

CONSULTATION OR CONFRONTATION?

*The Campaign to save the Scottish Colleges of Education**

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One of the most passionate debates in Scotland this year has centred on the threatened closure of four of its ten Colleges of Education. Not, one might think, an issue of major public concern. Yet well over two hundred thousand people have signed petitions, and several thousands have demonstrated. The story has been given extensive coverage in the press and on television. The strength of feeling has taken everyone by surprise. In this paper I want to discuss the campaign and the reasons for its forcefulness. In doing so, I hope to illustrate some points about power and authority in our society.

The Secretary of State for Scotland, Mr Millan, published in May 1977 a second paper¹ on the future of Scotland's ten Colleges of Education. Four of these had been threatened with merger or closure in the original document published in the January of that year. In the revised proposals one of these, Craiglockhart, has now been reprieved and decisions on the other three have been deferred. It could be argued that these changes confirm the consultative nature of the original document. Such a response would represent a naive view of decision-making procedures. These are frequently presented as analytical processes conducted on the basis of rationality topped up by principle, whereas in most policy situations they involve hard bargaining between power-groups in the resolution of conflicts. I shall argue in this analysis that the original proposals, the colleges' reactions and the May modifications provide a fascinating case-study of the operation of power-groupings in our society, all the more fascinating because the colleges, in themselves, are relatively powerless institutions. The sequence of events from January onwards provides an important example of central administration

*This paper was originally presented at a seminar in the Department of Social Administration, Edinburgh University, in May 1977.

being checked and brought up short by a range of strategies which ultimately forced a change of procedure and of policy. It also demonstrates vividly the dilemma of individuals torn between conflicting obligations and priorities.

Perhaps I should start by explaining why I have just asserted that the colleges are relatively powerless institutions. They are powerless because to date they have been largely restricted to one function — producing teachers. In Scotland they receive all their funds from one source — central government — and must expand or contract their intake of students in relation to the school population in accordance with instructions from the Scottish Education Department. The combination of low birth-rate and economic recession means that some cutbacks have been acknowledged as essential; so the phenomenon of central government's proposals on closures and mergers being not only vehemently but successfully challenged by institutions accustomed to compliance needs explanation. Of course, the most compliant individuals and institutions react when their livelihood and very existence are threatened. But Colleges in England have closed and merged with only whimpered protests. The success of the Scottish Colleges in mustering support and mounting a challenge which has left government and the central bureaucracy deeply embarrassed is a remarkable feat.

That the consultative nature of the original document was initially a polite convention is apparent from the time-scale imposed. The situation in England and the figures for live births in Scotland had provided ample warning that some trimming of the college sector was inevitable. A document setting out policy for the colleges was promised for September 1976 — indeed it was referred to in discussions as the September Review. The September Review never materialised. Throughout November and December there was cynical speculation as to the reason for the delay, and a number of press predictions — some remarkably accurate — as to the likely content. The document *Teacher Training from 1977 Onwards* was published on 17th January 1977. In it, the only direct reference to consultation was the following statement “the question whether one particular college can be incorporated in another or whether appropriate uses can be found for spare buildings depends to some extent on detailed information and advice not available to the Secretary of State at present but which should emerge from the process of consultation. The following paragraphs therefore do no more than set

out what seem to be possible courses of action on which the views of the various parties affected are invited.”² After an unexplained delay of several months, the various parties, which included, of course, not only the 10 institutions but the professional organisations and unions, ALCES, AHASCES, NALGO, and NUPE³ were given a bare six weeks — until February 28th — for making their submissions and mustering delegations. Genuine consultation does not operate within such a time schedule.

What were the proposals? Briefly, that six colleges, Moray House, Jordanhill, Hamilton, Dundee, Aberdeen and Notre Dame should survive, that two, Callendar Park and Craigie, should close and that two, Craiglockhart and Dunfermline, should merge, Craiglockhart with Moray House or Dundee, and Dunfermline with Dundee. As the briefest of concessions to an alternative scenario, item 59 acknowledged the possibility that either Callendar Park or Craigie could be saved at the expense of even more drastic cuts at Jordanhill or Moray House.

