Dear Professor Brown,

Thank you again to you and your colleagues for providing evidence at the Education and Culture Committee’s meeting on 29 September.

As notified by the clerks, there are some issues on which members would welcome further information from you. I have set out these points in the annex to this letter and have included, where appropriate, references to the relevant column of the Official Report of the meeting.

I would be grateful to receive a response from you by 24 November.

Yours sincerely,


STEWART MAXWELL MSP
CONVENER
Annexe: follow-up points from meeting

The Official Report of the meeting is available here.

The information requested is as follows—

1. To provide your views on the merit of the SFC taking an equity share, or similar, in relation to the public money it provide to universities for knowledge exchange activities. (col 41 onwards);

2. Specific examples of when the funding council has influenced course provision in a way that significantly improved outcomes for employers and students (col 43);

3. The Council said it is in “a unique position to anticipate, and to respond to, student and employer needs and gaps in higher and further education across Scotland.” Given this statement and the statements bulleted below (in the context of a discussion on IT, col 45 onwards) we would welcome a more detailed update on how you intend to better meet employers’ future needs:
   - “We need to match the courses better to employers’ needs”
   - “There are mismatches in areas such as ICT, and we want to work with colleges and universities to ensure that the mismatch disappears”.
   - “We will encourage the colleges and universities to come together in some form of partnership to ensure that the courses are right and are badged to employers;

4. In column 53, the SFC committed to raising with the board criticisms made by some universities about your relationship with the Scottish Government. Please provide an update on any action you agree to take further to these discussions;

5. In relation to your statements that the SFC is “not actively engaged in monitoring international competitors” and that “other people are trying to emulate what we are doing in the sector in Scotland”, please state whether you consider that the council should have a defined international role. The Committee’s interest is in whether some countries may, in the future, substantially increase their spending on universities with the result that Scottish universities are not able to realise the same income levels from research, international students, foreign campuses, etc.

6. On a related note, please explain the extent to which – in providing public money to bodies that also receive substantial income from other sources – you take account of universities’ overall incomes.