Submission from Martyn Quick

Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Bill

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to express my concerns about the above bill. As someone who has been employed in the UK Higher Education sector all my working life and within a Scottish University since 2004, I appreciate that the Scottish Government hopes to strengthen Higher Education within Scotland. However, I am unconvinced that the introduced bill is the best way to achieve this goal.

As I understand it, the bill is principally attempting to unify the way that individual universities within Scotland are governed. I am afraid that I fail to see why a one-size-fits-all method should be applied here. As far as I can see, there is no actual case made as to why the proposed unification is needed. There are a wide variety of Universities in Scotland, in terms of size, age, and academic focus, and I see little reason to believe that all such institutions should be governed in identical ways.

Indeed, there is good reason to believe that the Scottish Higher Education system is in excellent shape at this point. My own institution continues to perform well in many UK league tables and is widely respected across the world. I am also well aware that similar positive statements can be made for many other institutions in Scotland. I see little in what is proposed that will improve upon these successes and surely the greatest danger is that the actual upshot will be damage to our Higher Education system. There is concern within the sector that the proposals will introduce greater, and unnecessary, bureaucracy that will burden universities and provide a drain on their funding.

As an academic contributing to the daily life of an institution, we currently admit excellent students and personally I can honestly say that it is a pleasure to teach them and open their eyes to the wonders of my subject. I do not want to see this position to change and I am concerned that this bill could seriously damage our position.

In addition to reading the bill, I have also looked briefly at the Royal Society of Edinburgh’s Advice Paper (February). The latter august institution makes a number of serious points that do not seem to have been taken sufficiently seriously within the bill. I agree with their statement that “the proposed intervention could only be justified by clear evidence of serious systematic deficiencies in the governance of the sector.” However, it is unclear to me that such deficiencies exist and I have failed to find an attempt to provide such evidence.

In the end, I find it hard to ignore what inappropriate for an autonomous sector.

Yours sincerely,
Martyn Quick