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Dear colleagues,

I wanted to quickly update you all following various announcements today which impact on the further and higher education sectors.

Positively, you will have seen that we announced today £60m additional funding for further and higher education this financial year to assist with Covid-19 issues.

This includes:

£40m resource funding to help colleges and universities maintain research activity, protect jobs and help students; and
£20m additional capital to boost research and knowledge exchange.

SFC will develop allocations for this funding in the coming days for immediate spend.

EU and international students are also experiencing hardship as a result of COVID-19 including accommodation costs. Working closely with stakeholders to address concerns around student hardship, Regulations have been amended to allow EU and international students access to the additional Winter Covid Funds recently announced in Further and Higher Education.

Information on the allocation and the administration of the Higher Education fund (£22 million) can be found at <https://saas.gov.uk/files/315/saas-discretionary-fund-allocations.pdf> and <https://www.saas.gov.uk/files/499/saas-coronavirus-discretionary-fund.pdf>

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The Student Hardship Taskforce has been specifically set up to allow us to fully explore student hardship in further and higher education over the coming months. The first meeting discussed the additional payments and discussed the consistency of approach for the administration of these funds which will be fed into the guidance.

I am grateful for your contributions to the Learner Journey Task Force which is now developing an action plan. I want to encourage you all to continue your dialogue with my officials this week to develop and agree the immediate priorities for learners at our next Task Force meeting next week.

Finally, you will have noted that the First Minister's announcement to Parliament today around the staggered return of early learning and schools, she did not cover plans for further and higher education.

As the First Minister said, we have made important progress by slowing down the virus through lockdown and speeding up vaccination, and have suppressed the virus significantly (by two-thirds since the early January peak). However, the position remains fragile, and the headroom limited. Even a slight easing of restrictions could cause cases to start rising rapidly again.

Next week the Scottish Government will publish a strategic framework that will set out the broad order of priority for re-opening when that becomes possible. I expect that framework to cover further and higher education. I understand that you will be disappointed that we were not able to give you and students more clarity this week but this is a very fluid situation and we must proceed with caution.

In the meantime, learning in further and higher education should continue to be predominantly online with only those students whose attendance is critical and whose education cannot be delivered remotely or postponed receiving face to face learning.

I know this is not easy and so let me again you again for the patience and understanding you are showing during these incredibly stressful times.



RICHARD LOCHHEAD

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