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**Sectarianism and state funded schooling in Scotland.**  
**A critical response to the Final Report of the Advisory Group**  
**on Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland.**

**ABSTRACT**

The Scottish Government has recently invested considerable energy and resource into tackling sectarianism in Scotland. They have commissioned reviews of existing research, commissioned new research and funded community based projects. They also appointed an independent Advisory Group in 2012 to investigate the scope of sectarianism and provide some recommendations on how to address sectarianism. This article is focused on the *Final Report of the Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland - April 2015* (Scottish Government, 2015a) and the key statements in this *Final Report* that refer to state funded school education. The article argues that there is much to commend in the *Final Report* and provides a critical examination of the discussion of the relationship between school education and sectarianism and the contribution of school education to anti-sectarian activities and education.

**INTRODUCTION**

The debate and discussion concerning sectarianism in Scotland have been characterized by vague and imprecise conceptualization, confusing and sometimes emotive terminology and disputes concerning the scope and extent of contemporary sectarianism. Academics, politicians, government publications and charities, for example, have described sectarianism in the following ways: ‘Scotland’s secret shame’; a ‘blight’; a ‘hate crime’ and an ‘equalities issue’ (Boyle, 2011; Carrell, 2011; McConnell, 2011; Nil by Mouth, 2015; Scottish Government, 2015a, 2015b). Academics and the government have produced different definitions or working definitions of sectarianism (Leichty, and Clegg, 2001; Finn, 2003; Bruce et al. 2004; Scottish Government, 2011, 2013a, 2015a). In the reviews of research evidence on sectarianism, commissioned by the Scottish Executive/Government, a significant disparity has emerged between perceptions of the scope and locus of sectarianism and the experience of sectarianism (McAspurren, 2005; Scottish Government Social Research, 2013; Goodall et al., 2015a). There has also been some discussion about the role of school education, particularly denominational education, being the cause or contributing to the continued existence of sectarianism although much greater discussion has focused on school education being one of the most important sites for anti-sectarian education and activities (Scottish Executive, 2005; 2006a, 2006b, 2006c; McGlone, 2013; Dinwoodie, 2013). It is within this context that the Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland was established and produced two reports to help clarify the nature and scope of contemporary sectarianism and the most effective ways to tackle sectarianism.

The Advisory Group has published the following reports: Scottish Government (2013a) *Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland. Independent Advice to Scottish Ministers and report on Activity 9 August 2012 – 15 November 2013* and Scottish Government (2015a) *Tackling Sectarianism and its consequences in Scotland. Final Report of the Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland - April 2015*. Note: members of the Advisory Group have adopted the acronym AGoTS in Rosie et al. (2015) and refer to the Interim Report as AGoTS (2013) and the Final Report as AGoTS (2015). To avoid possible confusion, this article will refer to the two reports as the *Interim Report* and the *Final Report*.

The aim of this article is to examine the *Final Report* and some of the key statements that refer to state-funded school education and sectarianism: the claims of a relationship between sectarianism and denominational and non-denominational schools and, more importantly, the importance of state funded schools in anti-sectarian initiatives and education. This article will argue that the *Final Report* is a very valuable addition to the increasing corpus of literature on sectarianism in Scotland. The article will further argue that anti-sectarian education in schools can be best understood as the teaching of a controversial issue and, at times, the *Final Report* lacks a developed understanding of the complexity of teaching controversial issues in schools. The article begins with the background context of the series of initiatives and documents that preceded the *Final Report*, and then provides an overview of the evolution of the document and a concise discussion of the key points that emerge in the *Final Report*. The article continues with an exposition and critical analysis of the key statements in the *Final Report* that pertain to sectarianism and schooling in Scotland and ends with some concluding remarks.