Why were these proposals challenged as totally unacceptable? Here I shall not argue the merits or demerits of individual college cases but draw attention to the very nature of the January document which, not only through its proposals, but in its very content and presentation, invited challenge and rejection. It is a document which lacks authority. The argument rests on statistics, but the statistics lack authority in that they are inconsistently presented, and the essential costings are totally absent. It lacks the authority of coherent argument; there are ambiguities, non-sequiturs and internal inconsistencies; for example, criteria for retention are applied to some colleges and the same criteria, equally applicable, ignored in relation to others. Its most fundamental flaw as an authoritative document, however, is that it operates in a different world of meaning from that inhabited by college staff and educationists. No note of educational aspiration is sounded, no regret for the curtailment of ambitious in-service plans, no reference to cherished values, no rhetoric of improved standards, if not as a present reality at least as a future hope. The very title of the document highlights these differences. It is called “*Teacher Training from 1977 Onwards*”. Now the term “Teacher Training” is associated with a historical past when the colleges were low status institutions inducting diligent working class aspirants into a craft. The term has been deliberately superseded in

professional discourse by the phrase ‘Teacher Education’. Using the phrase ‘Teacher Training’ ensured from the outset that the inter-action between policy maker and practitioner would *not* be perceived as “meaningful”.

How was this hostility towards the document and its proposals channelled and orchestrated? First, the colleges closed ranks as a system. The professional organisations under a strong lead from ALCES supported the retention of all ten colleges. The Committee of Principals also agreed to support the retention of all ten, in spite of the fact that this would probably mean disproportionate cuts in Jordanhill and Moray House staff. This solidarity has held up in the public domain in spite of the understandable tensions induced by the fact that Craigie’s survival threatens Jordanhill’s intake, and Dunfermline’s recalcitrance reduces the viability of Dundee.

The four threatened colleges then mounted campaigns designed to apply pressure on central government and to force a change of policy. Each college had a case for survival in terms of demographic and geographical factors, and in terms of its individual contribution to educational development. Conversely, the case against overlarge institutions had been stated as early as 1960 when a recommendation had been made by the Scottish Council for the Training of Teachers that no new college should be larger than 1000 — the current size of Moray House is 2,700 and of Jordanhill 3,400. Dunfermline was established in purpose-built accommodation at Cramond as recently as 1966. The proposed move to Dundee was perceived as nothing more than an attempt to cover for a major planning blunder. Dundee was built for 1,800 students, was formally opened only last year, and now has only 753 students on roll. The transfer of a captive group of students and staff would fill the embarrassing empty places. Every college had a rational case. The fact that they did not merely put forward the case in submissions which the Secretary of State had invited, but invoked every agency they could enlist in support of their cause, showed their suspicion that consultation was a mere formality designed to deflect resistance. That suspicion was enhanced when attempts to learn who had been consulted in advance of publication of the document and to obtain costings of the proposals were blocked.

What were the agencies involved? First, the press, television and radio. A spate of letters, articles, news items and press conferences ensured publicity not just in *The Times Educational*

Supplement but in *The Scotsman*, *The Daily Record*, *The Evening News*, *The Daily Express*. Craigie achieved not just a news slot on television but a full length programme which ended with the Principal, Peter McNaught, and the Chairman of ALCES, John Maxton, confronting the Secretary of State, Bruce Millan, in discussion — a Millan at this stage apparently unperturbed by individual college protest and with the politician's skill at handling argument. Viewers without a particular interest in educational issues might have switched off the worthy, balanced but unexciting Craigie documentary. Dunfermline College of Physical Education was able to exploit television more cunningly. The college mustered some of its nubile national and international athletes and arranged for them to be interviewed by a sports commentator on the Sunday afternoon programme 'Scotsport'. Not the damage Millan's proposals would inflict on Scottish education, but the damage to Scottish sport was the line taken! The college tapped the high ratings of a very popular programme.

Secondly, public opinion was roused through processions, demonstrations and petitions. Government is well able to ignore demonstrations; it knows that processions, particularly by students, can be counter productive. But the fact that each threatened college mustered between 35,000 and 100,000 signatures in support of survival — Callendar Park was the champion with 100,000 — could not be ignored with local elections imminent.

