Attitudes Towards the European Union & the Challenges in Communicating ‘Europe’
Building a Bridge Between Europe and its Citizens – Evidence Review Paper Two
ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE EUROPEAN UNION &
THE CHALLENGES IN COMMUNICATING
‘EUROPE’

BUILDING A BRIDGE BETWEEN EUROPE AND ITS
CITIZENS

EVIDENCE REVIEW PAPER TWO

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Emma Berry – Scottish Parliament
Nikki Brown – Scottish Executive
Laura Close – European Commission in Scotland
Susan Dalgety – Scottish Executive
John Edward – European Parliament in Scotland
Tom Jackson – Scottish Executive
Daniel Kleinberg – Scottish Executive
Iain McIver – Scottish Parliament
Neil Mitchison – European Commission in Scotland
Elizabeth Watson – Scottish Parliament

The paper was also subjected to internal peer review, grateful thanks all those people who commented.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Attitudes to the European Union – Scotland

- There is very little difference between Scotland and the UK as a whole on attitudes to Europe. Where there are differences these tend to be an appreciation of specific benefits.

- Where divergences have occurred over the last thirty years these have been related to specific political and historical context such as the ‘independence in Europe’ campaign in the 1980/90s.

- 60% of Scottish respondents agree that ‘working conditions in the UK are better due to EU membership’ compared to the UK average of 51% and 80% of Scottish respondents agree that being part of the EU increases business opportunities compared the UK average of 78% (EB185-2006)\(^1\).

Attitudes to the European Union – United Kingdom

- The UK remains eurosceptic and the majority are inclined to disagree with the statement ‘the UK has benefited from its membership of the EU’ and ‘the EU is a good thing’ (EB185-2006)\(^2\).

- Trend data suggest that attitudes towards the benefits of the EU reached a low in 1999/2000, but have become steadily more positive.

- 79% of people in the UK recognised that being part of the EU presented more opportunities to live, work and study in another EU country.

Challenges in communicating ‘Europe’ - knowledge

- The Council of the European Union is the least known of the three European institutions. Less than half the people in the UK have heard of it.

- The European Parliament is viewed as the most open of the three institutions.

- 36% of UK citizens expressed a desire to be more involved in European affairs but were unaware of how to go about this (EB64-2005).

Challenges in communicating ‘Europe’ - ownership

- The key challenges to communicating European governance relate to knowledge, the role of the media and the extent to which both the public and politicians feel a sense of ownership of the EU.

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\(^1\) The Eurobarometer is referenced throughout this report by EB followed by number followed by year.

\(^2\) The Eurobarometer asks 500 people in Scotland questions. Caution must be exercised with regional level analysis as often the survey may be carried out in a small number of areas. Where possible the evidence from the Eurobarometer on Scotland is substantiated through analysis from the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey.
INTRODUCTION

1. In the context of the French and Dutch referenda in which votes in those countries rejected the proposed constitution for the EU, the European Commission’s Vice-President Margot Wallström and Scotland’s First Minister announced the Building a Bridge project in October 2005. The aim is to look at how the experiences of Scotland, as a region with legislative powers and a new system of government, might help the EU connect better with its citizens. To that end, this project was included in the European Commission’s White Paper on a European Communication Policy.

2. This is the second of three evidence review papers prepared to support the Building a Bridge project. The review process involved three key steps: consultation with key agencies and academics, an analysis of the existing literature using specific search terms, and finally, disaggregating Scottish data from surveys carried out across European member states such as the European Social Survey and Eurobarometer.

3. This paper begins with a brief discussion of people’s trust in political institutions, then examines in detail people’s attitudes towards Europe, their knowledge of the EU, views on integration and the extent to which they claim to have a European identity.

4. The paper compares the views of people in Scotland on these issues with those of people in Britain as a whole in order to assess the extent to which the evidence supports a distinct Scottish perspective on Europe. The paper serves to set the media-tracking and case study chapters of the Building a Bridge report within the broader context of awareness and attitudes to Europe.

5. Given the overall project’s context of the current period of reflection and the issues set out in the Communication White paper, the review considers whether there are limitations in understanding citizens’ outlook. Using nation and sub-national analysis, it includes a brief analysis of five key factors that affect people’s views of the EU: sex, education, location, identity and age. The question of whether young people have a distinct outlook on European matters is the subject of Evidence Review Paper Three.

6. The review concludes that variations in each of these individual-level factors are not as great as national-level variation, i.e. that differences between citizens, eg along skills level, are not nearly as great as differences between nation states.

7. The final part of the review touches on the challenges that are inherent in communicating Europe. These relate to a knowledge challenge and a more political ownership challenge. The review assesses people’s knowledge of the EU, taking each of the EU institutions in turn as well as outlining the way that citizens have said they would like to receive information. The paper draws to close with a discussion on the extent to which both individual citizens and politicians feel a sense of ownership of EU policies.

