Submission from Malcolm MacRae

Dear Clerk,

The Academic Freedom of our Universities.

You are no doubt aware of the concern among the older Scottish Universities about the changes proposed by the Scottish Government to the way in which our universities are governed.

Until now, governments of every shade have through it right to respect the freedom of our universities to govern themselves according to their own traditions. For the most part, this policy has ensured that our older universities have secured a standing internationally which has earned for Scotland an outstanding reputation for academic excellence. This standard can be maintained only if the traditional understanding of academic freedom is safeguarded. The spirit of competition, not least in crucial areas of research, guarantees that resources are used to maximum effect.

It would, I feel, be a most retrograde step if the Scottish Government were to interfere in the structure of the administration of the life of our universities, by changing posts and constitutional practices. The existing way of working is largely the product of the gradual evolution of life within what until now have been autonomous academic institutions.

I would urge that the present proposals withdrawn and that the Scottish Government engages much more fully with university Courts on any proposed change.

Yours sincerely,