Correspondence from the Scottish Government to the Public Audit Committee,
dated 29 October 2013

AUDITOR GENERAL SCOTLAND (AGS) REPORT “SCOTLAND’S COLLEGES
2013” – INVITE TO GIVE ORAL & WRITTEN EVIDENCE

Thank you for your letter of 15 October requesting further information on national pay
bargaining prior to the Public Audit Committee meeting on 6 November. I have
summarised below progress to date. As you will see, national bargaining is at a
relatively early stage of development and I am therefore not yet in a position to
answer your specific points.

At present, all colleges, as independent employers, are responsible for collective
bargaining which includes local salary negotiations for their staff.

Through the National Bargaining Development Group (NBDG), led by Ian McKay,
regional lead and Chair of Edinburgh College, discussions on the structure through
which national pay bargaining will take place are underway. This is a partnership
approach between the sector and the trades unions recognised to represent college
staff.

Whilst models are being explored with the national officers of the recognised trades
unions, no final agreement has yet been reached. So far, there is a proposal that
national pay bargaining might operate through a national joint negotiating committee
structure based on Whitley Council principles i.e. through a management and staff
side drawn from colleges as the employers and the trades unions recognised in the
sector.

Clearly, we cannot prejudge the outcome of these joint discussions. But once in
place, any national committee, with a remit to determine pay, could be tasked with
agreeing a new pay structure. This would have regard to equal pay principles for
staff in the college sector. In the meantime, merging colleges are considering
regional salary negotiations, in advance of the creation of a national structure. The
aim is that this committee would be based on informal arrangements. In the event
consensus could not be reached on such a way of operating, the new Post-16
Education Scotland Act does provide for the establishment of a statutory advisory
committee on national pay bargaining.

Boards of regional colleges will not be in place until next year. Since members of
those Boards would form the management side of the national negotiating
committee, it is unlikely any national agreement could be implemented before
academic year 15/16. It is only at that stage that costs to individual colleges could be
assessed.

I hope this is helpful. I am happy to provide a further update for the committee in due
course.

Yours sincerely

LESLEIE EVANS