Submission from Simon Fraser

I grew up in Edinburgh and went to The University of St Andrews where I studied geography. I feel very privileged to have had a Scottish education and consequently have become involved in the development of the University over the last several years. Specifically I have sat on the 600th anniversary campaign to raise the awareness and reach of St Andrews on a global basis. I feel strongly that the opportunities for the Scottish education sector, and its great universities in particular, are great and with further innovation and expansion they can compete on a global basis to provide opportunities for many more like myself.

After graduating, I moved to the US and subsequently lived and worked in Asia. I also had the good fortune to study for my MBA at Columbia University in New York. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that the success of any country is founded in the depth and quality of its education system. There are clear examples of this in many countries in Asia but particularly in Korea and Japan. And in the US the unparalled success of the Californian tech industry is has been born out of Stamford and the other education establishments there. The healthcare and related industries around Boston clearly stem from the success of their universities as well.

Education is one area where the United Kingdom still excels and you can see the enormous spin-offs into research and development as well as commercial enterprises from the London Universities and also Oxford and Cambridge.

Scotland has an enormous heritage in education which has helped drive it's success in medicine, technology and other industries over several hundred years. Its ancient Universities are still remarkable leaders in both research and teaching and Scotland still clearly punches above its weight in both. Just look at how Edinburgh leads in so many research faculties and the impact things like Dolly the Sheep have had and the number of North American and Asian students who want to come to Scotland for both undergraduate and graduate studies.

For these institutions to remain at the forefront of both research and teaching they will continue to need to attract the very best teaching and student talent from around the world as well as from the UK. In order to do this it is imperative that they remain independent and flexible. Each one of The Scottish universities has something different to offer and they need to be able to retain their individual attributes.

It is unclear to me how the proposed new Scottish bill will help these institutions further build on their historical success. Indeed the proposals are highly likely that they will have the reverse effect as:
1. The autonomy of our Universities will be greatly weakened and will be vulnerable to direct political influence

2. Academic reputations will therefore suffer

3. They will lose their edge in a global market and will be less able to attract the best students, the best academic staff and funding

4. This will be bad for Scottish higher education, for the economy and for the country

5. All of this is unnecessary as we have a Governance structure that has proved itself it can work over many generations already that is not tainted by the short-termism inherent in the political system

In conclusion I think the financial impact and educational implications of the new proposal are not fully understood and will have both a short-term financial impact on research budgets and teaching capabilities and also a longer-term negative impact on the educational and economic future of Scotland. I sincerely hope that further thought and consideration will be given to the implications on our country from this ill thought out bill and ultimately sense will prevail and that the independence of our great ancient academic institutions will remain for the next 600 years.

Your sincerely,

Simon Fraser