Scotland has a long and proud history of achievement in Higher Education and, in particular, the excellence of its universities. The global standing of our universities is widely recognised and is of immense benefit to the country. This position has taken many years – indeed centuries - to develop, based on a great deal of informed judgement and sound decision making. This evolutionary process has a well established and very firm base and there is no reason to believe that the structures and processes that have created this highly desirable situation are about to fail us.

No organisational or institutional management process is incapable of improvement. However, as I myself know from my personal experience in hi-tech industries, the most effective way to manage effective change is to give the people in charge of the organisation free rein to seek sources of improvement on a continuous basis. Imposition of rules and regulations have their place but not in situations where the requirement is for continuous improvement in a system that is fundamentally working and is not materially failing to achieve an excellent result.

Therefore, along with many others, I am surprised and disappointed that the above bill is being presented to the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish universities do not need this. Perhaps some other parts of higher education would welcome the implementation of parts of this bill but I am absolutely certain that the universities will suffer as a result. They will lose valuable autonomy, have crucial academic freedoms curtailed and will become less attractive and, therefore, less competitive on the world stage.

The Scottish government is running a serious risk of being the agent of future failure. If there was any evidence that Scottish Government intervention in other areas (in particular secondary schools) had produced a substantial improvement in the standards of education across Scotland, there might be a case for looking for ways to extend this success to other sectors such as Further Education Colleges. But there is no evidence of such success. So, why is the Scottish Government so intent on fixing minor problems in “other people’s houses” when they have material and very serious problems in their own. (The universities would benefit enormously from substantially improved levels of literacy and numeracy in Scottish schools but this is not happening on the scale required.)

There is nothing in this bill that will improve the overall quality of our universities. All the universities and even the Royal Society are telling the government to abandon this bill and to look for other ways to achieve objectives that all players can agree with. This intervention is a “step too far” and will do nothing to enhance the reputation of (and support for) the Scottish Parliament.
Please, abandon this bill.

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