

“Academics for YES” – June 25th with Michael Russell MSP

This coming week, on 25 June 2014, Academics for Yes (Ayes) will be holding a public meeting in the University of Edinburgh, King’s Buildings Campus to speak on ‘Research Funding in an Independent Scotland’. The event is in the JCMB theatre B and starts at 19:00. People of both Yes & No persuasion are invited alongwith those still currently undecided as this is a unique opportunity in the campaign to date to have an open forum on the subject-

We will hear from two key speakers and then an open Q&A session where questions specific to the subject of the talks and any other referendum related questions can be asked.

The key speakers are Michael Russell MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Life Long Learning alongside Dr Stephen J Watson of the University of Glasgow.

A link to the event can be found here – http://events.yesscotland.net/neilhay/research_funding_in_an_independent_scotland_academics_for_yes?recruiter_id=25605

This open event comes on the back of the recent correspondence published in the Herald and I include the open letter here :

“We read with disappointment a letter in the Herald from some academics opposed to independence. It is from the ‘too wee, too poor’ template but, at least, it avoids ‘too stupid’, which normally completes the triptych.

For ‘too wee’ we are told that, as a ‘small country’, Scotland would have ‘little power’ in negotiations on research policy. To which the rather obvious response is that it would be more than under the Union. For ‘too poor’ we are told that the opinion of ‘a majority of economic experts’ is that ‘the

economic prospects for Scotland would be poorer than within the Union'. In fact, a Financial Times analysis concludes that an independent Scotland could 'expect to start with healthier state finances than the rest of the UK'.

We also read another recurring theme from the No campaign – a single research system 'has already been rejected by the UK government'. Recent revelations that 'of course' a currency would be up for negotiation suggest that we treat this claim with an 'aye, right' response. The Scottish Government's preferred option of a shared Research Councils' budget has been supported by those who understand the benefits to both countries. Professor Paul Boyle of RCUK told MSPs in March that he hoped the cross-border network would continue and that RCUK 'strongly supported' this.

It is also claimed that there are 'no precedents' for a shared system. There is, of course, the European Research Council but there are also examples within the British Isles. Several bilateral arrangements exist between the UK and the Republic of Ireland. These include joint funding arrangements between the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Irish Research Council for Humanities and Social Sciences, the merging of the postgraduate research councils of the Republic and Northern Ireland, and an agreement giving the universities of Ulster and Queen's University Belfast access to the Republic's scientific research funding scheme. Why would an independent Scotland be treated differently?

Several key issues are missing from the No argument. First is the current funding environment for research in the UK, which has been a matter of significant concern. The Campaign for Science and Engineering (CaSE) has noted 'the cumulative erosion' of the science budget of 'over £1.1bn' and CaSE Director, Dr Sarah Main, commented that 'The last four years of a flat cash science budget is biting scientists and engineers and squeezing universities.' CaSE also notes on the measure of the proportion of GDP spent on R&D 'the UK

languishes towards the bottom of the G8 and well below the EU-28 average'. In an independent Scotland, policies to develop the R&D base would also benefit universities.

In addition to the UK-wide research councils, research is funded, separately by Westminster and the devolved administrations, based on regular assessments of quality. This is under threat in England. One commentator (<https://telescopers.wordpress.com/tag/bis/>) argues that for this element of funding in England the 'the overall picture looks very bleak ... there will be very little money available ... to allocate as a result of the 2014 Research Excellence Framework'. And we are only half way through the public funding cuts which have been agreed by the government and the opposition at Westminster.

The second missing issue is the universally acknowledged negative impact on student recruitment to, and the reputation of, all UK universities of the Westminster immigration policy. The third issue is the invisibility of the Scottish brand. Evidence to the Scottish Affairs Select Committee from Professor Raffe of the University of Edinburgh and Alastair Sim from Universities Scotland pointed out that 'despite its excellence, the Scottish higher education and research sector was not as visible internationally as it could be because it was perceived as being part of the overall UK brand'. In an independent Scotland, with an appropriate immigration policy, we will create our own brand to develop opportunities in research and to attract international students.

Devolution and a sympathetic government have provided short term protection against the financial policies being imposed on universities in England. But likely changes to, or abolition of, the Barnett formula for allocating public funds to Scotland would mean substantial cuts to the Scottish budget. The real threat to research in Scotland's universities is not independence but continued participation in the union. Independence would not harm the research base; independence

would protect it and allow it to thrive. We will be voting Yes in September and we look forward with hope to the opportunities that an independent Scotland would create.

