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Education, Children and Young People Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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December 2023

Dear Convener,

EVIDENCE TO COMMITTEE – POST SCHOOL REFORM 10 January 2024

I am writing to update the Committee on reforms to the post-school education, research and skills landscape following my update to Parliament and ahead of my attendance at committee on 10 January 2024.

In my letter to you 5 December I outlined the priority areas I will be taking forward as part of post school reform. These included but were not limited to;

- Leading national skills planning and strengthening regional skills planning;
- Streamlining the funding landscape;
- A review of Community Learning and Development; and
- Enhancing the careers offer.

I will of course be happy to update further on my thoughts for the future delivery of these areas at my appearance. The Committee will note that the Cabinet Secretary made reference to revised governance arrangements as part of her statement to Parliament, 7 November, which I can expand further on.

Priorities for Reform

I am committed to working closely with you and look forward to my appearance. As the Committee is aware James Withers made a number of recommendations on the case for change to ensure our post school system is fit for the many challenges of the future. The Initial Priorities paper, published as part of the Purpose and Principles in the summer, accepted the premise of many of the recommendations in James' review and set out the action that the Scottish Government would take to set the foundations for change. Since

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then, I have engaged extensively with people, practitioners and opposition parties, listening closely to views.

I have been greatly encouraged by the collective desire to rise to the challenges of reform. I provided an update to parliament on 5 December 2023 where I outlined the following substantive updates:

Skills Planning

As I have already confirmed, the Scottish Government will take on responsibility for national skills planning, recognising the need to be clear about national strategic skills requirements, and to strengthen regional skills planning.

Funding Landscape

Recent reviews have all demonstrated that our current post-school system is overly complex with three public bodies responsible for funding different parts of the system. My statement indicated that as an initial step I am committed, in principle, to bringing together learner support funding into one place, and funding for provision, including apprenticeship provision, into one place. Understandably this will take some time but I will work closely with SFC, SAAS and SDS to make this happen. As part of this work, I will also be considering how apprenticeships can better reflect economic and learner needs. I have asked Scottish Government policy officials to lead this work.

CLD Review

Recent reviews linked to education and skills reform have highlighted the important role for Community Learning and Development (CLD) in delivering learning to some of the most marginalised and vulnerable people living in Scotland. Nevertheless, there is more we need to know about the way and extent to which this is happening across the country, particularly if we are to ensure CLD continues to be an integral part of our life-long learning offer in a reformed education system. In recognising this I announced a short and focused independent review of the current approach to CLD provision, and how it will fit within a reformed education and skills landscape. The review will be led by Kate Still who will bring extensive relevant experience to bear on this issue and who will report her findings to Ministers by June 2024.

Careers Services

Between the careers services provided by SDS, the Developing the Young Workforce network and third sector initiatives like Career Ready I believe the foundations for a strong offer that enables learners to make informed choices about their future are in place. I am delighted that Grahame Smith has agreed to stay on to help develop this work through his work as Chair of the Careers Collaborative. I am keen that this work's immediate focus is to develop a clearer, more coherent focus for our national careers services to the benefit of learners and employers.

Budget

Following the Deputy First Minister's statement and publication of the 2024/25 Draft Budget on 19 December, the Committee will be aware of the challenging fiscal environment and that tough decisions around Budget 2024-25 have had to be made. The central focus on the three missions of equality, opportunity, and community have informed the approach taken to the Budget.

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Scotland is facing the most challenging fiscal position since devolution. Mindful of Scottish Government missions and priorities, legal and contractual obligations have had to be prioritised in determining how to deploy this budget across Education and Skills priorities.

The Scottish Government remains committed to supporting a high quality Post-School education, research and skills system with over £2.4 billion investment. This will maintain Scotland's reputation for world-leading research; provide opportunities for people to learn and develop their skills through further and higher education and apprenticeships – honouring this government's commitment to free tuition; dive forward our work on Widening Access; and, provide vital financial support to students to enable them to complete their studies in the face of significant cost of living pressures.

In the year ahead Scottish Government will continue to work closely with the Scottish Funding Council, Skills Development Scotland and the Student Awards Agency for Scotland as well as individual institutions and other partners and stakeholders to agree how best to work together to respond to both the necessity and opportunities for reform.

Taken together the areas I have outlined demonstrate commitment and direction from the Scottish Government to deliver real and substantial reform in the Post-School landscape. I am committed to working closely with you and the Committee in the reform process to ensure that our services deliver the highest possible standard for those who use them.

GRAEME DEY MSP

Minister for Higher Education, Further Education; and Minister for Veterans

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