

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of Lincoln
Unit of Assessment: 21 – Politics and International Studies
Title of case study: Elected bodies: promoting participation and representation
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>This case study encompasses research carried out within the participation and representation research group. It reflects a body of research on elected bodies at UK, devolved and local tiers, which has taken place within the School over the past twenty years. Among other things it has: provided the principal body of data collection and analysis on Scottish local elections; influenced debates on the (lack of) diversity of representatives, particularly women; and fed into debates about stimulating voting and enhancing political literacy. The research continues to develop and have an impact, for example with recent work on citizenship and political education and the role of public petitions in elected bodies.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>In recent years issues of representation and declining participation in conventional forms of politics have become a major preoccupation of policy makers and academics across liberal democracies. The School has a history of work on issues around participation and representation in elected bodies that dates back for more than twenty years, and in many cases predates the topicality of these issues. Successive cohorts of staff, all still working in the School, have generated a succession of projects which share an overriding concern with participation and representation, but which are also marked by cross-cutting issues, most notably in relation to the representation of women, electoral turnout, and the application of policies and policy lessons from different tiers of government across the UK and abroad. The research has been funded by a range of external bodies, including the Electoral Commission, the Nuffield Foundation and the British Academy, and has drawn on a wide variety of methods as appropriate to the various topics being examined.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Local elections in Scotland</i> – the collection and analysis of local government election results since 1994 (H. Bochel, with Denver of Lancaster University), drawing primarily upon returns from local authorities, but also on other sources, such as the media, including elements of funding from the Scottish Executive and the Electoral Commission. Where Scottish local elections are concerned there has been no official system for the collection and publication of these results, so that this research has essentially provided the key data and standard reference work on this topic. More recently Bochel and Denver have provided key data for the Electoral Commission, such as the Electoral Data Report for the 2012 Scottish council elections. • <i>Political representation and careers in local government</i> – gender issues and local government (C. Bochel, H. Bochel and Briggs, 1996-2001), and local government and political leadership (C. Bochel and H. Bochel, 2000-2006), including funding from the Nuffield Foundation, using secondary data from local authorities and others, and primary data including face-to-face and telephone interviews with councillors. This work, which has examined barriers to, and processes of, election and progression to leadership positions, has contributed, in particular, to debates on the representation of women. • <i>Petitions and petitioning</i> – research on the impact of petitions systems on representative democracy in a range of settings, including the Westminster Parliament, the devolved assemblies and local government (C. Bochel 2009-). Funded by the British Academy, the research has included interviews with petitioners, committee clerks and members of elected bodies at local, devolved and national levels. Whilst identifying significant challenges to the effective operation of petitions systems, the research concludes that they do have the potential to act as a significant input to representative democracy. • <i>Citizenship and participation</i> – research examining the role of citizenship education in combating the decline in political participation (Kisby 2008-2009). This research, partly-funded by an ESRC Postdoctoral Fellowship, focused on the Labour government’s introduction of compulsory citizenship education and on policy lessons from the four UK home nations, and also from Germany, France and the USA. Related research has

examined whether the electorate should be obliged to fulfil their civic duty through compulsory voting, based on the lessons that Britain could, potentially, learn from Belgium (Briggs, with Celis of the Free University of Brussels, 2007-10), while research by Parks has focused on social movements and civil society across the EU to determine whether civil society can act as a 'conveyor belt', supplementing electoral participation at the European level.

3. References to the research

Bochel, H. and Denver, D. (2007) *Scottish Council Elections 2007: Results and Statistics*, Lincoln: University of Lincoln.

Bochel, C. (2012) 'Petitions Systems: Contributing to Representative Democracy?', *Parliamentary Affairs*, volume 66, number 4, 798-825.

Bochel, C. and Briggs, J. (2000) 'Do Women Make a Difference', *Politics*, volume 20, number 2, 63-8.

Bochel, C. and Bochel, H. (2004) 'Modernisation or backward step? Women councillors and new decision-making structures in local government', *Local Government Studies*, volume 30, number 1, 36-50.

Briggs, J. and Celis, K. (2010) 'For and Against: Compulsory Voting in Britain and Belgium', *Social & Public Policy Review*, volume 4, number 1, 1-30.

Kisby, B. (2012) *The Labour Party and Citizenship Education: Policy Networks and the Introduction of Citizenship Lessons in Schools*, Manchester University Press.

4. Details of the impact

Local elections in Scotland: the research on the collection and analysis of local government election results in Scotland has in many respects become the standard reference work on the subject, so much so that the Electoral Commission has facilitated and supported this work for the 2007 and 2012 elections(1), while the Scottish Government itself purchases copies of the report, together with many Scottish councils. The research has been used in several Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament reports and analyses, including the *National Survey of Local Government Candidates*, in relation to who stands, the gender of candidates, and turnout(2). Findings in relation to candidate ordering on the ballot paper featured in the Scottish Government's response to the independent review of the 2007 elections(3), and recommendations in relation to turnout and the 'decoupling' of local and Scottish Parliament elections have been cited in debates in the Scottish Parliament (for example, (4)), with decoupling being introduced for the 2012 elections.

