

Letter dated the 2nd of March 2023 from the Minister for Higher Education, Further Education, Youth Employment and Training to SDS

Thank you for taking the time to meet me on 29 December 2022 to discuss the recommendations from the SAAB Gender Commission report, published on 4 October 2022.

I am grateful to yourself and other members of the Gender Commission for the time and dedication you have shown to this important piece of work, which was clear to see during our discussion.

Although work is underway to promote equal access, recent statistics published by Skills Development Scotland show that there still appear to be barriers in regard to gender balance in apprenticeships, and we are committed to identifying, understanding and addressing these.

The work that the Scottish Government will carry out in response to these recommendations will be key to addressing these concerns as we look to effect systemic change with a major cultural shift in the career pathways that people choose, as well as the recruitment and employment practices of businesses.

As part of our meeting in November, I agreed to formally respond to the Scottish Government recommendations as part of the SAAB Gender Commission report, which you will find enclosed.

Our priority is to ensure, where possible, that apprenticeships are of high quality and lead to sustainable employment opportunities for everyone. We will continue to work with partners to ensure that our careers system delivers for every citizen, regardless of where they live in Scotland, their age, gender or circumstance.

I thank you again for your work as part of the SAAB Gender Commission, and I look forward to further cooperation in the future.

Excerpt from letter dated 10 March 2023 from the SDS Chair to the Minister for Higher Education, Further Education, Youth Employment and Training (the rest of the letter is not included as it is not in scope)

For 2023/24, the SDS budget challenge is compounded by **[REDACTED: section 30(b)(ii) of FOISA refer to the free and frank exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation in relation to communications/meetings with external stakeholders]**, the COVID impact on new and additional MA liabilities **[REDACTED: section 30(b)(ii) of FOISA refer to the free and frank exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation in relation to communications/meetings with external stakeholders]**

The SDS Board examined a range of options to reduce the budget deficit whilst protecting key priorities including 25,000 MA starts.

[REDACTED: section 30(b)(ii) of FOISA refer to the free and frank exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation in relation to communications/meetings with external stakeholders]

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Further to our discussion yesterday, the executive has prepared a range of options to consider;

B [REDACTED: section 30(b)(ii) of FOISA refer to the free and frank exchange of views for the purpose of deliberation in relation to communications/meetings with external stakeholders]

D [REDACTED: section 30(b)(ii) of FOISA refer to the free and frank exchange of views for the purpose of deliberation in relation to communications/meetings with external stakeholders]

Excerpt from letter dated 16 March 2023 from the SDS Chair to the Minister for Higher Education, Further Education, Youth Employment and Training (the rest of the letter is not included as it was not in scope)

[REDACTED: section 30(b)(ii) of FOISA refer to the free and frank exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation in relation to communications/meetings with external stakeholders]

the SDS Board has directed the SDS executive as follows;

- It is essential to progress the award of MA allocations **[REDACTED: section 30(b)(ii) of FOISA refer to the free and frank exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation in relation to communications/meetings with external stakeholders]**
- Reassurance that the initial and active contract value management of MA volumes provides scope **[REDACTED: section 30(b)(ii) of FOISA refer to the free and frank exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation in relation to communications/meetings with external stakeholders]**. This action doesn't predetermine future decisions and allows the Minister to consider potential reduction to MA volumes if required

Letter dated 23 March 2023 from the Minister for Higher Education, Further Education, Youth Employment and Training to the SDS

On behalf of all Ministers and Cabinet Secretaries I would like to thank you and Skills Development Scotland for your hard work and commitment in making this year's Scottish Apprenticeship Week 2023 the success that it was.

I know everyone involved appreciated the opportunity to get out and about to hear the success stories first-hand from apprentices and employers who took part in the week. Personally, I took great value in visiting Lloyds Banking Group in Edinburgh, presenting the course completion certificates-to apprentices and appreciating the hard work they have done to get to this point.

Furthermore, I was delighted to play a part in the Scottish Apprenticeship Awards 2023 which were again a great Success and streamed live to over 660 viewers on the night. I recently met a selection of the award winners and felt inspired as I discussed with them their journeys so far and the successes they shared whilst undertaking an apprenticeship. I have great confidence that this is just the start of extremely successful careers for these bright individuals.

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I would also like to recognise the Skills for Scotland Performance Report and the work that SDS has put into supporting apprenticeships.

Apprenticeships remain a key way for all employers to continue to invest in their workforce, providing the skills the economy needs both now and in the future. Our priority is to ensure, where possible, that apprenticeships are of high quality and lead to sustainable employment opportunities. It is encouraging to read the findings from the report. These will be considered once the findings from Independent Review of Skills Delivery is published this spring.

In the meantime, I would like to thank you again for writing to me, along with the other Ministers and Cabinet Secretaries. Along with my colleagues, I greatly appreciate the work that SDS commits to making Scottish Apprenticeship Week a success and the invaluable contribution you make to our apprenticeship programme.

Excerpt from Letter dated 20 April 2023 from SDS to Minister for Higher Education, Further Education and Veterans (the rest of the letter is not included as it was not in scope)

The 2023/24 SDS budget challenge is compounded by **[REDACTED: section 30(b)(ii) of FOISA refer to the free and frank exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation in relation to communications/meetings with external stakeholders]**, the COVID impact on new and additional MA liabilities **[REDACTED: section 30(b)(ii) of FOISA refer to the free and frank exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation in relation to communications/meetings with external stakeholders]**

As previously advised, the SDS Board examined a range of options to reduce the budget deficit whilst protecting key priorities including 25,000 MA starts

In response to your direction and in support of your priorities I can confirm that the SDS Board will;

- 1 Protect MA starts at the current level and make provision for up to 25,500 MA starts in 2023/24 as a follow on the on the 25,447 MA starts supported during 2022/23.

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

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