018), 163–81; <https://campuspress.stir.ac.uk/scotmagsnet/>

financial as well as educational – of a major university like Edinburgh and argued that its structures and curricula were designed to sustain the institution as much as cater to the needs of its students.⁴⁵ These were common themes in discussions of the British university system and were particularly prominent in the 1960s, as new universities prepared novel, interdisciplinary, curricula and conducted experiments in pedagogy, assessment and, in the case of the new University of Stirling, the structure of the academic year.⁴⁶ The particular unpopularity of Edinburgh stemmed from the way that its expansion laid waste to the late Georgian architecture of George Square.⁴⁷

The critique soon acquired a nationalist hue, however. The nationalist intellectual, Stephen Maxwell, published two excoriating articles in *Scottish International* that questioned the place of the Universities in Scottish cultural life and accused them of

⁴⁵ 'What's University For?', *Scottish International*, May 1972, 8–15.

⁴⁶ *THES*, 29 Mar. 1974, 6; 27 Dec. 1974, 6; 21 May 1976, 6; Nehring, 'Failed utopia?'

⁴⁷ David McCrone, *Who Runs Edinburgh?* (Edinburgh, 2022), 168–94; Nick Hayes and Clive B. Fenton, *Building Knowledge: An Architectural History of the University of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, 2017); Robert D. Anderson, Michael Lynch and Nicholas Phillipson, *The University of Edinburgh: An Illustrated History* (Edinburgh, 2003), 197; there were similar controversies elsewhere but Edinburgh seemed to acquire particular opprobrium, it was Scotland's biggest university and was located in the centre of its capital city.

national treachery.⁴⁸ For Maxwell, this was a twentieth-century version of the process of Anglicisation that George Davie had detected in the nineteenth.⁴⁹ It became easy to paint the universities as an oligarchy, a conservative network that saw devolution as a threat to their privileged position, a position that they idealised as autonomous, but which supporters of autonomy for Scotland saw as special pleading.

Devolving Higher Education: ‘parochialism’

The principal arguments used in the debate tell us a great deal about the controversy over the place of the universities in the Scottish education system and wider cultural life. The discussion was polarised and polarising.⁵⁰ It can be analysed under a number of ‘key words’. The first is ‘parochial’. This word was much used, even more frequently implied, with references to its supposed binary opposite, ‘international’, the meaning of which in this debate we will turn to in the next section of the article. In 1977 one senior Aberdeen academic urged graduands to question the motives of those who would ‘turn us into a tartan university’.⁵¹ When St Andrews established a committee to examine devolution, its first principle was that the

⁴⁸ Stephen Maxwell, ‘Treason of the Clerks’, *Scottish International*, August 1972, 18; Stephen Maxwell, ‘Treason of the Clerks’, *Scottish International*, September 1972, 14–17; see also Stephen Maxwell, ‘Can Scotland’s political myths be broken?’, *Question*, 19 November 1976, 9.

⁴⁹ Davie, *Democratic Intellect*.

⁵⁰ There is a clear summary of the arguments on either side in *THES*, 13 Jun. 1975, 6; 20 Jun. 1975, 16; 19 Nov. 1976, 14–16

⁵¹ *TESS*, 5 Dec. 1975, 2; 15 Jul. 1977, 2.

university 'should retain its international reputation', this was of 'paramount importance', whereas it was merely 'a prime duty' to serve the Scottish and local communities.⁵² In a submission to the Kilbrandon Commission, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals asserted, while claiming to eschew a definitive view on the general principle of devolution, that 'division of the university community would be generally damaging to its international standing', the argument was couched with especial reference to research, which was seen as having a quintessentially 'international' quality.⁵³ Occasionally the language was stronger. Tam Dalyell MP, referring to Trinity College Dublin and its alleged collapse in quality since 1922, talked of 'inbreeding' to exemplify the dangers of devolution. He meant that by retreating into an Irish national context the university had sacrificed the international standing it had as a UK and imperial institution.⁵⁴ Norman Hunt,

⁵² University of Andrews Archives, UYUY 875, Watson (Acc.1705) Box 210, Joint Committee of Senate and Court on Scottish Devolution.

⁵³ TNA, HO221/74, Extract from a letter from the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, no date (but 22 Dec 1969), see copy in TNA, UGC1/64; UGC7/1088, CVCP to Secretary of Commission on the Constitution, 22 Nov. 1969.

⁵⁴ TNA, CAB198/372, Dalyell to Ted Short, 24 Dec. 1974; Dalyell made the same point in a speech in 1975, *THES*, 5 Sep. 1975, 24; see also his column in the *New Scientist*, 20 Feb. 1975 and NRS, ED26/1697, Dalyell to Dainton, 4 Sep. 1975, enclosing his address to the meeting of the British Association; *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 885, col. 1124, 4 Feb. 1975. Dalyell was one of the longest-standing Labour opponents of Scottish devolution; see his books, *Devolution: The End of Britain?* (London, 1977); *The Importance of Being Awkward* (Edinburgh, 2011), 180–8; *The Question of Scotland: Devolution and After* (Edinburgh, 2016); on Trinity see Tomás Irish, *Trinity in War and Revolution, 1912–1923* (Dublin, 2015), 201–76.

Professor of Business Studies at Edinburgh, and a member of the UGC, felt that 'one of the happiest features of the Scottish universities is that they are not local but international institutions ... to bring them under a Scottish assembly would inevitably, even if unintentionally, make them more subject to local pressures'.⁵⁵ Sir Charles Wilson, Principal of the University of Glasgow, which had very strong local links, felt that the intimate connections with the rest of the UK system provided by the UGC was a guarantor of excellence and that devolution would bring an inward-looking culture. His successor, Alwyn Williams, attempted to straddle entrenched positions by exalting the positive influence of the UGC, while arguing that the upper reaches of the Scottish education system should be more integrated.⁵⁶ The Principal of Heriot Watt, George Burnett, made essentially the same point, arguing that it would be 'folly' to 'cut ourselves off' and risk losing impact on economic, social and industrial policy. This was a particular concern for Burnett, who was trying to position his institution to take advantage of the research and teaching possibilities of the North-Sea oil industry.⁵⁷ James Drever, the Dundee Principal, attempted to make the constructive suggestion that the Secretary of State for Scotland's functions in relation to the UGC could be transferred to the Assembly. He called this a 'tactical

⁵⁵ TNA, ED188/311, Hunt to Wm Ross, 26 Aug 1974.