## **BACKGROUND TO THE PUBLICATION OF THE FINAL REPORT**

The Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland was established by Roseanna Cunningham MSP on 9 August 2012. The role of the Advisory Group was ‘to provide the Scottish Ministers with advice on all issues relating to sectarianism in Scotland’ (Cosla, 2013). The Advisory group was an independent body but supported by the Scottish Government. The Advisory group consisted of: Dr Duncan Morrow; Dr Cecelia Clegg; Ms Margaret Lynch; Rev Ian Galloway and Dr Michael Rosie. The remit of the group was focused on ‘sectarianism as it has been experienced in Scotland, essentially Catholic-Protestant tensions and relationships’ (Rosie et al., 2015; Scottish Government, 2015a). The Group sought to answer two main questions:

- What is sectarianism in Scotland now?
- How should we best deal with its consequences?

The Advisory Group consulted a very diverse group of individuals and organisations over a twenty-three month period, including representatives from the Scottish Government, local authorities, churches, the police, football, youth workers, charities, the Orange Order, academics and Education Scotland (Scottish Government, 2013a, 2015a).

The Advisory Group is the latest in a series of Scottish Executive and Scottish Government initiatives to tackle sectarianism. These initiatives can be traced back to the Summit on Sectarianism convened on February 14, 2005 by Jack McConnell, the then First Minister of the Scottish Executive. This Summit was prompted by a series of incidents in the late 1990s and early 21<sup>st</sup> century: the murder of two Celtic fans; Donald Findlay QC recorded singing sectarian songs; the James MacMillan speech at the 1999 Edinburgh Festival decrying deep-rooted anti-Catholicism in Scottish society and an escalation in hostility between supporters of Celtic and Rangers football clubs (Finn, 2000; MacMillan, 2000; Gallagher, 2013, McKinney, 2015). The Summit produced a *Record of the discussion of the Summit on sectarianism held on 14 February 2005* (Scottish Executive, 2005) and subsequent documentation emerged: *Sectarianism. Action Plan on Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland* (Scottish Executive, 2006a), *Sectarianism. Update on action plan on tackling sectarianism in Scotland* (Scottish Executive, 2006b) and *Building Friendships and Strengthening Communities* (Scottish Executive, 2006c). The Scottish Executive and (later) Government commissioned reviews of extant research of the evidence on sectarianism in Scotland, as they

sought to understand sectarianism and the ways in which it is manifested in contemporary society: *Religious Discrimination & Sectarianism in Scotland: A brief Review of the Evidence (2002-2004)* (McAspurren; 2005) and *An Examination of the Evidence on Sectarianism in Scotland*, (Scottish Government Social Research, 2013). The Scottish Government commissioned new research on sectarianism: Hamilton-Smith et al. (2015a) *Community Impact of Public Processions*; Goodall et al. (2015a) *Community Experiences of Sectarianism* and Hinchcliffe et al. (2015) *Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2014: Public Attitudes to Sectarianism in Scotland*. The Scottish Government also introduced anti-sectarianism legislation in 2012 (Scottish Government, 2012).

## **SOME OF THE KEY POINTS RAISED IN THE FINAL REPORT**

There are some very interesting and insightful points raised by the *Final Report*. The *Final Report*, revising the definition of sectarianism provided in the *Interim Report*, defines sectarianism as follows (section 5):

Sectarianism in Scotland is a mixture of perceptions, attitudes, actions and structures that involves overlooking, excluding, discriminating against or being abusive or violent towards others on the basis of their perceived Christian denominational background. This perception is always mixed with other factors such as, but not confined to, politics, football allegiance and national identity.

The *Final Report* acknowledges that their definition could be further developed and that sectarianism can be conceived to be wider than the ‘Catholic/Protestant divide’ in Scotland but emphasizes that this is the predominant manifestation of sectarianism in Scotland (1.8.1). While this ‘Catholic/Protestant divide’ may appear to be similar to the situation in Northern Ireland, the *Final Report* insists on an emphasis on the differences rather than similarities between sectarianism in Scotland and Northern Ireland. One of the main differences is that there has been no sustained armed struggle between Catholics and Protestants in Scotland in the late twentieth century comparable to the well documented struggle in Northern Ireland, nor have there been strictly segregated living areas (1.8.5; Bruce, 2000; Cochrane, 2013). Another difference is that there are no influential ‘Catholic’ or ‘Protestant’ political parties in Scotland as there are in Northern Ireland (1.8.5; Bruce and Glendinning, 2007; McKinney and Conroy, 2015).