Yours faithfully

Dr Dorothy Aidulus, University of Glasgow
Prof. Rachel Baker, Glasgow Caledonian University
Dr Ian Barnes, University of the Highlands and Islands
Dr Geraint Bevan, Glasgow Caledonian University
Dr Ian Black, Heriot Watt University
Dr. Valentina Bold, University of Glasgow
Prof. Steve Bruce, University of Aberdeen
Dr Derek Bryce, University of Strathclyde
Dr Douglas Chalmers, Glasgow Caledonian University
Prof. Mark Chaplain, University of Dundee
Dr. Graham Connelly, University of Strathclyde
Prof. Ted Cowan, University of Glasgow (Emeritus)
Prof. Cairns Craig, University of Aberdeen
Prof. Andrew Cumbers, University of Glasgow
Dr Jeannie Daniels, University of the West of Scotland
Prof. Mike Danson, Heriot Watt University
Dr Lesley Diak, Robert Gordon University
Prof. Iain Docherty, University of Glasgow
Allan Elliot, Royal Botanic Gardens
Dr Marion Ellison, Queen Margaret University
Dr. Kieran German, University of Strathclyde
Prof. Heinz Giegerich, University of Edinburgh
Dr Paul Gilfillan, Queen Margaret University
Dr Myshele Goldberg, University of Strathclyde
Prof. Joe Goldblatt, Queen Margaret University
Dr. Lesley Graham, Bordeaux
Dr. Alexia Grosjean, University of St. Andrews
Prof. Igor Guz, University of Aberdeen
Dr Peter Hastie, University of Glasgow
Prof. Donna Heddle, University of the Highlands and Islands
Dr Lizanne Henderson, University of Glasgow

Dr Michael Herron, Robert Gordon University
Prof. John Howell, University of Aberdeen
Dr. Gill Hubbard, University of Stirling
Dr Gordon Jenkins, University of the Highlands and Islands
Dr Andrew Jennings, University of the Highlands and Islands
Dr. Ralph Jessop, University of Glasgow
Dr Innes Kennedy, University of the Highlands and Islands
Prof. Mike Lean, University of Glasgow
Prof. James Livesay, University of Dundee
Dr Scott Lyall, Edinburgh Napier University
Dr Alan MacDonald, University of Dundee
Prof. Bryan MacGregor, University of Aberdeen
Prof. Allan MacInnes, University of Strathclyde
Dr Andrew Mackillop, University of Aberdeen
Prof. Fiona MacPherson, University of Glasgow
Prof. Paul Maharg, Australian National University
Prof. Willy Maley, University of Glasgow
Prof. David Manderson, University of the West of Scotland
Prof. Marian Marian, University of Aberdeen
Dr Michael Marten, University of Stirling
Dr Judith Masthoff, University of Aberdeen
Dr Chris McCabe, University of Glasgow
Prof. Colin McCaig, University of Aberdeen
Dr J. Derrick McClure, Ottawa (Emeritus)
Peter McColl, University of Edinburgh
Dr Brian McDonald, Glasgow Caledonian University
Anna McFarlane, University of St. Andrews
Dr David McGuinness, University of Glasgow
Ross McLachlan, University of Glasgow
Dr Fiona McNeill, Heriot Watt University
Dr Wallace McNeish, University of Abertay
Dr Gerry Mooney, Open University
Dr Carlo Morelli, University of Dundee
Prof. John Morrison, University of Aberdeen
Prof. Steve Murdoch, University of St. Andrews
Dr. Jeffrey Murer, University of St. Andrews
Prof. William G. Naphy, University of Aberdeen

Riaz Nighit, University of the West of Scotland
Dr Nir Oren, University of Aberdeen
Stephen Osborne, University of Edinburgh
Prof. Laura Piacentini, University of Strathclyde
Prof. Murray Pittock, University of Glasgow
Prof. Alan Riach, University of Glasgow
Dr David Roberston, Robert Gordon University
Dr. Douglas Robertson, University of Stirling
Dr Duncan Ross, University of Glasgow
Dr. Alasdair Ross, University of Stirling
Dr. Sian M. Russell, Glasgow Caledonian University
Prof. Alex de Ruyter, Glasgow Caledonian University
Prof. Stephen Salter, University of Edinburgh
Dr Eurig Scandrett, Queen Margaret University
Dr Mark Sheridan, University of the Highlands and Islands
Dr David Small, University of Glasgow
Dr Mark Smith, University of Edinburgh
Dr Cassie Smith-Christmas, University of the Highlands and Islands
Duncan Sneddon, University of Edinburgh
Gemma Stevens, University of the West of Scotland
Dr John Thomson, University of St. Andrews
Dr Steven Timoney, University of the Highlands and Islands
Dr Will Tuladhar-Douglas, University of Aberdeen
Prof. Philip Wadler, University of Edinburgh
Dr Moray Watson, University of Aberdeen
Prof. John Watson, University of Aberdeen
Dr. Stephen J Watson, University of Glasgow
Prof. Andrew Watterson, University of Stirling
Dr Tom Webster, University of Edinburgh
Dr Geoff Whittam, Glasgow Caledonian University
Prof. Bill Whyte, University of Edinburgh
Dr Norman Wilson, University of the Highlands and Islands
Dr Willie Wilson, University of Glasgow (Emeritus)
Prof. Alan Wilson, University of Strathclyde
Prof. James Young, University of Stirling
Eleanor Yule, University of the West of Scotland"

Submitted by [Neil Hay](#)

