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7 June 2023

Dear Convener

## **INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF THE SKILLS DELIVERY LANDSCAPE (WITHERS REVIEW)**

The Scottish Government initiated the Independent Review of the Skills Delivery Landscape (Withers Review) in August 2022 and Ministers appointed James Withers to lead the Review which commenced in September 2022 and has ended with the submission to Ministers of the final report. A copy of the report is attached and will be published later today.

The scope of the Review was established under the Terms of Reference (ToR) as published on the [Scottish Government website](#). A key purpose for initiating the Withers Review was to look at how the public body landscape should evolve to deliver Ministers ambitions in both the National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET) and our response to the Scottish Funding Council's (SFC) Review.

To accompany his report, James Withers has provided an independent analysis of the call for evidence submissions and webinar engagements that he undertook during the course of the Review. The analysis report is being published alongside the Withers Review today.

I have thanked James for this thorough and thoughtful piece of work. It is highly complimentary about the commitment and engagement of the people who work in our education and skills system, but its headline conclusion is that the system as currently configured cannot deliver what Scotland needs for the future. I understand that the need for change was a consistent feature across all submissions and throughout James's engagement. This chimes with what we have heard in developing the Purpose and Principles for post-school education, research and skills and amounts to a strong case for reform of the structures and processes underpinning the post-school education and skills landscape. I agree that change is needed.

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Withers' makes 15 recommendations, five of which focus on structural changes to Scotland's public body landscape while the remaining ten are operational and relate to the underpinning processes that, in Withers' view, need to be improved within the system.

The recommendations for significant change to the status and functions of existing public bodies include:

- a new approach to skills planning at national and regional level with the Scottish Government taking lead responsibility for that function, providing stronger leadership in this space and more clearly linking to Ministers strategic priorities for the wellbeing economy.
- establish a single public body with responsibility for the funding and oversight of delivery of all post-school learning and training provision; bringing together functions from SDS, SFC and possibly SAAS.
- appoint a single agency (the new qualifications body) to have responsibility for overseeing development and accreditation of all publicly funded post-school qualifications, including apprenticeship frameworks and the underpinning National Occupational Standards (NOS) and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs).
- provide the enterprise agencies with a clearer remit for supporting businesses with workforce planning as an integrated part of business development.
- substantially reform the remaining functions of SDS to focus on the development of a national careers service, with a mission to embed careers advice and education within communities, educational settings and workplaces across Scotland.

These recommendations have wide-ranging impacts not least for the bodies and staff working in them which means that decisions cannot be taken lightly. The case articulated in the Review is persuasive and we are minded to follow the direction of travel that it outlines, Scottish Ministers will now consider the implications of the recommendations, working with partners, before setting out a more detailed response.

We have heard loud and clear the calls for reform and won't shy away from decisions which will deliver better services for learners and employers and simplify the operating environment for our colleges, universities and training providers. We intend to work in partnership with the agencies affected, legal and HR professionals and the relevant unions, to consider the practicalities of implementation and will set out our next steps, in the wider context of lifelong education and skills reform, in due course.

Yours sincerely



**GRAEME DEY MSP**

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