

Friday 12 June 2020

Rt Hon Nicola Sturgeon MSP  
First Minister  
St Andrews House  
Regent Road  
Edinburgh  
EH1 3DG

Dear First Minister,

I am writing on behalf of the University and College Union to ask for your support in calling on the UK government to do more to secure the future of the post-16 education sector.

Our sector has always been a critical part of the social and economic fabric of the UK and will be crucial to our country's recovery from the damage done by the Covid-19 crisis. Staff in the sector responded magnificently in the early days of the pandemic and continue to do so. Shifting within a matter of days to online teaching in order to support millions of students and continuing to provide expertise and ground breaking research aimed at combating the virus.

As you are aware the crisis has created huge uncertainty and without urgent action we risk losing vital educational capacity just when it will be needed most. Our union welcomed the £75m of new research funding that your government is providing to universities in Scotland right now, and we are playing an active role in the Ministerial Leadership Group set up by your Minister Richard Lochhead MSP. However, our universities need significantly more support to retain capacity and maximise the positive impact that they can make to our social and economic recovery.

I wrote to the UK [Secretary of State for Education](#) in April, calling on the Westminster government to take action to underwrite post-16 education by committing to maintain the income all publicly-funded further and higher education institutions at current levels, and implementing the additional funding commitments for UK research announced in the recent Westminster budget. I called on the UK government to set out a clear and coherent plan for the sectors, which would be relevant across the four nations of the UK.

While the UK government appears to recognise the importance of further and higher education for our recovery, the very limited actions it has taken so far have been inadequate to the great challenges the sector faces and to the crucial task of maintaining the confidence of students and staff.

The recent report by London Economics for UCU highlighted a potential £2.5bn loss of income from tuition fees and teaching grants for UK universities. This analysis has been confirmed by the recent large scale study of international students' intentions undertaken by the British Council. We know that the Scottish sector is particularly exposed due to its over-reliance on international student tuition fee income, and that the Scottish Funding Council's own reports show on a possible assessment a [loss of £651m](#) in the next academic year.

Without government intervention, an estimated 30,000 sector jobs are at risk across the UK, with a further 32,000 jobs under threat throughout the wider economy. The total economic cost to the country from the reduced economic activity generated by universities alone due to the loss in income is estimated at more than £6bn.

UCU is today writing to the Prime Minister to highlight the crisis situation facing our university sector, and launching our "Fund the Future" campaign across the UK. I understand that your government has already been making representations on behalf of the sector to the UK government, and I would urge you to continue to do so.

We now desperately need a clear and coherent plan from the UK government, that co-ordinates with work already taking place in Scotland, which guarantees funding and jobs to protect our academic capacity. We cannot afford to push tens of thousands of teachers, researchers, and education professionals into unemployment at a time when we will need education to be a key driver of recovery.

I would welcome the chance to discuss UCU's campaign with you further.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Jo Grady, UCU general secretary