⁵⁶ NRS, ED26/1697, Charles Wilson to Peter Mackay (Scottish Office), 21 Jun. 1974; for an interview with Wilson, *THES*, 27 Feb. 1976, 11; and with Williams, *Glasgow University Guardian*, 26 Feb. 1976, 4; there is a profile of Williams at *THES*, 26 Mar. 1976, 7.

⁵⁷ NRS, ED26/2065, Heriot Watt Press Release, 19 Mar. 1976; for an interview with Burnett see *THES*, 13 Dec. 1974, 7; for further comment on the Universities and the oil industry, including the ambitions of the University of Aberdeen, see *THES*, 1 Aug. 1975, 2; 16 Dec. 1977, 9.

readjustment'. Overall, however, he was opposed to any change in the 'status of the universities'.⁵⁸ George Hammersley of the History department at Edinburgh was a frequent correspondent with newspapers and politicians and made this point frequently, as did his colleague Professor Sir Frederick Stewart, who held the Chair of Geology.⁵⁹

The Scottish universities also acted corporately as the debate proceeded, they overcame fears of pushing a common line and, by the middle of 1976, the Conference of the Courts of the Scottish Universities wrote to the government to outline their worries about devolution. This was reported on the front page of *THES*, with a cartoon showing a small kilted character, representing the universities, being fought over by Britannia and a large bearded figure in kilt and plaid asking 'Hoot toot woman – whose bairn [child] is it?!'.⁶⁰ The paper touched on a very important point in the general defence of the internationalist *status quo*, which was presented as a fundamental issue of principle, but which reads as special pleading:

The role which universities play in our educational system is a fundamental question. It may be said that universities are just part of the broad educational

⁵⁸ University of Dundee Archives, RU252/28/6/1, Drever to Dainton, 30 Mar. 1976; Drever to Chris Allan, 30 Jul. 1976; RU525/42/6/7, Drever to Burnett, 24 Mar. 1976.

⁵⁹ TNA, UGC7/1088, Hammersley to Tam Dalyell, 27 Feb. 1975; NRS, ED26/2004, Hammersley to William Ross, 11 Feb. 1975; ED26/2066, Hammersley to James Callaghan, 4 Jun. 1976; ED26/2065, Sir Frederick Stewart to Harry Ewing, 19 Mar. 1976.

⁶⁰ *THES*, 18 Jun. 1976, 1.

system, but they have a very special part to play. Universities are, or should be, outward looking and internationalist in orientation. They are cosmopolitan, not local, bodies.⁶¹

What this amounted to was a fear of what kind of institution the new Scottish Assembly would be, and how it would exercise financial responsibility for the universities. If the Assembly chose to move away from block grants to institutions and to attach conditions to financial support, greater financial control of universities than existed through the UGC would occur. Four of the universities were shielded by their Royal Charters and the 1966 Act provided a route by which the others could seek Charters to distance themselves from government. In such a scenario there was potential for conflict between the universities and the Assembly.⁶² Even if this was unlikely, it was a fear prominent in the minds of many opponents of devolution.

A notable defender of the *status quo* was J. Steven Watson, the Principal of St Andrews. Watson, a historian of eighteenth-century Britain, was suspicious of the proposed Scottish Assembly. His fears revolved around concepts such as autonomy, internationalism versus parochialism, research culture (especially in

⁶¹ University of Dundee Archives, RU162/2/74, 'Devolution – Universities in Scotland', Statement by the Conference of Courts of the Scottish Universities for 1976, 14 Jun. 1976; it is striking that the title of the paper refers to 'Universities in Scotland' rather than 'Scottish Universities' or Universities of Scotland; there was commentary in *TESS*, 18 Jun. 1976, 2.

⁶² NRS, ED26/2060, Davison to McClellan (both of SED), 3 Feb. 1976; see also ED26/1695, McClellan to Robertson, 9 May 1975.

science), prestige, funding, administration and veneration for the way in which the UGC operated to provide a supposed 'buffer' between government and the universities.⁶³ Interestingly, Watson was in favour of closer links between the universities and other institutions of higher education in Scotland.⁶⁴ Within his own university, he established a joint committee of Court and Senate to look into the problem. It failed to reach a unanimous conclusion and ended up putting forward papers giving the arguments for the *status quo* as well as moderate devolution models. Nevertheless, it stressed the commitment of the university to an international outlook and implied that devolution was a threat to this.⁶⁵ This construction of a polarity between devolution – and, by implication, Scottishness – and 'internationalism' was a feature of the debate. At a meeting at Edinburgh University in May 1976, John Smith, then Minister responsible for drafting the devolution legislation, heard this argument put forward by the Principal and the Deans. They were also fearful that the Assembly could be given power to alter the constitutions of the Scottish universities, by devolution of the Universities Acts.⁶⁶

In his speech to the St Andrews General Council in 1975, Watson asserted:

⁶³ *TESS*, 31 Jan. 1975, 3.

⁶⁴ University of Andrews Archives, UYUY 875, Watson (Acc.1705) Box 210, Watson to Devine, 3 Feb. 1975; Watson to Ballantrae, 23 Sep. 1975.

⁶⁵ University of Andrews Archives, UYUY 875, Watson (Acc.1705) Box 210, Joint Committee of Senate and Court on Scottish Devolution, Draft of Final Report to Senate and Court, 1975.

⁶⁶ TNA, CAB198/372, Notes of a meeting held in Old Senate Room, Old College, 14 May 1976.

... in my opinion it would be an error, a peevish piece of patriotic pique, if we and the other Scottish universities were at this stage to opt out from a Grants Committee of the UK. ... I think it better for our independence to be associated with a larger unit; I could, if you were to tempt me, name the most probable members of a purely Scottish Grants Committee; I can almost feel their hot familiar breath on the back of my neck.

In remarks to the same body in 1976, he argued:

while a university has to be a world institution, it has also to be rooted in a small community to enrich the lives of those who are, by choice, stay-at-homes ... There is one thing which is worse than being provincial and that is being parochial.⁶⁷

There were, however, other voices in St Andrews. Elements of student opinion, for example, took a position contrary to that of the Principal. At several points, the Students Representative council complained to Watson that his public statements were unrepresentative. In March 1975 the Secretary of the SRC wrote to complain, and earlier that year Mark Lazarowicz (later a Labour MP) and a colleague produced a paper, 'Devolution and the Universities', which argued in favour of a Scottish Assembly's oversight of higher education. They suggested that the UGC and the

⁶⁷ University of St Andrews Archive, UY UY 875/Watson (Acc 1705) Box 210, Address to General Council.