TRUST IN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

8. Generally people in the United Kingdom are fairly measured in their trust of political institutions (see Table 1). There are few political institutions which elicit a high level of trust and this is the case across a number of evidence sources. People in Britain tend to have somewhat more trust in the United Nations than the either their own parliament or the
European Parliament. The European Parliament attracts a relatively high level of distrust. As Evidence Review Paper One on participation and engagement in Scotland showed, the Scottish Executive is trusted by around half the people in Scotland.

Table 1. Trust in political institutions, United Kingdom 2002 - 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>British Parliament</th>
<th>European Parliament</th>
<th>United Nations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No trust at all/slight distrust</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>45.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither trust or distrust</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>43.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly to Complete Trust</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>2029</td>
<td>1877</td>
<td>1865</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Scottish Executive Analytical Services using European Social Survey – 2002 and 2004 ‘How much do you personally trust each of the following institutions’

9. Whilst trust in one’s own government and trust in the United Nations is in line with the EU-25 average (see Table 2 below) there is a clear divergence on the subject of the European Parliament, where around half of people across the 25 member states trust the European Parliament compared to less than a third in the United Kingdom.

Table 2. Trust in political institutions United Kingdom compared to European Union average

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Own/UK Parliament</th>
<th>European Parliament</th>
<th>United Nations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UK %</td>
<td>EU-25 %</td>
<td>UK %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tend not to trust</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tend to trust</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>1312</td>
<td>29,220</td>
<td>1312</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Scottish Executive Analytical Services using Eurobarometer 65.2 July 2006 ‘I would like to ask you how much trust you have in certain institutions’

10. Successive Eurobarometers have show that of all the European Union institutions, the European Parliament is generally the most trusted. This relatively low level of trust may relate to knowledge of each of the institutions. This question is taken up later in the paper.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE EUROPEAN UNION

Scottish attitudes towards the European Union

11. It is often believed that within the UK, Scotland is one of the most pro-European areas. The evidence within this review suggests that on the whole this is not the case, with people in Scotland reporting broadly similar Eurosceptic views as people in Britain as a whole.

12. A third of the people in Scotland in 2005 would favour staying in the EU and reducing its powers. This has remained the case for the last five years (see Table 3). A further one in five people, over this period, would like things to stay as they are. Around a quarter
demonstrate consistently positive attitudes to Europe, supporting increased integration or a single European government.

Table 3. Attitudes towards membership of the European Union, Scotland 1999-2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leave the European Union</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay in EU and reduce powers</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>36.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave as they are</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay in EU and increase powers</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single European government</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>1482</td>
<td>1663</td>
<td>1508</td>
<td>1637</td>
<td>1549</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Scottish Executive Analytical Services using Scottish Social Attitudes Survey* 1999 – 2005 ‘Do you think Britain’s long term policy should be…’

13. This distribution of opinion has stayed steady over the last six years, although there has been a slight decline in the proportion of people who are inclined towards increasing the EU’s powers.

14. A comparison of Tables 3 and 4 demonstrates that Scotland remains in line with views across Britain. Just over a third of people tend to favour reducing the EU’s powers, with proportionately less, one in ten, taking the view that we should stay in Europe and increase the EU’s powers.

Table 4. Attitudes towards membership of the European Union, Great Britain 1999-2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leave the European Union</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay in EU and reduce powers</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave as they are</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay in EU and increase powers</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single European government</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>1060</td>
<td>2293</td>
<td>1099</td>
<td>3435</td>
<td>2293</td>
<td>3199</td>
<td>4268</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Scottish Executive Analytical Services using British Social Attitudes Survey* 1999 – 2005 ‘Do you think Britain’s long term policy should be…’

15. Generally, European surveys report more positive attitudes and views on Europe than either the British or Scottish Social Attitudes Survey. This may be due to the broad context where the former ask questions chiefly on Europe throughout the questionnaire and the latter ask a small number of questions on Europe amongst questions on a variety of policy areas and social issues.

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3 The Scottish Social Attitudes survey is conducted annually by the Scottish Centre for Social Research.
4 The British Social Attitudes survey is conducted annually by the National Centre for Social Research.
16. For example, in 2004 the European Social Survey asked a question specifically on unification which found that the majority of people in Britain accept the status quo (see Table 5). It also provides evidence that one in five people in Britain support the idea of increased unification.

