

Institution: The University of Edinburgh

Unit of Assessment: 23 Sociology

6: Nationalism and National Identity: Informing Political Life

1. Summary of the impact

The members of the Nationalism and National Identity group at the University of Edinburgh have successfully brought their research into the public domain in Scotland, the UK and internationally, influencing the 'public conversations' concerning nationalism and national identity. For example, in November 2008, group member David McCrone was named in the *Scotsman* newspaper as one of 12 'academics [who] are helping to shape our political future'. Other evidence of impact includes:

1. research insights from our group being sought out by the then Prime Minister Gordon Brown and the 2010-2015 UK Coalition Government's Cabinet Office;
2. the appointment of a group member to a high-level governmental advisory group on tackling sectarianism;
3. detailed discussion of one aspect of our research at First Minister's Questions in the Scottish Parliament.

2. Underpinning research

Nationalism and national identity can be hotly debated issues. The Edinburgh group aims to produce impartial and evidence-based knowledge, which is publicly available but produced on its own terms. The study of nationalism and national identity has long been framed by debates about how ancient or recent these phenomena are, and whether they express enduring aspects of human nature, or historically contingent configurations of social life. Our research centres on the idea that nationalism and national identity are not fixed properties of social groups, but rather ways of making claims on and about the world: people lay claim to an array of identities, institutions and ideas in national ways. This perspective lets us get around intractable theoretical puzzles, and instead focus on how nationalism gets done: we examine empirically the complex and variable ways in which people lay claim to nations and national identities.

In two large research projects funded by the Leverhulme Trust (see section 3), we explored this issue in the 'natural laboratory' formed by the part-fragmented multinational state that is the United Kingdom. Bechhofer & McCrone (eds) (2009) brings together the key findings of this research, also disseminated in many other publications. These findings include:

- (1) That there is minimal ideological and policy preference divergence between Scotland and England, and that connections between national identity, party support, and constitutional preferences are relatively loose in Scotland.
- (2) That Scots tend to be able to take Scottish identity for granted, while English identity tends to be more problematic for the English.
- (3) That national identity can be understood as a mode of perception and interaction conditioned by situational cues.
- (4) That key institutions such as universities and banks play an important role in mediating and focusing national identity.
- (5) That news coverage in the UK appears to be fragmenting along national lines.

Findings such as these have generated multiple international speaking invitations and international visitors to our group, especially from places in which the issues being researched are particularly pertinent, such as Catalonia, Euskadi (the Basque Country), Flanders and Canada.

Around this core are a range of mutually reinforcing research projects among the wider group, *inter alia*: Stanley's (University of Edinburgh [UoE] since 2005) current ESRC Professorial Fellowship, 'Whites Writing Whiteness'; Kennedy's (UoE since 2000) and Riga's (UoE 2008-10 and 2011 onwards) ongoing research into the influence of domestic ethnic politics in the US on a century of US foreign policy in central and eastern Europe; and Hearn's (UoE since 1998) work on theories of nationalism and on the role of national identity in an embattled Scottish banking sector.

The research underpinning the three specific impacts focussed on in section 4 below is:

- (1) **McCrone's** (UoE since 1975) research on the Leverhulme projects, which he directed. Much of this research was joint with Frank Bechhofer (UoE since 1965; now Emeritus).

(2) **Rosie's** (UoE since 2002) long-running work on religious identities and sectarianism reflected in his monograph (next section) and co-authored *Sectarianism in Scotland* (2004) with Steve Bruce and others. He argues that far from being a matter of 'structural inequality', sectarianism in Scotland has retreated into a matter of residual prejudice and bigotry – and can be effectively tackled as such.

(3) **Bond's** (UoE since 2004) ESRC-funded research into graduate migration and retention, which reveals the complex ways in which intra-state national boundaries are significant for the migration and identities of graduates.

3. References to the research

F. Bechhofer & D. McCrone (2008), 'Talking the Talk: National Identity in England and Scotland' in A. Park, et al. (eds), *British Social Attitudes: The 24th report*, Sage; available from HEI.

F. Bechhofer & D. McCrone (eds) (2009), *National Identity, Nationalism and Constitutional Change*, Palgrave Macmillan; available from HEI.

R. Bond, K. Charsley & S. Grundy (2010) 'An Audible Minority: Migration, Settlement and Identity among English Graduates in Scotland', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 36 (3), 483-499; DOI: [10.1080/13691830903357983](https://doi.org/10.1080/13691830903357983). Can be sourced from REF2.

R. Bond (2011) 'The National Identities of Minorities in Scotland: Anticipating the 2011 Census', *Scottish Affairs*, 75: 1-24; can be sourced from REF2.

D. McCrone & F. Bechhofer (2010) 'Claiming National Identity', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 33 (6), 921-948; DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01419870903457199>. Can be sourced from REF2.