DES were English-oriented and that this had resulted in specialization in the Scottish universities in recent times, an interesting echo of the Davie thesis from a non-nationalist position.⁶⁸ There was some awareness that this was potentially damaging to the reputation of St Andrews. The Joint Committee of Senate and Court discussed this in March 1975:

Several members of the committee felt ... St Andrews ought to make a positive statement in rebuttal of various vague accusations that the university was endeavouring to become a university in the English style.⁶⁹

Underlying these remarks was a controversy to which St Andrews was central: the accusation that students from Scotland were not performing as well at Scottish universities as their English counterparts. The charge levelled at St Andrews and, to a lesser extent, Edinburgh, was that they admitted too many English students and biased their curricula in their favour.⁷⁰ Although this was a theme which can be

⁶⁸ University of St Andrews Archive, UY UY 875/Watson (Acc 1705) Box 210, Christine Philpott to Devine, 6 Mar. 1975; Paper by M. Lazarowicz and M. Sime, 'Devolution and the Universities', 15 Mar. 1975.

⁶⁹ University of St Andrews Archive, UY UY 875/Watson (Acc 1705) Joint Committee of Senate and Court, 23 Sep. 1975.

⁷⁰ *THES*, 22 Aug. 1975, 2; 12 Sep. 1975; 10 Oct. 1975, 2; 2 Jul. 1976; 1 Apr. 1977, 3; see also, J. D. Nisbet and Jennifer Welsh, 'A note on SCE marks and University performance', *Scottish Educational Studies*, 2 (1970), 56–9; J. D. Nisbet and Jennifer Welsh, 'Diagnosing first-year science failure', *Universities Quarterly*, 27 (1973), 457–64;

detected in the late 1960s, as well as the mid 1970s, the context of the latter period gave it greater salience.⁷¹ By then Scottish universities were under greater critical scrutiny and the devolution debate added political pressure. These discussions, and worries that application rates from different parts of the UK had varying levels of success and frustration, with the Scots most frustrated, presented a challenge to the notion that the universities were institutions based on intellectual merit rather than national distinctions.⁷²

Overall, in this phase of the debate, when the universities felt that they had to actively campaign to keep the proposed Scottish Assembly at bay, they emphasised that devolution and the threat of control from Scottish politicians with little experience of, or sympathy with, the world of higher education was likely to be limiting. ‘Scottish’ and ‘parochial’ were natural synonyms for many university leaders, there was very little sense that a genuinely international institution could be built from a Scottish political base, or that there could be an association between Britishness – Englishness in the SNP point of view – and parochialism. Access to the British network through the UGC was the foundation on which the international reputations of the universities were constructed. The next section will develop this point further, with particular reference to research.

⁷¹ NRS, ED26/1308, contains material on this theme from the middle of 1968.

⁷² TNA, ED188/310, Thompson (DES) to Timms (DES), 7 Nov. 1974; NRS, ED26/1344, Morell (Registrar, Strathclyde) to Fearn (SED), 14 Jul. 1976.

Devolution of Higher Education: ‘internationalism’.

A variant of the ‘parochial’ argument was that devolution would affect research culture. This was especially evident among scientists. John Gunn wrote to the Chairman of the UGC in January 1975, reporting that while support for devolution in Glasgow was strong among the social scientists and the lawyers it was very weak in the Science faculty, which had voted 44–1 against the ‘devolutionist line’.⁷³ The argument was that the facilities needed for large-scale science projects, eg in particle physics, could not be provided in a Scottish context.⁷⁴ Indeed, some argued that even the British system was not sufficiently large and that funding and provision needed to be at the European level. Gunn argued that it was more difficult for small countries like Norway and Denmark to participate in CERN than it was for Scotland as part of the British system. Devolution would endanger this strength.⁷⁵ Gunn was an active correspondent across the political spectrum, often referring to his position as a UGC member to add authority to his *status-quo* arguments. He was one academic who was not merely antipathetic to the inclusion of the universities within a

⁷³ TNA, UGC7/1088, Gunn to Dainton, 23 Jan. 1975; another copy can be found in University of Glasgow Archives, P282/5, along with further letters from Gunn, who was a particularly strong anti-devolutionist.

⁷⁴ Martin Goldman, ‘Scottish science and devolution’, *Nature*, 17 Mar. 1977, 208–9

⁷⁵ TNA, ED188/311, Gunn to Clive Saville, Privy Council Office, 26 Sep. 1975, including his Note on ‘Devolution and the Scottish Universities’; see also University of Glasgow Archives, P282/5, Gunn to Saville, 3 Oct. 1975.

devolution scheme, but opposed to devolution *in toto*.⁷⁶ Another leading Physicist, R.V. Jones of Aberdeen, sought to gather a lobby of Fellows of the Royal Society in Scottish universities to plead the case for science in opposition to devolution.⁷⁷

The Association of University Teachers was strongly opposed to devolution of the universities and projected its arguments as representative of the views of the academic profession in Scotland. Their principal means of achieving this end was a survey of their Scottish membership. John Gunn sent this on to Fred Dainton, who disparaged the likely outcome as 'interesting but without great significance'.⁷⁸ Local branches passed motions of opposition and these were widely publicised.⁷⁹ AUT officials were assiduous in lobbying government in Edinburgh and London, as well as individual members of the UGC in their own institutions, such as Professor Robert

⁷⁶ University of Glasgow Archives, P47/1, Gunn to Neil Carmichael MP, 7 Jan. 1976; P288/6 Gunn to Carmichael, 24 Mar. 1976; Gunn to J. Dickson Mabon MP, 30 Mar 1976; P282/5, Gunn to Lionel Robbins, 23 Jun. 1975

⁷⁷ Churchill College Cambridge, Archives Centre, RVJO, F.122, Jones to David Martin, Secretary of the Royal Society, 17 Sep. 1975; see also, at RVJO, F.123, his 'Pros and cons of devolution', mostly cons.

⁷⁸ TNA UGC7/1089, Gunn to Dainton, 12 Jan. 1976, with draft ms reply in Dainton's hand; in the same file is a press release from AUT(Scotland) with the results of the survey, showing support for the status quo from about 60 per cent of the 4000 members; see also NRS, ED26/1695, Aberdeen University AUT to Robert Hughes MP, 26 Feb 1975; NRS ED26/2004, Gillender to McLellan (both SED), providing report of the 5 Feb. 1975 meeting of Glasgow AUT on devolution, 12 Feb. 1975.

