



## Anthropology in Scottish Schools

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Inspired by the initial success of the anthropology A-level in England, and finding myself spending more and more time in Scotland, I decided to see if we could offer Scottish students something similar. At the ASA (Association of Social Anthropologists) decennial in Edinburgh in the early summer of 2014, I raised the subject with colleagues in Scottish departments and found several who agreed that it would be a good idea. Like those of us in England who found that some of our new students had an ill-informed idea of what the subject they had chosen involved, whilst others only discovered it once they had arrived at university – and then could not always switch – they liked the idea of their applicants coming with a bit more prior knowledge. Some also wanted to increase the number of Scottish students among their annual intake. In Scotland, the word anthropology is not well known among the general population, although a brief explanation is usually enough to have people not only recognise the concept, but express enthusiasm for it. A good place to introduce anthropology more widely then ...

The innovative Aberdonians (actually Alex King, the American HOD at the time) set the ball rolling by holding a meeting to mull over the idea, inviting Liz Curtis, an anthropologist from the Education Department, who offered some very useful knowledge of the existing system in Scotland. She also pointed out that primary schools in Scotland do already teach anthropology -- they just don't use the word -- so that would explain the general understanding. A short while later, I followed this initial meeting up with fellow Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI) Education Committee member, Stephanie Bunn, in St. Andrews, where we were encouraged by the Head of School Nigel Rapport. We also met Mike Johnson in the recruitment office who spoke about how teachers might be trained to teach anthropology using a distance learning system they were developing there. He suggested we contact John Lewis at the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) whom he thought might help.

I had a long telephone conversation with John about how best to proceed. He had studied some anthropology as part of his sociology undergraduate degree in England and agreed that it would be a good idea to introduce it at a senior level in Scottish schools. He noted spontaneously that his half-Greek, half-Welsh daughter was already learning something very like anthropology in primary school where the children were encouraged to share and learn about each other's background heritage, although they did not call what they did anthropology. He explained that the SQA invited people to put forward new proposals for 'development opportunities' for the Scottish education system and that there was even a form to be filled in for this purpose. There is a section for the rationale for the proposal, some suggestions about related employment opportunities, some detail about what the proposed courses would include, and a section entitled market research. John emphasised the importance of identifying a 'demand' for the subject, that numbers would be important, and he explained the need to lay out arguments in the form of a 'business case'. This sounded a little daunting to a mere academic, but I asked him to send me the form anyway.

Somewhat in the spirit of 'nothing ventured, nothing gained', I set about filling in said form, and outlined all sorts of reasons why anthropology would be a great addition to the existing programmes, to the future careers of school leavers, and indeed to any thinking person! It was confirmed when I studied the existing provision that they do indeed teach something very close to anthropology in

primary school in Scotland. In social studies, for example, the syllabus explains that ‘children and young people develop their understanding of the world by learning about other people and their values’, and religious and moral education ‘builds on Scotland’s diversity in offering an understanding of the different faiths that are practised’. Two themes had been chosen by the Scottish government for their education system in the two years while I was thinking about this project, and I could link anthropology to both. They were ‘global citizenship’ and ‘sustainability’. I could even refer to my own recent book on the latter subject (Hendry 2015)!

In my first draft of the proposal, I chose the ‘higher’ as a ‘product type’, this being the approximate equivalent of the A-level in Scotland where the system is different, and one of my main arguments (for those all-important numbers) was how well the A-level was doing in England. The English recruitment was not yet brilliant – the A-level had only been running properly for three years -- but the students seemed to love it, the teachers were very enthusiastic, and reports to the Education Committee suggested that it was about to take off. There had been a lack of supportive resources at the start in England, so I emphasised the various ways in which these had now been developed and made available. We had some discussion at the RAI about how I should describe what the proposal form called the ‘product specification’, which required detail about what the course would comprise, because it seems that we had signed a copyright agreement with the AQA, the board which had validated the A-level. So I devised a different way of introducing the subject, which also included an offer Aberdeen had made to invite local school sixth formers to take their first year foundation course entitled Introduction to Anthropology: Peoples of the World as a pilot.