Table 5. Attitudes towards European Unification, United Kingdom 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unification has already gone too far</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unification is about right</td>
<td>50.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unification can go further</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>1783</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Scottish Executive Analytical Services using European Social Survey – 2002 and 2004. ‘Now thinking about the European Union, some say European unification should go further. Others say it has already gone too far’

17. However, when questions on the Euro and the European constitution were asked in the 2005 British Social Attitudes survey it was found that people in the UK adopted a largely Eurosceptic approach. Two-thirds (67%) of Britons would vote ‘no’ in a referendum on Britain joining the Euro and only a fifth (20%) would vote ‘yes’ to a European constitution. The question was asked before the rejection of the constitution in France and the Netherlands.

18. This was broadly reflected amongst supporters for all three main political parties (Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat). However, at 48%, slightly less than half of Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters said they would vote no to adopting the EU constitution in contrast to 72% of Conservative supporters. Over 50% of supporters for all three parties said they would vote against joining the Euro although again Conservative supporters (79%) were most Eurosceptic (Evans & Butt 2005:199).

19. Within the Eurobarometer, associated with the most positive account of people’s attitudes to the European Union, 80% of people in Scotland, the overwhelming majority, agree with the view that the ‘majority of people living in the United Kingdom think British businesses, consumers and workers benefit from EU membership, although not equally’. The comparable UK average was 78%. It also found a majority of 80% in Scotland and 79% in the UK as whole agreed that ‘being part of the EU means more opportunities to live, work and study in another country’ (EB185-2006).

20. As discussed, differences between people in Scotland and people across Britain, such that they are, tend to be brought out by more detailed questioning on the benefits of being a member of the EU. For example, 60% of Scottish respondents agree with the statement ‘the majority think working conditions in the UK are better due to EU membership’, compared to the UK average of 51% (EB185-2006).

21. Additionally, 74% of Scottish respondents agree with the statement ‘being part of the EU means British exporters benefit from UK membership of the European Single Market’, compared to the average of 68% across the UK and finally the statement ‘British consumers benefit from the UK membership of the European Single Market’ elicited, this year, a 66% agreement rate in Scotland compared to the UK average 63% (EB185-2006).

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5 Unification refers to further integration rather than further enlargement. The ESS uses a numerical scale from 0 – 10, this have been aggregated to three scores negative 0-3, neutral 4-6, and positive 7-10.
22. A fuller understanding of people’s attitudes can be explored through a trend analysis. This is currently not possible for Scotland alone, while the examination of British attitudes demonstrates clear fluctuations.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE EUROPEAN UNION IN THE UNITED KINGDOM – TREND ANALYSIS

23. A review of how British attitudes towards the European Union have changed over 20 years found that:

“From the early 1980’s until 1991 there was a steady increase in the public’s acceptance of EU membership, from less than half supporting continued membership in 1984 to over three-quarters by 1991. The impression during that period was of a population slowly becoming accustomed to and even perhaps comfortable with, being part of the European Community. However, in 1992 there was a small but significant fall in acceptance and…by 1997 the secular upward trend had been reversed” (Evans 2003).

Evans suggests there has been a steady decrease in support up until the mid-1990s and then views tend to stabilise until the late 90s, concluding that the upward trend was feature of the early 1990s. Examination of the more recent data from 1999 to 2005 (see Table 4) suggests that attitudes towards membership have continued to remain stable.

24. However, when asked the straightforward question of whether membership of the EU is ‘a good thing’ the European trend data from the late 90s to the present indicates that support for the EU in the UK was rising again (see Graph 6 below). The survey showed that 42% of Britons regard the UK’s membership of the EU as a good thing. This compares with just 25% in 2000 and signals a rise of 12 points in just two years. It is also the highest approval rating for EU membership in the UK for a decade.

25. Although this rise was viewed positively by the European Commission and a number of commentators, the Europe wide survey shows that only Finland, Latvia and Austria have populations who are less supporting of their country’s EU membership and it also well below the EU-25 average of 55%.

Graph 6. Is your country’s membership of the EU “a good thing” and has the UK benefited?

Source: Standard Eurobarometer 65.2 (2006)
ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE EUROPEAN UNION IN SCOTLAND – TREND ANALYSIS

26. Despite the relative lack of divergence outlined above, a four-nation approach is gaining favour with commentators as people express frustrations with the term ‘United Kingdom’ or the term ‘British’ masking the detailed views to European integration of some of the Northern Irish, Welsh or Scottish. Scholars have seen the value in allowing Britain a more complex identity and there seems to be some analytical advantages to this approach, if a longer perspective is taken.

27. For example, looking at Scottish attitudes since 1975 is revealing: the Scottish electorate showed less enthusiasm for the continuation of EEC membership in the 1975 referendum, with 58.4% saying yes, compared to 67.2% in the UK as a whole. Both the Shetlands and Western Isles voted against membership. During the 1980s there was evidence to suggest the Scottish were more pro-European.

