



BY EMAIL

Our Reference: **20-007**

Mr John Swinney MSP
Deputy First Minister & Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
The Scottish Government
St. Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Tuesday, 28 January 2020

Dear Mr Swinney,

We write together ahead of the Scottish Government's final budget decisions, united in our belief that this remains a key budget for universities. We recognise the challenges of publishing a Scottish budget before the UK budget is announced, but we urge a turnaround from the continued decline in support for higher education.

We worked together over the autumn to highlight the real pressures now facing university funding and to make the positive case for investment. Over the last twelve months three entirely independent sources have pointed to the funding pressure that has been building in our universities:

- The European Universities Association was first, last spring, by calling Scotland's universities a "*declining system under pressure*".
- Audit Scotland's report from September found more than half of universities in deficit and highlighted again that public funding does not cover the cost of teaching every Scottish Government funded student nor cover the cost of doing research.
- Most recently, the Fraser of Allander's analysis of the 2019 budget highlighted that universities are the only part of education and skills to be unprotected in recent budgets.

Universities now receive £127.6 million less in real terms and every Scottish domiciled student in our universities has almost £700 less invested in their education compared to 2014/15. We ask for a real terms increase in baseline university revenue funding, in the order of £39.4 million of funding to benefit our students and our staff.

As students, union members and Principals we don't always take the same position but we do all share a belief in the significance of the 2020/21 budget for higher education.

The case for investment is a positive one, linked closely to Scottish Government objectives. 2020 has already brought good news on that front with HESA's latest data for academic year 2018/19, published on 16 January, showing that the sector has already practically reached the First Minister's 2021 target that 16% of entrants to undergraduate degree programmes should come from the 20% most socio-economically disadvantaged communities, with 15.9% of entrants now coming from these backgrounds.

We're confident that you understand the commitment and energy that higher education brings to many key Government priorities and shared agendas including widening access, sustainable economic growth and a Can Do Scotland.

Thank you for engaging with our case and for representing this within Cabinet.

Yours sincerely,



Liam McCabe
President, NUS Scotland



Mary Senior
Scotland Official, University and
College Union



Professor Andrea Nolan,
Convener, Universities
Scotland

Cc: Mr Derek Mackay MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Economy and Fair Work
Mr Lochhead MSP, Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science
Ms Clare Adamson MSP, Convener of the Education and Skills Committee, Scottish Parliament
Aileen McKechnie, Director of Advanced Learning and Science