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SCOTLAND AND THE MEDIA



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FOREWORD

It is always refreshing when you hear someone talking straight, perhaps expressing an unfashionable point of view, celebrating another's success without recourse to flattery, admitting a failing, or that they simply don't know. I like to think I can still trust my instinct about these things and see through the spin and obfuscation, but then who doesn't? There were some such pleasant surprises in this wide-ranging conference where in a neutral forum practitioners engaged in frank, mature debate about the state of our nation's Media.

Set in train long before the events which led to the Hutton Inquiry when trust was brought so sharply into focus, this conference evolved as a result of concerns expressed by Fellows of the Society about a growing climate of distrust amongst the Scottish Parliament, our distinctive Scottish Media and the people of Scotland. I would like to offer my sincere thanks to the Organising Committee of this event and to all of the Speakers who are named at the end of this report.

Freedom of speech is an invaluable tenet of our democratic society and one that is perhaps too easily taken for granted. Our journalists' licence to hold those in positions of authority to account must be preserved, but mud also sticks and reputations and lives are easily undermined or destroyed. Words and pictures must be used wisely in this sound-byte age of twenty-four-hour multimedia news. As in any field, there are good and bad journalists and politicians, but beyond this significant individual dimension there are trends which this conference sought to explore.

Open to all, the event was widely attended by journalists and corporate communications specialists, Fellows and members of the public. Through the many question and answer sessions built into the programme, they gave as good as they got, enriching and enlivening the debate. Ethics, responsibilities and regulation, the relationship between press and politicians, the balance between praise and pillory and opinion being peddled as fact – just some of the many dimensions considered in this conference. My neatly packaged 'take home message' is a question: who will translate this fascinating debate and its words into actions?



Lord Sutherland of Houndwood, KT, FBA, PRSE
President of The Royal Society of Edinburgh

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INTRODUCTION

“The three-way breakdown of trust between government and politicians, the media and the general public..... has led to increasing disillusionment amongst parts of society, particularly the young and ethnic groups. There has been a corresponding disengagement and withdrawal from the political and democratic processes, evidenced by declining participation in local and general elections. The breakdown.....poses questions both to politicians and to the media as to how they conduct their legitimate, but very different, roles and responsibilities.

An Independent Review of Government Communications, January 2004.

Voter turnout across the UK at the last general election fell to 59%, the lowest since 1918. It was even worse amongst younger voters, with just over a third of 18-34 year-olds (39%) registering their vote. Today, it appears many younger people are more likely to vote in televised pop contests such as Pop Idol than they are for their local politicians. Saturday-night entertainment is assuming greater importance than participating in democracy.

At the same time, public confidence in our elected representatives and institutions is falling. In 1974, 39% of the population believed the Government of whatever political persuasion would put the national good above party gain. Today, according to the British Social Attitude Survey, it is 16%. These trends were sufficiently worrying for the Government to commission an independent review – the Phillis Report quoted above – to see what can be done about it.

The blame for much of this has been attributed to aggressive media coverage that focuses on failure rather than celebrating success. This has a corrosive effect, reducing respect for politicians and turning people away

from the political process. It begs many questions – how much are politicians to blame for this situation; is journalism properly serving the public interest; what can be done to curb the excesses of the media; and how can relationships be improved in the interests of creating a better informed, interested and engaged electorate?

These were some of the key questions examined at a conference organised by the Royal Society of Edinburgh on March 9, 2004. It arose out of concerns from within the Fellowship of the Society at the apparent breakdown in trust between the people of Scotland and their politicians. The conference sought to examine how Scotland can respond. It was expertly chaired by the BBC presenter, James Naughtie, and featured presentations from leading figures from the world of media and politics.

This report summarises the day’s discussions and the main conclusions of the conference.

SESSION ONE

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Professor Philip Schlesinger, Director of the Media Research Institute at the University of Stirling and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, opened the conference by examining the issue of trust. He drew a distinction between a complete breakdown of trust and a culture of suspicion. The latter results in people being unwilling to accept what they are told, to distrust institutions and people in power and to have little confidence in many sources of information. In Professor Schlesinger's view, even if it is only a culture of suspicion rather than a complete breakdown in trust that we are suffering from, the consequences are still serious, as it creates an adverse climate for those in public life.

The Phillis Report, published in January 2004, made a number of recommendations on how Government communications might be reformed to help address these issues. It called for a change in culture and behaviour from politicians, the civil service and the media in the wider public interest. Professor Schlesinger believed that the obsessive struggle of Government spin doctors to control communication has been ultimately self-defeating. The report's conclusion is that greater professionalism,

impartiality and openness are the means by which trust can be built with both the media and the public.

The culture of suspicion has been created by the actions of politicians and the media. Governments, he said, have a compelling and chronic need to explain failure and pass it off as success, whilst the news media are programmed to focus on conflict and exposure. Increasingly, the public knows that news does not mirror reality. The promotional politics of spin doctors has increasingly converged with the cult of celebrity. The result is that politics, at times, can resemble a soap opera with protagonists whose fatal flaws lead them into farce or tragedy.

Professor Schlesinger said we seem to expect more and more of people in public life and yet, the more that is known, the less faith the public has in either their probity or their good intentions. This is the point at which regulation becomes relevant. Can the news media establish standards for reporting that can demand public trust and do we have regulatory or self-regulatory bodies that are themselves seen as credible?

SESSION TWO

A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

Lord Steel of Aikwood, the former Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament and former leader of the Liberal Party, gave an insight into the world of politics and the media based on forty years of experience in public life. He began with a confession by saying that he liked journalists and he defended the roles of both sketch writers and columnists - they provide a necessary corrective to the self-importance tendency which affects all public figures.

However, he spoke out against what he described as 'bitch journalism' and gave personal examples of stories which were inaccurate, intrusive, malicious or completely misleading. Lord Steel said he has successfully sued different publications four times and received apologies under threat of suing on several other occasions. He thought 'bitch journalism' is probably worse in the Scottish press than in what used to be called the Fleet Street papers but, sadly, it is far from a new phenomenon.

He advocated strengthening the Press Code and the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) as a way of reining in this type of irresponsible journalism. He said the Press Code is excellent on paper but needs more effective implementation. For its part, the PCC contains too many people with direct interests in the press as owners or editors. Lord Steel said he was against statutory controls on the press, which would be potentially dangerous. It would be far better, he suggested, if a powerful and informed PCC dealt properly with complaints.

Discussion: Lord Steel was asked to expand on his views on regulation in the question session that followed. He said he would like to see the PCC much more representative of civic society rather than dominated by people with ownership or editorial interests in the press. The present PCC is not acting effectively to implement what is there on paper in the Press Code.

Magnus Linklater, former Editor of *The Scotsman*, followed this up by asking if establishing a Scottish PCC would be a good idea. Lord Steel described this as an interesting idea and one he would not be against, as the present PCC is very London-orientated. Professor Schlesinger agreed there was a case for considering such a move.

Sir John Shaw, however, was less enthusiastic. He said he was always astonished when he read anything in the press or heard something on the radio on a subject he knew something about because it would be one-sided and inaccurate. There are too many commentators in Scotland compared with people who are actually doing things. Setting up a Scottish PCC would add to what he described as the current mess with botched devolution which has created all sorts of difficulties in introducing different arrangements north and south of the border.

