I am a recent former Commandant of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (up until 2012). In addition to the development of British officer cadets as future leaders in the British Army, I was responsible for the 10-15% of officer cadets who attend Sandhurst from overseas.

Further to the arguments, fiscal and social, put forward by SCIS in opposing this divisive and unfair bill, one further argument can be clearly made.

About 20% of all private schools attendees in Scotland are from overseas. In particular they come from EU countries, Russia and the Far East. They come from influential groups, primarily those connected with business and whose linkage and influence is important to Scotland. These groups value greatly Scottish education and many go on to Scottish Universities and add to those bodies in thought and deed - greatly. Since the removal of rates relief would certainly involve most, if not all, Scottish private schools closing down, this vital “capture of influence” would end. The message that Scotland is “open to business” to overseas markets, vital for trade, would be very seriously undermined. Scotland would not be offering its “educational reputation” to any but its own. Further, these overseas pupils would undoubtedly be displaced to English and Irish schools - and most would then undoubtedly progress to English and Irish universities, rather than to Scottish ones. That would be educational isolationism for Scotland at its very worst.

The overseas cadets who have attended Sandhurst now include numerous Heads of State and Government, overseas business and military leaders and other key “influencers”. The leverage and importance of this friendly cohort cannot be underestimated; neither should the loss of the not dissimilar cohort that has moved, and continues to move through, our Scottish private schools - the disappearance of which would do incalculable damage to our reputation and influence overseas. Scotland has traditionally been a world class host; this is closing doors, not opening them.

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