The *Final Report* comments on the different perceptions of the scope of sectarianism that often leads to a polarization of views (1.5; 1.8.6; 3.11). Some of these perceptions consider sectarianism to be widespread throughout Scotland while others consider sectarianism to be more prevalent in the west of Scotland (3.11; 3.11.1; 3.11.9). The *Final Report* draws from the recent *Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2014* and research conducted in Glasgow (reported in 2003) to highlight that while many people have a perception that sectarianism exists in Scotland, a smaller number of people have experienced sectarianism (3.11.1; 3.11.6; NFO, 2003; Hinchcliffe et al. (2015)). The *Final Report* stresses the importance of these perceptions but argues that there is a need to have an evidence-based approach to sectarianism in Scotland to establish facts and how effective interventions can be undertaken (1.14; 1.15.2; 3.1). The *Final Report* provides a very useful way of understanding sectarianism through: *glass ceilings* (inequality and discrimination continues in some form, 1.9.1); *glass bottles* (sectarianism justifies violence, threat or intimidation, 1.9.2-1.9.4) and *glass curtains* (sectarianism creates residual suspicion or antagonism, 1.9.5-1.9.8).

The *Final Report* poses some searching questions for the debate and the focus of research on sectarianism. The *Final Report* questions if football authorities and clubs are sufficiently active in addressing sectarianism and recommends that they become much more proactive (8.9-8.10; 4.14-4.16.3; 4.24.1-4.24.2; 5.7.9-5.7.10). The *Final Report* challenges Scottish football to accept strict liability (which is in place for UEFA competitions) or respond to the question: if not strict liability then what? (8.11; 4.17; 4.23; 4.24.3; 5.7.11). The *Final Report* identifies a number of areas that require research evidence: the role of gender in sectarianism, particularly masculine cultures; the use of the internet/social media for spreading (perceptions of) sectarianism; the relationship between football and sectarianism and the polite, educated forms of sectarianism (8.1-8.4; 3.11.17; 3.14.1-3.14.3). The research on gender, in particular, could examine the role of the family in generating models of behaviour and preserving sectarian attitudes (8.1; 3.12; 3.14.1).

The Scottish Government produced a *Scottish Government Response to the Final Report of the Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland* in May 2015 (Scottish Government, 2015c). This short document praised the work of the Advisory Group and highlighted the work of the Government-funded Community based projects aimed at tackling sectarianism.

## **ANALYSIS OF THE FINAL REPORT**

The *Final Report* is a distinctive type of document: a published written report available through open access that addresses a specific issue and makes recommendations (Scott, 2004). The *Final Report* is probably both a 'primary' and 'secondary' document because the Advisory Group draws on the discussions in the consultation process but also draws on extant research (Cohen et al., 2011). The *Final Report* can be tested for internal and external coherence. I have adapted this from Hodder (2000): internal coherence exists when points raised in the *Final Report* do not contradict each other and external coherence exists to the extent to which points raised in the *Final Report* are consistent with theories or research within the field. The methods of analysis adopted in this article were content analysis and thematic content analysis that enumerated and abstracted dominant themes that are relevant to the relationship between education, schools and sectarianism (Franzosi, 2004). In the process of analyzing the *Final Report*, the reading of the text focused not only on the text itself but also on the wider policy and research context that provides the background and contemporary relevance for the document. After some extensive coding, the examination of the selected topics was clustered around four main themes: *denominational schools; sectarianism and schools; education has a role to play as one of the leaders of anti-sectarian change and the role of the school curriculum in addressing sectarianism.*

## **DENOMINATIONAL SCHOOLS**

The Advisory group examines the perception of the role of school education as contributing to the problem of sectarianism and the group provides a number of suggestions on the major role that schools can play in anti-sectarian education and how this is best implemented in schools. It is important to note that the vast majority of the discussion on school education is focused on the major role of schools in contributing to the efforts to tackle sectarianism. Considerably less attention is dedicated to the perception of the role of school education as contributing to the problem of sectarianism and tends to focus on the position of denominational schools in the schools system. Almost all of the denominational state funded schools in Scotland are Roman Catholic schools (Scottish Government, 2013b).

