

Committee of Scottish Chairs
c/o University of Glasgow
Glasgow
G12 8QQ

The Editor
The Herald
200 Renfield Street
Glasgow
G2 3QB

Friday 5 February 2016

Dear Sir,

We write as the Chairs of the Governing Bodies of Scotland's 18 Higher Education Institutions. We come from a wide range of backgrounds in the public, third and private sectors including health, education and the church. A number of us are graduates of our Institution.

As Chairs, we have overall responsibility for ensuring effective leadership and good governance of our Institution. All of us are committed to delivering excellence in the governance of our Institution. This is why, in 2013, we proposed that the effectiveness of the Scottish Code of Good HE Governance, the Main Principles of which were adopted by the Scottish Funding Council, should be reviewed this year. We believe that if Scotland's enviable position as a world leader in Higher Education – with 5 of our Universities in the Global top 200 – is not only to be maintained but enhanced, it is essential that our governance is robust, diverse and inclusive of all stakeholders.

We are deeply committed to attracting diverse candidates for Governing Bodies through a transparent and inclusive process. The current process for selecting a Chair by a Governing Body involves representatives of staff, students and other stakeholders and delivers that diversity. As evidence, 9 out of the last 12 Chairs to be appointed are women, each selected as the best person for the role. By mid-2016 at least half of the HEIs in Scotland will have women in the role of Chair. We are also committed to seeking to secure a minimum 40 per cent of each gender among the independent members of our Governing Bodies and to measure the fulfillment of that commitment in 2018.

However, the proposal put forward this month by the Scottish Government for the Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Bill (the Bill), that Chairs of Governing Bodies should be chosen by a public election, which will inevitably be adversarial, will reverse the excellent progress that has been made towards achieving equality and diversity within this important role in HE governance.

While elections to political office are a fundamental part of our culture, they are not always the most appropriate way of making an appointment to every position. This very issue has just been considered by The Scottish Parliament's own Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, in considering how Conveners of Parliamentary Committees should be appointed. In their Report that Standards Committee stated that *"Nothing we have heard has persuaded us that the introduction of elected conveners would result in more effective committees or conveners."*

This is consistent with the only recent comparable experiment to that proposed in the Bill, namely of elections to public bodies in 2010. These were elections to Health Boards; and the experiment was abandoned by the Scottish Government because it failed to attract a diversity of suitable candidates. Elections to political office, or even as the NUS reported in their elections report 2014, to elected student officer roles, have resulted in disproportionately low representation of women and of people with protected characteristics. All of this runs counter to what the Bill purports to achieve, and what we, the people who are and remain responsible for good governance in Higher Education, strive for.

Enhancing the diversity of Governing Bodies ensures that there is a broader range of views involved in decision making. No doubt unintentionally, the Bill's proposals will have the effect of discouraging rather than encouraging candidates. None of us, including the 12 who have been appointed in the last two years, would have stood as a candidate in a publicly adversarial election for our role.

The Scottish Parliament is approaching its last chance to protect the diversity of who chairs Governing Bodies, and we urge MSPs to take this opportunity. Good, diverse, inclusive and effective governance will be best delivered in future if Parliament retains the capacity for a Governing Body, that includes staff and student members, to elect its own chair.

Yours sincerely,



Keir Bloomer

Chair of Court, Queen Margaret University



Hazel Brooke

Chair of Court, Glasgow Caledonian University



Ewan Brown

Senior Governor, University of St Andrews



Frances Cairncross

Chair of Court, Heriot-Watt University



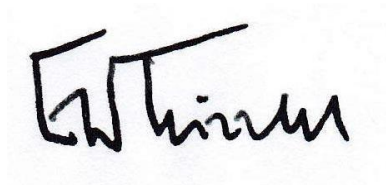
Jennifer Crow,

Chair of Board, Robert Gordon University



Garry Coutts

Chair of Court, University of the Highlands and Islands



Edward Frizzell

Chair of Court, Abertay University



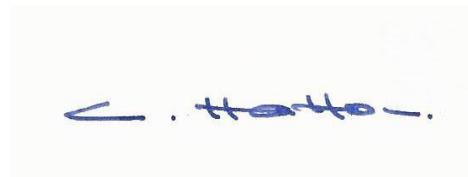
Graham Forbes

Chair of Court, Edinburgh Napier University



Muriel Gray

Chair of the Board of Governors, Glasgow School of Art



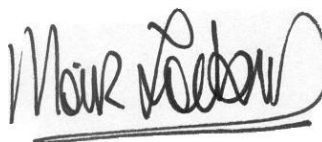
Waiyin Hatton,

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Edinburgh



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