The Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Bill

The Bill wrongly seeks to increase Ministerial control over Scottish Universities, whose independence is one of the factors that has led them to take extraordinarily high positions in the world rankings. The proposals for greater Ministerial control were not flagged up in the consultation, and should therefore not be pursued now. The changes proposed to the autonomy of universities will have a negative impact on their fundraising and competitiveness. There is no evidence that there are defects that need to be remedied and, even if there were, the Scottish Code of Good HE Governance provides a suitable and adequate remedy.

The proposals to prescribe the membership of governing bodies on a “one-size-fits-all” basis is wrong-headed. There are several different types of university in Scotland, and it is appropriate for each to be given the freedom to establish the type of Governing Body most suitable for its needs. I oppose in particular the proposal to reduce the number of alumni representatives to two. Alumni (or General Council) representatives provide a valuable and disinterested challenge function on Governing Bodies. I also oppose changes to the role of Rectors.

In relation to academic freedom, the greatest threat I perceive is that of increased Ministerial control.

I believe the Bill is unnecessary and harmful. It should be dropped.

L Macmillan