

Thursday 14 March 2019

Comment on the Ministerial Statement on Brexit

Commenting on today's (Thursday) Ministerial Statement by Richard Lochhead, Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science, on the impact of Brexit on Scotland's college and university sectors, Shona Struthers, Chief Executive of Colleges Scotland, said:

"The repercussions of Brexit are hugely concerning for the college sector, which is why we are engaging with the Scottish and UK Governments to establish what the implications are for non-UK EU staff, students, and their families, as well as for the extremely beneficial EU funding and cultural exchange programmes.

"More than 16,000 non-UK EU nationals enrolled in Scottish colleges in 2016-17 – approximately 7% of college students – and the outcomes of the UK withdrawing from the EU could adversely affect their ability or desire to remain at college and deter other EU citizens from enrolling in future.

"Scottish colleges have greatly benefitted from EU funding programmes, and it is currently unclear what will replace those when the UK leaves the EU – as it is currently scheduled to do on 29 March 2019. We are urging clarity from the UK Government on the future funding of Erasmus + and other European funded programmes pertinent to the college sector after the UK's withdrawal from the EU.

"EU funding helps Scotland's colleges deliver high-quality courses which are advantageous to students, colleges, Scotland's economy, and our wider society. Through Developing Scotland's Workforce and Youth Employment Initiative some £66 million of EU finance was invested in our colleges from 2015 to 2018, and that investment often focused on those most distant from the workforce, so we are seeking reassurances around how this investment will be replaced by the UK and Scottish Governments post-Brexit.

"The college sector is also urging the UK Government to reintroduce a post-study work visa for graduates, or enable the Scottish Government to introduce a similar scheme, as we want to retain the skilled and educated graduates from overseas who make valuable contributions to the labour market in Scotland and our society. We want to ensure that Brexit does not diminish the college sector's capacity to continue delivering high-quality learning and skills to our learners and providing employers with the skilled workforce required to support inclusive, sustainable economic growth and increase productivity."

ENDS

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