Education and Culture Committee

Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Bill

Submission from Eric Anderson

My qualifications for writing is that as a Scot and a St Andrews graduate, and later head of three academic schools and of an Oxford College, I have some experience of Higher Education in Scotland, England and world-wide and some understanding of the relative success and reputation of universities in different countries. I am alarmed at the prospect of this Bill which, I believe, will adversely affect the excellence and excellent reputation of Scotland’s universities.

My belief is

- that the league tables which show the best Scottish universities high in the world rankings are correct;
- that our universities enhance the reputation of Scotland abroad;
- that they bring to Scotland talented students from the rest of the world and talented teachers and researchers;
- that membership of what you might call the commonwealth of learning is of inestimable value to Scottish students and academics as well as contributing to the country’s international reputation;
- that our excellence depends on the independence of these institutions and their ability to operate without fear, favour, prejudice or political pressure;
- that the provisions of the Bill imperil that independence;
- that over quite a short time the international pool from which Scotland draws many of the best academics and students in the world would shrink in size;
- that the overall result would be to impoverish the Scottish Universities intellectually and in terms of global reputation.

The universities of Scotland are not broken and do not need to be fixed urgently. Higher Education as a whole is not perfect, however. Is there not a strong case for pausing rather than rushing into legislation? A commission of enquiry, or something of the sort, on which those who work in Higher Education should be largely represented, ought to produce proposals more useful than those in this Bill. Please consider this.

Eric Anderson
(Sir Eric Anderson, K.T., F.R.S.E.)
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