



12 July 2004

THE GENERAL COUNCIL
of THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

Merger of the Funding Councils Team
Enterprise Transport and Lifelong Learning Department
2nd Floor, Europa Building
450 Argyle Street
GLASGOW
G2 8LG

Charles Stewart House
9-16 Chambers Street
Edinburgh EH1 1HT

Telephone (home): 0131 664 2717
General Council Office Telephone 0131 650 2152
Email: General.Council@ed.ac.uk

Dear Sirs

**CONSULTATION PAPER: 'A CHANGING LANDSCAPE FOR TERTIARY
EDUCATION AND RESEARCH IN SCOTLAND'
RESPONSE FROM THE GENERAL COUNCIL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF
EDINBURGH**

We enclose the written response of the General Council of the University of Edinburgh to the invitation to comment upon the Consultation Paper 'A Changing Landscape for Tertiary Education and Research in Scotland': a Consultation Paper on the Merger of the Scottish Further Education Funding Council and the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council.

We are also sending a copy of the response by email, as indicated in the paragraph in the Consultation Paper on responses.

Yours faithfully

Dr Ann Matheson
Secretary of the General Council

Enc.



'A CHANGING LANDSCAPE FOR TERTIARY EDUCATION AND RESEARCH IN SCOTLAND': A CONSULTATION PAPER ON THE MERGER OF THE SCOTTISH FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL AND THE SCOTTISH HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL

RESPONSE FROM THE GENERAL COUNCIL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

The General Council of the University of Edinburgh, which represents the University's graduate body, welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposals set out in the Consultation Paper 'A Changing Landscape for Tertiary Education and Research in Scotland' (April 2004). The General Council also warmly welcomes the interest of Ministers in lifelong learning, as set out in the document 'Life through Learning; Learning through Life'; and endorses their commitment 'to create a Scotland where enterprise can flourish, where opportunity does exist for all, and where Scotland's people and Scotland have the confidence to face the challenges of the global society'.

In making its response, the General Council of the University of Edinburgh wishes to support and to endorse the submission to the Consultation Paper made by the University of Edinburgh (July 2004). In addition, the General Council emphasizes the following particular points that are pertinent from the perspective of the General Council's external constituency and its role in the wider community.

1. From its perspective in the wider national and international community, the General Council wishes to underline to Ministers how important it is that extreme care is taken to avoid any changes that might lessen or undermine the high reputation overseas of Scottish universities in general – and, in particular, that of the University of Edinburgh, the individual concern of this General Council. It is vital that the merging of the two Funding Councils into a single organization does not lead to any perception of a 'dilution' of the higher education sector. The creation of any impression of this kind would be extremely damaging to Scotland in an international environment where so many Universities, not only in the UK but also throughout the rest of Europe and internationally, are now strenuously competing for students, academic staff and private sector support.
2. The continuance of the high national and international reputation of Scottish Universities is of primary concern to their graduates, who work all over the world. At a time when all Scottish Universities are actively seeking the support of alumni in contributing to financing their activities, and where Government is strongly encouraging Universities to move in this direction, it is of particular importance that no steps are taken that will undermine or diminish the proud standing of Scottish universities in the wider community, or adversely affect the confidence of their alumni.
3. The General Council submits that while it understands that the term 'Specified Tertiary Education Providers (STEPs)' is put forward by Government as a generic over-arching category, it is essential that individual Scottish Universities should continue to be known nationally and internationally by their existing long-standing

institutional identities. There must be no blurring of these renowned identities by the use of a term that has no meaning outside the Scottish Executive. Ministers will know that it is, above all, the individual identity, expertise, reputation and knowledge of a university such as the University of Edinburgh that continues to attract students and teachers from all over the world, and gives the University and the City its particular standing in the international educational community.

4. The General Council submits that in introducing the merger of the two Funding Councils, Ministers must ensure that the autonomy of Scottish Universities is protected and maintained. This autonomy is the foundation on which universities' long tradition of independence of thought and advancement of knowledge is based. From the perspective of the wider community, it is an essential component of the independence of our educational system and of the basis of our democratic society, and it should not be tampered with.
5. The General Council views with deep concern any implication in the Consultation Paper that Government might become more closely associated in the 'planning' aspects of Scottish Universities through a single merged Funding Council, or involve itself through the Funding Council in directly determining the teaching and research priorities of Scottish Universities. We firmly believe that any such move would be detrimental to the interests of our country, and would seriously undermine the democratic principles on which our society is based. Scottish Universities have the professional expertise, acumen and drive to run their own institutions for the benefit of the society they serve. Through their governing bodies they are already able to call upon a wide range of highly trained and public-spirited men and women from other walks of life to offer advice and assistance.
6. The General Council emphasises to Ministers that in merging the two Funding Councils, care must be taken to provide adequate future funding for Scottish Universities, so that they may maintain their competitive edge in an increasingly competitive global world. Equally, it is vital to ensure that acknowledged international excellence in particular disciplines or fields of research in Scottish Universities is able to co-exist with the concept of 'parity of esteem' referred in the Consultation Paper; and that 'parity of esteem' does not lead to the erosion of adequate financial support for leading-edge research and excellence in Scottish Universities.

9 July 2004