A third factor was the influence of the Roman Catholic Church. One of the threatened colleges, Craiglockhart, trains teachers for denominational schools. At the suggestion of merger with a non-denominational general college, the Roman Catholic hierarchy moved into the controversy. Cardinal Gray, in an unprecedented meeting at the College with Bishops from all over Scotland, came out in support of the College's continued existence in Edinburgh. The meeting of Bishops was well publicised on television and in the newspapers. The *Scottish Daily Express* had banner headlines proclaiming that the Sisters of the Sacred Heart were prepared to barricade themselves in the building. Every pulpit in the East and Centre of Scotland was mounted by a student or member of staff who delivered a five-minute set piece, inviting support for the College, signatures for the petition, fighting funds and letters to M.P.s. Though the hierarchy knew that no general attack on Catholic education

was being mounted, and though they were scrupulous at all public rallies in proclaiming their support not only for Craiglockhart but for all ten colleges, the Government was reminded both by these public actions and by behind-the-scene negotiations of the importance of the Roman Catholic vote. Indeed twenty per cent of Scots are Roman Catholics.

The most fascinating aspect of the campaign has been the fluctuation of the political battle, where parliamentary procedures and social legislation have been cleverly invoked to create the maximum harassment of the civil service and of the ministers it advises. Every threatened college has received the support of its local M.P. Callendar Park is in the constituency of Harry Ewing (Labour — Parliamentary Under Secretary), Craigie of George Younger (Conservative), Craiglockhart of Malcolm Rifkind (Conservative), and Dunfermline of Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Conservative). Moreover, the college student population is drawn from virtually every constituency and students have been mobilised to write to their M.P.s, thus spreading political awareness of this particular policy document. Questions began to be asked in the House not only by Conservatives seeking opportunities to needle the Government but by Labour members genuinely torn between party loyalty and commitment to constituency or religious affiliations. The most striking instance of this conflict was manifested by Harry Ewing who as a Parliamentary Under-Secretary never the less marched in a pro-Callendar Park demonstration.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton as Conservative M.P. for Cramond* has had no such conflicts to resolve. In support of Dunfermline he has shown remarkable ingenuity and persistence. As well as tabling approximately 100 questions in the House and contributing to all debates, he has —

- (a) put forward a private member's bill to change the name of the college from Dunfermline College of Physical Education to The Scottish College of Movement and Education (failed to obtain a second reading).
- (b) is mounting a charge of maladministration based on the Government's refusal to supply information, and on its giving inaccurate information and failing to consult its own experts

*Note that Dunfermline College, despite its name, is in Cramond, Edinburgh.

- (c) initiated the charges of sex discrimination being brought before the Equal Opportunities Board by the Scottish Physical Education Association
- (d) has threatened the Secretary of State with the Ombudsman if facilities for the handicapped are withdrawn at Cramond as the result of the College's move to Dundee.

At first the parliamentary attack was led by the opposition. A two-day debate in the Scottish Grand Committee* was forced on the Government on the 15th and 17th of February. M.P.s were lobbied by delegations from the colleges haunting the corridors of Westminster. At the end of the debate Mr McElhone, Under-Secretary of State, made a significant concession on behalf of his honourable friend, Mr Millan, stating that he "would like as many representations as possible from everyone concerned, including Members who have spoken this morning and those who have not. He will accept submissions after the 28th February, which is an extension of the time".⁴ At the end of the debate the Government faced the humiliation of being defeated 39 to 25, partly due to a sudden influx of English Conservative M.P.s. It is, of course, not without significance that Lord James Douglas-Hamilton is a Tory Whip. But two Labour M.P.s. voted against the proposals, Dennis Canavan (West Stirlingshire) and James Dempsey (Coatbridge & Airdrie).

The Government's discomfiture was increased by the ingenuity of Tam Dalyell, Labour M.P. for West Lothian, but unremitting in his opposition to the White Paper. He won an adjournment debate for the 1st March and chose the topic of the Scottish Colleges. Normal procedure is for the winner of such a half hour slot to speak to the questions he poses for a considerable amount of the allotted time. Tam Dalyell spoke for two minutes. "The first question is in relation to the costs of closing down Callendar Park and the alternative use, and the second question is whether it is sensible to do this for a college that exists in one of Scotland's major growth areas.