There are three explicit references to denominational schools and their putative relationship with sectarianism in the *Final Report* and these are worth examining in some detail. These are contained in sections: 1.9.8; 3.11.10 and 4.41. The first reference, 1.9.8, summarises some of the comments made by those who were consulted. The Advisory group has presented these comments as constituting two contrasting positions:

*The role of schools and education was also raised with some arguing strongly that the existence of choice in schooling relating to denominational schools was sectarian in and of itself while others arguing that targeting one sort of school as a contributor to sectarianism was itself sectarian.*

The Advisory group advises that debates must consider these contrasting positions and the implications of the positions:

*Debates which do not take seriously the risk that either or both of those approaches could end up with deeply sectarian outcomes are both pointless and counter-productive.*

The difficulty with the way in which these two positions have been articulated in the *Final Report* is that the reader is not informed of the identities of the individuals/groups who hold these positions and the *Final Report* does not provide any evidence to substantiate these positions. This is further compounded by a lack of sufficient research evidence that would provide credence to the perception that denominational schools are sectarian in and of themselves. This is problematic for the external coherence of the *Final Report* (Hodder, 2000). Further, the Advisory Group, having acknowledged these positions and their importance, immediately changes the focus from the structures of schools to the experiences of young people:

*Sectarianism primarily exists in the quality of relationships that grow between whole communities and children and our approach to education has been to shift the focus from the structure of education to the quality of what happens for young people, with a strong emphasis on the need for proactive engagement with this issue in age-appropriate ways.*

This change of focus is potentially problematic for the internal coherence of the *Final Report* (Hodder, 2000).

The second reference, 3.11.10, to denominational school is within the context of the perceptions of the areas and institutions that have a key role within sectarianism in Scotland. These perceptions were collated from the meetings with representatives in Scottish society and the independent research commissioned. This was mirrored by the *Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2014* (SSA) that asked which aspects contributed to sectarianism (Hinchcliffe et al., 2015). The Final report highlights some of the findings of the SSA:

*Very substantial proportions mentioned football (88%), Orange Order/Loyalist Parades (79%) and Irish Republican marches (70%). Smaller, but still notable, proportions of around one third mentioned denominational schools, internet/social media, and traditional media.*

The Advisory group does not include all of the additional information provided in the 2015 SSA report. The SSA further explains that in terms of what is considered to contribute to sectarianism, 25% identified churches, 8% non-denominational schools and 8% the police. The Advisory group adds that when asked in the SSA which aspect contributed *most* to sectarianism, 55% identified football, with much smaller numbers identifying Orange Order/loyalist Parades (13%) or Irish Republican marches (3%). More importantly, the *Final Report* fails to provide a fuller picture of the range of views in the SSA report on what is considered to contribute *most* to sectarianism that is relevant to their discussion of denominational schools. The SSA report points out that there are very low percentages of respondents who considered denominational schools, internet/social media, and traditional media to be among the aspects of Scottish life that contribute *most* to sectarianism (all 5% or less). This omission in the *Final Report* is a little surprising and incoherent with the overall position of the Advisory Group as expressed in both the *Interim Report* and the *Final Report*. This position is outlined below in the final reference to denominational schools in section 4.41 of the *Final Report*.

*Our position stated in 2013 report has not changed from the belief that sectarianism would not be eradicated by closing schools.*

It is important to revisit the *Interim Report* and the statements that were made about denominational schools. The most important statement is under the heading *Young People and Education*:

*The debate around schools in Scotland can quickly degenerate into sterile or emotive conversations about the importance of religious diversity in education versus the importance of single-provider education. We do not believe that sectarianism stems from, or is the responsibility of, denominational schooling, or, specifically, Catholic schools, nor that sectarianism would be eradicated by closing such institutions (Interim Report, 6.38).*

In summary, the Advisory Group draws from the interviews (and focus groups) that were conducted and the SSA and acknowledges that there are perceptions that denominational schools contribute to sectarianism (though, as I have identified, not necessarily an aspect of Scottish life that contributes most). The Advisory Group, nevertheless, is consistent in the *Interim Report* and the *Final Report* in rejecting claims that denominational schools are a source of sectarianism or have been responsible for sectarianism. This is also consistent with the existing research evidence. Denominational schools, as part of the Scottish schools system, are, of course, a locus for anti-sectarian education.