SESSION THREE

BROADCASTING MEDIA/ TABLOIDS AND BROADSHEETS

Valerie Atkinson, then Deputy Head of News and Current Affairs at BBC Scotland, looked at the lessons that can be learned from the first few years of the Scottish Parliament. This was a particularly difficult time, characterised by negative coverage over many issues that has helped to undermine confidence in the new institution.

She stressed that the nature of broadcast journalism is very different from that of the print media, and broadcasters have escaped a lot of the criticism that has been directed at tabloid newspapers. However, she accepted that much of what was said about the Parliament resonated with what the Scottish public felt at the time.

Ms Atkinson said that much of the distrust between politicians and the media is engendered by unattributable briefing and off-the-record sources. Politicians collude with journalists in planting stories, briefing against each other and opposing particular policies. She called for greater openness and expressed disappointment that the Scottish Executive had shown no enthusiasm for holding all briefings on the record and on camera. This is one of the key recommendations from the Phillis Committee. She said the Fraser inquiry into the building of the new Scottish Parliament may be the best argument for openness because all the evidence has been on camera and on the record, leaving no room for media misrepresentation.

However, she accepted there are difficulties. Politicians are unwilling to discuss policy difficulties because they want a good spin on everything. The media responds with aggressive adversarial questioning, which makes it difficult for politicians to communicate openly. Ms Atkinson stressed that broadcast media need to give time for proper questioning and analysis, find ways to place individual stories in a wider context and say sorry when they get it wrong. That, however, is not easy when the trend in news broadcasting is for shorter and shorter pieces.

Andrew Jaspan, then Editor of the *Sunday Herald* examined issues of ownership and control and what that means for editorial policies. He said that prior to 1997 there was a broad consensus in the Scottish press in support of devolution and the establishment of the Scottish Parliament. That changed with the purchase of the Scotsman Publications by the Barclay brothers and the subsequent appointment of Andrew Neil as Editor-in-chief

of both *The Scotsman* and *Scotland on Sunday*. From that time, the Editors had to take their line from Mr Neil and it was one of opposition to the Parliament. The Editor of *The Scotsman* during this period, Martin Clarke, was then appointed Editor of the *Daily Record* and followed a similar anti-devolution editorial approach in his new post.

Mr Jaspan pointed out that only one daily newspaper in Scotland is controlled both commercially and editorially in Scotland and that is the Dundee *Courier*. Some others, such as his own newspaper, have been given a guarantee of editorial non-interference. He said he would like to see such guarantees extended to all Scottish newspapers so that editorial policy is decided by Editors based in Scotland and not by someone sitting in London or elsewhere.

Politicians also have to take their share of the blame for any breakdown in trust that has occurred. Mr Jaspan said there were some terrible decisions made in the early years that have done untold damage to the standing of devolution and the Parliament. They provided ready ammunition to certain newspapers to attack the credibility of devolution itself, but he now believes there are signs that the relationship between the press and politicians is calming down and things are improving.

Iain Martin, then Editor of *The Scotsman* contested Mr Jaspan's analysis. He pointed out that *The Scotsman* advocated its readers to vote 'yes' in the referendum that led to the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, and pursues an agenda about improvement and reform of the institution, not opposition. He said there is not a newspaper in the land that does not have an agenda, but as someone born and educated in Scotland and now editing a Scottish newspaper, he had no interest in seeing the institution fail.

He said *The Scotsman* is deeply concerned at the progress of devolution to date but has argued extensively for measures that would strengthen the Parliament and improve the quality of its deliberations and actions. He added that to pretend there are not problems with the institution as currently constituted does no favours to Scotland in the long run. However, although relations between the press and Parliament have been difficult, the situation is now improving. Mr Martin also made the point that things changed after the attacks in the United States on September 11. Less space was given to the Parliament, as a new balance had to be struck between coverage of international affairs and what was happening at Westminster. The story had moved elsewhere.

Bob Bird, Editor of the *Scottish News of the World*, explained the influence that newspapers can have. He was working for the *Sun* in 1992 when it carried its anti-Labour headline on the day of the general election – “Will the last person to leave Britain please turn out the lights?” The Conservatives won the poll and next day’s headline was “It’s the *Sun* that won it.” Tabloids, he said, are loved by politicians if they are on their side and hated if they are not.

The Scottish popular press was largely supportive of the creation of the Scottish Parliament, but turned against it when it realised the poor calibre of many MSPs and saw how they went about their business. When the damaging stories started to appear, the MSPs blamed the media messengers.

Mr Bird suggested that relations may be improving. Most MSPs have realised that ‘whinging’ is not the answer and that they are responsible for the level and kind of coverage they receive. But he issued some words of caution. Tabloid readers are more interested when someone does something wrong, than when they do a great job. He has found that politicians who have co-operated with stories have been pleasantly surprised by the results – however, he said he still hopes to get them in the paper “for all the wrong reasons.”

Paul McKinney, then Head of News and Current Affairs at Scottish Television, said that television news programmes in Scotland are considered to be among the best regional programmes in the UK, but he suggested ways in which they can be improved further. There can still be a tendency to go for the easy report, to concentrate on who is ‘up’ and who is ‘down’, who is ‘in’ and who is ‘out’, and fail to target the harder journalism of engaging in ideas. This is especially true for commercial stations that are reliant on advertising and have to capture and hold on to the audience.

One of the problems is that regional broadcast news programmes are now operating in a devolved decentralised environment. Mr McKinney suggested that Scotland needs a broadcast media that is capable of lifting its eyes from the parochial and the parish pump and reporting on what is happening in the UK and the rest of the world from a Scottish perspective, just as our leading

newspapers already do. That would not only create news programmes that better serve the public but would also lift the standard of journalism.

He said the last seven years have seen fundamental changes in the way the UK is governed, but no changes in how broadcasting in Scotland responds to these changes. He also questioned whether control of broadcasting matters should remain at Westminster. Whilst there are strong arguments for a unified approach to broadcasting policy across the UK, he believed the Scottish Parliament should have some control over media policy and ownership if relations are to be built up between the Scottish media, the Parliament and the people.

Discussion: Journalists are scrutinising the activities of those in power – but one questioner asked: “who scrutinises the journalists?” It was pointed out that there are regulatory frameworks that oversee the broadcasting world, and the PCC acts in the same way for print media. Bob Bird said newspapers are ultimately accountable to the market. If they continue to get stories wrong, people would stop buying the paper and it would go out of business.

There was support for Paul McKinney’s view that Scotland needed to look outward more, but Andrew Jaspan expressed concern that adequate resources may not be provided to allow broadcasters to develop these programmes in the way they might want. The creation of the Parliament has also led Scotland to become more insular, commented John Edward of the European Parliament Office in Scotland. No Scottish media organisation has a full time correspondent based at the European Parliament today, whereas there were at least four a few years ago.

The selection of news was also challenged, with the media accused of choosing to ignore good things going on in Scotland in favour of things that go wrong. Iain Martin disputed that and said there is plenty of celebration of Scotland in the media, especially when it is not about politics. Andrew Jaspan insisted that there is no ‘monolithic’ media; there are differences between the different newspapers and broadcasters. He saw his job as celebrating the best in Scotland, whilst at the same time demanding that Scotland does better in every field.