The draft form went out to interested colleagues in all the Scottish departments, and I incorporated their suggestions before getting back to my contact at the SQA to see if he would take a look before I submitted it. It took some time to locate the man in question, and even then we only managed a phone call again, but at this stage he suggested we might make more progress at first if we went for something less ambitious than a whole Higher – a ‘special award’ perhaps, or some individual ‘units’. Well, I hummed and hawed about this, and discussed it with a few people, who thought I should hold out for a Higher, but eventually I managed to make an appointment to have a serious planning discussion with Carol Hunter, who is not only a qualifications manager at the SQA, but has a first degree in social anthropology from the University of St. Andrew’s. We were to be joined by a colleague of hers, Elaine McFadyen, who had just seen psychology into the higher school offering. This seemed like progress indeed and I looked forward to our meeting.

This was the point – approximately – when the A-level came under threat, and suddenly I found myself engaged in trying to save the course we had worked so hard to set up. One of the main aims of the RAI Education Committee, for the years since I had been invited to join it, was getting anthropology into the pre-university sector. Under the RAI directorship of Hilary Callan and Education Committee chair, Brian Street, we had spent some time finding an examination board to take on a proposed A-level syllabus we had carefully written, and after the AQA had agreed, creating resources and otherwise supporting its introduction in schools. I had even taken on the onerous task – made somewhat more tedious than usual by an extraordinarily invasive copy editor – of co-writing with Simon Underdown, a purpose-built textbook. As it happened, this turned out to be less useful than we had hoped, and took much longer than we had planned – but much work had been done on all these fronts, and I had taken to giving papers about how good I thought anthropology was turning out to be for sixth form students. The threat was a great shock then, and I turned to devoting time to writing articles of protest. The rest of this special issue is devoted to the outcome of that particular venture, so let us return to Scotland.

Of course, my proposal to the SQA would need to be adjusted, and at first I thought the A-level disaster in England might have irrevocably undermined our case, but when I finally made it to the meeting in Glasgow, the wonderful Scottish capacity for independent thinking came to the fore, and I think that the negative English situation may even have helped! We considered all sorts of options for the introduction of anthropology in Scottish schools and colleges, as well as discussing the best way to

submit the proposal form, and on the whole, Carol and Elaine were very positive about it. The only section of the existing draft that remained weak was the ‘business plan’, for we needed to show evidence of ‘demand’. As few people in Scotland yet know what the word anthropology means, that was something of a challenge. Gradually I began to realise the advantages of the ‘units’ that John Lewis had suggested – they could be introduced as options in wider Higher fields such as Social Studies, they could stand-alone in courses for people dealing with asylum seekers, or for inmates of HM Prisons, perhaps they could even be exported to England! In all these cases, people would gradually learn about the value of the subject and a demand could build up. It seemed like a ‘cunning plan’ in this time of UK government negativity.

For the Education Committee, we were able to offer a small glimmer of hope then, and although no one wanted to get too excited at this early stage (again), they were encouraging. The prospective demise of the A-level at least meant that we could get our copyright back from the AQA, and as I began to adapt the ‘product specification’ under these new circumstances, I was fortunate to be able to seek advice from the A-level teachers about what went down well with their sixth-formers, and I would particularly like to thank Josie Gadsby, Aimee Middlemiss, Roy Jarvis, James Harvey, Laura Pountney and Tomislav Maric for this support. Things suddenly seemed to fall into place when Carol informed me that a proposal that didn’t go for a complete course, like a Higher, did not require a business plan, so the decision was confirmed to go initially for ‘units’ and the form was eventually submitted towards the end of 2015.

