



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Education Children and Young People Committee

Graeme Dey MSP

T3.60

Minister for Higher and Further Education,
and Minister for Veterans
Scottish Government

The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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By email only—

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Dear Minister

The Education, Children, and Young People Committee thanks you for the evidence you provided at its meeting on Wednesday 21 June 2023 about the Scottish Education Exchange Programme (SEEP) and further and higher education issues. The Official Report of that meeting can be found [here](#). I am writing to follow up on a number of matters which were discussed at the meeting.

Scottish Education Exchange Programme

The Committee notes that the Scottish Government intends to launch a pilot project for the Scottish Education Exchange Programme, in conjunction with relevant partners within sectors which would be involved in its delivery, within this financial year. The Committee welcomes your commitment to provide updates on the timetable for this work and for the establishment of a full exchange programme.

The Committee also notes your commitment to provide information on the costs of the pilot and the full scheme to the Committee as these plans advance and are implemented. The Committee asks to have early sight of these figures; this will allow

the Committee to consider the costs of the programme in the context of wider budget scrutiny and other priorities within the education portfolio.

Although only established last year, the education exchange scheme in Wales, Taith, already appears to be operating successfully.

In evidence to the Committee, Susan Pryde stated that the Scottish Government engaged with Taith colleagues when they were setting up the programme; the Scottish Government also has monthly contact with UK Government officials about Turing and with Welsh Government officials about Taith (cols 7-8). When asked about when the Scottish Government had last been in contact with Taith, the Committee heard from Susana Galván from Taith that:

I think that it was in the initial months of the set-up of the programme. We had a few regular conversations in spring last year—between March and before the beginning of the summer holiday—but since then we have had no further engagement ([cols 19-20](#)).

The Committee suggests that it would be helpful for there to be ongoing direct engagement between Scottish Government officials and Taith officials as well the Welsh Government, in order to continue to learn first-hand from their experience.

Colleges

The Minister is aware of the recommendations in the Committee's [report on college regionalisation](#) regarding financial and operational flexibilities:

“The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government and Scottish Funding Council urgently give colleges as many financial and operational flexibilities as possible to help them deliver on the various strands of their work. This could include, but not be limited to: flexibility for year end, flexibility on SFC outcomes and flexibility in terms of access to additional funds.

The Committee notes that the Scottish Government agreed to explore the possibility of end year flexibility in October 2021 and, in his evidence to the Committee, the Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training stated that he would consider flexibilities that colleges could be given on an expedited basis. The Committee asks for an urgent update from the Scottish Government and the Scottish Funding Council in respect of the flexibilities colleges will be given.”

The Committee notes that discussions are ongoing in relation to these matters, and that the recent Purpose and Principles Initial Priorities publication sets out plans to develop a new model of public funding for all forms of post-16 education provision. The Committee notes your commitment to provide an update following your meeting with the college sector about securing a firm agreement on solutions and opportunities for flexibilities in the short- and long-term. The Committee asks you to update the Committee on these discussions at the earliest opportunity.

At the Committee meeting, the Minister was asked about a potential anomaly in relation to the SFC approval required for voluntary and compulsory severance

schemes within Scotland's colleges (cols 18-19). The Committee asks the Minister to provide further information on requirements for SFC approval for different types of severance schemes and whether the Scottish Government considers that changes are required in relation to this policy.

The Committee also notes the Minister's undertaking to provide information on the reasons for colleges being excluded from the 'no compulsory redundancies' policy which applies to other public bodies in Scotland (col 18). The SFC [Financial Memorandum with Fundable Bodies in the College Sector](#) states that 'the institution must have regard to public sector pay policy set by the Scottish Ministers.' It would be helpful if you could clarify the meaning of 'have regard to public sector pay policy' in the context of colleges and whether or not colleges are covered by the Scottish Government's public sector pay strategy.

Finally, the Committee notes your undertaking to provide an update on future governance of Lanarkshire and Glasgow colleges in due course (col 19).

The Committee would welcome a response to these points by **Friday 28 July**.

Yours sincerely

Sue Webber MSP
Convener