⁷⁹ *THES*, 27 Sep. 1974, 10; 4 Apr. 1975, 24; 26 Dec. 1975, 16; 26 Mar. 1976, 14

Cross (Regius Professor of Logic) at the University of Aberdeen.⁸⁰ They attempted to be objective on the overall question of devolution while expressing opposition to the inclusion of the universities in the scheme.⁸¹ They deployed the classic arguments in favour of the status quo: the dangers of academic isolation, the impossibility of funding 'big science', and the dangers to the autonomy of the universities and to academic freedom that would emanate from a Scottish Assembly that would have no international responsibilities. They were also opposed to 'regionalisation' of universities, which, they felt, would impose 'frontiers' to the transmission of knowledge. Devolution and 'internationalisation' were seen as opposites. They also argued that breaking up the UK system would pose dangers for negotiating terms and conditions for members of staff.⁸² For nationalists, and others in favour of devolution, this was not surprising, given that they had laid the groundwork for the argument that the academic staff were increasingly anglicised

⁸⁰ TNA, UGC7/1088, Robert Cross to Dainton, 29 Nov. 1974; Dainton to Cross, 4 Dec. 1974.

⁸¹ TNA, UGC7/1088, Basil Ribbons to Dainton, 17 Feb. 1975; Ribbons to Prentice, 17 Feb. 1975;

⁸² TNA, CAB198/372, 'Note of a meeting between Minister of State, Privy Council Office and the Glasgow University Branch of the AUT, 6 Jan. 1975; G. R. Talbot (Assistant General Secretary, AUT) to Ted Short, 14 Mar. 1975, enclosing 'Memorandum on regional devolution in higher education'; Basil Ribbons (Hon Secretary, AUT(Scotland)) to Ted Short, 1 Apr. 1976, enclosing 'The Scottish universities and devolution: safeguarding academic freedom'; the AUT also organised a conference at Strathclyde on the theme of devolution; University of Dundee Archives, A56/148/4/6, Report of Conference held at the University of Strathclyde, 11 Dec. 1976; see also the letters of the Glasgow ecclesiastical historian, Prof W. H. C. Friend, to the press, *TESS*, 12 Sep. 1975, 5; 7 May 1976, 104; 7 Jan. 1977, 13.

and insensitive to the Scottish tradition of higher education. The effective campaigning of the AUT on the subject provided the government with evidence of an important interest that was opposed to inclusion of the universities in the devolution proposals. The reaction of leading scientists and organisations like the AUT symbolised a feeling – perhaps understandable in the early days of the UK's membership of the EEC – that devolution would be anti-international, limiting and redolent of the erection of hard boundaries to the transmission of knowledge and academic exchange. Advocates of devolution, however, did not really tackle such questions in a direct manner. Rather, the principal argument in favour of devolving higher education was constructed in the context of the best way to integrate post-18 education in Scotland. This will be the theme of the next section.

Devolution of Higher Education: 'integration'.

The cacophony of voices against devolution did not have a monopoly, however. The Cabinet Minister, Peter Shore, made a very important, even far-sighted, point. He argued that not to devolve the universities was a mistake in that it would create the impression that the devolution scheme was not 'sufficiently full-hearted to be durable'. The universities, he argued, were 'pre-eminently Scottish institutions ... pre-dating the union in four cases'. He concluded, 'to devolve responsibility for other Scottish institutions, like the whole of Scots private law, and Scottish courts – which in many ways are more central to the integrity of the Union – but not to devolve the Universities is going to place us in (sic) a quite untenable position'.⁸³ There is much

⁸³ TNA, CAB198/426, Peter Shore to Michael Quinlan, 12 Jul. 1976.

substance to the analysis of the politics of devolution in this view and it provides evidence on the extent of Labour divisions. This is a key feature of historical accounts of the period.

Indeed, by 1976 John Smith was sufficiently worried about the apparent anomaly of not devolving Scottish higher education, that he felt bound to respond. According to Smith, 'the political dangers' had to be recognised.⁸⁴ He engaged with the universities in a meaningful way in meetings in May 1976, during which he saw a range of groups representing a wide range of opinion and hearing 'all the fears, hopes and sentiments which it is difficult to put in writing, certainly in formal, and possibly, public, submissions'.⁸⁵ Of the meeting at the University of Glasgow, John Gunn reported that Smith was 'very receptive' to the arguments against devolution for the Scottish Universities but was aware that the arguments for integration of the Scottish education system carried weight, particularly in the teaching profession. Gunn (hardly a disinterested observer) advised Dainton that this was the key argument to be countered.⁸⁶ Smith also met a group of Edinburgh academics, where the tone of the meeting was strongly against devolving the universities. There was a

⁸⁴ TNA, UGC7/1089, Notes of meeting at Privy Council Office, 6 Jul. 1976; Notes of meeting in Minister of State's Room, Privy Council Office, 6 Jul. 1976. These represent two separate accounts of the same meeting written by different civil servants; for Smith's ministerial role see Stuart, *John Smith*, 74–94.

⁸⁵ TNA, CAB198/372, Goome to Quinlan, 'Minister of State's visit to Scotland 12/14 May 1976', 18 May 1976

⁸⁶ University of Glasgow Archives, P288/6, Gunn to Dainton, 21 May 1976.

full rehearsal of the key anti-devolution arguments, especially contempt for the SED, veneration for the 'buffer' role of the UGC and the difficulties of replicating that in the relatively small Scottish system, with a much smaller amount of funding at its disposal.⁸⁷

In particular, Smith was worried about the potential for divisions in the Labour party on this point. He sought to address it by leavening the *status quo* with a 'Council', which would help to co-ordinate Scottish tertiary education. This was opposed by the DES, on the grounds that it was incompatible with the functioning of the UGC. Nevertheless, this idea emerged as a proposal in the second White Paper on devolution published in August 1976.⁸⁸ The universities were wary of this body placing them in an isolated and vulnerable position among representatives of the more numerous Central Institutions and Colleges of Education. As a result, they argued that this should be a consultative, rather than an executive, body that would be useful even in the absence of devolution. Further, research – which the universities saw as their exclusive domain – should not be part of its agenda.⁸⁹

There was also concern that the Council would complicate the relationship between

⁸⁷ TNA CAB198/372, 'Notes of a meeting held in the Old Senate Room, Old College ... on 14 May 1976'. This note was prepared by University of Edinburgh officials rather than Smith's civil servants, see CAB198/372, Hugh Robson to John Smith, 25 May 1976, in which Robson indicated his support for the advisory council that Smith saw as a way out of his political difficulties.

