Dear Mr Dornan,

SUBMISSION ON PRE-BUDGET SCRUTINY ON PUBLIC BODIES

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on behalf of SOLACE Scotland to this review.

Our submission draws on our response to Scottish Government’s recent review of the Enterprise and Skills landscape, which overlaps to a degree with the subject of your enquiry. In responding, SOLACE Scotland would like to refer to some overarching policy positions, recognising the regional/local and spatial/economic focus of Councils as they work across the sectors to deliver the range of agreed agendas and initiatives.

- SDS is required to engage in Community Planning Partnerships. There are examples of a strong emphasis on performance management, and SDS regularly use local authorities as delivery partners, working to fair and challenging targets, and having the national agency as a partner has helped councils to raise outcomes for communities and individuals. This engagement is not consistent across Scotland.

- As the key local player in economic development, local government is heavily involved in many aspects of employability and skills development for communities and is a critical contributor and driver of the inclusive growth agenda.

- There are good examples of collaboration between Councils and local partnerships and national agencies in the enterprise and skills arena: City Deal programmes, Modern Apprentice programmes, local employability partnerships, for example, as well as
Developing the Young Workforce mechanisms and PACE mechanisms. The work of taskforces (such as Longannet, Tullis Russell and Halls of Broxburn) are similarly relevant.

- There are, it is considered, areas for improvement across co-ordination, delivery, strategy formulation and performance frameworks and evaluation. In particular, we would suggest that the information held by SDS could be shared more effectively between schools and colleges to provide better support to those who are more at risk of non-completion.

- There is considered to be a benefit in assessment of the nature, level and deployment of provision for the post 24 age group currently, and in the offerings and support programmes for the post 55 age group and the extension of working lives now experienced and to be experienced by many.

- SOLACE recognises that there are elements of the skills and economic development agenda that need to be delivered nationally, but expects that most elements should be delivered at a local level and in harmony with the early intervention and prevention, and other locally-determined, agendas. There should be clarity of role across national, regional and local levels:
  - At national level the role of any agency should be defined and boundaries set to avoid mission creep.
  - At the regional level a coming together of national and local agencies to define an appropriate agenda, format and geography as well as thematic approach where appropriate.
  - At local level, Councils lead on delivery in their capacity as Community Planning lead.

- With the publication of the Phase 1 of the Enterprise and Skills Review, and the proposal to establish a single national Board, SOLACE Scotland would wish to highlight the need for clarity about the role of this Board, and its relationship to the Boards whose work it is co-ordinating.

- There should be places made available for local government representatives on national bodies in respect of setting fiscal and development strategies.

- A common and shared reporting and evaluation framework should be developed. Common data sets and management reports should be established to assist with a better evidence-based approach to initiatives influencing strategies at the different tiers mentioned above.

- An approach should be developed to allow for localised responses as an exception to national programmes.
The method of commissioning and provision of services needs to be clarified as there is some confusion across the model as operated by SDS at the moment.

SOLACE would lastly highlight the complex and cluttered nature of the skills landscape. We would wish to see the number of stakeholders involved being rationalised, with clarity on their respective roles and responsibilities. Such streamlining and simplification is essential in order to ensure that young people have a single point of access to tailored support, and employers are clear on how to find those seeking employment, training and modern apprenticeships.

I hope these comments are of assistance to the committee and can be considered in your deliberations.

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Burr
Chair
SOLACE Scotland