28. Though not a representative sample, a 1988 Herald & BBC Survey found that 55% of Scottish respondents thought Scotland would be better off independent in Europe. At the time this was associated with the SNP ‘independence in Europe’ policy and, since then, there has been a relationship between independence and Europe. During this period, pro-European views could also be used as a form of protest against the then Conservative government. A MORI poll at this time put people in Scotland at 4% ahead of people in England and only 3% ahead of British (ie excluding NI) in terms of support for EC Membership. More revealing is opposition to membership which is weaker in Scotland with 31% compared to 40% and 39% in England and Britain (excluding NI) respectively.

29. In 2000 when Scottish people were asked about joining the Euro the difference is more pronounced - 33.5% said if there was a referendum on the euro they would vote yes, whereas in Britain as a whole it was 27.3%.

Explanations

30. Ichijo has attempted to explain the rise and fall of this divergence which has continued for two decades, considering both the historical dimension and the geopolitical dimension. He gives an interesting account of British exceptionalism and argues that the Scottish can draw upon a pre-Union history quite different to England i.e. they have a different collective memory of Europe. He suggests that the Scottish do not define themselves in opposition to Europe but rather in opposition to England, because of historical alliances with France and Baltic trading partners. As a result of this, people in Scotland today have different raw material to work with and can project different futures.

31. Ichijo sets out three mains views: (i) Europe is a guarantor of enhanced autonomy or independence; (ii) Europe becomes a substitute for empire, ie Scots are energetic and talented and need opportunities that go beyond their small country (where before they had the empire to realise this, there is now a need for something else); and (iii) Europe will create a more just Scotland – European values are actually closers to Scots than the UK (Ichijo 2003). This sort

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6 With the Scottish sample amounting to 9%, of the whole sample there is a significant risk of sampling error.
of analysis suggests there may be a distinct Scottish identity which has, as an integral part of its construction, a European outlook.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A EUROPEAN IDENTITY

32. Attitudinal research suggests that we are still some way from a significant proportion of people in Scotland describing themselves as European. Currently around one in ten people see themselves as European (see Tables 7 and 8 below). This is more or less the same amongst people in Scotland and people in Britain as a whole. This seems to reflect a committed core of people, with no real signs of an increase or decrease over the last six years.

Table 7. The extent to which people describe themselves as European, Scotland 1999 - 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>1482</td>
<td>1663</td>
<td>1605</td>
<td>1665</td>
<td>1508</td>
<td>1637</td>
<td>1549</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source Scottish Executive FCSD- Analytical Services – using Scottish Social Attitudes Survey

Table 8. The extent to which people describe themselves as European, Great Britain 1999 - 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>3143</td>
<td>3426</td>
<td>3287</td>
<td>3435</td>
<td>4432</td>
<td>3199</td>
<td>4268</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source Scottish Executive FCSD- Analytical Services – using British Social Attitudes Survey

33. It is worth noting this question simply ask respondents to choose which, if any, of the terms presented describe the way respondents think of themselves. The question on which Table 9 is based approaches being ‘European’ in a slightly different way, asking people the extent they would have something in common with someone who says they are ‘European’. It finds that, again, the majority of people in Scotland say they do not have anything in common with someone who describes themselves as European. Nearly 20% have a little or a lot in common.

34. There has been some more discursive comparative analysis of what it means to have a European identity which was carried out recently in France, the UK, and the Netherlands. This found being ‘European’ relates to a sense of cosmopolitanism, peace and anti-identity values. Where predominant perceptions of ‘Europeaness’ relate to either a civic identity or a cultural one, both of which according to Bruter, are based on the disappearance of internal EU borders (Bruter 2005).

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7 In the question presented in Table 7 and 8 respondents can tick as many boxes as they wish.
8 A smaller proportion of people describe themselves as ‘English’ in Britain than say they are Scottish in Scotland, there are a number of reasons for this including the fact that this sample includes people who are Scottish, Northern Irish, Welsh as well as other ethnicities.
Table 9. The extent to which people have something in common with people who see themselves as European, Scotland 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Scottish Social Attitudes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A lot</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No more in common than with other people</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source Scottish Executive – FCSD – Analytical services using Scottish Social Attitudes Survey Question ‘In general, how much do you have in common with people who say they are European’.

35. The research across five member states, which is set out further in Evidence Review Paper Three, demonstrates that an increased sense of national or sub-national identity is associated with a low sense of being European.

36. The study also carries out research with what is terms ‘target’ samples, containing people who have some connection with Europe. This depth analysis reveals that national context, education and career path were key predictors of the extent to which young adults have a sense of a European identity. Jamieson further emphasizes travel and use of language skills because direct exposure was a major factor in having a sense of a European identity (Jamieson 2005:47).