## **SECTARIANISM AND SCHOOLS**

Let us now examine the broader discussion of the possible relationship between sectarianism and all forms of schooling. There are a few points in the *Final Report* where the Advisory Group discusses the possible existence of sectarianism or sectarian activity in schools. The *Final Report* comments that the escalation of sectarianism to hate crime, abuse and violence is often the result of a combination of factors (1.9.2). This is an antisocial outcome that can create:

*...what Police Scotland described to us as a 'permissive environment' where abuse and violence is tolerated and even sometimes encouraged. At other times it spills into hostility between young people or in schools.*

This section is intriguing as it is not clear that the claim that 'it spills into hostility between young people or in schools' is also attributable to Police Scotland. Further, the statement is not substantiated with any evidence. The reports on *Religiously Aggravated Offending in Scotland* (2010-2015) do not include schools in their collation of the locus of charges, unless schools are included under 'other' (locus of charge) (Cavanagh and Morgan, 2011; Goulding and Cavanagh, 2012, 2013; McKenna and Skivington, 2014; Davidson, 2015). The external coherence of this section is questionable. Later in section 4.36 the Advisory Group qualifies this view when they state:

*There is no doubt that much of the sectarian behaviour exhibited and experienced by young people takes place in their communities outside of school.*

This section continues by advocating working with young people in community settings (but also connected to formal education settings). The *Final Report* states that education and legislation and changing social attitudes have helped to ease social inequality and while poverty and social exclusion was widespread, there is evidence that anti-Catholicism 'was a significant factor restricting life chances and access to individual advancement' (1.9.1). The evidence is not specified but presumably refers to the findings of research by Devine (2006), Paterson (2000), Paterson and Iannelli (2006), Paterson et al. (2015), Raab and Holligan (2012) and Rosie (2015).

A more specific reference to the role of school education is contained in section 4.52 where the Final report states that it is often schools and youth services that have to:

*...pick up the preventative work with police and Accident and Emergency Departments dealing with the extreme ends of the issue.*

The preventative work includes recommendations for anti-sectarian education initiatives and there is significant emphasis on this in the *Final Report*. These will be discussed in the next section.

The final point to be examined raises concerns about some local communities in Scotland (4.9):

*One of the clear potential strengths of churches is the range of relationships that they have in local communities, including in many fragile places where mixtures of poverty, poor health and education and a lack of opportunities have reduced people to levels of desperation which allow injustices and antisocial behaviour to go unchallenged within those communities.*

This point identifies four factors that contribute to the breakdown of communities: poverty; poor health (which is often an effect of poverty), education and lack of opportunities. This breakdown, if I am reading this correctly, produces contexts where sectarian attitudes and behavior are unchecked. This section is far too general: there is insufficient detail and there are no examples of such communities (even anonymised) provided in the *Final Report* to illustrate this point and to assess the external coherence of such claims. Is this section



referring to state funded school education? If this is the case, school education is clearly supposed to be deficient, but in what ways? Is school education also considered to be ‘poor’, similar to ‘poor’ health? This unsatisfactory section fails to acknowledge the series of attempts at intervention in Scottish state funded schools that are designed to support children and young people in areas of deprivation, including staged intervention, nurture groups and strategies of inclusion and expectation (Sharples et al., 2011; McKinney et al., 2012, 2013; Education Scotland, 2015a, 2015b).

