My name is Hugh Bradford and I am a graduate of two Scottish Universities - St Andrews (BSc, 1977) and Strathclyde (PhD, 1992).

I am also a graduate of Manchester University (MBA, 1985), and have worked as an administrator at two colleges in the United States (Colgate University, and Mount Holyoke College).

I am a permanent resident of the United States and I would not normally feel that it would be appropriate for me to weigh in on proposed Scottish legislation. I do however have a vested interest in the performance of the institutions from which I have graduated. Furthermore one of the great strengths of Scotland's universities is that they operate simultaneously and effectively in Scottish, UK, and global contexts. From both the alumni and international perspectives, I am writing to express serious concern about The Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Bill.

It is totally appropriate for the Scottish Government to hold universities accountable for the funding that the Scottish Government provides. The Scottish Code of Good HE Governance is a well written, sensible, document that allows the Scottish Funding Council to do exactly that, while giving institutions some flexibility in how they achieve good governance.

In stark contrast, The Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Bill seeks to provide Scottish Ministers with powers to intervene in university governance at a very detailed level, which will undermine the autonomy of every institution. It is immaterial whether or not those powers are exercised, their mere existence will serve to stifle independent thought and action by university governing entities and their senior leadership; and promote self-censorship and other undesirable traits.

Although much attention is focused on the allegedly high salaries paid to University Principals, they are low by international standards, and it is already difficult to recruit talented leaders for these positions. The increased government/political influence outlined in the Bill will make it harder yet to recruit such leaders.

With regard to the very detailed proposals on the composition of governing bodies, the Bill is once again concerning. In particular, the stipulation that two places are reserved for trade union nominees seems to run directly counter to established principles of good governance, in that it would create an immediate conflict of interest.
Lastly, it is very hard to understand why details of the composition of an institution's academic board need to be the subject of government legislation.

Scotland's universities have a global reputation and influence that is disproportionate to the country's size. The Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Bill, as proposed, has the potential to adversely affect both. I would strongly urge that the Bill be withdrawn.

Hugh Bradford
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