Political representation and careers in local government: related research on local councillors has had a particular impact in relation to findings regarding the under-representation of women and the barriers to their election and career progression. C. Bochel and H. Bochel's research has been cited in reports by bodies such as the Office of Deputy Prime Minister, the Department for Communities and Local Government, and the Commission for Councillors. It has also been taken up by groups campaigning for better representation of women. For example, their explanation for the low numbers of female councillors formed part of the evidence base for the Institute for Social Change report on civic life for the Equality and Human Rights Commission, and their research was cited extensively in the Centre for Women and Democracy's examination of *Leadership and Gender in Local Government 2009*(5). This research has also had international impact, featuring in a study of gender quota systems by the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, while the work of Bochel and Briggs has been cited by groups promoting greater political participation by women, including *One World Action*, around women transforming political spaces, and the *Initiative for Inclusive Security*, on promoting women candidates in local government in Rwanda(6).

Petitions and petitioning: research has fed into debates about the future of the e-petitions system introduced by the Coalition government, with C. Bochel being invited to participate in a Backbench Business Committee/Hansard Society seminar on this topic at Westminster. Her research featured prominently in the Hansard Society's interim report, *What next for e-petitions?*, which referred to her conclusions in relation to the potential benefits, but also the challenges of using petitions to

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empower individuals, as well as her work on the use of petitions in the Scottish Parliament(7). She submitted evidence on petitions to the House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee's inquiry, *Revisiting Rebuilding the House: the impact of the Wright Reforms*, and was invited to give oral evidence to the Committee. Her evidence also informed parts of the Committee's questioning of others, including Tony Wright, and featured prominently in the Committee's report, which accepted and made a number of recommendations in response to her criticisms of the current system(8). This research has also had significant impact beyond Westminster. It has been used in reviews into the use of petitions in local government, and the National Assembly for Wales. It is now generating international interest, featuring for example, in a guide for the development of e-petitions by *America Speaks*, a long-established Washington-based NGO which promotes participation and deliberative democracy, and in an article by a Canadian Member of Parliament, supporting a motion in the Canadian House of Commons to introduce an electronic petitions system, in an in-house journal for Canadian legislators(9).

Citizenship and participation: Kisby submitted evidence to the Youth Citizenship Commission, established by the UK Government in 2007 to promote youth participation in the political process, and participated in a one-day conference on 'Revitalising Politics' held in Parliament. He has also, for example, established links with *Shout Out UK*, a national media social enterprise run by and for young people, and was influential in persuading them to pursue a campaign to make political education a compulsory part of the national curriculum'. His work (with Sloam) on citizenship education featured in a report on student participation commissioned by the library of the Canadian Parliament(10). Locally, the School has a long-established relationship with the democratic participation teams in local government within Lincolnshire, and, for example, Briggs has worked closely with Lincolnshire County Council's Participation Team for a number of years, including part of the Council's Participation Conference to an audience of local government officials, policy makers and representatives of pressure groups. As part of an ongoing project, staff in this research group, together with others from the School, have been working with Lincoln City Council on a number of projects on enhancing democratic accountability and participation within the City, the area in which the University arguably has its most immediate and daily impact.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Commissioned to collect data on 2012 Scottish Council Elections by the Electoral Commission c. £12,000 (Hugh Bochel PI), www.electoralcommission.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/150534/Lincoln-report-on-Scotland-local-elections.pdf and www.electoralcommission.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/150517/Scotland-elections-report-May-2012.pdf.
2. Scottish Government (2008) *National Survey of Local Government Candidates, 2007*, www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/221835/0059630.pdf; Scottish Parliament Information Centre Briefing (2008) *Local Government Elections 2007: SPICe briefing 08/12*, www.scottish.parliament.uk/Research%20briefings%20and%20fact%20sheets/SB08-12.pdf.
3. Scottish Government (2008) *Scottish Elections 2007: Scottish Government Response to the Independent Review of the Scottish Parliamentary and Local Government Elections 3 May 2007*, www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/216411/0058058.pdf.
4. Scottish Parliament, *Official Report, Debate* 9 October 2008, John Wilson MSP, www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28862.aspx?r=4820&i=40843&c=0.
5. Institute for Social Change for the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2010) *Civic Life: Evidence Base for Triennial Review*, www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/triennial_review/civic_life_evidence_base_for_the_triennial_review.pdf. Centre for Women and Democracy (2009) *Leadership and Gender in Local Government 2009*, www.cfd.org.uk/uploads/pdfs/Leaders09Final.pdf.
6. European Parliament, Directorate-General Internal Policies of the Union (2008) *Electoral Gender Quota Systems and their Implementation in Europe*, www.europarl.europa.eu/document/activities/cont/200903/20090310ATT51390/20090310ATT51390EN.pdf; Initiative for Inclusive Security (2008) *Engendering Rwanda's*

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Decentralization: Supporting Women Candidates for Local Office,
www.inclusivesecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/1091_engendering_rwandas_decentralization.pdf.

7. Hansard Society (2012) *What Next for E-Petitions*,
www.hansardsociety.org.uk/blogs/press_releases/archive/2012/05/18/parliament-must-take-over-e-petitions-says-hansard-society.aspx.
8. House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, Third Report of 2013-14, *Revisiting Rebuilding the House: the impact of the Wright reforms: vol. 1 Report together with formal minutes and oral evidence*, www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmpolcon/82/82.pdf.
9. America Speaks, *Government Sponsored E-Petitions: a guide for development and implementation*, 2013, americaspeaks.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/EPetitionPaperFinal.pdf.
10. Ben Kisby, 'Why Politics lessons are important', www.shoutoutuk.org/2013/01/31/why-politics-lessons-are-important/; Library of Parliament (2010) *Student Council Participation and Broader Civic Engagement: a preliminary study*, www.parl.gc.ca/Content/LOP/ResearchPublications/cp2-e.pdf.