FACTORS AFFECTING ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE EUROPEAN UNION

37. As the comprehensive study above illustrates there are key factors which affect people’s attitudes towards the EU and sense of being European. As stated at the outset individual level factors are not more significant than national context. However for those interested in communicating European governance some interesting differences are revealed. This paper looks only at sex and education, paying attention to the different ways that the latter has been explored. A consideration of whether age affects attitudes towards the EU is touched upon here and given further consideration in Evidence Review Paper Three.

Sex

38. Men in the UK appear to be more pro-European than women. For example, 37% of men saw EU membership as a good thing, compared with 30% of women. Similarly, 40% of men thought the UK had benefited from EU membership whilst 33% of women thought the same (EB65-2006).

Education

39. Evidence suggests that as people’s education increases, so does their understanding of the EU. Further, the better educated a person is, the more likely they are to see EU membership as a good thing and to recognise the benefits of EU membership for the UK. For example, 48% of the most educated respondents thought that UK membership of the EU was a good thing whilst amongst the group considered the least educated, 41% thought EU membership was a bad thing (EB64-2005).
40. It was found that: 36% of people who left school at 15; 58% of people who were educated to age 20 or more; and 59% of young people who were still studying, regarded themselves as ‘attached to the EU’. The education level of people in Britain also correlates with their sense of trust in the EU, with 44% of people who have been educated until they are 20 or more trusting the EU, compared to just 20% of those who had completed their education by age 15 (EB65-2006).

41. Gabel’s analysis suggests that liberalisation across the Union will most likely benefit the most educated, who in turn will have more positive attitudes towards the EU. He found that professionals and executives are more likely to support European integration than manual labourers (Gabel 1998).

42. However closer analysis suggest that the relationship is not so straightforward. For example, Gabel (2003), using Eurobarometer data, found that more years of education was associated with lower levels of support for the European Parliament.

Skills and advantages in the labour market

43. Another way to approach this diversity is in terms of individual’s skills levels, the country’s skills levels and their subsequent attitudes towards integration. For example, since the movement of workers from the accession states, competition for jobs may be a current concern and, as a result, low skilled workers may be less accepting of European integration. However, it is not this straightforward and a more complete picture emerges if individual-level analysis is understood through the frame of national-context factors. Brinegar & Jolly (2005) found that looking at people’s skills alone was a weak predictor in terms of support for European integration. However, once national context, in particular the way in which how the national institutions operate, are factored in, support for integration can be predicated better.

44. For example, 14% more manual labourer respondents were in favour of integration in low-skill endowment countries than in high-skills endowment countries Brinegar & Jolly (2005:157)⁹.

Age

45. Generally, older people are more sceptical of the EU and are less likely to self identify as European. Of those between the ages of 15 and 24, 44% of respondents thought that EU membership was a good thing. In contrast, of those over the age of 55, 27% thought EU membership was a good thing.

46. This pattern was repeated when respondents were asked whether they thought the UK had benefited from EU membership. Of those aged 15-24, 51% of respondents thought the UK had benefited, whilst of those aged over 55, 30% thought the UK had benefited. The views of young people on Europe are examined further in Evidence Review Paper Three.

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⁹ High-skilled endowment is defined as whether the country’s percentage of population completing secondary education is above the EU mean. Low-skilled is below the EU mean.
**Knowledge of the EU**

47. These factors combine to affect people’s knowledge of the EU. People in Scotland tend to know about the European Union to the same extent as the United Kingdom as a whole - 14% compared to 13%. People in Scotland are also similar in how they would like to receive information on the European Union.

48. Men claim to have a better knowledge of the EU than women, with 19% compared to 8% of women, claiming to know quite a lot about the Europe Union. In contrast, 35% of women compared to 23% of men admitted knowing nothing about the EU (EB182-2006).

49. Education was an important indicator of perceived knowledge of the EU. For example, amongst those who left school early, 11% claimed to know quite a lot about the EU whilst 22% of those who went on to further education claimed to know quite a lot about the EU.

50. In terms of age, those aged 55 and over rated themselves as most knowledgeable about the EU, with 18% claiming to know quite a lot about it. Interestingly, the younger people were, the less they claimed to know about the EU.

**THE CHALLENGES IN COMMUNICATION EUROPEAN GOVERNANCE**

**The knowledge challenge**

51. There are a number of dimensions that combine to create challenges in communicating European governance. This final discussion in the review explores: the extent to which people understand the EU and each of its institutions and want to know more; the role of the media; and the question of political ownership.