⁸⁸ Cmnd 6585, *Devolution to Scotland and Wales: Supplementary Statement*, 1976, 4.

⁸⁹ University of Dundee Archives, RU525/42/2/7, Papers for meetings of Scottish Principals, Oct. 1977 to Sept 1978, 'Council for Higher Education in Scotland'

the universities and the UGC, which would be of no concern to the Central Institutions or the Colleges, and that academic freedom and autonomy could be compromised.⁹⁰ The Council never materialized, but the debate around it showed that even this minimal attempt to bring the universities closer to the rest of the Scottish post-school education system was a matter of sensitivity for them. The discussion showed that the universities were, at least, positioned at an angle to the rest of the system. This, in turn, fuelled general criticisms of them.

What were the origins of this nervousness on the part of Smith, mirrored by a wider lack of conviction on the part of the government for their devolution proposals? What were the arguments used by those opposed to the government's position? We have noted the views of a range of senior academics in the Scottish universities who were opposed to devolution but there were significant voices who took a contrary position. Among the most prominent were the academic lawyer Professor Neil MacCormick and the educationalist Professor Nigel Grant. MacCormick was well-known for his

⁹⁰ The Universities convened an Inter-Senate Working Party to come up with a response on the Council, which settled on the idea of a purely consultative body. See University of Edinburgh Archives, Devolution (2) 1977–9 M/Dev D27, George Burnett (Principal of Heriot Watt) to Bruce Millan, 6 Mar. 1978; Burnett to Charles Stewart (Secretary, University of Edinburgh), 3 Feb. 1978; Inter-Senate Working Party, Minutes of Meetings, 5 and 20 Jan. 1978; Charles Stewart to David Morrell (Registrar, University of Strathclyde) 1 Dec. 1977; David Devine (Secretary, University of St Andrews) to Morrell, 19 Dec. 1977. This file also contains a copy of a University of Glasgow Staff Newsletter from 19 Jan. 1978 with the headline 'Goodbye Autonomy, Hello CHES'!

nationalist views. In internal debates in the University of Edinburgh he was a courteous voice pressing the institution to moderate its opposition to devolution.⁹¹

If 'parochialism' was central to the 'No' argument, then 'integration' was the key word that encapsulates the counter arguments of those in favour of devolving the universities. The essence of this case was that to leave the universities as the only part of the Scottish education system not devolved, undermined arguments about a Scottish educational tradition that were often deployed in favour of devolution. This was a key argument for those supportive of devolution of higher education. In 1979

⁹¹ University of Edinburgh Archives, UGC/V/75(1), Neil MacCormick to Principal, 8 Feb. 1975; MacCormick to Principal, 11 Feb 1975. These letters, with their gentle attempts to revise texts of Educational Policy Committee, were written as the University leaders prepared for a formal 'Visitation' from the UGC; *TESS*, 29 Oct. 1976, 2; he also argued this point at a General Assembly of University of Edinburgh staff in 1974, see *THES*, 31 Dec. 1974, 2; there was a vigorous debate at the AUT conference in 1978, see *THES*, 13 Jan. 1978, 4. The letters in the Principal's correspondence on the subject bears out MacCormick, in that his was a minority view: UGC/V/75(1), Berwick Saul to Principal, 13 Dec. 1974; Henry Drucker to Principal, 28 Jan. 1975; UGC/V/75(2), Norman Hunt to Lord Crowther Hunt, 6 Apr. 1974; Hunt to William Ross; 28 Aug. 1974. Hunt was Professor of Business Studies and a member of the UGC. During the devolution debate Grant published widely on the key issues, see Nigel Grant and Alex Main, *Scottish Universities: The Case for Devolution* (Edinburgh, 1976); Robert Bell and Nigel Grant, *Patterns of Education in the British Isles* (London, 1977); for a succinct distillation of his arguments see a letter to *THES*, 20 Sep. 1974, 23; *Herald* (Glasgow), 5 Aug. 2003 for an obituary.

Henry Cowper, of the OU in Scotland, and the educational journalist Willis Pickard, argued that there was a danger of 'administrative untidiness' leading to the 'isolation' of the universities unless they were devolved.⁹² There were different levels of argument here. The first was technical, and suggested that there was a poor relationship between the Scottish secondary schools and the universities. This was becoming more evident in the 1970s as more Scots stayed on for a sixth year of secondary education, either, to complete more 'Highers', or, to take the new 'Certificate of Sixth Year Studies'.⁹³ There were also some issues in the relationship between the universities and the Colleges of Education that would be simplified if the whole system was devolved and integrated.⁹⁴ The growth in degree-level work,

⁹² *Scotsman*, 20 Feb. 1979, 18, this was one of the few interventions relating to higher education in the referendum campaign.

⁹³ Andrew McPherson and Guy Neave, *The Scottish Sixth: A Sociological Analysis of Sixth-Year Studies and the Changing Relationship between School and University in Scotland* (Windsor, 1976); *THES*, 6 Aug. 1976, 3.

⁹⁴ Paterson, *Scottish Education in the Twentieth Century*, 162–3; W. Marker, 'The Robbins Report and teacher education in Scotland', *Scottish Educational Review*, 26 (1994), 41–50; W. Marker and C.D. Raab, 'Advise and construct: the expansion of the Scottish Colleges of Education in the 1960s', *Scottish Educational Review*, 25 (1993), 3–16; Elizabeth Perrot, 'A break with tradition: Stirling University's plans for the preparation of graduate teachers', *Scottish Educational Studies*, 1 (1967–9), 19–24; Stanley Nisbet, 'The study of education in Scotland', *Scottish Educational Studies*, 1 (1967–9), 8–18.

accredited by the CNAAC, in the Central Institutions, also provided an argument for integration.⁹⁵

A second integrationist argument proceeded on a deeper cultural level. This suggested that Scottish needs were not well-catered for by the UGC and that it was part of an insidious Anglicisation that undermined elements of the Scottish system.⁹⁶ This was a nationalist argument but it was voiced by those outside the SNP, such as the educationalist Professor Nigel Grant, a Labour member, who feared that without an Assembly, Scottish education would be smothered by 'a provincial, outdated and narrowly specialised English system'.⁹⁷ This was a familiar reheating of the debate over the Davie thesis about Scottish higher education since the union, but it had particular salience in the devolution period. Although it is doubtful that the UGC worked towards Anglicisation, the integration argument was an intriguing one. It required the universities to defend in an explicit manner their British linkages without, if possible, revealing their contempt for the SED.⁹⁸ It also brought many key issues

⁹⁵ University of Edinburgh Archives, UGC/V/75(1), 'Edinburgh University and Devolution in Scotland', paper by the Rector's Assessor [Allan Drummond], March 1975.

