

By Email

Our Reference: 25-037

Wednesday, 9 July 2025

Douglas Ross MSP
Convener, Education Children and Young People Committee
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Dear Convener,

Responding to the Professor Gillies and BDO report into the University of Dundee

We wanted to take the opportunity to advise the Committee of Universities Scotland's plans in response to the Professor Gillies and BDO report into the University of Dundee. Whilst the report is primarily focused on the specifics of one institution, Professor Gillies did offer 18 lessons for the wider sector. As the report has been accepted by the Scottish Government, Scottish Funding Council and the University itself, it is appropriate that Universities Scotland gives full consideration to the lessons offered by Professor Gillies to the wider sector.

We absolutely accept it is important that the sector collectively takes the opportunity to provide robust assurance of financial management and good governance to our funders, regulators, supporters and all who depend on universities.

We welcome Professor Gillies' view that both the Funding Council's Financial Memorandum and the Code of Good Higher Education Governance in Scotland are fit for purpose. It was also helpful to hear the Cabinet Secretary reaffirm this in her statement to Parliament on 24 June. We are of the same view. Yet, in keeping with the Code's commitment to continuous enhancement, we will work collaboratively with Chairs over the summer to develop an outline of enhancements to the executive functions and governance of HEIs. We intend to have a direction of travel by the early autumn.

We have begun this process on an inclusive basis, working with stakeholders, including a helpful debrief on the report between Professor Gillies and all Principals (mirrored between Professor Gillies and Chairs), a bilateral conversation between Universities Scotland and the Chair of the Committee of Scottish Chairs, and separate meetings the Funding Council and UCU Scotland.

We will progress this in coordination with the Committee of Scottish Chairs, the Scottish Funding Council and Scottish Government given their respective and differing roles and responsibilities for university governance.

We'd be happy to discuss our plans in more detail with you at your convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Sir Paul Grice
Interim Convener, Universities Scotland
Principal, Queen Margaret University
Edinburgh

Professor James Miller
Convener-elect, Universities Scotland
Principal, University of the West of Scotland