

T: 0300 244 4000
E: scottish.ministers@gov.scot

Sue Webber MSP
Convener
Education, Children and Young People Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

By email: ECYP.committee@parliament.scot

March 2024

Dear Convener,

UPDATE TO COMMITTEE – POST SCHOOL REFORM

When I appeared before you on 10 January, I committed to providing further information in March on progress on post school reform. The note below provides an update on the key areas I identified for action at my session with you. In addition, I have also provided information on wider work to support delivery of the reform programme.

The progress that is being made shows our ambition to match the recommendations made in James Withers **Fit for the Future: developing a post-school learning system to fuel economic transformation** report and reinforced in the initial priorities set out in our ***Purpose and Principles*** document.

Developing a national approach to skills planning and strengthening regional approaches

Significant work has started on the commitment we have made for the Scottish Government to take responsibility for skills planning at national level and I welcome the constructive engagement from across the system on this matter. I have led several discussions with Ministerial colleagues, employers, colleges, universities and other stakeholders about how we should approach skills planning in the future.

My officials are aiming to complete an exercise this summer to develop a better understanding of the specific skills needs across the economy and how we can address them, particularly through the education and skills system. This exercise will inform the detailed design of new national skills planning processes by the end of this year.

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
www.gov.scot

My officials have also commenced work on determining how skills planning could become more effective at regional levels, so that key stakeholders at local levels can better respond to skills needs according to regional ambitions, whilst remaining aligned with national priorities. In doing so, I have had initial engagement with the Regional Economic Partnership Network. My officials are gathering views from colleges and Regional Economic Partnerships on a future approach, and to identify good practices already in place which we can build on. I will set out further information for partners on our approach towards regional skills planning later in the year.

Simplification of the post-school funding body landscape

I have previously outlined my commitment to simplify the post-school funding body landscape, including understanding the options for a single funding body. As a first step I signalled the intention to bring together funding for student support into one place and funding for apprenticeship provision into one place. My officials have been working on the strategic business case for simplification of the funding body landscape, following HM Treasury Green Book principles.

Simplification of the funding body landscape is one of the key enablers for reform and improvement across a range of priority areas. Delivering this aspect of reform is a clear signal of Ministers' wider commitment and enables different choices to be made on funding for provision and student support – ensuring that more of the investment that we make is directly benefitting learners and employers. I expect to be able to share the detail of the shortlisted options with the Committee shortly, and to set out the next steps we will take to deliver on this commitment.

Student support

Related to this, officials have been considering the impact on, and benefits to, learners in having the student financial support offering in one place. We want to ensure that the system is fair and easy to navigate for students.

Work is underway to review the support available for those studying part time, which we committed to in the 2023-23 Programme for Government. We have already delivered on our PfG commitment to increase the HE student support package to the student equivalent of the Living Wage.

Recognising that there is disparity in support on offer to students in FE and HE, officials are looking at these differences and considering options on how to address this in a way that is fair but also sustainable.

Future development of apprenticeships

As part of our work, my officials are looking at what a future model for apprenticeship delivery could look like, including the role of colleges, independent training providers and employers. We know that the current procurement model for Modern Apprenticeships is complex and resource intensive, so we want to explore alternative options with stakeholders to identify how this process can be streamlined and remain robust.

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
www.gov.scot

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE™
We invest in people Silver



α

Graduate Apprenticeships have great potential and scope for further development, so I have asked my officials to set up a Graduate Apprenticeship Enhancement Group to consider how we can expand Graduate Apprenticeships in both volume and the range of occupational areas. Ensuring that Graduate Apprenticeships support our widening access ambitions will be an important part of this work.

Foundation Apprenticeships have a strong role in preparing senior phase pupils for work and future learning. We know that there is some work required on the design of Foundation Apprenticeships to improve consistency of outcomes. The Foundation Apprenticeship Enhancement Group is working with representatives from across the landscape to identify options for improvement and I look forward to seeing the results from that work later in the year.

Developing a clearer and more coherent modus operandi for our national careers offering

I have outlined to Committee previously the importance I place on good quality careers information advice and guidance to help support people make informed choices. I have also set out that through the current careers offer, the work of DYW and mentoring offered by partners including Career Ready that the foundations are already in place.

