

Student Representatives



22nd December 2015

We know how important it is for us as a country to have qualified people with the right skills and knowledge to contribute to our society and economy. It is why this Government continues to value and invest in you as students as well as in our universities.

Our universities are absolutely outstanding. Viewed as world leading around the globe, we have five institutions in the world's top 200, more per head of population than any other country except Luxembourg.

Our average student loan debt levels remain lowest in the UK, we are continuing to pay bursaries to support our poorest students and this year saw UCAS confirm record numbers of Scots accepted to study at Scottish universities.

But we also want a more modern and accountable governance framework for universities to work within.

Our Higher Education Governance Bill will continue to be considered by Parliament in early 2016. At its heart, this Bill seeks to enable every voice on campus to be heard, not least those of students and the associations that represent them.

The Bill aims to reflect the Scottish Government's values of inclusivity and fairness by strengthening participation in decision-making matters affecting all who work and study in universities.

The 2012 Review of Higher Education Governance in Scotland, led by Professor Ferdinand von Prondzynski, made recommendations for reform and this work, and the evidence it amassed, has informed the Bill.

Central to our objectives is the introduction of a new and transparent process for the appointment of elected chairs of court in universities and other governing bodies in higher education institutions.

I see elected chairs as an important new means of enabling all of our higher education institutions to appoint their leaders in a more transparent fashion.

We have also been clear that there is no intention to abolish the position of rector or undermine that historical role, nor will we be involved in the appointment of an individual chair or office bearer at any institution.

Higher Education institutions are and will remain autonomous and nothing in the Bill will require universities to come to government for permission to take decisions.

Student representatives gave compelling evidence at the Parliament's Education and Culture Committee about their feeling of being excluded from the decisions taken by some university courts. You have a real and significant interest in seeing your universities prosper and your views and experiences should inform how that happens.

Consequently, our Bill aims to ensure that students are represented on the key bodies which help to run universities. I welcome continued support from Scotland's student community as the Scottish Government progresses this Bill towards a place in statute.

Of course no year is without its challenges. We know we need to do more to widen access in 2016 and beyond, so that all young people have an equal chance of going to university. The recommendations from our Commission for Widening Access will inform our approach and if you have views or relevant experience, please do share that with the Commission.

And there is the small matter of a Scottish election in May. This Government has fought hard to ensure that every young person from the age of 16 can vote. So please don't lose out on yours by forgetting to register to vote at your term time address.

Whether you have just started out on a degree, are enjoying your middle years or embarking on your final few, no doubt frantic months, I wish you well in 2016. May it be a healthy, happy and prosperous year in which you study well and reap the rewards of your hard work.



ANGELA CONSTANCE