## **EDUCATION HAS A ROLE TO PLAY AS ONE OF THE LEADERS OF ANTI-SECTARIAN CHANGE**

Education is identified in a number of sections as one of the areas that should be leading in anti-sectarian initiatives. Change, according to the *Final Report* (1.14, Principle 5):

*...will depend on organisations which have been linked to sectarianism through perception or historic actions – such as churches, cultural organisations, football clubs and governing bodies, educational organisations, the criminal justice system, youth work and community work – responding to the underlying will to see change by developing their own actions to address the manifestations of sectarianism in their areas of activity and influence.*

The advisory group promotes the ideas of a ‘culture of responsibility’ and ‘proactive interventions’ and states that key figures and areas in Scottish culture, including education, have a ‘specific obligation to provide active leadership’ (1.15.3). This idea of leadership is repeated in the Findings and Recommendations (5.5) and in the Conclusion (6.4.2). In section 1.9.4, it is stated that it is ‘critical’ that organisations including schools address the issue in an appropriate manner for their constituents. In one section it is noted that educationalists (among others) have alerted the Advisory group to the fact that the social media is a ‘key arena for the transmission of sectarianism’ (3.12). Youth and community projects are encouraged to work closely with organisations such as education departments (4.62; 5.7.20; 8.20) and schools (1.15.6) to begin mainstreaming work. The Advisory group recommends that Scottish Football address the perception of the association between football and sectarianism through:

*...direct programmes of intervention, clear anti-sectarian messaging and active and visible leadership in partnership with other agencies such as local government, youth work, schools and the police* (4.24.2; repeated almost verbatim in Section 5: Findings and Recommendations, 5.7.10).

The *Final Report* states that education and schools have an ‘obligation’ to be among the leaders of anti-sectarianism initiatives and schools should also address the topic of sectarianism in the school curriculum. Let us now discuss these suggestions in the *Final Report* in some detail.

## **THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM IN ADDRESSING THE TOPIC OF SECTARIANISM**

The Advisory Group states, then, that sectarianism should be addressed in the school curriculum:

*Ensure sectarianism is integrated into the curriculum in a clear, locally appropriate way to provide a pathway into the wider equalities work when teachers and schools have the opportunity to not only address sectarianism but build their own skills, experience and confidence (8.17).*

The oddly phrased aim of ‘ensure sectarianism is integrated into the curriculum’ would possibly be better expressed as: ‘ensure the topic of sectarianism is integrated into the curriculum’ or ‘ensure anti-sectarianism is integrated into the curriculum’. It can be observed that the *Final Report* identifies two ways to integrate the topic of sectarianism. The first is in a clear, locally appropriate way and the second is within the wider equalities issues. The Advisory Group states that Education Scotland will need to decide when and where the two ways should be adopted, but cautions that it would be more efficacious to integrate the topic of sectarianism into the curriculum in a clear, local way before integrating it into the wider equalities issues (4.42; 4.43; 5.7.17). This would enable teachers to ‘build their own skills, experience and confidence’.

Another of the recommendations of the Advisory Group is to:

*Aid development of all schools actively tackling the issue by producing a “Horrible Histories” style timeline of sectarianism in Scotland that can be used within schools and where appropriate the local history can be investigated (5.7.18).*

This is repeated verbatim in the Executive Summary (8.18). There is a curious amplification on this in 4.45:

*(Horrible Histories)...can be picked up and used by schools and where appropriate the effects and impact of Scotland’s history had on local history can then be investigated.*

It is difficult to ascertain how Scotland’s history can have an effect on local history – perhaps the sentence would make more sense if we substituted ‘sectarianism’ for ‘Scotland’s history’:

*(Horrible Histories)...can be picked up and used by schools and where appropriate the effects and impact of sectarianism had on local history can then be investigated.*

The incorporation of the topic of sectarianism in the school curriculum, as described above, is the incorporation of a controversial issue and the teaching of controversial issues requires some attention.

