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Message Body:

I am strongly supportive of the basic need for a new Scottish Code of Good Higher Education Governance. However, I am not sure the current draft goes far enough. Many of its recommendations are heading in the right direction of more accountability, but may not have much effect in ensuring that the autonomy of individual institutions is used responsibly.

I have already signed a joint submission by a group of academic staff at Glasgow University, but would like to add one further general point. At the moment, the case for "academic freedom" is sometimes used by senior university management as a reason for obstructing proper scrutiny either from within or from outside. In my view, a good Scottish Code of Governance should put in place an explicit requirement that each University should formulate a formal Code of Governance for itself. Such an institutional Code should be open to public scrutiny, and if necessary enforcement, by the SFC. Each institutional Code must prescribe a balanced governance for that institution, whereby the operational powers of Court and the academic authority of Senate (Academic Board) are balanced.

Every University should fulfil its academic remit, in the best interests of its students, its staff, and the public. In my view the best way of ensuring that happens, is to limit the power of senior management (unelected and unaccountable in the present system), and instead ensure proper scrutiny of both operational and academic decisions by open and accountable bodies with full student and staff representation. At the moment, the Senate (Academic Board) in most Scottish Universities struggles to hold senior management to account; whilst Court (mostly appointed, and certainly not accountable to any elected/representative body) and Senior Management Groups (totally unaccountable to students, staff or the public) can impose decisions dictated by short-term financial expediency, or even whim, without listening to advice from the academic community or the public.

The key phrase, therefore, is "responsible autonomy". The Scottish Code, as it stands, is not specific or precise enough to achieve this.