⁹⁶ Bell and Grant, *Patterns of Education*, 110.

⁹⁷ *Scotsman*, 8 Feb. 1979, 7 and an editorial, 'Educational Stimulus', 12.

⁹⁸ Contempt that was of very long standing, see I.G.C. Hutchison, 'The Scottish Office and the Scottish Universities, c.1930–c. 1960', in Jennifer Carter and Donald Withrington (eds), *Scottish Universities: Distinctiveness and Diversity* (Edinburgh, 1992), 67–78; W.H. Walsh 'Discussion', in J.N. Wolfe (ed.), *Government and Nationalism in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1969), 120–2; R.E. Bell, 'The

to the forefront of the debate and exposed the way in which Scottish-university leaders had an ambiguous attitude to the rest of the Scottish education system, something that they found difficult to hide at certain points in the debate.

The integrationist argument was, on occasion, challenged. Indeed, it was unkindly paraphrased by James Drever, Principal of the University of Dundee, who argued that 'putting the running of nursery schools and research into nuclear physics under the same management is ... absurd'.⁹⁹ There were different levels of aspiration for 'integration'. The SED worked through the possibilities for ways in which post-school institutions could be brought together in Scotland. One additional feature in the context was the reform of local government in Scotland in 1975 and, in particular, the creation of large regional authorities. In some models suggested by the SED these could be given significant responsibility for advanced further education, but the SED were aware that there would be resistance to this idea in the Colleges. The ideal that the SED aspired to was the creation of a Higher Education Commission through which funding for the Colleges, Central Institutions and Universities could be channelled. This would bring advantages of coordination and manage potential duplication in a city like Aberdeen, where there was a University, a Central Institution, a College of Education and FE Colleges. The SED recognised, reluctantly, however, that this was out of reach because of the lack of appetite for

institutional structure', in A. Mitchell and G. Thomson (eds), *Higher Education in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1987), 26–7.

⁹⁹ James Drever, 'The Scottish universities and devolution', in *Scottish Universities and Devolution*, 7.

devolving the universities. They did not want to bring the universities under direct control and the Commission would operate as a buffer in the same way that the UGC did. They were also aware that the universities feared separation from other UK universities, a 'possible lowering of prestige and standards' and a 'fear of academic isolation' that had 'some substance'. They lamented that the devolution debate had actually set back the possible integration of post-school education in Scotland.¹⁰⁰ The presence of bodies supportive of devolving the universities troubled some Scottish university leaders and led them to worry that the government would yield to pressure.¹⁰¹ These ranged from the EIS and the National Union of Students to the STUC, the Transport and General Workers Union in Scotland and the Scottish Labour Parliamentary Group.¹⁰²

One unusually clear statement of support for devolving the universities came from a group of academics at the University of Dundee. This is the only such example

¹⁰⁰ NRS, ED26/1281, SED paper on 'Administrative Structure of Higher Education in Scotland', no date but c. late 1975.

¹⁰¹ University of Dundee Archives, RU525/42/6/7, Burnett to Drever, 18 Mar. 1976.

¹⁰² University of Stirling Archives, UA/A/8/5/1, John Pollock, General Secretary of the EIS, 'Devolution and Scottish Education'; TNA, CAB198/372, Summary of comments on Cmnd 6348 from bodies operating in the educational field; Memo from Michael Quinlan, Reactions to Cmnd 6348; CAB198/426, Cabinet Ministerial Committee on Devolution and Policy, Reactions to Cmnd 6348, Devolution of the Universities, Note by the Minister of State, Privy Council Office (Smith), 14 Jun 1976; see UGC7/1089 for another copy; *TESS*, 11 Jun. 1976, 104; 31 Dec. 1976, 24; UGC7/1089, Gordon Brown to Millan, 23 Nov. 1976, enclosing his 'Devolution and the Scottish universities'.

encountered in the archival research for this article. The argument that they put forward in April 1976 placed emphasis on universities as institutions that have a significant impact on their localities and on Scotland as a whole. Indeed, their primary impact was Scottish, as opposed to British.¹⁰³ The paper went on to argue that there was no contradiction between Scottishness and the international role of universities. Indeed, they argued, the wider contribution of the Scottish universities could only be enriched by 'a harmonious relationship with their local communities and educational background'. The paper went on to refute arguments about Scottish devolution necessarily incubating threats to academic freedom and autonomy, and suggested that devolution could be accompanied by continued access to the UK-wide research councils.¹⁰⁴ Predictably, this paper did not secure universal agreement in Dundee. The academics behind it came from departments across the university. It is interesting to note that of the 35 signatories cited in the version of the paper sent to the Scottish Office, 28 were medics, scientists, mathematicians or engineers.¹⁰⁵ This is a striking contrast to opinion and rhetoric from other Scottish

¹⁰³ University of Dundee Archives, RU525/28/6/1, 'Devolution and the Scottish Universities', Apr. 1976.

¹⁰⁴ University of Dundee Archives, RU525/28/6/1, 'Devolution and the Scottish Universities', Apr. 1976. This arrangement is, largely, what transpired after 1993.

¹⁰⁵ NRS, ED26/2065, A.J.O. Cruickshank to J. Gilmour (Scottish Office), 15 Apr. 1976, with the signed paper appended.

universities. The Principal was worried 'about the publicity being gained by people 'with the wrong views about devolution and the universities'.¹⁰⁶

Devolution: student opinion

Student opinion on the question is difficult to discern. As we have seen, at St Andrews there were some clear expressions of support for devolution. At other universities the evidence of student newspapers is more equivocal. Devolution was only one of a number of issues exercising students in the mid-1970s. At Aberdeen, for example, there was an occupation of the administration building in support of disinvestment from Apartheid South Africa.¹⁰⁷ In Edinburgh, there was a controversy over the attempts – ultimately unsuccessful – by the university leadership to clip the wings of student Rectors.¹⁰⁸ Also running through the period was the awkward relationship between the NUS and the Scottish student community.¹⁰⁹ The NUS, was

¹⁰⁶ University of Dundee Archives, RU525/28/6/1, Prof I.R.C. Batchelor (Psychiatry) to Drever, 2 Mar. 1976; Drever to Batchelor, 3 Mar. 1976; Cruickshank to Drever, 10 Mar. 1976; *THES*, 7 May 1976, 3; see also *TESS*, 14 May 1976, 2;

¹⁰⁷ *Gaudie*, 26 Oct. 1977, 1; 2 Nov. 1977, 1.

