

About The Scottish Agricultural College Board - Roger Crofts CBE

Was your first contact with SAC positive or negative?

Fairly negative in the 1990s. When I was the CEO of SNH I found SAC arrogant and not prepared to listen or dialogue on issues of common interest and not prepared to discuss collaboration in research or sharing offices.

How much has your perception of SAC changed since then?

Very significantly since the leadership at executive and board level has changed in the early years of this decade. SAC has taken seriously criticisms like those of SNH and sought actively to engage with key partner organisations, to listen to ideas and to identify topics for collaboration.

How do you perceive the “conservation movement” views the work of SAC? Are they right or wrong?

I think still with some suspicion because we do lots of work on the production side. Largely wrong because we seek to improve the stewardship of the land resource through translating best practice from the lab and the research farm etc to the tractor cab and the farm office. But we should be an exemplar of best environmental stewardship on our own farms.

In your opinion what are SAC’s strengths/weaknesses?

Key strength is definitely the integrated approach to its work and the concentration on knowledge transfer. No one else does this to the same extent and professionalism or to the same level of success. We need to be even more influential in advising on policies from an objective assessment of the facts: work begun well by the Policy Unit.

What do you hope are you able to contribute to SAC?

At Board level to ensure that all angles and aspects are covered, provide a clear strategic view, and to act in a pragmatic manner with common sense; sound knowledge of rural strategy and policy, including environmental components, in all of my SAC activities; and a listening ear and supportive participation in my role as chair of the 3 Student Liaison Committees.

If you could change rural Scotland, you would...

1. Introduce an integrated policy focussing on rural community viability and highest level of stewardship of natural resources.
2. Force all government bodies to work effectively together through framework agreements focussing on delivery to the customer.
3. Create rural centres throughout Scotland for all government services (both national government and local council).
3. Scrap the CAP Pillars and replace with single contracts with individual farmers to deliver all of the services which society would wish from them (i.e. food security, biosecurity, greenhouse gas emission reductions, biodiversity improvement, public access improvement, and landscape management improvement) through an incentivised package and constraints to remove bad management of land water and livestock.
4. Substantially increase the financial support for environmental stewardship of land and water resources.
5. Develop a scheme for substantially reducing conflict between different lands uses especially between farming, nature, landscape, energy and forestry.

What would you not change about rural Scotland?

The dispersed pattern of settlement, the mixture of land uses, the maintenance of well-managed rural landscapes, availability of local services in small settlements, keep open the pub with a decent pint, and retain those restaurants with good service and convenient opening hours.

How do you relax?

Listening to classical music, cooking for the family, reclaiming gardens, playing with the grandchildren, taking my black lab for a walk on the hill, and writing articles and presentations (yes, I find that relaxing and stimulating).

David Attenborough or Jeremy Clarkson?

Attenborough, as I cannot stand celebs with huge egos

Edinburgh festival or a week on Rum?

I could do both by taking the Apple iPod I am about to buy with me as I tramp the western granite hills and marvel at the effects of the frost and walk the great Rum Cuillin and be inspired with the inner plumbing of the old volcano erupting when the North Atlantic opened up. But it has to be in May before the midges so recordings from last year's Edinburgh Festival would be needed!

Pie and a pint or a table for two?

Depends on the company: the former with the lads and the latter with my best friend who happens also to be my wife

Your favourite view in Scotland? What music to go with it?

This is impossible as I have so many favourite views in different seasonal, weather, and light conditions and different personal moods. Here are just 3: looking down Glen Docherty to Loch Maree and the Torridonian hills in the summer evening light listening to Wagner's Siegfried Idyll, over the Galloway hills westwards towards the Ken valley and the Rhinns of Kells in the mist of late afternoon in winter listening to all of Mozart's Don Giovanni; and at the Slack of Tillylodge looking towards Lochnagar over the Howe of Cromar with a light dusting of snow on the hills listening to The Trumpet Shall Sound from Handel's Messiah.

Proudest moment?

Two granddaughters being born within two months last autumn.

Most embarrassing moment?

I do not embarrass easily.

Unfulfilled dream/ambition?

If I am allowed two: to write a book on the environment of Iceland; and to secure capital and operating funding for a bird centre in Galloway.