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Clare Adamson MSP
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Our ref: INT/HES
24 March 2021

Dear Clare,

I am writing to you to inform the Education and Skills Committee of the Scottish Government's work with the Irish Government concerning a joint Scottish/Irish Statement of Intent on post-Brexit cooperation in the areas of education and research.

Our relationship with Ireland, as one of our closest friends and allies, has significant cultural, strategic, and economic importance for Scotland. Following the Scottish Government's decision to end free access to Scottish universities for Irish students – an unfortunate and unavoidable outcome of the UK's leaving the EU – I have met twice with the Irish Minister for Education, Simon Harris, to discuss how bilateral cooperation on Higher Education and Research can be maintained between our two countries. This has taken place within the context of our recently launched 5 year framework for enhanced bilateral relations between Scotland and Ireland.

Following my meeting with Mr Harris on the 27th of January, I instructed my officials to work with their Irish counterparts to further advance the development of deeper collaboration on education and research, with a specific focus on student mobility. A draft Statement of Intent, which I include at the end of this letter, sets the basis and parameters for future work on this, which I discussed with Mr Harris at a subsequent meeting on the 18th of March.

At that meeting we both agreed that the draft Statement of Intent forms a good basis from which our officials can further and actively explore ways to support student mobility, and encourage collaboration on higher education and research. Before the rising of the Scottish Parliament this week we intend to signal our desire and hope to continue this work.

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I am keen that officials keep the momentum of this important work going throughout the election period. Depending on the outcome of the elections, further announcements will be made on this key area of bilateral cooperation.

Yours Sincerely

JOHN SWINNEY

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DRAFT SHARED STATEMENT OF INTENT ON HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

Ireland and Scotland Partnership in Higher Education and Research

Preamble

Parties to this Shared Statement

Opening statement

Context of

- (a) Post-Brexit relations;
- (b) CTA;
- (c) Ireland – Scotland Review

Purpose and Framework

Objective to provide a framework for the development of cooperation activities of mutual interest, which will include the possibility of signing specific agreements and instruments between the agencies/institutions/other bodies of the higher education and research institutions having competences in the areas identified by this Shared Statement of Intent;

Main Fields of Cooperation

Within the context of this Shared Statement, the Participants will have the possibility of sharing their resources, experience and expertise in the fields of higher education and research. The Participants will endeavour to promote cooperation and the exchange of experiences related to:

- (a) The delivery of higher education, including new pedagogies, practices for learning, pedagogical management, curriculum development, research, implementation and assessment with a view to promoting educational quality and practices in general;
- (b) Strengthening the relations between higher education institutions and similar institutions of the Participants in accordance with their respective legislations.
- (c) The exchange of information and experiences in digitally rich learning environments and to promote creativity, collaboration and participation in the generation of actions that respond to the current challenges of higher education;
- (d) Building on the strong existing bilateral research and innovation collaborative links between research institutions and businesses, in the context of UK-Ireland bilateral research programmes and the new EU Framework Programme, Horizon Europe.
- (e) The promotion of student and staff mobility between higher and further education institutions;

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Exchange of Information

The Participants will support the exchange of materials on higher education, educational methodology, including the use of state-of-the-art communication technologies (ICT).

Student/Researcher Mobility Activities

The Participants will promote activities in order to encourage mobility and cooperation. Such activities may include the development of joint degrees, in accordance with each Participant's applicable regulations on the matter, mobility of academic staff, experts, researchers and students; participation in conferences, seminars and meetings (or similar) held in the other country. Each Participant will disseminate information about educational opportunities and scholarships available for the other Participant.

Participants are committed to exploring a Post-graduate/early researcher scholarship scheme, which will be founded within agreed priorities between research organisations. These priorities will be developed, and agreed between Participant nominated research leads.

Participants will explore the funding and development of Joint Programme/Awards between two or more higher education institutions (at least one from each jurisdiction) based on a competitive Call for Proposal. The use of Joint Programme/Awards will facilitate mobility of students from Irish and Scottish higher education institutions to complete modules in the participating institutions.

Joint Working Group

The Participants may establish a Joint Working Group (JWG) to facilitate the implementation of this Shared Statement. The JWG will monitor, assess and review its implementation regularly and, where necessary, may meet on a date and place decided by the Participants. The JWG will be co-chaired by representatives of the Participants, with possible participation by members of other Ministries and agencies, as appropriate. The JWG may, if necessary, establish sub-groups to formulate the thematic cooperation initiatives.

Disputes

Any dispute about the interpretation or application of this Shared Statement will be resolved amicably by consultations between the Participants.

Amendments

This Shared Statement may be amended at any time by the mutual written consent of the Participants.

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Financial Underspend

Following any commitment of funding any resultant underspend will be returned to the respective Participant for re-prioritisation.

Confidentiality

The Participants will respect the confidentiality of documents and information that are being classified as confidential, received from or supplied to the other Participants during the period of the operation of this Shared Statement.

The Participants will ensure that any research data, the results of research and any other information which is mutually provided, obtained and developed in the implementation of this Shared Statement, will not be transferred or supplied to a third party without the prior consent of the other Participants in accordance with prevailing laws and regulations of their respective countries.

The Participants agree that the provisions of this paragraph will remain in effect, notwithstanding the termination of this Shared Statement.

Code of Conduct

Each Participant will ensure that its personnel engaged in the activities under this Shared Statement will respect the laws and regulations of the host country and will avoid any activities inconsistent with this Shared Statement.

Termination

This Shared Statement may be terminated by either Participant giving six months written notice. The Participants will consult to determine how any outstanding matters should be dealt with.

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