**Understanding the EU and wanting to know more**

52. For some in the UK, whether in favour of EU membership or not, a key determinant in attitudes towards the EU may centre on a lack of understanding. This means understanding the institutions of the EU and how they operate. Successive Eurobarometers have shown that most EU citizens have little understanding of the EU’s policies, its institutions or how it operates (Eurobarometer – The European citizens and the future of Europe).

53. This led most EU citizens to express a desire to be better informed and more involved in the mechanics of the EU. A survey amongst people in the UK carried out in 2002 showed that in both the UK and Scotland 1% of the population felt they knew a great deal about the EU with 11% claiming they knew quite a lot about it. In contrast, 87% of the UK and 88% of Scottish respondents admitted they either knew little or nothing at all about the EU.

54. 62% of UK respondents and 64% of Scottish respondents said they didn’t understand how the EU worked (EB64-2005). Nevertheless, when asked on specific EU activities, UK citizens knew a reasonable amount about the EU.
People were asked eight questions relating to the EU. These included asking about: the number of members of the EU; EU regional development funding in the UK; when the UK joined the EU; proposed Turkish membership of the EU; the cleanliness of UK beaches; and the ability of the European Commission to set UK income tax rates. The results showed that the majority of respondents were able to answer at least five out of the eight questions correctly (EB185-2006). Whilst this is positive, the nature of the questions did not really test respondents’ understanding of how the EU operates and how people can interact with it.

Only 13% of UK citizens felt they were involved in EU affairs, compared with 26% across the EU. However, an important finding for those concerned with communicating the project of the European Union is that 36% of UK citizens did express a desire to be more involved in European affairs, but said they didn’t know how to go about it (EB64-2005). This result illustrates that although many people in the UK admit they are uninformed about the EU, some of them would like to be able to access more information about it. If they were able to do this, it would allow them to make a more informed decision about their views towards the EU.

This is further supported by this year’s data where around half of respondents wanted further information about the EU (EB185-2006). There is a slight gender difference with just over half of all women (52%), compared to just under half of all men (47%) saying that they need more information about the EU.

Mirroring the results of perceived knowledge about the EU, older people felt they were least in need of more information about the EU (43%), whilst over half of young people between the ranges of 15-39 wanted more information. This was mirrored amongst those in education, where 56% of respondents said they wanted more information about the EU (EB185-2006).

It is worth not losing sight of the fact that half the respondents in the UK did not want any more information. This lack of understanding and apparent lack of concern about getting more information among over half of all respondents could be key in explaining the perceived democratic deficit that some people suggest exists within the EU. The argument here is that if people do not understand, nor want to understand how the EU operates, they are in a poor position to influence decisions which may ultimately affect them or their business. Another interpretation of the evidence is that support for an institution, or seeing the benefits of membership of the EU, is not predicated on a technical understanding of how it works.

Responsibility for keeping people informed

When respondents were asked who they thought should be responsible for keeping people informed about the EU and its decisions, nearly half of all respondents (46%) said they thought the national government should be responsible for providing the information. Another 18% thought local government should provide the information and 15% thought it was the responsibility of television and newspapers.

Marcella & Baxters examined the provision of European Union information in public libraries, with specific relation to the European Commission’s sponsored initiative ‘Public Information Relay’ (PIR), designed to bring EU information closer to the public through libraries. They demonstrate that, whilst Scottish libraries provide EU information with ‘general citizen’s needs’ in mind, the actual needs relate to education, business and
employment (1997). Although 28% had actively sought EU information in the past, only 25% of respondents, when asked, were aware that the PIR facility existed in the library. Nevertheless, 72% of this 28% used their local public libraries to find information on education/study, general, work and job-seeking (Marcella & Baxters 2002).

62. Unsurprisingly, the preferred mode for receiving EU information varies significantly by age and education, with young people and the educated far more likely to wish to receive this information from new technologies such as the internet. For example, 23% of 15-25 year olds would like to receive information online compared with 7% of over 55’s. In contrast, older people preferred to receive information from traditional sources such as television and newspapers (60% of those over 55 choose this method compared to 37% of those between 15-24).

63. Interestingly, women viewed both newspapers and television and also the internet as more important information sources than men did. This might be because women had expressed a desire to get more information about the EU whereas men had suggested they felt they knew a fair amount about it already.

How people currently get information on the EU

64. As illustrated above, many people in the UK rely heavily on the media for information on the EU. In addition to this, respondents also state that they gather information through discussions with their friends (32% in the UK in 2004 and 46% in Scotland in 2004), or using books, brochures and information leaflets about the EU (20% in the UK and 29% in Scotland). Another major way in which people now gather information is through the internet, with 40% of UK respondents and 33% of Scots stating this as one way in which they gather information about the EU.

