

Interviewee: Jack McConnell (Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale)

UoS Dates: BA 1977 - 1983 (Mathematics and Education)

Role(s): President of the Students' Association, 1980 - 1982, Deputy President of NUS Scotland and Honorary President of the University of Stirling.
First Minister of Scotland, 2001 - 2007



Interview summary:

Summary of content; with time (min:secs)

Start 00:39 - He was born in the same hospital in Irvine, Ayrshire, as another First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon. The family moved to Arran to farm when he was 2; he went to secondary school on the island but saw academic success as a route to a different kind of life from farming. Stirling was fifth on his list of preferences when he applied to university but when he saw the campus he changed it to first choice. He studied mathematics with education in order to become a teacher; his father wanted him to do accountancy and he began it but was able to give it up because of the flexibility of Stirling's system.

05:22 - He values the flexibility of the system at Stirling; that it admits students to the University and not to faculties. In the cut-backs of 1981-2 he became active politically, defending the university's innovative approach to education, its semesters, continuous assessment, and its welcoming attitude to international and mature students. As Student President he campaigned with Sir Kenneth Alexander, the Principal, who had come from elsewhere but bought into the unique dimensions of the University. Good financial management and student campaigning ensured the future of the University. JMcC learnt from Sir Kenneth about leadership, clarity of vision, political engagement, how to change one's opinion, and having a goal. Sir Kenneth was a good listener and was good at working with other people, standing up to the government, and having coherent plans; he helped to ensure the future funding of universities by arguing against reducing undergraduate numbers, but following student demand.

10:30 - JMcC joined the Student Association Council when he arrived encouraged by Tommy Geddes and Harry Adam, and valued knowing Dougie Herd. He had lively political friends such as Scott Ballantyne and Maggie Monteith. When he was Student President he had two sabbatical years because the cuts needed consistency, 1980 - 1982. He then became a maths teacher in Stirling and, thanks to Mike Donnelly's campaigning skills, he became the Labour local councillor for the University's Bridge of Allan ward which, before his election, had the smallest Labour majority. At 29 he became the Leader of the Council.

14:55 - He always had two groups of friends; the political ones included John Reid who is now in the House of Lords and Douglas Campbell and David Edgar who were both Student Presidents. Jackie Kay was a radical student activist who took no prisoners and had an amazing personality. His wife did an M.Ed. and a Ph.D. in Education and his daughter also graduated from Stirling, in Politics and Economics. The University was the basis for his subsequent career; he had a group of friends with whom he shared flats who were not involved in politics. He is still in touch with them and with former teaching colleagues to keep a perspective on life outside politics.

21:11 - He was keen on sport at University. Liam McClarey was Sports Union President; friendship with him led to the establishment of the first Sports Scholarships in Scotland. Ian Thomson, the Director of Physical Education, was a visionary in terms of public sport. When he was First Minister JMcC was able to support Ian Thomson's initiatives, also with the support of Michael Jackson, the Senior Deputy Principal. There were a lot of special people who contributed to the life of the University, for instance Hans Meidner, Doris Littlejohn, and David Wallace who was remarkable for his financial management and academic rigour.

27:00 - It was important to make sure that international students had memorable experiences at the University; Stirling Castle was hired for international banquets in International Week. His archive is coming to the University in stages.; the first phase arrived this year. He teaches in the Politics Department sometimes and does some promotion for the University. He hosted this year a visit to the House of Lords of a group of alumni of different generations who live in the south-east of England; Stirling students seem to him to be uniquely connected by a sense of community, wherever he meets them. He thinks himself very fortunate to have had the opportunities offered by being in the new Scottish parliament. The House of Lords seems to him a strange place in its ceremony and history though it has smart and experienced people. He thinks it is not justifiable to have a chamber of privileged people but had no doubts about accepting a peerage.

35:00 - His main preoccupations within international development are with children and conflict, and child refugees. He is active in the Scotland/Malawi partnership which is a people-to-people organization, not government-to-government. Thousands of people are involved. Initially it was impossible for African educational systems to compete with the UK but now the internet has changed everything and the gap is closing, though not fast enough. He closes by describing the day on which John Smith and his team asked him, in Stirling on the eve of an election in 1992, to give up teaching and run the Labour Party headquarters in Scotland. A milestone in his life.

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| Interview No: | SURSA OH / 077 | <p>SURSA University of Stirling Stirling FK9 4LA</p> <p>info@sursa.org.uk www.sursa.org.uk</p> |  |
| Interviewed by: | - Angela Smith | | |
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