SESSION FOUR

OFCOM IN SCOTLAND

Tony Stollard, Director of External Relations for Ofcom, gave an overview of the work of the new communications industry regulator. It has been established in response to the increasing convergence of broadcasting, telecommunications, broadband and other services. It is no longer appropriate to have separate regulators for broadcasting and telecommunications when broadcasting services will soon be available on mobile phones, for instance. Ofcom provides a single point of contact for consumer issues across the whole communications sector. It also addresses issues of competition in a communications industry that is increasingly dominated by global players.

Ofcom is accountable to the Westminster, not to the Scottish Parliament, but it will have an Advisory Committee for Scotland with a Scottish-based Director. Mr Stollard said Ofcom is setting out to have constructive, continuing engagement with the communication industry in Scotland, with consumers, the public, politicians and other stakeholders. He said Ofcom was determined to avoid the 'branch office' risk which is so often the case with a London-based regulator or institution. Ofcom in Scotland will not just be an office but a central part of what Ofcom is intending to do, he added.

SESSION FIVE

THE MEDIA: FROM UNDERSTANDING TO MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

Bernard Margueritte, President of the International Communications Forum and a former Editor of *Le Monde*, asked if journalists can be proud of what they are doing, given that only around 17% of people say they respect journalists. He quoted from various sources to illustrate how modern journalism is failing to be of public service. Instead, it is indulging in infotainment, “showbizification” of the news, he said. David Morris, in his book *Public Journalists and Public Life*, has stated: “It is no coincidence that the decline in journalism and the decline in public life have happened at the same time. In modern society they are co-dependent. Public life needs the information and perspective that journalists can provide and journalists need a viable public life because, without one, there is no need for journalists.”

Mr Margueritte stressed that people in the media should remember that they are not only producers, selling goods to consumers, but human beings and citizens addressing other human beings and citizens. He pointed out that following the attacks on 9/11, there were many

remarkable articles in the United States examining why America is hated around the world. However, Americans should have known about this earlier but the media failed to inform them.

He expressed concern at the increasing concentration of media power in global corporations. This is leading to ‘fast news’ – the news equivalent of fast food - where the same kind of information is presented in the same way with less respect for local identity or culture. He linked the increase in hatred and violence across the world to the failure of the media to inform. Hatred often comes from a lack of knowledge of others. Global corporations also have major commercial interests, which may lead them to slant their coverage and to be deferential to those in power.

He concluded by saying that the media can and should play a prominent role in building a better world, but to do that it has to rediscover its sense of mission.

SESSION SIX

QUALITY AND PUBLIC STANDARDS

Joyce McMillan, freelance journalist and a columnist on *The Scotsman*, said politicians have become dependent on the media as a vector for building their relationship with the public, because other forms of civic involvement, such as membership of political parties, has declined. However, the media has its own agenda and its primary job is not about building trust between people and politicians. Politicians need to re-think their relationship with the media and look at new ways of building their relationship with the public.

She then concentrated on the issue of ethical journalism. The National Union of Journalists has produced a 13-point code of conduct to which all members are supposed to subscribe. It includes obligations to be accurate, fair and not to use abusive means to get hold of material. However, there are pressures which act against journalists applying these high standards.

Ms McMillan said the print media works in a commercial environment and the first thoughts are not about upholding standards or about public service, they are about making the business work and succeed. There are pressures towards speed, sensationalism and lurid headlines that command attention. Commercial pressure also leads to cost-cutting, which can leave journalists with less time to pursue the traditional values of checking and balancing stories.

She called for a debate amongst journalists and the people who manage them to try to get agreement on an ethical framework that can be applied across the industry. She acknowledged that this would not be easy to achieve and may never work perfectly but there is a real need to agree minimum standards of journalistic ethics and develop ways of ensuring they are adhered to.

Another potential solution lies in the development of an educated audience. Ms McMillan suggested that journalists should support measures that educate the public to demand the best from their newspapers and broadcasters. The audience is the ultimate regulator and encouraging them to demand more will help to raise standards.

Tom Crone, Head of the Legal Department at News International, explained that a newspaper's public standards duties are two-fold – to get factual statements correct (accuracy), and to stay out of people's lives unless there is a public interest justification (privacy, intrusion). He considered that the Press Code and the establishment of the PCC have done a great deal to clean up newspaper

journalism. Progress on accuracy can be judged by the frequency of libel claims, which have fallen by 75% since 1990 when the PCC was established. Privacy complaints have remained at a relatively moderate level.

He said that newspapers and journalists have a public duty to subject politicians to scrutiny when they are asking the public to trust them. Mr Crone gave examples of libel actions against newspapers involving Jonathan Aitken and Jeffrey Archer (which were ultimately unsuccessful), in which these prominent former politicians committed perjury in defence of their actions. Honesty and dishonesty in public life and in journalism is a two-way street, he said, and as long as journalists ask questions of politicians they are fulfilling a public service.

Richard Holloway, former Bishop of Edinburgh and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, said he was speaking on behalf of the public, and the public interest is best served when politicians and the press are in conflict. It is when they collude and the electoral interests of politicians combine with the commercial interests of newspapers that the public is in trouble.

He used the example of youth justice to illustrate his point. The killing of Jamie Bulger gave rise to a moral panic in tabloid newspapers and a populist Home Secretary responded by changing youth justice policies. The result is that England and Wales now imprisons more children than at any time since 1908. Bishop Holloway believed this episode was a toxic combination of newspaper and political interests that ended up damaging the children of the country. There is evidence that the Scottish Executive is responding to a similar moral panic about youth crime and using newspaper support to introduce harder-line policies that are not based on evidence. He said he thought this a far greater danger than incidents such as those involving Jeffrey Archer and Jonathan Aitken, which have no real impact on the daily lives of the general population.

Discussion: The question was asked if journalists take more or less account of codes of standards or ethics today than they would have 20 years ago. Joyce McMillan replied that formal codes and statements of rights and duties are more a feature of recent years – in the past people tended to operate more according to a kind of common culture. The important thing now, she said, is to get some corrective to the newspaper culture of cut-throat competition and institutionalised machismo to give more time to journalists to consider ethical issues and reflect on what it is they are doing.

Richard Holloway said he hoped we could create a culture where certain issues, such as those involving children, could be de-politicised, and where policy was based on evidence of what worked. He said he thought the media would want to be part of such a culture because they are

part of the fabric of the community and would want to protect children's interests rather than whipping up hysteria to sell papers. He conceded that expecting such a level of public virtue could be perceived as naïve, but he remained optimistic.

SESSION SEVEN

MEDIA AND POLITICS

Alastair Campbell, the Prime Minister's former Director of Communications, gave an insight into the difficult relations between the press and politicians over devolution and the establishment of the Scottish Parliament. It was characterised initially by a suspicion amongst the Scottish media, which he said was completely misguided - that Tony Blair was not fully supportive of the Parliament. That then turned into hostility from some newspapers (including the *Daily Record* under its editor Martin Clarke, *The Scotsman*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express*) to the Parliament when it began operating – a process that Scotland's First Minister Donald Dewar described to Mr Campbell as "Rottweiler journalism."

He said there has been an explosion in media outlets in recent years, but the increased choice has come at a price. Media organisations now have to work harder to get noticed in the fiercely competitive marketplace. This has led to lower standards of accuracy and fairness, trivialisation, the increasing appearance of news as comment and the view among large parts of the media that it is their job to undermine politics and public life. He quoted one academic study that compared news coverage from 1974 with that of 2004. Thirty years ago the ratio of positive to negative stories was 3:1; today it is 1:18.