"I have here in my hands over 500 letters. They weigh together over four pounds. Many of my colleagues have exactly the same number of letters. This is evidence of why we should have a full reply from the Minister in 29 minutes tonight."

The hapless Frank McElhone was obviously appalled. "Look-

*This Committee comprises all Scottish M.P.s and concerns itself with Scottish affairs.

ing at the clock, I see that the time is fractionally after 10 p.m. I find myself in the unique position of having a full half hour, if that is the understanding of the Chair, in which to reply to the debate initiated by my hon. Friend, the Member for West Lothian. It is most unusual to have almost 30 minutes in which to reply."⁵ For thirty minutes he floundered and filibustered while Dalyell pressed him for specific costings, none of which he could supply. Cries of 'this is scandalous', 'get on with it', 'how much?', 'rubbish' punctuated his unhappy performance.

A fortnight later, on March 15th, Dalyell was attending an apparently innocuous late night debate on Teacher Exchanges with the United States. The Treasury was represented because tax problems were the issue. Dalyell suddenly saw an opportunity to involve the Treasury in relation to the Scottish Colleges. At 9.45 p.m. he intervened. "I wish to raise with the Treasury the tangential problem which has some relevance to the issue that my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood has raised. As the Financial Secretary knows, there is the vexed problem of the closing down and merger of teacher training colleges."

This intervention, of course, had no relevance, tangential or otherwise, to the tax problems of two exchange teachers. The Deputy Speaker through a series of exchanges tried to deflect Dalyell. "Whereas the Chair cannot in fact prevent him from raising matters without notice, the Chair strongly deprecates the practice". Dalyell was not to be put down. "In normal circumstances I would thereupon sit down, but the situation in Scotland is such, the justice of the cause is such, and the amount of feeling there is such, that I have received 540 handwritten letters, not to mention printed circular letters, about the merger and closure of these training colleges, and for the first time I do not take a hint from the Chair."⁶

He then swung into a full blooded defence of the threatened colleges, asking the Financial Secretary to investigate the savings involved in each proposed closure. By 10.15 an impromptu debate was under way, Scottish members hastening to the Chamber to participate. By 10.29 Mr Robert Sheldon, Financial Secretary to the Treasury, replied as follows: "My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State dealt with certain aspects of the educational problem and mentioned the statement which will be made in due course by the Secretary of State and the decision which will emerge. My hon. Friend the Member for West Lothian asked me to examine a number of points. I am happy

to undertake to carry out that examination". So now the Treasury itself was committed to the pursuit of the Scottish Education Department for the elusive costings.

The turning point which demonstrated that the situation had gone beyond Government control was the Labour Party Conference at Perth on March 11th and 12th. Inevitably the colleges were there, picketing. On Friday night ALCES held a fringe meeting for delegates. On Saturday afternoon Education featured on the official agenda. The conference was lethargic, dispirited, the bored delegates shuffling papers and yawning. Then Canavan, M.P. for West Stirlingshire, took the stand to support an Emergency Resolution calling for the retention of all ten colleges, their use in a diverse range of activities and the rejection of the proposed closures and mergers. He spoke with passion, rising to a climax that the public announcement system could not cope with. Through the distortions he could be heard invoking those aspirations centred on educational opportunity which rouse deep chords in Scottish breasts. Somehow, the impression was conveyed that the future of Scotland's children was at risk. The conference rose to the rhetoric and he finished to a storm of applause. The platform accepted an Emergency Resolution which overturned the proposed policy of government: an extraordinary situation brought about by increasing pressure from its own party members.

The culmination occurred on April 5th when, in an adjournment debate on the Scottish colleges in the full House, the Government was defeated by 203 against 185.