¹⁰⁸ *Student*, 15 May 1975, 1; 30 Oct. 1975, 1; 27 Nov. 1975, 1, 22 Apr. 1976, 1; 14 Oct. 1976, 1; since 1971 there had been two student rectors, Jonathan Wills and Gordon Brown; Paul Routledge, *Gordon Brown: The Biography* (London, 1998), 41–63; Gordon Brown, *My Life, Our Times* (London, 2017), 47–54.

¹⁰⁹ Mike Day, 'The National Union of Students and devolution', in Jodi Burkett (ed.), *Students in Twentieth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Basingstoke, 2017), 129–54; *Glasgow University Guardian*, 13 Feb. 1975, 12; 4 Dec. 1975, 2; 27 Jan. 1977, 3; 10 Mar. 1977, 3; *Student*, 9 Feb. 1978, 1; *THES*, 5 Nov. 1976, 3; 17 Jun. 1977, 28; 4 Nov. 1977, 28; 25 Aug. 1978, 8; *Scotsman*, 7 Feb. 1979.

strongly in favour of devolution in a general sense and it was argued that this represented the broad support for devolution among younger people.¹¹⁰ Student newspapers of the period give a certain amount of space to pro-devolution activity and editorial opinion was broadly in favour of devolution of the universities.¹¹¹ A common argument was that the universities could be made more accountable if responsibility for them was devolved, there was approval of the idea of a Scottish UGC and the argument in favour of integration of the Scottish education system was frequently articulated.¹¹² There were attempts to give both sides of the debate: in the *Glasgow University Guardian*, a classic 'Yes/No' feature appeared just prior to the referendum. The 'Yes' contributor emphasised democracy in a positive manner and the 'No' writer stressed bureaucracy in a negative way.¹¹³ Even where there were unsophisticated tests of opinion, the results were inconclusive. A vote taken at a General Meeting of Aberdeen students revealed a majority for devolution; whereas an opinion poll of 100 Glasgow students showed a plurality for the status quo, but a large constituency of the undecided and uninterested.¹¹⁴ At a more institutional level

¹¹⁰ See a letter to the *Scotsman* from the future scholar of Scottish education, Lindsay Paterson, 13 Jan. 1979.

¹¹¹ *Glasgow University Guardian*, 1 May 1975, 8; *Gaudie*, 4 Feb. 1976, 1; 25 Feb. 1976, 1; *Student*, 16 Jan, 1975, 2.

¹¹² Kevin Duffy, 'Devolution: the Universities' role examined', *Glasgow University Guardian*, 4 Dec. 1975, 4; see also 1 May 1975, 1;

¹¹³ *Glasgow University Guardian*, 27 Jan. 1979, 3; there was some follow-up correspondence from each side, 10 Feb. 1979, 2; 24 Feb. 1979, 2.

¹¹⁴ *Gaudie*, 9 Mar. 1977, 3; *Glasgow University Guardian*, 10 Feb. 1979, 5.

the NUS, unlike the AUT, was strongly in favour of the devolution of responsibility for higher education in Scotland. Their view did evolve and had some nuance.¹¹⁵ They were not impressed by the idea of a Scottish UGC, although they argued for control of the system by the Scottish Assembly. They were critical of the government's terse statements in the devolution White Papers and felt that they were a missed opportunity to define a 'comprehensive' restructuring of post-school education in Scotland, along integrationist lines.¹¹⁶ They argued for a national body to oversee all forms of higher education, as this would help to break down the binary divide, to which they expressed strong opposition. They argued that the Scottish system had grown in an incoherent way and was, in fact, divided into three sections: universities, Central Institutions and local authority colleges of higher education, like Napier in Edinburgh and Glasgow College of Technology, and the SED-controlled teacher training colleges.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ *TESS*, 21 Mar 1975, 3; 20 Feb. 1976, 2; 10 Sep. 1976, 2

¹¹⁶ University of Dundee Archives, A56/148/4/6, Stewart McIntosh (Scottish Chairman, NUS) to Drever, 8 Feb. 1977, enclosing two papers, the second of which was very critical of Cmnd 6585.

¹¹⁷ TNA, UGC7/1088, NUS, Scottish Executive, 'Devolution and the future of Scottish post-school education: a discussion paper', March 1975; NRS, ED26/1634, Note of meeting between the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State and NUS (Scotland), 6 Sep. 1974; ED26/2004, Doug Harrison (Chairman NUS (Scotland)), to William Ross, 29 Jan. 1975; *THES*, 21 Feb. 1971, 3; 21 Nov. 1975, 2; 20 Feb. 1976, 3; 19 Mar. 1976, 3; 10 Sep. 1976, 24; University of Dundee Archives, A56/145/1/3, Drever to Doug Harrison, 19 Mar. 1975.

The strong position of the Scottish universities in certain areas of academic study was used as evidence that the UK system brought advantages. The fact that Edinburgh and Glasgow provided 150 out of the 350 UK places for veterinary medicine was an example of the argument that devolution would threaten the Scottish universities' participation in the British 'big league'.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, a 'Scottish Universities Devolution Advisory Committee' – complained of as being misleading in its appearance of neutrality by university officials and the AUT – drew these arguments together.¹¹⁹ They argued that planning of post-16 Scottish education necessitated the devolution of the funding of Scottish Universities to the Assembly. Behind this lay the charge of the Anglocentricity and elitism of Scottish universities, which could only be dealt with by devolution. SUDAC suggested that the Principals were not representative of opinion in the universities.¹²⁰

Conclusion.

There are several ways to read the debate discussed in this article. The first is as a subset of the discussion of the mechanics of devolution. The devolution package, as it emerged in 1978, was quite limited; it could be argued that not devolving

¹¹⁸ TNA, CAB198/372, Notes for the Minister of State's visit to Scotland, 12/14 May 1975.

¹¹⁹ University of St Andrews Archives, UY UY 875/Watson (Acc1705) Box 210, D M Devine (St As Secy) to Lord Ballantrae (Chancellor), 5 Apr. 1976; Devine to Alex Main (SUDAC), 5 Mar. 1976; Main to Devine, 25 March 1976; Devine to Main, 29 Mar. 1976; University of Dundee Archives, RU525/28/6/1, Watson to Drever, 1 Mar. 1976; Drever to Watson, 2 Mar. 1976.