He accepted that the Scottish Parliament created some of its own problems, but added that in a relatively small country it was subjected to a level of scrutiny that must have felt overpowering at times. Some politicians and journalists felt that this scrutiny came close to destabilising the fragile political process.

That understanding has led the media to pull back, and Mr Campbell said he thought we are now in a more mature, less hostile, phase. There is a growing acceptance that the Parliament is neither as bad as the press have painted it, nor as good as they hoped it would be. The amount of legislation that has been passed is impressive and there is clear evidence that devolution is being used to change things. With turnout at elections a growing problem, the media as well as politicians need to be fair about the Parliament in making clear that just because it cannot deliver everything, that does not mean it delivers nothing.

One other concern he raised was the fact that, since devolution, the main UK national papers have virtually given up on coverage of Scottish political affairs. He said this is an issue that needs to be addressed, as it could end up with Scotland and Wales being covered in London in much the same way as an overseas foreign country.

Discussion: In the question session that followed, Mr Campbell expanded on his views on the increasing tendency for comment to be presented as news. He said that even ten years ago there was a much clearer distinction between news and comment. Today, there is fusion of news and comment right across the media spectrum. The result is that the public are being fed opinion without knowing the facts on which the opinion is based.

Mr Naughtie asked Mr Campbell if the spin doctoring tactics he employed in Downing Street may have had a part to play in some of the effects he now deplores in the media. Mr Campbell replied that he did not really know but conceded that it might have done. However, he said he could justify what was done in all sorts of ways. He had seen what the press had done in the past to people like Neil Kinnock and he was determined to stop that happening to Tony Blair. He accepted that the practices that had been employed in opposition in getting messages out through the media were continued for too long when in power. This included repackaging the same information to generate positive coverage, but that was soon weeded out of the system. He admitted that Downing Street did underestimate the extent to which its communications strategy would become an issue, largely because they did not think they were doing anything extraordinary. The same approach is taken in many other countries, such as Germany and the United States.

Mr Campbell was then asked to list the three things that he thought might help restore public trust. The first thing he mentioned was compulsory voting, which could force people to become involved in a process that it is far too easy to opt out of at the moment. The second was stricter enforcement of the PCC Code to help improve journalistic standards and the last was giving the right to third parties to make complaints to the PCC.

SESSION EIGHT

REGULATION AND CONTROL

David McLetchie, MSP and leader of the Conservative Group in the Scottish Parliament, welcomed the broad thrust of the Government's Communications Act. He described it as liberalising and de-regulatory and a sensible response to the modern communications industry. He was pleased it paved the way for the broadcasting media to open up to new sources of investment and innovation. However, he stressed that there are concerns about ensuring that the regionality and diversity of broadcasting are maintained. That can best be achieved, not by overly prescriptive content obligations or ownership restrictions, but by content that is driven by consumer demand. He was confident that Scottish consumers would want to watch programmes that reflect Scotland's distinctive news, sports and cultural agenda. The example of local newspapers is encouraging - they continue to thrive throughout Scotland in a competitive environment because there is consumer appetite for regional diversity.

The one area of disagreement with the Act concerns its treatment of the BBC. Mr McLetchie criticised the decision not to make the BBC subject to external regulation by Ofcom with regard to its public service obligations and complaints. The failure to include the BBC within the remit of Ofcom undermines the regulator's ability to oversee the whole of the broadcasting industry, particularly since the BBC commands some 40% of the television audience. The Bill should have established a level playing field because the BBC is in need of external accountability and independent adjudication, said Mr McLetchie.

Magnus Linklater, a columnist with the *Times* and *Scotland on Sunday*, a former Editor of *The Scotsman* and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, pointed out that newspapers have been 'bugging' politicians ever since they were invented and it is not surprising that politicians have long sought to curb the activities of journalists. One suggested solution has been a law of privacy, but the problem with such a law is that it would protect the guilty as well as the innocent. That obstacle has prevented any such law being introduced, but Mr Linklater said the situation has now changed with the introduction of the Human Rights Act. This was used last year by the radio presenter Sarah Cox, who successfully sued *The People* for invading her privacy after it published pictures of her on holiday. This amounted to regulation by the courts and was described by Mr Linklater as a very important shift in how the press is viewed.

He believed that the press needs to be able to regulate itself more effectively if it is to head off legislation and

prevent intervention by Ofcom. However, he was not a great admirer of the PCC, mainly because of the way it is seen by the public. The public neither knows nor understands much about it and, if they do know anything, they probably distrust it. It is becoming tougher, but he suggested that more could be done to raise its profile. This could include making its judgements more public and ensuring that newspapers publish them prominently.

There is merit in establishing a devolved Scottish PCC as this would bring the PCC much closer to people in Scotland. It would also provide a forum where people in Scotland who feel aggrieved at the actions of the media, such as some MSPs, could raise their concerns.

Alex Neil, MSP, said there will need to be a European, and even a global, dimension to regulation because the communications industry involves global companies. Unless that is recognised, a lot of the proposed UK regulation may eventually become rather worthless.

He believed that politicians have too much control over the media and should not be responsible for choosing the Board of Governors of the BBC, for instance. He agreed with David McLetchie that there is a strong case for including the BBC within the remit of Ofcom. He also agreed on the need to strengthen the PCC and make it easier for individual citizens to raise complaints against the media. The idea of having a separate Scottish PCC made a lot of sense, he added. Mr Neil also called for Ofcom in Scotland to be independent of Ofcom in London. There is a distinct media industry in Scotland catering for many special needs and that required to be reflected in the structures of Ofcom, he suggested.

Discussion: Mr Naughtie asked Tony Stoller of Ofcom to comment on the fear amongst some in the media that any form of regulation always ends up in some kind of control. Mr Stoller started by making it clear that Ofcom has no responsibility for regulating the press, although it has a role in giving advice to the Secretary of State if the Secretary of State wishes it. Ofcom works either through licensing or general authorisations, neither of which applies the press.

Two contributions from the audience challenged the view that broadcasting should be a matter reserved to Westminster, given its importance in Scotland. David McLetchie said that it is important not to get hung up on issues of ring-fencing. Mechanisms can be established, such as Ofcom's presence in Scotland, to reflect Scottish interests.

SESSION NINE

THE WAY FORWARD

Tom Brown, former Political Editor of the *Daily Record*, said that politicians would dearly like to control what is said about them and spin doctors would like to dictate editorial policy – neither of which should be allowed to happen. The media, however, have a responsibility to put their own house in order. He said he had been sickened by the decline in journalistic standards which has accelerated of late.

The Scottish Parliament came into existence as a result of the long-held and consistent demands of the Scottish people and it must not be undone. The media should reflect that it is doing the country a disservice and perhaps doing itself a disservice because circulation figures are falling dramatically. Could that have anything to do with the cynical, carping attitude of today's press, he asked?

It is not all the media's fault, however; MSPs have provided them with ample ammunition. He criticised the political party selection procedures which have left the Parliament not with the brightest and the best but with the dumbest, safest and those most likely to toe the leadership line.

Although it grieved him to say it, Mr Brown suggested that the question for a future symposium may well be – 'do we need the printed media?' The on-going communications revolution with 24-hour news programmes and information available on the Internet may render newspapers redundant. He has his own website where he can say what he wants, untroubled by Editors. He also advocated that MSPs and MPs should get out more, meet people and answer their criticisms. This would help to put right any misconceptions by talking to people face to face.

