

**ENGAGEMENT NOTES FOR THE FIRST MINISTER'S
LONDON VISIT
12TH FEBRUARY 2025**

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Minute of the First Minister's engagements during a visit to the London Campus of Glasgow Caledonian University – 12th February 2025.

Summary:

The First Minister visited the London Campus of Glasgow Caledonian University. Following a short tour of the campus, the First Minister held a private meeting with Professor Steve Decent, GCU Principal and Vice-Chancellor and Rob Woodward, Chair of University Court, centred around the ambitions of Glasgow Caledonian University as an institution, as well as our collective aspirations to support growth of the Scottish Higher Education sector.

Following this meeting a roundtable meeting was held with professional practice employers and placement providers, students and GCU representatives. This roundtable focussed on the student experience of the vocational courses they participate in and their employment prospects post-graduation. The visit concluded with a short Leadership and Learning class observation.

Attendees

- John Swinney MSP – First Minister of Scotland
- Rob Woodward – Chair of University Court, Glasgow Caledonian University
- Steve Decent – Principal and Vice Chancellor, Glasgow Caledonian University
- [Redacted - s38(1)(b)] – Head of UK, EU and International Relations, Scotland House London
- [Redacted - s38(1)(b)] – Public Diplomacy Officer, Scotland House London
- [Redacted - s38(1)(b)] – Private Secretary to First Minister
- Jack Middleton – Special Advisor to First Minister

Introductions

Following warm introductions, FM thanked SD and RW for welcoming him to the London campus, noting that GCU plays a key role in the Scottish Higher Education ecosystem, particularly in terms of widening access to further education, before reflecting on the importance of supporting multiple routes into Higher Education that cater to a diverse range of lived experience.

Scottish Higher Education landscape and GCU Glasgow campus

RW and SD provided an overview of the reach of the GCU's Glasgow campus, explaining it has enrolled the largest number of Scottish domiciled students and Graduate Apprentices of any Scottish university and attributed this success to their longstanding focus on vocational study and development of employability skills. SD explained highly vocational courses such as those in health, social work, law, and business science have a particularly strong uptake from students from deprived backgrounds. FM welcomed this specific focus on health and social work, noting that a strong partnership approach between public sector institutions and education providers is crucial to developing robust and resilient public service provision.

[Redacted – 2 lines – s33(1)(b)]. FM welcomed this and reflected on the potential to explore different models of shared education across healthcare disciplines and how it could lead to more effective and consistent levels of learning and in creating a more cohesive culture between Allied Health Professionals and other medical professionals, which could better prepare the next generation to pursue careers in modern health service delivery.

RW and SD reflected on the Scottish Higher Education ecosystem more widely. SD cited an increasing desire of Scottish students to study locally, which is particularly true of those from lower income and deprived backgrounds. FM noted with interest and recognised that practical and financial factors limiting mobility, such as lack of funds or caring responsibilities, can restrict educational and employment options for young people. FM referenced action taken by the Scottish Government to support young people's to access opportunities, for example the free travel for under 22's scheme. FM confirmed measurement of its impact on uptake of opportunities in Higher Education is ongoing, but he is keen to maintain dialogue on widening access to opportunity for our young people.

RW noted that for students from deprived backgrounds, the primary motivator for pursuing a university education is the expectation of securing a better paid job than they would if entering the workplace as a school leaver. RW and SD spoke of the importance of engaging with a range of employers across the public and private sector to develop a curriculum that prepares students to enter the world of work post-graduation, noting that courses which include workplace placements are increasingly seen as a more appealing proposition for students.

FM agreed and reflected on the key role that Graduate Apprenticeships can play in developing Scotland's young workforce and providing a skilled resource base for businesses, which is especially important in the wider context of a constrained working age population. He noted significant potential to roll out Graduate Apprenticeships more widely, which was welcomed by RW and SD.