## **TEACHING THE CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE OF SECTARIANISM AND THE USE OF THE HORRIBLE HISTORIES STYLE TIMELINE**

The Advisory group has expressed the view that the topic of sectarianism should be included in the school curriculum but have advised that caution must be exercised in preparing to introduce the topic. Arguably, the topic of sectarianism in schools can be best described as a controversial issue. A controversial issue is an issue that is: of topical interest; sensitive and may invoke strong feelings and emotions; complex and is an issue that will generate contrasting and conflicting opinions (Oxfam, 2006; Claire and Holden, 2007; Amnesty, 2011). Teaching controversial issues is considered by some academics and NGOs to be essential for an education for citizenship and global citizenship as children and young people

develop their critical thinking skills, engage with complex national and global issues and prepare to participate in democratic society (Oxfam, 2006; Hess, 2008; Humes, 2012). Great care must be exercised in this endeavor. Children and young people will encounter controversial issues in the media and the internet on a regular basis (Cowan and Maitles, 2012). As a result they may have acquired preconceptions from this information (and misinformation) about the controversial issue. Children and young people will have had different experiences and may come from different cultural backgrounds (Carr, 2007). This can be combined with a different ethnic and religious background. Humes (2012) points out that teaching controversial issues can be challenging for children and young people; the beliefs and values that they share with their families may be questioned or subject to scrutiny. There are, therefore, implications for the classroom culture. Teaching controversial issues requires a culture of openness and trust in the classroom and the teacher must be sensitive to diversity and possess confidence and experience (Humes, 2012).

Having examined controversial issues and the teaching of controversial issues in schools let us return to the *Final Report* and examine the adoption of an identified textual style for use in schools as an illustration of the challenges of teaching the controversial issue of sectarianism. The promotion of a ‘Horrible Histories’ style time line might, at first sight, appear to trivialize the controversial issue of sectarianism in schools. There are some academic and practitioner debates that raise concerns about the merits of popular representations of history (Coles and Armstrong, 2007; Kidd, 2011; Peal, 2015). Within this debate, Champion (2003) argues that horrible histories can be misunderstood as they are underpinned by scholarly research and acute characterizations of historical figures. This may assuage concerns that these books are simply a form of entertainment and confirms that they have a more serious educational purpose. Concerns may be further allayed by academic research on the use of children’s literature (including the use of picturebooks) to teach controversial issues (DeNicolo and Franquiz, 2006; Rogers and Mosley, 2006; Myhill, 2007; Lazar and Offenber, 2011; Arizpe et al., 2014; McAdam et al., 2014). The recommendation of the advisory group is to produce a ‘Horrible Histories’ **style** time line for sectarianism. This will only be successful, however, if there is robustness in the research underpinning the horrible histories style time line and acute characterization and great care is taken in the introduction and use of such a resource. This would mean ensuring that it is used with the sensitivity that is required when teaching a controversial issue. It is interesting to note that the *Scottish Government Response to the Final Report* (section 26) agrees with the recommendation to develop a history of sectarianism with key partners and a clearer history timeline for a range of practitioners and professionals (Scottish Government, 2015c). There is no mention, however, of a ‘Horrible Histories’ style timeline.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

This article has highlighted three important points concerning education and denominational schools in the *Final Report* that are not substantiated by evidence. First, the argument that the existence of choice for denominational schools was sectarian in and of itself. Second, the claims that (sectarian) hostility spills into schools. Third, the claim that education (or poor education) is one of the factors that contributes to the breakdown of communities and behaviour in communities. These are serious statements about state funded schooling and should have been substantiated by research evidence or at least by illustrative examples. This may be symptomatic of the distinctiveness of this document that is a combination of a primary and secondary document (Cohen et al. 2011). The *Final Report* draws on the consultation exercise and existing research which provide contrasting forms of evidence:

representative views from meetings with key stakeholders and commissioned systematic research. The attempts to balance the representative views with the research evidence can, at times, appear problematic for the internal and external coherence of the *Final Report* (Hodder, 2000). Perhaps the lack of substantiation could be counterbalanced by some of the academic articles in *Scottish Affairs* 24.3 (2015) which focused on sectarianism and included articles by members of the Advisory Group (Rosie et al., 2015; Rosie, 2015).<sup>1</sup> These are academic articles that are substantiated with research evidence and are closely referenced and could be conceived to be complementary to the *Final Report*. This does not resolve fundamental issues about the intended readership of the Final Report (wide readership) and the academic articles (more specialized readership) (Cohen et al., 2011).