Elaine Murray, MSP, said she generally does not talk to the national media because she expects them to be hostile to politicians, but she does have a good relationship with her local papers. She expressed concern about the standards of reporting and urged the media to take its responsibilities more seriously.

But she also suggested that MSPs needed to be a bit more adventurous, to be more willing to engage in debate on difficult issues and to 'take the knocks' to get the message across. Politicians are too risk-averse, which has been translated into too many 'apple pie' debates in the Parliament. The Scottish Executive should be confident enough to have debates on difficult issues, instead of going for easy targets.

She also said politicians needed to adopt more of a scientific attitude to things going wrong. Scientists are not pilloried for getting unexpected results, they are expected to learn from them, change and progress. Similarly, politicians should not argue about being right when they are patently wrong.

Tavish Scott, MSP, expressed the view that the new politics of Scotland post-1999 are somewhat 'shop-soiled'. It was said that Holyrood had to avoid replicating the worst effects of Westminster, but he is not convinced it has succeeded. The 'Westminster village' has, to some extent, become the 'Holyrood town'.

Scotland, he believed, needs a new form of politics and a new understanding between politicians and the media. One that is based on an open, transparent commitment to achieving objectivity, accuracy and balance in the reporting of politics and a candid approach from politicians involving on-the-record comment, no spokespersons and off-the-record briefings. Mr Scott admitted that this is probably a pipe dream and conceded that such an approach would not stop those in the Scottish press with a pre-ordained agenda to hatchet the Parliament. However, if nothing changes, cynicism about the reporter and the reported will grow. People are already by-passing traditional media outlets to find alternative sources of information and that is likely to increase. Politicians and journalists ignore these risks at their peril, Mr Scott warned.

CLOSING REMARKS

Trevor Royle, Associate Editor of the *Sunday Herald* and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, summed up some of the main themes that the conference had explored. He agreed with the view expressed by a number of contributors that relations between politicians and the press were improving in Scotland. It is not the end of the war but the beginning of a truce, he said. It was also perhaps a sign that we are beginning to grow up and to understand that the Parliament cannot deliver on everything.

Mr Royle said he was heartened to hear the discussion of a Scottish PCC, which may be an idea that will grow into something tangible. He supported the notion that the Scottish media should not be frightened of addressing big ideas and should look at what is happening in the rest of the world through a Scottish, and not a London,

dimension. However, that type of journalism is more expensive, which brought into question issues of ownership and investment in Scottish-based media.

He also welcomed the concern expressed about the increasing blurring of news and comment. He said he was not alone in finding it unsettling to listen to a radio or television news broadcast where a reporter is talking to a journalist about an issue or an event rather than to the people directly involved.

The electronic revolution in broadcasting and journalism did not get too much attention, but Mr Royle believed that this may be the face of the future. There is so much information that can now be accessed via the internet that it is a wonder, sometimes, why people bother to pick up a newspaper, he concluded.

APPENDIX ONE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Royal Society of Edinburgh would like to thank the Conference Organising Committee:

Sir Charles Fraser FRSE

Former Chairman, Lothian and Edinburgh Enterprise

Dr Magnus Linklater FRSE

Columnist, *The Times and Scotland on Sunday*

Mr Colin McLatchie

Manager, News International

The Rt Hon Lord Ross PC FRSE

Former Lord Justice Clerk, (Organising Committee Chairman)

Mr Trevor Royle FRSE

Associate Editor, *The Sunday Herald*

Professor Ian Stevenson FRSE

Programme Convenor, The Royal Society of Edinburgh

Ms Susan Walker

Events Officer, The Royal Society of Edinburgh

The Society would also like to take this opportunity to thank all the speakers who participated in this event.

APPENDIX TWO PROGRAMME

09.00	Registration / Coffee	13.30	Session 6 - Quality and Public Standards Panel Discussion 2
09.20	RSE Welcome The Rt Hon Lord Ross PC FRSE, Former Lord Justice Clerk		Miss Joyce McMillan, <i>The Scotsman</i> Mr Tom Crone, Head of Legal Department, News International
09.25	Chairman's Opening Remarks Mr James Naughtie, Presenter, BBC Radio 4		The Rt Rev Richard Holloway FRSE (Ex-Bishop of Edinburgh)
09.30	Session 1 - Introduction and Overview Professor Philip Schlesinger FRSE, Director, Stirling Media Research Institute, University of Stirling	14.25	Session 7 - Media and Politics Mr Alastair Campbell (Ex-Downing Street Director of Communications)
09.45	Session 2 - A Personal Perspective Lord Steel of Aikwood, Member of the House of Lords (Ex Presiding Officer, Scottish Parliament)	14.55	Question & Answer Session
10.05	Question & Answer Session	15.25	Coffee
10.20	Coffee	15.45	Session 8 - Regulation and Control Panel Discussion 3
10.40	Session 3 - Broadcasting Media/ Tabloids and Broadsheets Panel Discussion 1 Ms Val Atkinson, Deputy Head, News and Current Affairs, BBC Scotland Mr Paul McKinney, Head of News & Current Affairs, Scottish TV Mr Iain Martin, Editor, <i>The Scotsman</i> Mr Bob Bird, Editor, <i>Scottish News of the World</i> Mr Andrew Jaspan, Editor, <i>The Sunday Herald</i>		Mr David McLetchie MSP, the Scottish Parliament Dr Magnus Linklater FRSE, <i>The Times</i> and <i>Scotland on Sunday</i> Mr Alex Neil MSP, the Scottish Parliament
11.25	Question & Answer Session	16.20	Session 9 - The Way Forward Panel Discussion 4
11.45	Session 4 - Ofcom in Scotland Mr Tony Stoller, Director of External Relations, Ofcom		Mr Tavish Scott MSP, the Scottish Parliament Mr Tom Brown, Columnist, <i>the Daily Record</i> Dr Elaine Murray MSP, the Scottish Parliament
12.05	Question & Answer Session	17.05	Closing Remarks Mr Trevor Royle FRSE, Associate Editor, the <i>Sunday Herald</i>
12.15	Session 5 - The Media: From Understanding to Mutual Understanding Mr Bernard Margueritte, President, The International Communications Forum (Ex-Editor of <i>Le Monde</i>)	17.10	Close
12.45	Question & Answer Session		
12.50	Lunch		

APPENDIX THREE

SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHIES

N.B Please note that the biographies describe positions held at the time of the conference.

Ms Val Atkinson
Deputy Head, News and Current Affairs, BBC

Val Atkinson joined BBC Scotland as a radio researcher in 1978 and has worked as a reporter, producer or editor in most areas of news and current affairs. Currently she is Deputy Head of News and Current Affairs in a department which has expanded to produce 50 hours of programmes a week on radio and TV, and employs 300. Val was a member of the Expert Panel on the Media of the Scottish Office Constitution Group, and as Chairperson of the Broadcasters Group negotiated access agreements for televising the Scottish Parliament. She also chaired the BBC Committee examining the Corporation's response to devolution in Scotland and Wales on political policy and programming.

Mr Bob Bird
Editor, *Scottish News of the World*

Bob Bird has been Editor of the *Scottish News of the World* in Glasgow since 2000. His career working in regional newspapers started at the age of 18, taking up his first reporting shifts at the *Sun* at 21. Subsequently, he worked as Night Editor for the *Sun* in Wapping for many interesting years under Kelvin Mackenzie. In 1990 Bob moved to Glasgow as the *Scottish Sun* Editor and then, in 1998, he returned to London as Deputy Editor of the *News of the World*.

