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Mr Douglas Ross MSP
Convener
Education, Children & Young People Committee
The Scottish Parliament
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27 February 2026

Dear Convener,

Further to my letter of 16 January, I am writing to provide an update on Scotland's new national skills planning model.

The Scottish Government is developing the model with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). In the period ahead, this work involves identifying a manageable number of sectors for national Skills Needs Assessments (SNAs). This will focus assessment capacity where national level insight can add the greatest value, rather than attempting to assess the whole economy in depth at once.

Once we have enhanced understanding of the skills needs in these sectors, the Scottish Government will identify priority skills and set expectations for the system in addressing these, whereas SFC will ensure planning and reporting is in place for delivery of post-school provision for the priority skills.

Based on current evidence, five broad areas have emerged for early national assessment: energy, digital, engineering, construction, and financial, professional and business services. In these five broad areas there is evidence of current or emerging skills need, alignment with national policy priorities, and strong potential for national level assessment to generate insights, with relevance across multiple parts of the economy. This is being tested with partners across industry, regions and providers before any decisions are finalised.

For clarity, skills needs within Health (including Adult Social Care), Education (including Early Learning and Childcare) and Local Government are already monitored through varying degrees of established workforce planning arrangements. Within the national skills planning model, these needs will also be recognised and clearly communicated when setting Scotland's strategic skills priorities.

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The emerging national assessment focus is intended to complement, not replace, existing regional and portfolio-led approaches. Regions will continue to identify and address their own skills needs, and portfolio specific work responding to immediate skills challenges will continue across all sectors, including those not included in the five broad areas. The identification of five broad areas for national assessment does not constrain regional decision-making, direct investment, or limit the system's ability to respond to wider economic needs or to the needs and aspirations of learners.

This update is provided for the Committee's awareness and to support ongoing parliamentary scrutiny of the evolving approach to skills planning. I would be happy to provide further information as this work continues.

Yours sincerely,

Ben Macpherson
Minister for Higher and Further Education.

Cc:
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