Engagement with Scottish Funding Council

[Redacted – 9 lines – s30(b)(ii)]

RW reflected on the long term health and sustainability of GCU as an institution, confirming the University is currently in a strong and stable financial position. He equally stressed the importance of embracing innovation with the University's business model, for example through exploring further international campuses or Transnational Education partnerships.

Roundtable discussion with students and employers

Employers stressed the importance of university courses supporting students to develop a diversity of skills, particularly around how to integrate use of the most up-to-date software and AI tools into professional practice. The theme of AI as a tool with potential to increase efficiency and support workers, if integrated well, came up throughout the discussion. Both students and employers referenced a requirement

for the educational pathways to adapt quickly in order to prepare students for a rapidly and profoundly changing workplace environment.

Employers spoke of the culture shock first time employees and interns often experience when applying theoretical skills in a professional context for the first time. They noted that university course work placements are generally recognised as supportive environments for students to navigate this learning curve before entering the employment market full time. Students stressed the value of the GCU London's pre-placement preparation teaching in interview, networking, and general workplace skills.

Key challenges for graduates entering the workplace were discussed, including the shifting expectations attached to 'entry level' roles. Often tasks previously performed by entry-level employees are becoming automated, those tasks considered as 'entry-level' are becoming more complex, and students must be equipped for this. The Graduate Apprenticeship model was cited as a strong example of educational institutions and employers working together to bridge this gap.

Minute of the First Minister's bilateral meeting with H.E Pedro Serrano – EU Ambassador to the UK – 12th February 2025.

Summary

On Wednesday 12th of February 2025, the First Minister visited Europe House for a bi-lateral discussion with H.E Ambassador Serrano. The meeting provided a valuable opportunity to engage with the EU's most senior diplomat posted to the UK, at a key juncture as UKG-EU negotiations intensify.

Attendees:

- John Swinney MSP – First Minister of Scotland
- H.E Pedro Serrano – EU Ambassador to the UK
- Mark Boyce - Head of Scotland House London
- [Redacted - s38(1)(b)]– Home Affairs Counsellor – EU Delegation to the UK
- [Redacted - s38(1)(b)]– Political Secretary – EU Delegation UK
- Stephen Noon – Special Advisor to the First Minister
- [Redacted - s38(1)(b)] – Head of EU and international Relations – SHL
- [Redacted - s38(1)(b)] – Private Secretary to the First Minister

Introductions

Following warm introductions, FM reflected on his recent visit to Orkney and in particular the island of Papa Westray, noting he was struck by the positive contribution the EU had made to rural and island communities in Scotland, through its Regional Development Funding Programmes. A benefit which hasn't been replaced by UK equivalent funding since Brexit. PS confirmed one of the great benefits of the EU Regional Funding model was the bespoke funding offered to support such communities often, [Redacted – 2 lines – s30(b)(ii)].

UK – EU Re-set

The conversation reflected on the progress of the UK – EU Reset. [Redacted – 6 lines– s30(b)(ii)]

[Redacted – 43 lines – s30(b)(ii)]

[Redacted – 8 lines – s30(b)(ii)]. PS took the opportunity to again place on record his thanks for the support offered by the Scottish Government to ensure EU citizens feel welcome and at home in Scotland.

Scotland's Interests:

In response FM offered reflections on Scotland's interests, noting in his view there had been absolutely no up-side to EU Withdrawal. However the Scottish Government would be a pragmatic and constructive partner to the UKG in order to secure the closest possible relationship with the EU. [Redacted – 5 lines – s30(b)(ii)]

[Redacted – 4 lines – s30(b)(ii)]

[Redacted – 5 lines – s30(b)(ii)]. FM confirmed the SG continue to encourage the UKG to consider a bespoke Scottish graduate visa scheme and would continue to pursue all avenues to secure greater mobility with the EU, including for our young people.

With regards to defence the FM was unequivocal on Scotland's commitment to support broader European Security [Redacted – 4 lines – s30(b)(ii)].

