

Our Ref:

Kate Forbes
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The Scottish Government
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Dear Kate

As you finalise your budget for the coming year, we write on behalf of UNISON's representatives in Scottish tertiary education, urging fair funding for the further and higher education sectors. UNISON represents the cleaners, security staff, library workers and professional services staff who do so much to deliver the substance of a safe and conducive learning environment, even in these difficult times.

Higher Education

In Higher Education, UNISON broadly endorses Universities Scotland's call for an additional £205.9m to bring the sector to a sustainable footing. We want to see a forward-looking sector focused on excellence in its core functions, not continually driven to cut costs and chase cross-subsidy on an unsustainable basis. I'm sure we do not need to rehearse the immense strategic importance and rich potential of this sector for a flourishing Scotland - universities just need to be resourced to deliver.

As 'anchor institutions' in their local economies, we want universities to provide badly needed quality employment and stable spending power, especially where expansion of tertiary education employment went some way to compensate for deindustrialisation. Successive reports from Audit Scotland have highlighted disturbing trends of growing deficits and reduced financial resilience, even before the various shocks caused by the pandemic. UNISON has particular concerns that a coming wave of student refunds, bad debts and no-show international students will return Scottish universities to the acute financial crisis envisaged by the SFC last summer. This is even with HE employers imposing an insulting 0% pay offer UK-wide. The sector requires the latitude to respond to these strange times, without recourse to wasteful and self-defeating redundancies.

Years of real terms cuts and a constant search for cross-subsidy have not been positive for the sector: there is no good substitute for proper funding of teaching, research and supporting operations.

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Further Education

UNISON Scotland broadly accepts and supports the Colleges Scotland analysis of the centrality of Further Education to Scotland's economic recovery post-pandemic. (see <https://collegesscotland.ac.uk/briefings-and-publications/briefings/1578-covid-19-submission-to-the-education-and-skills-committee-august-2020/file.html>).

The first phase of the current Review of tertiary education funding http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/corporatepublications_sfccp052020/Financial_Sustainability_Analysis_report.pdf indicated a forecast operating surplus of £9.2 million with predicted shortfall in funding for 2020/21 of £15.3 to £20.7 million.

There is a need for a bold ' Marshall Plan' for Scotland's recovery and the workforce strategy associated with that will be delivered in great part by FE Colleges. However, colleges cannot delivery quality and innovative teaching, training (including a digital prospectus) ; proper student support and development without qualified , experienced and sufficient numbers of staff. The 'one club' strategy of Colleges to balance their books by repeated restructures, random shedding of staff through Voluntary Service Schemes, needs to end. That strategy is destroying the very fabric and resilience at the heart of Colleges (their 'people) which is currently required for the task ahead. Professional Support services have been cut to the bone since Regionalisation.

There needs to be a return to real terms investment and not a staggering forwards fueled by 'efficiency' drives.

Also, we should consider 'ringfencing' of funds for specific purposes like Fair Work initiatives, staff training, trade union facility time.

Yours sincerely

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