



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## **RURAL AFFAIRS, CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

Prof. Sir Tim O'Shea  
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6 November 2015

*Via email only*

Dear Prof. O'Shea

### **Re: Decision not to proceed with proposed strategic alignment between the University of Edinburgh and the SRUC – Scotland's Rural College**

As you know, the SRUC – Scotland's Rural College plays an integral role in the education and training of Scotland's agriculture sector, as well as providing a range of research facilities and other services which support Scotland's rural economy. The efficient and successful delivery of SRUC services is, therefore, of vital interest to a successful rural economy in Scotland and the communities which that economy supports.

Given this, the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee ("the Committee") of the Scottish Parliament will be undertaking an oral evidence session with the Chair and Strategic Management Board of the SRUC on Wednesday 25 November 2015. The focus of this session will be to consider the issues relating to the corporate governance and strategic direction of the SRUC, and its role in delivering key services to Scotland's rural economy.

The Committee is, of course, aware of the proposed strategic alignment between the University of Edinburgh ("UoE") and the SRUC, which was in the negotiation and planning stage for over a year.<sup>1</sup> An examination of the minutes of the UoE's University Court meeting of 22 June 2015 would suggest that, after 15 months of negotiation, the process of the strategic alignment was ended by the UoE "as a result of concerns particularly around governance issues" the SRUC had proposed in relation to the strategic alignment and that "it was not appropriate to proceed further at this stage"

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<sup>1</sup> SRUC press release on strategic alignment 20140321:  
[http://www.sruc.ac.uk/news/article/776/sruc\\_and\\_university\\_of\\_edinburgh\\_explore\\_closer\\_alignment %E2%80%93a\\_vote\\_of\\_confidence\\_in\\_the\\_future\\_of\\_scotland%E2%80%99s\\_agriculture](http://www.sruc.ac.uk/news/article/776/sruc_and_university_of_edinburgh_explore_closer_alignment%E2%80%93a_vote_of_confidence_in_the_future_of_scotland%E2%80%99s_agriculture)

with that alignment”.<sup>2</sup> Instead both organisations agreed to continue to work closely together “as independent institutions”.<sup>3</sup>

Clearly it is a matter of concern that the proposed strategic alignment with UoE, which formed such a key aspect of the SRUC’s future strategic development plans in terms of both necessary investment, and the delivery of its educational services, could come to such an abrupt and unexpected end with such little public clarity provided as to the reasons for this.

To this end, the Committee would like to understand the basis of the decision not to pursue the strategic alignment and is requesting that you provide it with the specific reasons, relating to the UoE University Court’s concerns over the proposed governance arrangements which led to the decision not to proceed with the strategic alignment with the SRUC. Specifically what were the criteria which in your view the SRUC proposals did not meet, in terms of satisfactory governance arrangements for the strategic alignment?

As we are seeking this information in advance of the forthcoming evidence session, we request that you reply with the information sought by close of business on Wednesday 18 November 2015.

If you have any questions, please contact the Clerk of the Committee on the contact details provided above.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rob Gibson', with a horizontal line underneath.

Rob Gibson MSP  
Convener

cc Sarah Smith, University Secretary, University of Edinburgh

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<sup>2</sup> University of Edinburgh, University Court Minutes of meeting 20150622, item 8:  
<http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/GaSP/Governance/Court/2014-2015/20150622-Minute.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> University of Edinburgh press release: <http://www.ed.ac.uk/news/staff/2015/sruc-statement-240615>