Mr Tom Brown
Freelance Writer and Broadcaster

Tom Brown was born in Kirkcaldy in 1935. His career in journalism began as a golf reporter, sports sub-editor and news reporter with the *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch* in 1955. In 1959 he moved to the *Scottish Daily Express* where he worked as a reporter and religious affairs correspondent before becoming News Reporter, Foreign Correspondent, News and Features Executive and Deputy News Editor for the *Daily Express* in London in 1964. He then took up the position of News and Current Affairs Journalist at BBC Radio Scotland in 1978, becoming Political Commentator and Leader Writer at the *Scottish Daily Express* in 1980. Since 1982 and prior to becoming a Freelance Journalist and Broadcaster, Tom Brown has worked in many senior positions at the *Daily Record*, including as Columnist and Assistant Editor (Politics).

Mr Alastair Campbell
(Ex-Downing Street Director of Communications)

Born in Yorkshire in 1957, Alastair Campbell is a former political journalist who became Tony Blair's Press Secretary in 1994. When Mr Blair became Prime Minister, Alastair Campbell was appointed Chief Press Secretary and later Director of Communications, the position he held when he resigned in 2003. He was exonerated by the Hutton Inquiry and has since been concentrating on public speaking, sports writing and charity work.

Mr Tom Crone
Head of Legal Department, News International

Tom Crone was a practising Barrister for five years before joining the Mirror Group Newspapers as an in-house lawyer in 1980. In 1984 he moved to News International, publishers of the *Sun*, *News of the World*, *The Times* and *Sunday Times*, and has headed the Legal Department since 1991. He is responsible for pre-publication legal advice (primarily to the *Sun* and *News of the World*) and for advice on post-publication problems, for example litigation, which arise when that legal advice has not worked.

The Rt Rev Richard Holloway FRSE
(Ex-Bishop of Edinburgh)

Richard Holloway was educated in Scotland, England and the USA. After his ordination in 1959 he worked in Glasgow until his move to Edinburgh in 1968. He worked in Boston Massachusetts from 1980 until 1984, when he took up a post in Oxford. He was elected Bishop of Edinburgh in 1986 and Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church in 1992. He resigned from both positions in 2000. He was Gresham Professor of Divinity in the City of London between 1997 and 2001. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and is also a well-known writer and broadcaster. His interests include long-distance walking, music, cinema and reading.

Mr Andrew Jaspan
Editor, *Sunday Herald*

Andrew Jaspan has been Editor of the *Sunday Herald* since 1999. He was educated at Beverley Grammar School and Manchester University. His media career began in 1977 as Founder and Editor of the *New Manchester Review*. In 1980 he moved to the *Daily Telegraph* as a Reporter, becoming Sub-Editor of the *Daily Mirror*, Manchester in 1982. He joined *The Times*, London in 1983, as late News Editor, before taking up the post of Assistant News Editor

with the *Sunday Times*, London in 1985 and subsequently becoming Editor in 1988. Andrew moved to *Scotland on Sunday* as Editor in 1989, becoming Editor of *The Scotsman* in 1994 and of *The Observer* in 1995. In 1996 he was Publisher and Managing Director of *The Big Issue*, London.

Dr Magnus Linklater FRSE
The Times and Scotland on Sunday

Magnus Linklater is a columnist for *The Times* and *Scotland on Sunday*. He is a former Editor of *The Scotsman* and served for five years as Chairman of the Scottish Arts Council.

Mr Paul McKinney
Head of News & Current Affairs, Scottish TV

Paul McKinney has been Head of News and Current Affairs at STV since 2000. Educated in Edinburgh and at University College, Oxford, his career in news and current affairs began in 1988 when he worked as a Researcher to Gordon Brown MP. In 1992 he moved to the Scottish Office and worked there until he joined STV News and Current Affairs in 1994, as a researcher, reporter and producer. He was appointed Chief News Producer in 1996, becoming Head of News in 1999. Paul is also a Board Member of the Tron Theatre in Glasgow. His interests include opera music.

Mr David McLetchie MSP
Leader of the Scottish Conservative Group

Born in 1952, David McLetchie was educated in Edinburgh. He qualified as a solicitor in 1976 and joined Tods Murray WS in Edinburgh, becoming a partner in 1980 and latterly heading the department dealing with tax, estates and trusts. Active in Conservative student politics from 1968, David was the Conservative candidate for Edinburgh Central in the 1979 General Election. He has held numerous senior positions within the Scottish Conservative Party at constituency and national level and was President of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Association from 1994 to 1997. In September 1998 he was elected to lead the Party's campaign in the first election to the Scottish Parliament held on 6th May 1999 and was the candidate for Edinburgh Pentlands. He was returned in 1999 as a regional member for the Lothians before winning the Edinburgh Pentlands constituency in 2003. He is the leader of the Scottish Conservative Parliamentary group. David is married to Sheila, a theatre nurse at the Royal Infirmary, Edinburgh. He has a 22 year old son James, by his first marriage to his late wife

Barbara. His interests include golf (12-handicap), football (Heart of Midlothian), theatre and music.

Miss Joyce McMillan
The Scotsman

Joyce McMillan is chief theatre critic of *The Scotsman*, and also writes a political/social commentary column for the paper. She is Convener of the Scottish Civic Forum and a member of the Scottish Working Group of the Hansard Society, and was a member in 1998-99 of the Consultative Steering Group on procedures for the Scottish Parliament. She also broadcasts regularly on Radio Scotland and Radio 4.

M. Bernard Margueritte
President, The International Communications Forum (Ex-Editor of *Le Monde*)

A Sorbonne graduate, Bernard Margueritte joined *Le Monde* in 1965, and was their Eastern European Correspondent in Warsaw from 1966 to 1970. Expelled from Poland in 1971, he moved to Vienna. From there he became a Research Fellow at Harvard University between 1975 and 1977, before returning to Warsaw in 1977 as a correspondent for French newspapers and radio. He was again at Harvard from 1993 to 1994, as Visiting Fellow at the Russian Research Center and the Center for Press and Politics. He is a frequent contributor to Polish television and newspapers. His articles have appeared in *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro* and *Politique Etrangère*. He is co-author of books on Austria and Planification in Eastern Europe and author of a research paper *The New Central Europe: the difficult birth of a free press*, published by Harvard University (1995). Bernard Margueritte became Deputy President of the International Communications Forum in 1996 and President in 2001.

Mr Iain Martin
Editor, *The Scotsman*

Iain Martin attended Glasgow University before becoming Assistant Editor (Politics) and then Political Editor at *Scotland on Sunday*. Before taking his current position as Editor of *The Scotsman* he also worked as a reporter on the *Sunday Times Scotland*, as Assistant Editor (Politics) at *The Scotsman* and finally as Deputy Editor of *Scotland on Sunday*. His interests include music and wine.

Dr Elaine Murray MSP
The Scottish Parliament

Elaine Murray studied Chemistry at both Edinburgh and Cambridge Universities before becoming a lecturer at the Open University. In 1990 she worked as an Assistant to Alex Smith MEP. Following this, she held two research fellowships, the first at The Royal Free Hospital and the second at the Cavendish Laboratory. She is the Labour representative for Dumfries.