M. Rosie (2004) *The Sectarian Myth in Scotland: Of Bitter Memory and Bigotry*, Palgrave MacMillan; available from HEI.

M. Rosie (2013) 'Outside the Hothouse: Perspectives Beyond the Old Firm', in John Flint & John Kelly (eds), *Bigotry, Football and Scotland*, Edinburgh University Press; available from HEI.

Underpinning research funding included two grants from the Leverhulme Trust to teams led by McCrone: *Nations and Regions* (1999-2005: £1.1 million) and *National Identity, Citizenship and Social Inclusion* (2006-11: £795K). The research by Bond on Scottish graduate migration was funded by a grant to him, Charsley and Grundy from ESRC (2005-7: £51.5K).

4. Details of the impact

Our group has achieved its impact through three main mechanisms: (1) Via the University of Edinburgh's **Institute of Governance**, co-directed by McCrone and now Rosie, which has been both an engine of research (eg the Leverhulme work was based there) and a platform for consultation and briefing for wider public audiences. It is committed to informing wider public, policy and political debate, and has a strong track record of liaising and working with the Scottish Government, the Scottish Parliament, MSPs and parliamentary staff, Scottish and UK civil servants, business, the media and others. (2) Via the long-running journal **Scottish Affairs**, which publishes work which spans academia, journalism and commentary from professional life (freely available online since May 2009). It has become the leading publication forum for discussion of Scottish current affairs and serious debate about the country's future, and from 2014 will be published by Edinburgh University Press. Bond, McCrone and Rosie are all Associate Editors. (3) Via **High-profile ad hoc events** such as the 2009 Institute of Governance conference, *Ten Years of the Scottish Parliament* (which included a recorded debate broadcast on BBC Radio Scotland), and a Bilbao meeting in 2013 in which McCrone gave the keynote speech and shared the platform with the Prime Minister of Euskadi (the Basque country) and the Speaker of the Basque Parliament.

For example, for around 15 years, McCrone and colleagues (often in conjunction with the Scottish Centre for Social Research) have provided around three to four annual 'Chatham House rule' round-table research briefings/discussions at the Institute of Governance [5.1]. Each of these briefings typically involves around 20 delegates, for example from organisations such as government bodies, the Scottish Parliament, private companies, NGOs (eg the Electoral Reform Society and the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations), etc. The briefings provide a non-partisan environment for knowledge exchange, including on controversial matters such as national identity and attitudes to independence. For instance, they have been attended by personnel from both sides of the independence debate: the 'Better Together' and 'Yes Scotland' campaigns.

Activities such as these briefings (and also, eg, an international interns programme linking the Institute of Governance with the Scottish Parliament) have had the effect of making our research well known in Scottish political/policy and media circles. Ad hoc events, international visitors to our group and its publications have also brought this research into the public domain in other countries, especially those in which similar issues of sub-state nationalism are important. Evidence of this impact includes:

- Multiple invitations to brief political figures (eg the Premier of Québec in January 2013) and to address or brief public/policy bodies (eg the House of Commons' Welsh Affairs Committee, Royal College of Defence Studies, the Scottish Human Rights Commission, Sardinian parliamentarians and civil servants, Danish civil servants). Examples of public bodies that regularly seek to be briefed by us include the UK Delegation of the Government of Catalonia and the UK Délégation Générale of Québec.
- Group members are frequently approached by the press to give their views on current events, or their research is quoted in newspaper articles, both in the UK (eg *Daily Telegraph*, *Sunday Post*, *Scotsman*, *Herald*) and internationally (eg the *Melbourne Age*, Ireland's *Sunday Business Post*, the Spanish press agency, *Europa Press*). For an indicative set of examples, see an analysis of the press coverage of the work of David McCrone, prepared with the help of the University of Edinburgh Press and Public Relations Office [5.2]. Group members are also asked, eg, to be interviewed on or otherwise advise TV and radio programmes (eg on ITV, Spain's RTVE network, the South African Broadcasting Commission and Radio 4).

Three indicative examples of our group's impact on the 'public conversations' concerning nationalism and national identity are:

(1) McCrone's research being sought out by Gordon Brown and the Cabinet Office; testimony to the impact of his research on Scottish politics and the Scottish media.

McCrone's Chatham House rule briefings have made him prominent in Scottish political life. In 2008, triggered by an article written with Bechhofer for the 24th *British Social Attitudes* report (see section 3), McCrone was sought out, via a Minister in the Scottish Government, by then Prime Minister Gordon Brown, who has a strong interest in questions of national identity in Britain. McCrone was asked by Brown to throw light on various issues about social and geographic mobility in Scotland and the distribution of kin relations across the Scottish/English border; the result was an exchange of handwritten letters between McCrone and Brown. In April 2013, McCrone was asked to provide a detailed briefing on questions of national identity and constitutional change to the Coalition Government's Cabinet Office, which he did in a two-hour session with top civil servants in June 2013 [5.3].

