

Mr Dornan MSP
Convener of the Education and Skills Committee
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
Scotland
EH99 1SP

Wednesday, 21 September 2016

Dear Mr Dornan MSP

Thank you for the opportunity to set out the priorities and challenges facing higher education to the Education and Skills Committee on 7 September.

A number of issues were referred to during the session and I thought it would be helpful to follow up on some of these points for the Committee. Including:

- **Westminster's Higher Education and Research Bill**

You expressed an interest in the Bill and in ensuring there is oversight given its relevance to Scotland. Universities Scotland is working with MPs on the Bill Committee to secure amendments that protect the interests of Scotland's higher education sector in both teaching and research.

We thought it might be helpful for the Committee to have a copy of Universities Scotland's briefing for the 2nd reading debate and for the Committee stage. Please see attached.

- **UK Government pilot Tier 4 visa for international students**

We wanted to clarify that there was no consultation with Scottish institutions prior to the announcement by the Home office that there would be a narrowly focused pilot of changes to Tier 4 visa involving only four higher education institutions. We believe there was no consultation with English institutions either, other than the four named participants.

We welcome the fact the Home Office is considering change to the Tier 4 visa in such a way but we are naturally very disappointed that Scotland was not included in the pilot. The four institutions that benefit from this pilot are in direct competition with Scottish

institutions in international student recruitment markets and so have been given a competitive advantage.

- **Gender diversity on boards**

Gender diversity arose during the discussion about governance in the college sector. We wanted to take the opportunity to update the Committee on progress on gender balance in governance structures in the higher education sector.

- There is a 50:50 gender balance amongst Chairs of university governing bodies as of August 2016.
- There is a 39:61 gender balance women:men amongst independent members of university governing bodies as of January 2016. Still some way to go but there has been good progress recently. This represents a 10% change in the last 3 years.
- University Chairs committed to working towards 40:40:10 gender balance amongst the independent members of governing bodies in 2015. Progress will be reviewed in 2018. 7 institutions are already there and two others have a 60:40 women:men balance.

There are staff and student members on universities' governing bodies but this commitment does not extend to include them as the process for their appointment is not for the institution to determine.

Please get in touch if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Andrea Nolan

Convener, Universities Scotland

Cc'd:

Roz Thomson, Clerk to the Committee

Ned Sherratt, Clerk to the Committee