This article welcomes the importance that is attached to education and school education in addressing the controversial issue of sectarianism. As has been seen above, controversial issues should feature in school curricula. Children and young people will become aware of these issues from other sources including the media and should be provided with the opportunity to understand a controversial issue in an informed way and from different perspectives. They may even be challenged in their own presuppositions (whatever they may be) (Cowan and Maitles, 2012; Humes, 2012). However, this article has also proposed that some of the recommendations in the *Final Report* appear to lack a full understanding of the complexity and problematic nature of teaching controversial issues such as the topic of sectarianism. These recommendations cannot be enacted without the professional expertise of Education Scotland, academics in the discipline of education and, most importantly, school practitioners. This may highlight a limitation in the composition of the Advisory Group – none of the members are academics or professionals specializing in education and school education, though this is understandable as the Advisory Group is quite small in number and could not be expected to represent all of the major disciplines that are involved in the topic of sectarianism (for example, history, ecclesiastical history, politics, religion, sociology, education and economics). It may be more instructive to revisit the consultation process. There was, as has been stated, a very diverse group of individuals and organisations consulted and some of these are engaged in education. Education Scotland were consulted on the 8 October 2012 and the 29 May 2014, the Scottish Catholic Education Service was consulted on 7 March 2013 and some of the charities/organisations that engage in anti-sectarianism education: *Sense over Sectarianism* (8 Oct 2012; 28 March 2013; 25 June 2013), *Nil by Mouth* (8 Oct 2012; 7 March 2013), and *Show Bigotry the Red Card* (8 Oct 2012; 7 March 2013) (*Interim Report*, 2013; *Final Report*, 2015). There is no record of consultation with the *Scottish Educational Research Association*, representatives of a Faculty or School of Education in any of the Scottish universities, identified Education Officers, Head Teachers Associations nor any schools. It seems a little remiss not to have consulted at least some of these organisations.

Fascinatingly, all of the organisations listed above that were not consulted by the Advisory Group were also not represented at the Summit on Sectarianism called by Jack McConnell in 14 February, 2005, despite ‘education’ being one of the four themes identified that are central to tackling sectarianism (the exception might be Professor Rowena Arshad though her

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<sup>1</sup> Other articles in *Scottish Affairs*, 24.3 are by members of the ScotCen Social Research that produced the Scottish Social Attitudes survey 2014 (Ormston et al., 2015), members of a government funded group researching sectarianism (Goodall et al., 2015b), a research group that had examined the role of marches (parades) in sectarianism (Hamilton-Smith et al., 2015b) and a concluding article that discussed the research agenda of the Advisory Group (McCrone, 2015).

participation was as Director for Education for Racial Equality in Scotland) (Scottish Executive, 2005). If there had been such consultation then the Advisory Group would probably have been better informed about the role of education and schools in the attempts to tackle sectarianism. There would probably have been a clearer understanding of, for example, the opportunities in the current *Curriculum for Excellence* for approaching the topic of sectarianism through interdisciplinary learning (one of the four contexts of learning of the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence) (Education Scotland, 2015c). The topic of sectarianism can be addressed through combinations of subjects such as Modern Studies, History, Religious Education and English.

The *Final Report* contains much that can be commended. The *Final Report* seeks clarity in the discussion on sectarianism and acknowledges the complexity of the historical and contemporary phenomenon of sectarianism and the troubling disjuncture between perceptions and experience of sectarianism. The *Final Report* provides a series of recommendations for action to tackle sectarianism. The *Final Report* calls for a stronger evidence base for the discussion on sectarianism and has identified some key areas for further research including: gender; football; social media and polite forms of sectarianism. The work of the Advisory Group provides a very important contribution to the series of initiatives designed to tackle sectarianism. It is to be hoped that future contributions will be planned strategically to include wider consultation with the key groups that are actively engaged in Scottish school education.

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