Item 17a
For Noting

Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans
Graeme Dey MSP

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

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FAO

All College Principals

7 June 2023

Thank you for taking the time to meet the Cabinet Secretary and I on 9 May at the College Principals and Chairs group, organised by Colleges Scotland. It was great to see the sector there as one, and I look forward to further engagement with you all, individually and collectively.

As I know you are aware, we currently face the most difficult public spending environment since devolution and as a government we have had to take tough decisions to address new pressures on the portfolio since the 2023-24 budget announcement.

In some instances, these have exacerbated already challenging financial circumstances for those concerned. And as a consequence, in some cases this, regrettably, may lead to a need for compulsory redundancies.

I am writing today to remind yourselves of this Government's continued commitment to Fair Work principles. Central to this, is my expectation that employers, workers, and trades unions should work together to reach the right decisions and ensure workers are treated fairly.

Through the Ministerial letter of guidance, the SFC is urged to continue promoting Fair Work principles and adhere to commitments to apply grant conditionality as set out in the Bute House Agreement and in alignment with Scottish Government strategic guidance.

Whilst it is for each individual college to determine how best to secure its own sustainability, while continuing to deliver provision that meets regional needs, I expect these principles to underpin the way in which the sector operates. It is therefore important that the 'Code of Good Governance for Scotland's Colleges' is followed to provide assurances and accountability for decision making.

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While I understand that individual institutions need to be able to restructure and reconfigure their organisations to best meet the needs of learners, respond to regional economic and employer circumstances and address financial pressures, I do expect every effort to be made, in consultation with the campus trade unions, to protect jobs.

I would expect this to include a carefully considered and appropriate standard of notice period, to enable full consultation with staff and trade unions, and to create the time and space to exhaust all options of redeployment. Although incorporated colleges are not directly bound by the Public Sector Pay Policy, our expectation is that all publicly funded institutions should have regard for this.

In his review, James Withers highlights the broad and pivotal role that colleges play in their regions, and it is important that we are committed to the collective endeavour of a culture of continuous improvement across the sector.

I want to place on the record Scottish Government's commitment to the long-term success of our colleges. I am cognisant of the crucial role that colleges play in supporting the economy as part of the National Strategy for Economic Transformation and we continue to invest nearly £2 billion a year on Scotland's universities and colleges through the SFC.

Furthermore, I am committed to working with Colleges Scotland and the SFC to explore all appropriate flexibilities and approaches that can help make our colleges more sustainable.

GRAEME DEY MSP

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