

Thursday 29 March 2018

College sector discusses Brexit implications with Scottish Government Minister

A year to the day from the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union, senior leaders from Scotland's colleges met with the Scottish Government to discuss its implications and what it could mean for the college sector.

Michael Russell, Scottish Government Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe, delivered a speech to over 60 senior college representatives at Colleges Scotland's All Chairs' and Principals' event at Norton House Hotel in Edinburgh, before engaging in a question and answer session.

College leaders outlined concerns over the future of current EU funding and cultural exchange programmes as well as possible repercussions for non-UK EU members of staff and students at colleges in Scotland.

Commenting on Michael Russell's Brexit address and subsequent discussion, Shona Struthers, Chief Executive of Colleges Scotland, said:

"Brexit elicits several issues for the college sector which is why we are engaging with the Scottish and UK Governments to raise our concerns around the implications for non-UK EU staff and students as well as for funding and cultural exchange programmes.

"As an example, Erasmus+, the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe, has benefitted thousands of Scottish college students in recent years, and there is an element of uncertainty over its future beyond 2020.

"Scottish colleges have a history of attracting staff and students from around the world and we want to maintain this and continue fostering relationships with our European partners at all levels. We currently have approximately 330 non-UK EU staff members and over the past three years at least 1,275 students from other EU nations have been studying at Scottish colleges, so this issue profoundly affects many people in the sector.

"EU funding helps Scotland's colleges deliver high-quality courses which are beneficial to students, colleges, Scotland's economy, and our wider society. Through Developing Scotland's Workforce and Youth Employment Initiative, £66 million of EU finance has been invested in our colleges over the past three years, often focussed on those most distant from the workforce, and we are seeking reassurances around how this will be mitigated by the UK and Scottish Governments post-Brexit."

"The college sector in Scotland is eager to ensure that leaving the EU does not adversely impact its capacity to continue delivering high-quality and effective learning which provides the skilled workforce required to support an increase in Scotland's productivity and wider inclusive economic growth."

The Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe, Michael Russell, said:

"Scotland is an outward-looking country that has a long tradition of welcoming people to our shores to live, work and study and we want to protect that and ensure it can continue. Our country, our students and those who want to study in Scotland have benefitted from the EU programmes that are available and it is important this support for students does not stop.

“Similarly, European funding helps the college sector support up-skilling, the development of young people’s employability, student support and has contributed significantly to the modernisation of our college estates.

“I am aware of a number of concerns about Brexit and the impact it may have on colleges across Scotland. The Scottish Government is committed to helping to ensure Scotland’s colleges remain attractive and enhance their competitiveness in a global education market and we will continue to discuss these issues with the sector.”

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