Throughout all these events, the Secretary of State reiterated as a defence against the attacks mounted that the document was consultative, that the whole operation was one in which the executive genuinely sought to sound all relevant opinion before arriving at decisions. In Westminster he stated "I personally have had meetings with the Joint Committee of Colleges of Education — that is, all the colleges of education — the General Teaching Council, the Hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church — last Friday — and, because I am well aware of the serious implications of my proposals for the staff of the two colleges, I have had meetings on two separate occasions with ALCES, the Lecturers' Association. In addition, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has had meetings with representatives of various colleges, the teachers' organisations, the Educational Committee of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the National

Union of Students. In order that each college directly affected by the proposals for closure or merger should have the opportunity to discuss the detailed implications for them of these proposals, I arranged for my Department to have meetings with each of the boards individually. Therefore there has been no lack of consultation".⁷

An alternative model of consultation was ruthlessly offered by John Mackintosh (Labour M.P. for Berwick and East Lothian) in the same debate. Committed as he is to industrial democracy, he had been deeply disturbed by the secrecy and lack of genuine consultation which had characterised the operation. He had met the Principals of the threatened colleges, had arranged a small meeting at Perth with Robin Cook and college staff at which these issues had been discussed, and now opposed the Government in the House.

"My right hon. Friend says there has been total consultation, because he can rattle off a list of bodies or agencies to which he has talked. That gives no evidence of consultation. Consultation is something more satisfactory . . .

"If we consider the need to cut down the number of teacher training places, at least four options become obvious. One is to close the colleges along the lines suggested in my right hon. Friend's document. The second is to cut the numbers in the big city colleges and keep the smaller colleges open, on the ground that small colleges have special merit in geographical areas where contact is needed between the colleges and the schools and pupils. The third is the closure of one college in particular, the one least used and most expensive — the Dundee College — and a certain amount of slimming down in the city colleges.

"A fourth possibility, one which would have meant real consultation, was for my right hon. Friend to tell the education authorities and the principals "These are my targets, gentlemen.⁸ Will you devise amongst yourselves a proposal to meet them and suggest to me how this can be done with the least damage to the education system in Scotland?"

"What in fact happened in the so-called consultations was that my right hon. Friend — having produced a consultative document without costings, without an explanation of what mergers would mean and without an explanation of how they could be done or where the residential places would be provided — stonewalled and defended his document for hour after hour

against questions, criticisms and requests for information from the people he was seeing. That is not consultation.”⁹

The Secretary of State's May announcement means that all ten colleges are reprieved for the time being. The problem however, remains. Callendar Park has a 45% occupancy rate, Craigie 49%, Dundee 42%. The birthrate is still falling, and the student intake figures for September are even lower than officially permitted. It is possible that recruitment difficulties will undermine the viability of some vulnerable institutions. But whatever the ultimate form of college provision in Scotland, I suggest that the very nature of the sequence of events from May 1977 will have its effect on the future of Scottish education. Bureaucracy traditionally guards the secrecy of its expertise and its decision-taking processes. It persistently promotes centralised systems which can readily be controlled through hierarchical structures. Now the Scottish Colleges, previously compliant elements in the education sector, have challenged the bureaucracy on the basis of openness in decision-taking and diversification in provision. They have enlisted public opinion, the media, the unions, the Roman Catholic Church, the law and parliamentary democracy, and have demonstrated that bureaucracy can be embarrassed and to some extent checked. Both sides have been educated in the process. The relationship between the SED and the Scottish Colleges of Education will never be the same again.

REFERENCES

1. Scottish Education Department, *Teacher Training from 1977 Onwards*, May, 1977.
2. Scottish Education Department, *Teacher Training from 1977 Onwards*, January 1977, pp. 21-22.
3. ALCES: Association of Lecturers in Colleges of Education in Scotland.
AHASCES: Association of Higher Academic Staff in Colleges of Education in Scotland.
NALGO: National Association of Local Government Officers.
NUPE: National Union of Public Employees.
4. Scottish Grand Committee: *Teacher Training in Scotland from 1977 Onwards*, 17th February 1977, p. 107.
5. Hansard, Vol. 927, No. 59, Tuesday, 1st March 1977, p. 328.
6. Hansard, Vol. 928, No. 69, Tuesday, 15th March 1977, pp. 348-349.
7. Hansard, Vol. 929, No. 84, Tuesday, 5th April 1977, p. 1142.
8. Even the enlightened about industrial democracy can slip into male chauvinism. Consider the implications of that 'gentlemen'. Three of the College Principals are women.
9. Hansard, Vol. 929, No. 84, Tuesday, 5th April 1977, pp. 1154-1156.