65. When people were asked about how they would like to be able to get information about the EU, 56% of UK respondents and 57% of Scottish respondents said they would like to get EU information from audio-visual media such as television and radio. In addition, 54% of UK respondents and 62% of Scottish respondents said they would like to be able to access information through the written media such as newspapers.

66. The other main ways in which people said they would like to get information on Europe were through information leaflets or brochures and from the internet. The methods through which people expressed a preference for gathering European information where basically the same as the ways in which respondents said they already gather information on the EU.

67. What is not clear from the survey results is how often people seek to gather European related information. For instance, do people only access information when they need it, or do they check on the information emanating from Brussels on a regular basis? This is important because if they are not accessing information regularly they may often miss things of interest or importance to them.

68. If people are reliant on the print and broadcast media to access their information, they may be at a disadvantage in terms of understanding how pieces of legislation are developed. This is of particular significance given that the media will often report the issue at the final stage of the process and will generally not explain how an issue got to that stage.
Knowledge of each of the European institutions

69. Evidence suggests that citizens have distinct attitudes towards each of the different institutions. The Council is seen as the most closed, the Commission as more accessible and the Parliament as the most open (Gabel 2003).

70. Gabel relates this to people’s support of democratic values and support of representative processes and suggests that people would like the parliament to ‘play a more important role’ (Gabel 2003:294). Caldeira & Gibson’s research demonstrated high levels of support for the European Court of Human Justice (Caldeira & Gibson 1995).

71. When asked if they have heard of each of the major EU institutions (see Table 10), it is interesting to note that only 46% of people in the United Kingdom knew of the existence of the Council of the European Union.

Table 10. Knowledge of each of the EU institutions, United Kingdom 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>European Parliament</th>
<th>European Commission</th>
<th>Council of the European Union</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU-25 Average</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


72. It is not necessarily clear that improving EU communication will lead to an improvement in the perception of the EU amongst people in the UK. For example in Italy less people have heard of the European Parliament (81%) and this has not affected their views on the European constitution.

73. Across the EU most people are likely to be critical of particular developments within the EU, but this does not make them Eurosceptic nor does it make them anti-European.

“The lack of definitional clarity has not hindered the flourishing of many conclusions with regard to the public attitudes towards the EU. One frequent conclusion has been that Denmark and Britain are Eurosceptic countries. A statement like this is misleading for the simple reason that there can never be one and only one public attitude. It is not possible to label 50 percent of a population “sceptical” – the situation, of course, is highly nuanced. The simple, though critical conclusion is that not only will public attitudes towards the EU be somewhere in between scepticism and pro-integration attitudes (degree); they are also likely to be directed against different types of integration (type)” (Sorenson 2004).

74. Anthony Forster suggests that there are two forms of Euroscepticism. These can be summarised as related to sovereignty and ideology (Forster 2000). Those who are sceptical for sovereignty reasons are those who believe the nation state should continue to control its own sovereignty, those sceptical for ideological reasons are those who are sceptical of the type of Europe being developed – for instance being opposed to political union.

The political challenge – the media

75. There has been a great deal written about the role of the British media in tackling both the practicalities of covering European issues where journalists have spoken of ‘having to sift
not dig’ and the more political question of the British media’s role in the ‘democratic deficit’ inherent in European governance (see Morgan 2003).

76. 76% of UK respondents did not trust the press whilst 42% of respondents did not trust television and 30% did not trust radio (EB64-2005). Despite this apparent lack of trust in UK media sources, when asked about the sources they used to gather information about the EU, 56% of UK respondents and 63% of Scottish respondents said they used television and radio, whilst 60% of UK respondents and 63% of Scottish respondents said they used printed media such as newspapers to gather information. This presents a tricky situation whereby people in the UK say they do not trust the main sources of media but are reliant on them to get their information on the EU.

77. In terms of the media themselves, the BBC has recently come in for criticism about its coverage of the EU. An independent review commissioned by the BBC was published in January 2005. It suggested that the BBC’s overall coverage of EU related issues was potentially biased and uninformed. This has led the BBC to appoint a Brussels based correspondent for EU issues and to a noticeable increase in pieces about the EU on BBC television news.

78. With this exception however, EU related coverage is scarcely on television in the UK except at high profile times such as meetings of the European Council. In addition it is arguable that when features do appear, they normally focus on the specific Member State angle and fail to take a broad overview a policies for a cross European perspective. In general television coverage of the EU is very limited in the UK. In terms of shows providing political and economic coverage of the EU, there is only one show which is devoted to a purely European agenda which is BBC Scotland’s show for Gaelic viewers, Eorpa. All other EU related coverage on UK television comes as part of a show generally devoted to news or current affairs such as Newsnight, Panorama or Frontline Scotland. This means that although European stories will occasionally be covered, there is no regular devoted coverage linked to EU issues on television in the UK.