Mr James Naughtie (Chairman)
Presenter, BBC Radio 4

James Naughtie presents *Today* on BBC Radio 4. Before joining the BBC to present *The World At One* in the late eighties, he was chief political correspondent of the *Guardian*, which he joined having held the same position on *The Scotsman*. He has been Laurence M Stern Fellow on *The Washington Post*, and is the author of *The Rivals*, an account of the relationship between Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. He also presents *Book Club* on Radio 4 and classical music on BBC radio and television.

Mr Alex Neil MSP
The Scottish Parliament

Alex Neil studied Economics at Dundee University before working as an Economic Consultant between 1993 and 1999. He was Director of Cumnock and Doon Enterprise for a number of years and was the Chairman of Network Scotland from 1987 until 1993. Alex Neil is currently the Scottish National Party representative for Central Scotland.

Mr Trevor Royle
Associate Editor, the *Sunday Herald*

Trevor Royle is a well-known author and broadcaster specialising in the history of war and empire with a score of books to his credit. His most recent book is *Civil War: The Wars of the Three Kingdoms 1638-1660* (Little Brown) which has just been published. As a journalist he is an Associate Editor of the *Sunday Herald* and is also a regular commentator on defence matters and international affairs for the BBC. From 1998 to 1999 he was a Visiting Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities in the University of Edinburgh.

Professor Philip Schlesinger FRSE
Director, Stirling Media Research Institute, University of Stirling

Philip Schlesinger FRSE, FRSA, AcSS, is Professor of Film & Media Studies at the University of Stirling, where he is also Director of the Stirling Media Research Institute. He has been a Visiting Professor of Media & Communication at the University of Oslo and is a long-standing co-Editor of the journal *Media, Culture & Society*. He has held the Queen Victoria Eugenia Chair at the Complutense University of Madrid, been a Visiting Professor at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, and a Jean Monnet Fellow at the European University Institute. He is a member of the Board of Scottish Screen, a Trustee of the Glasgow-based Research Centre for Television and Interactivity and is on the Editor's Advisory Panel of the *Sunday Herald*. He is a member of Ofcom's Advisory Committee for Scotland. He has written extensively on media, communications and cultural questions and his work has been widely translated. He is currently working on a European Framework Programme study of European communicative space and also researching the literature of exile. His most recent, co-authored, books are *Open Scotland* (2001) and *Mediated Access* (2003).

Mr Tavish Scott MSP
The Scottish Parliament

Born on May 6, 1966, Tavish Scott was educated at Anderson High School, Lerwick, and Napier University in Edinburgh, where he graduated with a BA (Hons) in Business Studies in 1989. He was elected as MSP for Shetland in May 1999 and served as Deputy Minister for Parliament between November 2000 and March 2001. Before being elected to the Scottish Parliament, Tavish Scott worked as a research assistant at Westminster to Jim Wallace, MP for Orkney and Shetland. He was a press officer for the Liberal Democrats for a short time and was a Shetland Islands Councillor between 1994 and 1999. Tavish Scott has also spent time managing a family farm in Bressay, Shetland. After the 2003 election he was appointed Deputy Minister for Finance and Public Services and Parliamentary Business. Tavish Scott is married with three children.

**Lord Steel of Aikwood
Member of the House of Lords, (Ex-Presiding Officer,
Scottish Parliament)**

Lord Steel became a life Peer in 1997 and has served as Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords. Educated in Edinburgh, his career in politics began when he became President of the Liberal Club, as well as being involved in student politics more generally at the University of Edinburgh. He graduated with an MA in 1960 and a law degree in 1962. After University his first job was as the Scottish Liberals' General Secretary. Following this he worked for a period of time as a journalist and broadcaster for BBC Scotland. However, his big break came in 1965, when he became one of the youngest Members of Parliament. Since then, Lord Steel has held numerous senior positions including Leader of the Liberal Party, Co-founder of the Liberal Democrats and European Parliament Candidate. His main legislative achievement was steering the Private Members Bill that was to reform the law on abortion: *The Abortion Act 1967*. His interests include classic cars, angling and writing. He is also involved in numerous organisations and has been Edinburgh University's Rector, as well as receiving several honorary degrees. He is married and has three children and six grandchildren.

**Mr Tony Stoller
Director of External Relations, Ofcom**

Tony Stoller is Ofcom's External Relations Director. As such he has senior responsibility for Ofcom's activities in Scotland, and the other Home Nations, as well as for all the outward-facing functions of Ofcom. Prior to this, from June 1995, he was Chief Executive of the Radio Authority. He has previously been a principal Director of the John Lewis Partnership, running the JLP department store in Southampton, Tyrrell and Green, as its Managing Director. His early career was in regional newspapers, with Thomson Regional Newspapers and then in broadcasting regulation. He was Senior Officer, Radio and then Head of Radio Programming at the IBA (Independent Broadcasting Authority) for five years, after moving in 1974 from the position of Marketing Services Manager of the Liverpool *Daily Post and Echo*. After a time as the first Director of the Association of Independent Radio Contractors, the trade association for commercial radio companies, he ran Reading's commercial radio station, and was for four years Managing Director of Thames Valley Broadcasting (Radio 210).

APPENDIX FOUR PARTICIPANT LIST

Mr R Ahlfeld

Communications Manager, IBM UK Ltd

Ms M Arnot

Director of Corporate Services, Napier University

Ms V Atkinson

Deputy Head of News, BBC Scotland

Mr J Bateman

Director, Lairig Communications

Mr C Bell

Director, Wave PR Ltd

Miss E Bell

Communications Officer, Scottish Funding Councils for Further and Higher Education

Mr A Bell**Mr B Bird**

Editor, *Scottish News of the World*

Dr S Bird

PR Manager, The Rowett Research Institute

Ms R Blake

Queen Margaret University College

Mr J Boyle

Chairman, Scottish Arts Council

Miss J Bradley

Head of Communications, Standard Life Investments

Ms J Brandon**Miss S Bridgland**

Assistant Communications Officer, Scottish Funding Councils for Further and Higher Education

Mr R Bright

Associate Director, Weber Shandwick

Mr T Brown

Freelance Writer and Broadcaster

Mr S Brown

PR and Communications Manager, The Royal Society of Edinburgh

Mr A Campbell

Former Director of Communications at Downing Street

Mr A Cochrane

Scottish Editor, the *Daily Telegraph*

Mr B Collins

Scottish Affairs Officer, GMC Scotland

The Most Rev M J Conti FRSE

Archbishop of Glasgow, The Curial Offices. Former Roman Catholic Bishop of Aberdeen

Mr R Convery

Director of Communications, Archdiocese of Glasgow

Mr A Crawford

The Sunday Herald

Miss S Critchley

Press Officer, Central Parking

Mr T Crone

Legal Manager, News International Newspapers Scotland Ltd

Mr V Czarnocki

University of Strathclyde

Dr T Dalyell MP FRSE

Member of Parliament for Linlithgow, Rector of Edinburgh University

Miss S Devlin-Thorp

CEO, Bizazz Ltd

Mr J Donaldson**Professor M C Donaldson FRSE**

Emeritus Professor of Developmental Psychology, University of Edinburgh

Sir James Dunbar-Nasmith FRSE

Emeritus Professor of Architecture, Heriot-Watt University

Mr J Edward

Head of Office in Scotland, European Parliament

Miss K Elsby

External Relations, OFCOM Scotland

Mr K Farquharson

The Scottish Times

Ms J Ferguson

Head of Communications, National Museum of Scotland

Ms M Ferrier

Head of Communications, Scottish Funding Councils

Professor Sir Patrick Forrest FRSE

Professor Emeritus (Surgery), University of Edinburgh. Former Regius Professor of Clinical Surgery, University of Edinburgh