In November 2008, McCrone was named in the *Scotsman* as one of 12 'academics [who] are helping to shape our political future' [5.4]. [Text removed] commented in August 2013 on the impact on Scottish politics and the Scottish media of McCrone's research: 'Academics have many goals. One, perhaps, is to sustain intellectual rigour while attaining relevance in wider society. Professor David McCrone has consistently achieved both. His research provides acute, insightful analysis which reflects society and politics back to all of us. It has been widely cited and deployed by leading political figures and the media' [5.5].

(2) Rosie appointed to Scottish Government's Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism.

In response to continuing concerns over Protestant-Catholic sectarian conflict, the Scottish Government set up this group in 2012 to advise Ministers on all issues bearing on sectarianism in Scotland. Among the tasks given to the group is to identify appropriate ways of combating sectarianism at a community level, and it makes decisions on the funding of proposed projects from community groups and other bodies, with £3m of funding allocated by June 2013 [5.6]. It also commissions original research, for instance a £100k project on the community impact of marches and parades in Scotland, commissioned in January 2013 [5.7]. Rosie was appointed to help 'ensure evidence is rigorously challenged before it is accepted' because of his 'longstanding research interest in sectarianism' (see section 3) [5.8]. His role includes briefing Scotland's Cabinet Ministers and senior civil servants. According to [text removed] the Advisory Group plays 'a vital role in shaping our future policy on sectarianism by assessing evidence, evaluating current and future projects and providing advice to [...] Ministers on sectarian matters'. [Text removed] notes Rosie's 'considerable knowledge and experience' in the field of sectarianism [5.9]. Rosie

has, eg, also been invited to chair the official launch event of the Scottish Government's Action on Sectarianism web portal.

(3) Bond's research discussed at First Minister's Questions, Scottish Parliament.

In a context of public concern about demographic trends in Scotland (population decline, 'brain drain', etc.), the Scottish Executive and ESRC funded six research projects on these topics, including a case study of graduate migration and retention led by Ross Bond. A resulting 2010 publication in the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (see section 3) was picked up by the *Sunday Times Scotland* and then repeated in the *Scotsman* in April 2010. Both stories chose to focus narrowly on the observation in the article that anti-English sentiments expressed toward undergraduates from England could weaken the capacity of Scotland to retain highly skilled English undergraduates. This was presented in the newspapers as evidence of a problem of anti-English racism in Scottish universities. Bond promptly wrote a letter, published in the *Scotsman* the next day, correcting misrepresentations of the research, and making clear that while the research identified some anti-English sentiments, these did not appear to be significant factors in English students' decisions about where to settle after graduation, and that many English students came to feel an affinity with Scotland. The following day the whole issue was raised in the Scottish Parliament at First Minister's Questions, by MSP Ian McKee. In the ensuing exchange, First Minister Alex Salmond discussed the original research article and referred in detail to Bond's letter to the *Scotsman* dispelling the errors in the press coverage [5.10].

Note re testimony: Bonney (author of the *Scotsman* article), [text removed] are reporters on the impact, not involved in the process of its delivery (except via [text removed] role as a Minister advised by Rosie).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Items marked 'on file' are available on request from the University of Edinburgh. In case of broken links, PDFs of weblinks available at: www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/REF2014REF3B/UoA+23

5.1 Sample anonymised attendance lists at 'Chatham House Rules' briefings (on file).

5.2 Analysis of press coverage of the work of David McCrone, prepared with the help of the University of Edinburgh Press and Public Relations Office, available at www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/REF2014REF3B/UoA+23

5.3 Email invitation to McCrone from the Cabinet Office, 18/04/13 (on file).

5.4 N. Bonney, 'How Academics Are Helping to Shape Our Political Future', *Scotsman*, 30 Nov 2008: <http://www.scotsman.com/news/how-academics-are-helping-to-shape-our-political-future-1-1146583>

5.5 Email from Political Editor, BBC Scotland, 06/08/13 (on file).

5.6 £3 million funding of anti-sectarian projects 'following a robust assessment process supported by the independent expert group set up to look at sectarian issues in Scotland': <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2013/06/sectarianfund100613>

5.7 Tender document for 'Research on the community impact of marches and parades in Scotland': <http://www.government-online.net/research-on-the-community-impact-of-marches-and-parades-in-scotland/>

5.8 Rosie's role in ensuring that 'evidence is rigorously challenged before it is accepted': <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2012/09/sectarianism-27092012>

5.9 Letter from Scottish Government's Minister for Community Safety, 06/07/12, inviting Rosie to serve on the Advisory Group (on file).

5.10 Bond et al's migrant study raised at First Minister's Questions (S3F-2329), minute at online Scottish Parliament Archives: <http://archive.scottish.parliament.uk/business/businessBulletin/bb-10/bb-04-13d.htm>