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Your ref: [REDACTED]

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Thank you for your letter dated 8 November regarding the *Empowering Schools: A Consultation on the Provisions of the Education (Scotland) Bill* which I launched on 7 November.

I understand the concerns you raise regarding the substance of the proposals around the creation of the Education Workforce Council, and particularly the manner in which you were informed of these proposals. I appreciate that you will have found this situation frustrating.

Firstly, I would like to address the policy underpinning the creation of the Education Workforce Council. I am committed to establishing an Education Workforce Council to take on the responsibilities of the General Teaching Council for Scotland and the Community Learning and Development Standards Council and to register other education professionals and practitioners. I believe the establishment of such a Council could contribute to enhancing the quality of learning and teaching in Scotland by bringing coherence to the skills and standards which underpin our education professionals and practitioners.

You are right to note that the commitment of the early years workforce to raising qualification levels and skills over the last 10 years has been remarkable and the work of the Scottish Social Services Council has been key in supporting this. Our early years workforce is integral to delivering our commitment to the near doubling of the entitlement to Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) from 600 to 1140 hours per year from August 2020. I do not need to reiterate that this is one of the most important and transformational changes we are making during our current Parliamentary programme.

Earlier in November, we published *A Blueprint for 2020: The expansion of early learning and childcare in Scotland: Quality Action Plan*, this action plan reaffirms what experience and the research evidence tells us about what drives quality in ELC. The most important factor is that ELC is delivered by a profession that is dedicated to the care, learning and development of our youngest children. The actions set out in the plan demonstrate our strong commitment to investing in its professional identity and development. The Scottish Social Services Council

has been instrumental in every aspect of supporting our plans for expansion and I am grateful for your on-going commitment to this agenda.

As the consultation document sets out we are seeking views on which education professionals and practitioners should be included within scope of the Education Workforce Council. Given the opportunity which the Education Bill provides, I think it is essential that we consider the education workforce as broadly as possible and I will carefully consider your views on this issue alongside other consultation responses. As you allude to in your letter there may be longer term strategic benefits of aligning the early years workforce with the new Council, however I would not wish to risk unnecessary disruption in the short term.

An Education Workforce Council Strategic Working Group has been established with relevant stakeholders from GTCS and the Standards Council for Community Learning and Development for Scotland to consider the implications associated with the immediate establishment of the Council. I know my officials have discussed how you might engage with this work and I hope this is something you are open to.

I value your willingness to engage with us on this very important agenda, and I would like to reassure you that every effort will be made to ensure you are fully involved and informed as we progress through the consultation process and beyond. I am aware that Fiona Robertson, Director of Learning, has been in touch with you directly and that you are due to meet lead policy officials on Friday. I hope this will allow us to move forward constructively.



JOHN SWINNEY