My immediate focus remains on developing a clearer, coherent offer for learners and also looking to build clearer pathways for employers to support and be involved in shaping the support provided. This does not rule out structural changes to careers delivery. I have met with the Careers Collaborative this week to discuss early priorities. I will continue to work with them to shape a careers offer that supports people of all ages to make informed decisions to find the right path to a rewarding career. I am delighted that Grahame Smith will continue as interim Chair of the Careers Collaborative until the end of the year whilst we work through this transitional period.

Enhancing employer engagement and ensuring their involvement at all points in the system

It remains my ambition that we engage with a wider range of employers - and learners – across a broader span of the education and skills issues where their input will be crucial.

I continue to engage widely with employers on a wide range of issues. I have spoken to a number of businesses the length and breadth of the country, including a roundtable in February with a cross section of employers, which has helped to inform my thinking on how to ensure employers can support the system to work more flexibly as well as how best to maintain their input as we shape the system for the future.

All organisations I have spoken to have signalled their willingness to be involved and work collectively with the institutions in their local and national areas to better develop support. In keeping with my wider approach, I have ensured that colleges and universities have been part of discussions so that both they and employers can work more closely together. I have been greatly encouraged by the approaches already being developed that bring the right partners round the table to discuss issues. I am keen to learn more about examples of where colleges, universities and employers work together to improve outcomes.

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
www.gov.scot

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE™
We invest in people Silver



α

In my appearance before you I said I was minded to take forward James Withers' recommendation to wind down the Scottish Advisory Apprenticeship Board.

Our longer term approach to employer engagement is still at an early stage of development. I have however indicated that I do see the merits in a greater role for the private sector in supporting the system and by extension learners.

Exploring how this might work to the benefit of employers and learners will continue to be a significant factor in the discussions we have in the upcoming months.

Improvements to College Regional Collaboration

As discussed at Committee, the College Regional Boards are currently operating sub-optimally for different reasons in different places. My officials are working with SFC to progress work across all Regional Boards. I have received advice from SFC and my officials and I have been undertaking full due diligence on these recommendations, including speaking to the Chairs and Principals of the colleges and Boards. A decision on my preferred option for both the Glasgow and Lanarkshire Boards is imminent.

The Regional Board of the University of the Highlands and Islands is a different matter. I have instigated the assigned colleges to work constructively together, with the support of SFC and the UHI Executive office, to bring forward a recommended option for reform that will put them on a more sustainable footing for the long term.

Most potential options for reform of regional board structures would need legislative change. If myself and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills decide to move towards such reform, this would necessitate a period of formal consultation on our preferred options to ensure we have considered all intended and unintended outcomes prior to a final decision and implementation. The Committee would be able to provide their views throughout any such process.

CLD Review

I understand that Kate Still's Independent Review of CLD is making good progress and remains on track to deliver its report and recommendations by the end of June.

I know that the review has been hearing from many and varied sources, including in focus groups with learners and potential learners in different parts of the country. Two online consultation surveys ran in parallel from 22 January to 3 March, seeking evidence and views from learners and from CLD practitioners, stakeholders, decision-makers, budget-holders, and other related services.

I understand that the response rate for both of those surveys has been very good. I look forward to receiving the report and recommendations in due course, which I will consider alongside CoSLA.

In my statements to Parliament I have noted the balance between making progress whilst ensuring we take the necessary care not to implement measures that have unintended consequences. I am acutely aware that the current structures are supported by dedicated people who, from my experience, are committed to delivering the changes required. That is why I continue to focus part of my engagement on meeting with staff to understand any unintended consequences.

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
www.gov.scot

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE™
We invest in people Silver



The delivery of reform will be a significant undertaking and will involve partnership working across the post-school landscape and ecosystem. I look forward to continuing to work with the Committee and wider partners in taking forward this critical work.

Given the range of interests in post-school reform I am sharing this update with the Economy and Fair Work Committee and the Public Audit Committee.

GRAEME DEY MSP

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

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
www.gov.scot

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE™
We invest in people Silver



α