

Colin Smyth MSP
Convener
Economy and Fair Work Committee
The Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

Ruby Gibson
PCS Union National Officer for Scotland
Phone: 07717196436
Email: ruby@pcs.org.uk

16 April 2025

Dear Colin,

TERTIARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING (FUNDING AND GOVERNANCE) (SCOTLAND) BILL

I am writing to you on behalf of PCS Trade Union members working in Skills Development Scotland and Student Awards Agency Scotland, whose jobs are affected by the tertiary education reform, of which the TE Bill is one part.

PCS is disappointed by the lack of attention to worker voice which has been displayed by the Scottish Government, and the Economy and Fair Work Committee, thus far in this process. PCS asks that you urgently remedy this situation by inviting the Trade Unions to give evidence on the Bill.

I understand that after recess, the next two sessions of the Committee will hear from employers and employer representative bodies. It is understandable that the Committee would view employers as key stakeholders for this legislation; but it is quite egregious that the committee with responsibility for Fair Work has overlooked the need for evidence from the workforce.

To be candid, there are problems with the draft Bill, and especially with the Financial Memorandum, which could have been avoided through early and genuine workforce engagement.

This gap has been brought to the Committee's attention by other witnesses recently, for example on 26 March, Damien Yeats, CEO of Skills Development Scotland, highlighted the demoralisation felt by staff within SDS as a result of how this reform has been handled. PCS concurs with his comments, but we also believe it is important for those workers to be able to speak for themselves.

Several Committee members, particularly Kevin Stewart, have at recent hearings lamented the lack of input from apprentices and other learners themselves. In addition to representing staff in affected organisations, PCS Union represents apprentices in the public sector (and other Trade Unions represent apprentices elsewhere). We have members who can speak firsthand about their own experience as apprentices. We also have longer-serving members, many of whom began work as apprentices, who can provide their observations about how apprenticeships have changed.

When asked about the absence of learner voice, James Withers responded that "the employer and the business voice [...] are quasi-politically well-organised; learners aren't" and that "the parliamentary system likes organisation". This is a fair observation. Trade Unions are the recognised conduit for worker voice and affording these workers with the opportunity to have their voice is crucial to the success of the objectives of this bill.



I have attached PCS's responses to the calls for views on the Bill and Financial Memorandum respectively. As you will see, PCS members have identified what they see as serious problems with the assumptions that have been made about how apprenticeship delivery currently operates, and that contributes to problems with the financial projections.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Ruby Gibson
PCS National Officer for Scotland