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By email

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Dear Ben

BI-ANNUAL REPORTS - 1+2 LANGUAGES POLICY, EU OBLIGATIONS,
HORIZON 2020 AND EUROPEAN STRUCTURAL FUNDS.

On behalf of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee I would like to thank you for your letter of 17 December 2019 which includes four bi-annual reports on a range of EU issues. The Committee considered these reports at its meeting on 9 January 2020 and made a number of observations which are set out in more detail below.

1+2 Languages Policy

Annexe B of the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skill’s letter includes information relating to secondary school teachers by main subject. While the Committee notes these totals may not accurately reflect overall teacher numbers as the information on characteristics are not known for all teachers, we remain concerned about the consistent downward trend in teacher numbers for certain languages, specifically French and German. Given the importance of these languages, the Committee would appreciate further information as to the reason for this decline and steps the Scottish Government is taking to encourage an increase in teacher numbers for these subjects.

The Committee notes with interest the results from the 1+2 Languages Survey and understands a full analysis of the results is being prepared. The Committee would be grateful if these findings could be provided to the Committee once the analysis of the survey has been concluded.
Erasmus +

In November 2017, the Committee undertook an inquiry into Scotland’s participation in the Erasmus+ programme. The purpose of the inquiry was to learn more about the opportunities currently available under Erasmus+ and to consider the implications were Scotland not to be a participant after the UK withdraws from the EU. The Committee heard a great deal of compelling evidence from participants and representative organisations regarding the value of these programmes and the transformational impact the programme can have, particularly for those in deprived areas.

While the Committee understands that the UK’s future participation in the Erasmus+ programme is a reserved matter, we would encourage the Scottish Government to raise, in the strongest possible terms, the value of ongoing participation in the programme. Furthermore, given the value of these programmes, we would also be interested to know if the Scottish Government has undertaken any work to ascertain if Scotland could continue to participate in the programme as a non-EU programme country.

Horizon 2020

The Committee shares the concerns of the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science regarding Scotland’s continuing participation in EU programmes for research and innovation, particularly given our higher education institutions perform disproportionately well for the size of our research base. Despite the UK Government’s assurances regarding what it describes as precautionary measures to investigate potential alternatives to participating in Horizon Europe and its stated intention to associate to the programme, the Committee would appreciate regular updates on this issue.

European Social Fund and European Regional Development Fund

The Committee recognises the measures taken by the Scottish Government to minimise the potential loss stemming from the suspension of the European Social Fund (ESF) programme in November 2019. However, the Committee would appreciate further information on the impact on recipients and the specific measures taken to ensure no organisations go out of business as a result of the suspension.

The Committee welcomes the Scottish Government’s consultation regarding the replacement of European Structural Funds in Scotland Post EU-Exit. The Committee would appreciate regular updates regarding the work of the steering group and conclusions drawn from the consultation following its completion in February 2020.

Finally, the Committee shares the Minister’s frustrations regarding the lack of clarity from the UK Government on their proposals for the replacement of ESFT and ERDF via the “shared prosperity fund”. The Committee intends to write to the UK Government asking for clarity but also requests regular updates from the Scottish Government on this issue.
Yours Sincerely,

Joan McAlpine MSP, Convener,
**Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee**