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February 2024

Dear Convener,

## **EVIDENCE TO COMMITTEE – POST SCHOOL REFORM 10 JANUARY 2024**

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee 10 January to discuss post school reform and the budget settlement. Committee members raised a number of queries which I have responded to below.

### **REFORM PROGRAMME**

#### **Timeline for Reform**

Committee members asked about the progress on reform and the sequencing that will be needed to manage the interconnections between responding to the different reviews.

I outlined in my appearance that I would be in a position to update the Committee with more detailed timelines in March.

#### **Withers Review recommendations**

I also set out the early priorities from the Withers recommendations that I am committed to implementing, building on the statement I made to Parliament on 5 December.

These are that the Scottish Government will lead on;

- Development of a national approach to skills planning and strengthening of regional approaches;

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- Simplification of the post-school funding body landscape including options for a single funding body and, as a first step, bringing together funding for student support into one place and funding for apprenticeship provision into one place;
- Future development of apprenticeships;
- Developing a clearer and more coherent modus operandi for our national careers offering - building on the work of SDS, DYW and third sector initiatives like Career Ready; and,
- Enhancing employer engagement and ensuring their involvement at all points in the system.

Members asked about the position on the individual recommendations contained in the Withers report. I have been clear that I agreed with much of what James Withers found. I was also clear that an important part of the extensive engagement undertaken with stakeholders has been to understand any unintended consequences.

As outlined, I will set out a more detailed timeline for Education and Skills Reform in March. A further update on post school reform progress will be included as part of that correspondence.

### **Union representation on governance**

Ministers fully recognise the important role trade unions will play in the reform process. Both the Cabinet Secretary and I have met with union representatives since coming into post. More widely, governance and working level arrangements are being developed that will ensure that a range of views continue to be heard as implementation of the programme of reform is taken forward.

### **Duplication of resource**

It is imperative that any duplication is targeted and tackled. That is why some of the early actions I have set out, such as developing options to simplify the funding landscape, are being prioritised. My officials are working closely with agencies and other partners on the due diligence needed to understand funding flows, including identifying any overlaps. This work will be part of our ongoing approach to continuous improvement and throughout the Post-School reform programme.

### **Strathesk Report**

Responses to the report and its recommendations have been received from all partners in the national bargaining process.

National collective bargaining is, and should remain, a joint voluntary arrangement between employers and trade unions with negotiations taking place against the backdrop of that ambition. While I will continue to encourage dialogue on these recommendations, with a view to seeing their implementation and the operation of national bargaining improved, the Scottish Government has no locus to enforce their implementation.

### **SEEP Pilots**

I expect to have this information shortly and will write with further details on the pilot projects in due course.

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Thank you again for the opportunity to engage with the Committee. I look forward to working with you in the delivery of reform. Should you have any further questions please do get in touch.

**GRAEME DEY MSP**  
**Minister for Higher Education, Further Education; and Minister for Veterans**

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