

Wednesday, 15 April 2020

Joint statement from Scottish Government and Colleges Scotland

College sector will play essential role in economic revival post-COVID-19

Following constructive discussions today (Wednesday) between John Swinney MSP, Deputy First Minister and Education Secretary, Richard Lochhead MSP, Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science, Colleges Scotland and college principals, the Scottish Government and Scottish Funding Council have committed to continue working with the college sector to collectively do everything possible to protect students and staff during the COVID-19 crisis and from its inevitable economic repercussions.

Mr Swinney expressed gratitude for the vital national and community roles Scotland's colleges are playing to support their students, staff, and local communities – especially in supporting frontline care staff in elderly care and hospice settings – whilst also recognising the central role the sector will play in Scotland's economic recovery post-COVID-19 through upskilling, reskilling and helping specific economic sectors that have been hardest hit.

Speaking after the meeting, Mr Swinney said:

“I have been impressed by the way Scotland's colleges have already adapted quickly to the unprecedented challenges posed by COVID-19, taking swift action to protect staff and students' wellbeing and contribute to the national effort to tackle this virus and support vulnerable communities.

“Colleges have already demonstrated – for example, by speedily adapting to online learning – that they are ideally placed to play a key role in the wider economic response and the recovery to come, in particular upskilling and retraining individuals and businesses.”

Carol Turnbull, Lead Principal of the College Principals' Group and Principal of Ayrshire College, said:

“It is clear from our constructive discussions with John Swinney, Richard Lochhead and Scottish Funding Council that, by working collaboratively, we will do everything possible to protect social cohesion and promote economic recovery. The college sector has responded agilely and flexibly to this crisis and we are very much open for business with thousands of hours being delivered weekly online and remotely.

“As well as the immediate health risks posed by COVID-19, there will inevitably be significant economic repercussions, and the college sector will play a vital role in Scotland's economic revival by providing the skills employers need and supporting those most disadvantaged from this crisis.

“As was recognised by the Deputy First Minister, and similarly to previous recessions, colleges' agility and capacity to quickly reskill and upskill individuals, coupled with our emphasis on vocational and academic skills, lifetime learning and supporting business engagement, will be crucial in delivering Scotland's economic revival post-COVID-19.”

ENDS

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