Mr D Fraser

Political Editor, the *Sunday Herald*

Sir Charles Fraser FRSE

Former Partner W & J Burness; Former Chairman, Lothian and Edinburgh Enterprise Ltd

Ms M Gallacher

Audit Scotland

Miss A Geary

Lecturer, Bell College

Mrs M Gibson

Head of Communications, Scottish Arts Council

Mr D Goldberg

Director, Deegee Research Consultancy

Mr J Gray

Mr R Guild

Mr Ian Hamilton

Advocate

Mr P Henderson-Scott

CMG

Sir Russell Hillhouse KCB FRSE

Governor, Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama;
Former Permanent Under-Secretary of State, The Scottish
Office

Ms A Hinds

Director of Media and Public Affairs, The Electoral
Commission

Right Reverend R F Holloway FRSE

Former Bishop of Edinburgh and Former Primus of the
Scottish Episcopal Church

Miss M Hughes

Lecturer, Bell College

Dr D Hutchison

Glasgow Caledonian University

Mr J Hynd

Communications Administrator, General Medical Council

Ms K Innes

Communications Executive, Seafish

Mr R Instrell

Lasswade High School Centre

Ms L Jackson

Mr A Jaspan

Editor, the *Sunday Herald*

Mr R Jones

Scottish Conservative Party

Ms M Jordan

Senior Communications Officer, Scottish Arts Council

Mr K Kemp

Director, Kemp Organisations

Mr J Kennedy

Director, Wave PR Ltd

Mr D Kennedy

Media Manager, COSLA

Mr R Kerr

Media Officer, The University of Edinburgh

Rev L Kirk

Miss S Kosinski

The Electoral Commission

Dr M D Linklater FRSE

Columnist, *The Times* and *Scotland on Sunday*.
Chairman, The Little Sparta Trust; Board Member,
Encounter

Miss W Littlejohn

PR Manager, KPMG

Mr R McAlpine

Public Affairs Officer, Universities Scotland

Mr C McClatchie

General Manager, News International Newspapers
Scotland Ltd

Ms L McClymont

Student, Napier University

Professor R G L McCrone CB FRSE

Vice-President, The Royal Society of Edinburgh; Professor
in Business Studies, University of Edinburgh

Mr B McGee

Business Writer, *Scotland on Sunday*

Mr M MacIver

Chief Executive/Registrar, General Teaching Council for
Scotland

Ms E MacKay

Chair, David Hume Institute

Mr P McKinney

Head of News and Current Affairs, STV

Mr N Mackinnon

Chief Press Officer, Scottish Liberal Democrats

Ms S Mackinnon

Education Correspondent, *The Scotsman*

Mr A Macleod

Corporate Affairs Manager, Standard Life Bank

Mr D McLetchie

MSP for Lothians, the Scottish Parliament

Mr P MacMahon

Mr A McMillan

Ms J McMillan

Mr McWhirter

Mrs M McWilliams

Deputy Director Communications, University of Edinburgh

M. B Margueritte

International President, International Communications Forum

Mr F Maxwell

Agricultural Correspondent, *The Scotsman*

Miss G Meighan

Head of Media Relations, the Law Society of Scotland

Mr F Moir**Ms S Morris**

Student, Napier University

Dr M Montgomery

Director, Scottish Centre for Journalism Studies

Mr A Muirhead

Chief Executive, Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland

Mrs B Munro

Head of Corporate Communications and Marketing, Napier University

Mr R Murphy**Dr E Murray**

MSP for Dumfries, the Scottish Parliament

Mr J Naughtie

Presenter, BBC Radio 4

Mr A Neil

MSP for Central Scotland, the Scottish Parliament

Miss K Nevin-Ridley

Press & PR Manager, University of Edinburgh

Mr T Nugent

Director, Noble Gossart Ltd

Mr A O'Neil

Head of Office, the Electoral Commission

Dr S Oates

Lecturer, University of Glasgow

Mrs A Packard

Chairman, RSA Scottish Committee

Mr D Paterson

Head of Communications, the Scottish Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Party

Mr J Pelan

Director of Communications, Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland

Ms P Petersoo

Student, University of Edinburgh

Miss K Raeside

Communications Officer, IBM UK Ltd

Ms I Reid

Head of Corporate Communications, City of Edinburgh

Miss R Robertson

Consultant, GPC International

The Rt Hon Lord Ross PC FRSE

Former Lord Justice-Clerk of Scotland

Mr T B Royle FRSE

Associate Editor, the *Sunday Herald*

Mr C Rullkotter

Student, Napier University

Professor W C Russell FRSE

Emeritus Research Professor, University of St Andrews

Ms J Saren

Scottish Council Foundation

Miss L Sawers

Corporate Communications Manager, Scottish Executive

Professor P R Schlesinger FRSE

Professor of Film and Media Studies, University of Stirling

Mr T Scott

MSP for Shetland, the Scottish Parliament

Sir John Shaw CBE KStJ FRSE

Former Governor, Bank of Scotland; Former Chairman, Scottish Science Trust

Miss L Sinclair

Bell College

Ms K Smith

Student, University of Glasgow

Mr N Smith

Managing Director, Auld Valves Ltd

Mr I Spinney

Director, Spinney and Partners

The Rt Hon Lord Steel of Aikwood KBE PC

Member of the House of Lords

Professor I H Stevenson FRSE

Programme Convener, The Royal Society of Edinburgh; Professor of Pharmacology (retired), University of Dundee

Mr A Stewart

Acting Director, Ofcom Scotland

Mr T Stoller

Director of External Relations, Ofcom

Mr B Taylor

Political Editor, BBC Scotland

Ms J Todd

Head of Scottish Affairs, General Medical Council
(Edinburgh)

Ms L Turnbull

Ms F Van Buuren

Corporate Communications Manager, the National Trust
for Scotland

Mr M Wade

Editor of *Ecosse*, the *Sunday Times*

Ms S Walker

Events Officer, The Royal Society of Edinburgh

Mr S Walker

The Scotsman

Ms S Ward

The Scotsman

Ms L Watson-Brown

Freelance Journalist

Mr J Wassell

Barkers PR

Mr G Whyte

Scottish Co-Ordinator, CSM

Mr H Williams

Producer/ Reporter, BBC Scotland

Mr C Williams

Editor, BBC Scotland

Mr M Wilson

All Media Scotland

Ms K Wilson

Public Relations Manager, Heriot-Watt University

THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF EDINBURGH

The Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) is Scotland's National Academy of Science & Letters. An independent body with charitable status, its multidisciplinary fellowship of 1300 men and women of international standing represents a knowledge resource for the people of Scotland. Committed to its Royal Charter of 1783 for the "advancement of learning and useful knowledge" the Society recognises the important role it can play in today's Scotland. Working as part of the UK and within a global context, the RSE seeks to contribute to Scotland's social, economic and cultural wellbeing by:

- Organising conferences and lectures for the specialist and for the general public on topics of national and international importance.
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Contact us

The Royal Society of Edinburgh
22-26 George Street
Edinburgh, EH2 2PQ

Telephone/textphone: 0131 240 5000

Fax: 0131 240 5024

e-mail: rse@royalsoced.org.uk

website: www.royalsoced.org.uk

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