In February 2016, Carol came back to me and asked when I would be ready to start writing, so Stephanie and I made an appointment to meet her in Glasgow with her assistant, Fiona MacKinnon, and we began to make some concrete plans. Stephanie was part of STAR, a consortium that links the Scottish anthropology departments, and she managed to put together an academic team comprising a representative of each one: Arnar Arnasson in Aberdeen, with whom we had an initial skype meeting, Lucy Lowe in Edinburgh and Nicole Bourque in Glasgow – and of course Stephanie herself from St. Andrews. A discussion was also organised in Edinburgh by HOD, Toby Kelly, who has been ever supportive, inviting his counterpart in St. Andrews, Adam Reed, who happens to live in Edinburgh, Dimitri Tsintjilonis, a colleague working on the redevelopment of the International Baccalaureate in Anthropology, and Lucy. He also invited me to be an Honorary Fellow of the department in Edinburgh, which makes me look a little less like an English interloper, though I do in fact come of good patrilineal Scottish stock!

Gradually some ideas for content were gathered, the SQA supplied me with a template for laying them out in a way suitable for validation for teachers and colleges, and I set to work. Each of the units was to stand alone, but also if desired they could build on one another, and we decided to start with four – at levels equivalent to the English A-level, or two sixth form pre-university years, but also two earlier years, so potentially starting students at ages 13/14. In Scottish terms that translates into a year before the Highers, as well as Higher and Advanced Higher, and continues into a college qualification equivalent to first year university. These would offer a degree of flexibility, then, and could be picked up in various outlets. Presently I am talking to two departments of the University of the Highlands and Islands, where ethnologist Hugh Cheape has been very helpful, as well as the principal of a language school in Stirling, and teachers who came along with their pupils to an Anthropology Scotland day held at the National Museum in Edinburgh in June. The SQA will advertise the Units once they have been properly validated, and our next task will be to identify and possibly to train potential teachers.

The units are actually quite substantial – each designed to fill 40 hours of class contact time, and they lay out certain aims and outcomes which are to be achieved at each of the levels. The Scottish system is freer than the A-level, and once these criteria have been validated by the SQA, the precise teaching and assessment methods are left to the teachers and their schools and colleges. Within schools offering Highers, the units can form an optional part of the Higher in Social Studies, along with sociology and psychology, or they can be part of another set of Highers in Modern Studies, which includes history

and politics. The first unit would be part of the National Awards that precede Highers, and at all levels the units can be offered as Special Awards, among other things. All the units can also be offered in post-secondary colleges, and different courses could choose to add one or more that might supplement an existing qualification. Most recently I have been talking to a college in Skye about social anthropology becoming an option for courses in Gaelic studies.

To make each unit independent, or 'stand-alone', was something of a challenge, but in the end I went for different approaches. For the first, which could be taken by the pupils as young as 13-14, I received some valuable advice from James Harvey – not only an A-level teacher, but one educated in Scotland – and I also consulted a few local pupils in the age group, and ended up with a unit called *Our Place in the World*. It offers an experiential method of learning, where the students are to be asked to think about people, places and objects close and important to them, and then to compare their findings with those of others in the class – and elsewhere in a more distant location. Finding a range of possibilities is the name of the game, along with understanding how different these can be, and ultimately recognising their value, wherever the person holding the views is located – or came from.

It was a great help talking to the odd pupil of the appropriate age when thinking about how to proceed with these units – although of course, I needed not to forget that they might also be offered to adults. Still, when I checked out the content of the first unit with one young man just a year ahead of the initial target age, and asked what he thought of the title, he replied, 'Spot-on! Our place in the world is just what we were thinking about last year'. 'So what are you thinking about this year?' I pressed him. He didn't even hesitate. 'We are thinking about where we are going in that world', he replied, confidently! He was only one informant, I must admit, and I did find him out doing work experience, but I liked the idea, and decided to call the next unit *Anthropology's Place in the World*. It would offer examples of all the possible occupations I had entered in the SQA proposal form as reasons for taking the subject up (and indeed copied into the protest petition for the A-level withdrawal as my reason for signing it -- where it received more 'likes' than any other!).