In conclusion, PS thanked the First Minister for his continued efforts, [Redacted – 4 lines – s30(b)(ii)].

[Redacted – 7 lines – s30(b)(ii)]

- [Redacted – 2 lines – s30(b)(ii)]
- [Redacted – 2 lines – s30(b)(ii)]

Minute of the First Minister's bilateral meeting with Hiroshi Suzuki, Japanese Ambassador to the UK – 12th February 2025.

Attendees:

John Swinney MSP – First Minister of Scotland

Hiroshi Suzuki – Japanese Ambassador to the UK

Mark Boyce – Head of Scotland House London

[Redacted - s38(1)(b)] – Directorate for International Trade and Investment, Scottish Government

[Redacted - s38(1)(b)] – Deputy Private Secretary to the First Minister

Jack Middleton – Special Advisor

Ross Ingebrigtsen – Special Advisor

Notes:

- The **FM** opened the meeting by outlining Scotland's plans for engagement and participation in EXPO 2025 Osaka. FM outlined the three themes Scotland is focusing on across the 6-month period;
 - Creative Technologies/ Gaming;
 - Life Sciences and Health Technologies;
 - Renewable Energy and Net Zero.
- The **FM** highlighted that renewable energy / net zero is at the heart of all of Scotland's work.
- He reference the Sumitomo investment in the subsea cable factory in Nigg and is delighted that Sumitomo have chosen this location.
- **HS** highlighted that [Redacted – 4 lines – s33(1)(b))].
- **HS** highlighted that [Redacted – 2 lines – s33(1)(b))]. The ambassador emphasised that he wants to work with Scotland [Redacted – 2 lines – s30(b)(ii)]
- [Redacted – 2 lines – s30(b)(ii)]
- [Redacted – 3 lines – s30(b)(ii)]
- **FM** highlighted the general progress and advancements in net zero technologies in Scotland. He gave the example of renewable energy being collected from offshore wind turbine, converted into hydrogen, storing that hydrogen, and then using that hydrogen energy to power housing nearby. This type of technology is accelerating Scotland's journey to net zero.
- FM highlighted that we cannot ignore the climate realities.
- **HS** also commented on EXPO Osaka, and that he was very much looking forward to the Scottish delegations coming out to Japan.

- He highlighted this engagement shouldn't be treated as a one off event but a first step in continued partnerships and cooperation between Scotland and Japan.
- **HS** highlighted the Osaka expo in 1970 and how this served as a catalyst to new and continued investment in Wales years later.
- **FM** agreed that this should not be a one off engagement, highlighting that Scotland will [Redacted – 3 lines – s30(b)(ii)] to show our commitment to the relationship and reference the dates and themes again.
- **HS** referenced the Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP) between the UK, Italy and Japan. He reference the Italian company Leonardo in Scotland who are now partnering with Mitsubishi Electric, highlighting there would be many Japanese engineers travelling over to Scotland soon as part of this partnership.
- **FM** also asked the Ambassador about plans to visit Scotland.
- **HS** mentioned that he plans to visit Scotland [Redacted – 1 line – s30(b)(ii)] and would like to meet with FM on one of those day.
- [Redacted – 3 lines – s30(b)(ii)]
- This will be the ambassador's first visit to Scotland. The FM also suggested the Ambassador visits Edinburgh during the festival in Scotland in August.
- **MB** highlighted the role of Scotland House London and availability to collaborate in growing relations between Scotland and Japan and noted that along with Richard Lochhead he looked forward to co-hosting the Osaka 2025 event at SHL with the Ambassador and he was keen to maintain good relations with the Embassy going forward.

Comments/Actions

- DITI and Scotland House London colleagues to follow up on the embassy on the Ambassador's trip to Scotland [Redacted – s30(b)(ii)] and possibility of round table with key Japanese companies in Scotland.