Dear Sir or Madam

I am writing to express my considered opinion - after paying conséquente attention to the national debate on this issue - that the proposed 2015 Higher Education Governance Bill will be bad for Scottish higher education, bad for the economy, and bad for the country.

The new legislation seeks to enforce greater consistency among institutions, thereby reducing their ability to adopt individual strategies. How can that be anything other than a bad idea?

The Bill will burden universities and the public purse with extra regulation and bureaucracy, exactly the curses of modern political life that stifles enterprise. This will jeopardise the positive contribution that universities make to the economy.

In the opinion of many eminent commentators - political and entrepreneurial, as well as academic commentators - the legislation is not only harmful; it is superfluous.

The Scottish universities and their General Councils have strongly opposed these proposals.
The Royal Society of Edinburgh, as well as various other bodies, has been extremely critical.
I wish to add my own, modest but professional, criticism of the proposals.

Scottish education has been the root of Scottish success for five centuries or more, the root of the Scottish (and the world's) industrial revolution, and the root of the Scottish Enlightenment. Any move by the political establishment to threaten this area of Scottish pre-eminence, is cause for the greatest concern.

The Higher Education Governance Bill offers exactly such a threat.
It is a threat to the autonomy of the Scottish universities, to their creativity and to their originality.
This is especially serious for my own Alma Mater, St Andrews, which has produced generations of excellence based precisely on its creativity and originality.

The Royal Society of Edinburgh even goes so far as to state that the Bill will produce the opposite of 'good governance'. The Society describes the proposed strategy as "a level of government intervention that is wholly inappropriate for an autonomous sector." The Society suggests that the whole Bill should be withdrawn.

The autonomy of the Scottish universities is an area that should be untouchable. The SNP has proved to be remarkably adept in governing and very shrewd in its political judgements. I believe we have here one example of the SNP making a mistake: for the Bill in question shows political, philosophical and educational misjudgements. The existing Scottish Code of Good HE Governance
(July 2013) already achieves the objectives of the Bill, without imposing the negative elements of ministerial interference - with all the risks that are implied therein.

The opportunity for Chairs of governing bodies to be elected by people from outside, is an invitation to political and / or commercial interference in the affairs of research and education institutions. This is most inadvisable. This runs counter to all the Scottish experience of HE governance gained through the 500 years of excellence I previously mentioned. Having worked personally with universities in UK and USA, and also in Austria, Switzerland, France and in French West Africa, I can assure you and the Education and Culture Committee, that the independence of the Scottish universities is a precious asset: it must not be diluted or destroyed.

I urge the Education and Culture Committee to reconsider the whole issue in its September meeting, and to send the Bill back to the drafters for a profound rethink.

I hope that Scottish university professors, students and graduates will be vocal and numerous in expressing similar opinions to my own.

Yours sincerely

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