Dear Sir,
The unique Scottish tradition of the Scottish Ancient universities for students to select and elect their Rector to chair University Court, the ruling body of the university, is a special and precious tradition which the Higher Education Bill before you, will remove.
Sadly, the changes proposed will see the Rector no longer have the right to chair the most important governing committee of the university.

In its current form, the Bill before you - in addition to removing the right of the Rector to chair University Court - will also take away the democratic right of students to determine who will be the candidates who stand for election as Rector.

The concept that students nominate individuals to stand for election is an excellent counter-balance to the traditional hierarchy of universities. It is an open and democratic process, accessible to all matriculated students to put forward the candidate of their choice: selected by the students, for the students.

As the proposal stands, students will for the first time no longer determine the candidates who will go forward for election. Instead this right will be replaced by a committee whose membership and remit is unclear.

The strength of the current model in place is that it allows the key stakeholder group of any university - the students - to determine the individual to chair University Court (the Rector).

This system in the ancient universities should not be dismantled to accommodate a one-size-fits-all approach, but should be considered as a model of democratic strength.

To see a piece of Scottish history disappear, when the principle of electing an individual to preside over University Courts throughout Scotland already exists in the universities which by ordinance have elections for Rectors every three years, seems short-sighted.

In conclusion, flexibility is required in the proposed legislation to accommodate a system that conforms to a democratic tradition which has a historic record of success.

I would be delighted to speak to your committee. After all, it would be a tragedy that under the current proposals I would be the last Rector of St Andrews to chair University Court.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Stihler
Rector, University of St Andrews