Submission from William Berry

The Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Bill

1. I am writing to object strongly to the principle of this Bill, which will strike at the autonomy of Scottish Higher Education Institutions.
2. I believe that the current and continuing success of the leading Scottish Universities is of the greatest value, nationally and internationally, to Scotland and her people.
   In addressing any perceived needs of the less successful institutions, the autonomy and success of the best universities must not be prejudiced by a “one size fits all” approach.
3. The two Universities of which I am a graduate, St Andrews and Edinburgh, each rank impressively in UK and World higher education comparisons. There is no evidence whatever to suggest that their respective governance arrangements are deficient in any way. Quite the reverse.
   It would be folly to put the success of these and other institutions at risk.
4. Detailed objections to the proposals have been made widely in the Press and elsewhere, including the General Councils of my two universities and also notably the Royal Society of Edinburgh. I associate myself with the Royal Society’s view that the proposals are “inappropriate, unnecessary, and potentially counter to good governance”.
5. I have particular experience as regards the University of St Andrews. I was elected to the University Court by the General Council (in a contested election) in 2000. As a member of Court, I was elected Senior Governor (again in a contested election) in 2002 and served in that capacity until 2007. During that period Governance arrangements were kept under continuous review, including a rigorous review by a specially constituted Governance Review Group under the chairmanship of the Chairman of the Audit Committee and with a senior external member, as a result of which certain improved arrangements were initiated.
6. In view of the 600 year history of St Andrews and its current admirably high standing, it seems to me arrogance – and possibly worse – to think that a small group of people comprising the ministers of the Scottish Government for the time being, should be in a better position to organise the Governance of the University than the dedicated people with the special knowledge and interests of the University at heart.
7. I urge the Scottish Government to reconsider before going further with these shameful and potentially disastrous proposals.

William Berry