In fact the next unit didn't retain that title, because my draft units were sent out to the academic team, which met for the first time with the SQA in St. Andrews in April, and although they generally approved the content of that unit, they thought the title didn't really represent what it contained. So Unit 2 is now called *Social Anthropology: Who Does it and How to Do It*. It introduces fieldwork, as the title might suggest, but it also asks students to find people in many walks of life who have studied anthropology. The content of the third and fourth units were discussed at that meeting, and we decided to go for a bit more history and theory of the subject for the next one – now completed with a focus on the body and the life course – and then turn to a regional focus for the last one. These two are still out for comment as I write, and we have another meeting coming up in September, but Scottish Ethnography appears in the title of the last one at the moment, though asking students to look for cultural links abroad, particularly to their own place of study.

The Education Committee at the RAI agreed to send the Education Officer, Emma Ford, to our meeting in St. Andrews, where she played a great part, bringing her experience of having worked with the A-level teachers, and gathering resources for the *Discovering Anthropology* website. As the RAI, and indeed the A-level, always retained the biological side of anthropology, I should explain why we decided to make the social our initial focus in Scotland. In fact we had discussions about this at the departments, and in the SQA office, and although the focus in Scottish universities does tend to be on social anthropology, we are planning to include further units in the future when (I suppose I should say if) these take off. Medical anthropology is a specialist one we hope to include at an early stage, for example, and if Alan Barnard can be persuaded to come out of retirement, evolutionary anthropology might be another. A visit to newly honoured Dame Sue Black in Dundee has assured me of her support for the venture, and hoping that she might later find space in her busy life to add a unit of forensic anthropology.

It would be a mistake to jump too far ahead at this stage, of course. These first units are written, and two are already published, the other two to follow shortly, but we still have a way to go. We need teachers to teach them, schools and colleges to add them to their programmes, and students to take them up. As this article goes to press I can report a very positive reaction from a group of college lecturers I met recently, and further collaboration with the SQA to verify the college proposals to offer the units. We still need to help out with suggesting resources, but I am collecting articles and film clips that may be useful to offer teachers, so do please share ideas with me. I am already indebted to Aimee Middlemiss and Roy Jarvis for sharing some of their own A-level resources which I may be able to pass on, and to Danny Miller who has made me aware of the abundance of free resources that come with his *Why We Post* project. We now need to start the process of building a list of teachers and keeping in touch with them.

Meanwhile, I have another cunning plan to bring the word anthropology into the ears of the Scottish public, and this is by offering some comment and even programmes to BBC Radio Scotland. Again it took a while to get some reaction from my approaches (or maybe I am just impatient) but I now have some good contacts there. One of these is a commissioning editor for current affairs, and he has asked me for a list of anthropologists who would be willing to appear at short notice on the radio, and I am busy recruiting – so let me know if you are willing to add your name to the list. With another I am committed to dream up a feature – possibly a series of programmes – and our present idea for a theme is rites of passage – Scottish ones, of course – so I shall start devising something along those lines.

It is early days to be getting too excited about this Scottish venture, for we have little idea how it will eventually pan out, but at least we have made a start, and I hope to lobby a few political figures next in the hope of avoiding the negative attitude that arose in Westminster with the A-level. My local SNP MP, Tasmina Ahmed Sheik, is on board already, and the member for West Dundee, Chris Hall, who actually mentioned his study of social anthropology in his maiden speech, has been supportive too. Now I need to approach some members of the Scottish parliament in Holyrood, and convince them that the study of anthropology will make a fine contribution to the aim for excellence that is currently their prime concern.

## **References**

Hendry, Joy, 2015, *Science and Sustainability: Learning from Indigenous Wisdom*, Palgrave, New York.