79. Newspaper coverage of the EU across the 25 Member States is patchy. In the UK coverage is at best limited and very often unbalanced, with the notable exception of the Financial Times, which normally devotes at least one page a day to balanced news coverage from the EU. Further, coverage in the Financial Times is also most likely to track issues from the beginning of their legislative process. Often other UK media will pick up an issue when it has reached the final stages of the process and nothing can be done to change it.

80. In general, media coverage of the EU in the UK tends to be issue based. This means that no substantive information is provided on how the institutions operate and how they are accountable, which is likely to be a factor in people’s relative ignorance about each of the EU institutions. This means people in Britain who use the media to get their EU information do not receive a balanced and informed account of events.

81. However, there is a danger in making the assumption that the content of media coverage on European affairs is driven by cynicism (see de Vreese (2005) ‘the spiral of cynicism reconsidered’).

82. For example studies have shown that when examining particular events or political contexts very effective communication can occur. This often relates to when the media
combines with specific party position. Carey and Burton found the public to be to be well-informed in terms of their decision-making, in their study which followed the communications around Britain joining the Euro (Carey & Burton 2004).

The Political challenge – ownership

83. The relative ignorance of the EU and negative attitudes towards the EU outlined in this review might also be connected to a belief amongst many people that they have no power to influence decisions taken at EU level – that their voices aren’t heard in Europe. For example, when people were asked if they felt their voice counted in the EU, 59% of respondents across the EU felt their views did not count, compared to 74% in the UK (EB64-2005). This view that people cannot influence EU policy is likely to affect the attitude taken towards the EU as an organisation in a negative way. As Erikson & Fossum (2002) explain there are risks that ordinary citizens see decision-making in Brussels as being closed, elitist and expert-driven.

84. Evidence points to the role of political ownership particularly to how politicians themselves give accounts of the role of Brussels in their decision-making. Politicians may wish to emphasize their role in negotiating for the nation’s or region’s best interests rather than their role in promoting co-operative agreements across the Union.

85. Understanding of the EU is perhaps not helped by a tendency amongst member state governments across the Union to take the credit for European initiatives when they are a success, whilst simultaneously blaming the EU institutions when something is unpopular in their country. Morgan (2003) terms Brussels “an easy and remote scapegoat”. The European Commission has previously suggested that member states need to take greater ownership of the EU and its initiatives and tell their populations when the EU does something successful whilst also taking the responsibility for decisions which affect a country in a negative way. The European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso alluded to this issue when he addressed the European Parliament on preparations for the European Council in June 2005:

“It would be wrong to enter a "blame-game" he said. While the EU institutions were not perfect - and could and would be improved - leaders should beware of blaming 'Brussels' for all unpopular choices: "If you attack Europe six days a week from Monday to Saturday, how can you ask citizens to vote for it on Sunday?" (European Parliament debate – 8 June 2005)

86. Further, there is a geopolitical argument related to ownership which suggests that British politicians will favour working across the US and EU but not over identify with the EU, where the EU is seen as harbouring anti-US feelings.

87. This can be related to a sense of Britain’s historic role in the world.

“British popular euroscepticism seems closely tied to its perceived role as an independent actor on the world stage as well as to the impression of not forming part of the Continent of Europe. Scepticism, thus, appears directed both towards the wording “European” and “Union” in the European Union (Sorenson 2004).

The Commonwealth, a seat on the UN Security Council and relations with the United States supports this view. The latter points to a key choice that many people in Britain feel they have to make – support the EU or maintain the special relationship with the United States.
These factors would seem to be other reasons why the UK feels it cannot throw its full weight into the European Union as a political union.

CONCLUSION

88. Overall the evidence suggests that people in the UK are supportive of the EU to an extent and can see the benefits of being part of the EU. That support begins to wane as the EU’s competence spreads (such as the introduction of the Euro) or as it appears to impact further on British life (such as the proposed EU Constitution).

89. There are a few minor differences between people in Scotland and people in Britain, with people in Scotland being, currently, slightly more pro-European. There have been specific periods in the history of Scotland where there was a greater divergence.

90. However, British views tend to be the one of the least positive across the EU-25 and the second half of the paper discusses three challenges which are inherent in any communication of European governance: the knowledge challenge – the relative ignorance amongst people in Britain and the desire to know more; the political challenge of increased media coverage; and the domestic political challenge of taking ownership of the European Union.

91. In terms of the latter the review points to the challenges inherent in British or Scottish politicians taking ownership of the EU in terms of where to place the credit for activities. Messages of co-operative advances seem remote and it is worth noting the extent to which people in Britain remain unaware of the role of the Council of European Union despite this being the very body that their Ministers sit on.
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