¹²⁰ *THES*, 19 Mar. 1976, 3; 26 Mar. 1976, 14; 9 Apr. 1976, 9; TNA, CAB198/372, Alan Main, SUDAC, to Ted Short, 19 Mar. 1976; TNA, ED188/311, Main to Short, 25 Sep. 1975.

responsibility for universities was part of this general limitation. Clearly, the strength of feeling on both sides was marked. The schemes put forward by the Labour government were not well thought through and, although devolution had been part of Scottish political discussion since the late 1960s, realisation seemed unlikely. Both Labour and Conservative governments found ways of consigning it to the margins. Things changed after the 1974 elections and devolution moved to centre stage. Thus, Scottish institutions were faced, for the first time in nearly a century, with the prospect of what seemed like a fundamental change in the terms and conditions of the Union. Our view of the 1978 scheme is mediated by awareness of the Scotland Acts of 1998, 2012 and 2016, which have created a more powerful devolved Parliament. Seen in the context of the time, however, devolution was a profound prospect for many, both supporters and opponents. This can help to explain the reactions of opponents of devolution.

The matter also concerned the place of the universities in wider Scottish culture and identity. They included among their number some of the most ancient Scottish institutions and the most exciting new creations. There was an identifiable Scottish university tradition, based on breadth of study, the importance of philosophy and claims of a tradition of open access. In reality, the universities had an ambivalent position in Scottish life and there was a growing critique of their role. That this was articulated by – among others – nationalists, increased the intensity of the debate and helps to explain some of the reactions to the devolution proposals. The fact that universities were not well integrated with the Scottish education system – although

there were links through the student body and the teaching profession – meant that this critique had a basis in reality. The existence of a distinct system of higher education through the Central Institutions was also important. They were funded via the SED and seemingly exempt from the nationalist critique, although they lacked many of the supposed qualities of the Scottish traditions of higher education. That they were also distinct from the English polytechnics – the so-called ‘public sector’ – was also important. Their lack of depth in the arts and humanities and the monotechnic structure of some, meant that they played a different role in the Scottish system.

To consider the matter purely in the context of the discussion on Scottish devolution, however, can provide only part of the explanation of the intensity of the debate. One of the principal concerns of those opposed to devolution connected to concepts of institutional autonomy and academic freedom. The two concepts are separate, but related, and they were often linked in the statements of those opposed to devolution. A variety of arguments were used, often using the word ‘parochial’, to explain opposition to devolution, hostility to potential governance by the SED and the apparent threat to research, especially in science. The overarching concern was with institutional autonomy, which was seen as fundamental to the operation of universities. The operation of the UGC – effectively the *status quo* – was seen as the guarantor of autonomy, although there was a line of argument that this was a naïve assumption.¹²¹ The UGC was a British-wide institution and many statements

¹²¹ Grant, ‘Devolution and the universities’, 15.

polarised Britishness and 'international' against Scottishness and 'parochial', but the *status quo* had wider implications. The veneration for the UGC and the unwillingness to accept the argument that its qualities could be replicated in Scotland played a part in the growth of a consensus that devolution constituted a threat to institutional autonomy and, ultimately, academic freedom. Wider changes in higher education policy in the 1970s contributed to this consensus in the short term, although it also played a part in its breakdown in the longer term. The end of the quinquennial system of funding and visitation – which turned out to be the first element of the breakdown of the UGC system, although this was not immediately evident, as a result of the economic pressures of the mid-1970s – also contributed to a defensive and conservative outlook among senior academics. Although the period from 1963 to 1981 is often seen as a 'golden age' of university funding and autonomy from the government, it is clear that the terms of the relationship were changing in the 1970s. This was not just a matter of budgetary cuts, although they were significant.¹²² The emasculation of the UGC, and the criticisms of it for its role in the 1981 crisis, changed views in a profound manner.¹²³ The ultimate replacement of the UGC with the Universities Funding Council represented a significant bolstering of the government in its relationship with the universities.

In Scotland, there was a further dimension to the narrative of University-Government relations in the period between the Scotland Bills of 1978 and 1998. The relatively

¹²² Carswell, *Government and the Universities*, ix.

¹²³ Maurice Kogan with David Kogan, *The Attack on Higher Education* (London, 1983).

uncontentious creation of a Scottish funding council, SHEFC, in 1993 seemed to indicate a reversal in the consensus among the academic establishment in Scotland.¹²⁴ The devolution that was feared in the 1970s, and which seemed indicative of ‘parochialism’, was no longer so dreadful in the 1990s. The themes of autonomy and integration that have been present in this article are relevant here too.¹²⁵ The UGC, perceived guarantor of autonomy, was long gone and Scottish universities were willing to accept a much weaker position *vis-à-vis* the state than they would have tolerated in the 1970s, although this brought its own controversies. Major players in the debate – such as the AUT – reversed their positions. The experience of the 1980s was transformative. The ‘autonomy’ that was appealed to in the 1980s and 1990s was Scottish autonomy rather than the autonomy of the Scottish universities.¹²⁶ The moment of the creation of SHEFC represented integration, however. The abolition of the binary divide in England was complicated by the fact that the writ of the National Advisory Body (NAB), which distributed funds

¹²⁴ The Scottish-Office files on this matter reveal a detailed discussion of operational technicalities, but few principled objections from the universities; although the Principals of Edinburgh and Aberdeen were the last to join the consensus. See, NRS, ED26/1892, 1893, 1894, 1895, 1896.

¹²⁵ Robert Berdahl, ‘Academic freedom, autonomy and accountability in British universities’, *Studies in Higher Education*, 15 (1990), 169–80; R. Eustace, ‘University autonomy: the 80s and after’, *Higher Education*, 48 (1994), 86–117; E.R. Tapper and B.G. Slater, ‘The changing idea of university autonomy’, *Studies in Higher Education*, 20 (1995), 59–71; B. R. Clark, ‘The many pathways of academic coordination’, *Higher Education*, 8 (1979), 251–67.

¹²⁶ J. Duffy, ‘Scottish autonomy and the universities’, *Radical Scotland*, no. 45 Jun./Jul., 1990, 18–19; Isobel Lindsay, ‘Claim of right for education’, *Scotsman*, 16 Nov. 1990.

to the English public sector, did not run in Scotland. The SED and local authorities were the key funders of Central Institutions and other colleges. The Scottish Office was faced with a dilemma when these institutions became universities: either, lose control of post-school education in Scotland, or, accept 'devolution' of the entire system. The political circumstances of the time meant that they could make a virtue of the latter, although this was not very convincing. Nevertheless, it demonstrated the extent to which the times had changed since the 1970s when the universities feared that devolution would be a profound threat to their autonomy.