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SCOTTISH TRADES UNION CONGRESS

Grahame Smith, General Secretary

Temporary Office

Suite 11, Red Tree Business Unit

24 Stonelaw Road

Rutherglen, Glasgow G73 3TW

Tel 0141 337 8100

Email info@stuc.org.uk

www.stuc.org.uk

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Richard Lochhead MSP
Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science
Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Dear Richard

Protecting staff and students at Scottish colleges and universities

Trade unions representing every part of the further and higher education sector met this week to discuss the response to Covid-19 in Scottish colleges and universities.

There are serious and shared concerns about the inconsistent response and lack of a coordinated approach across both the further and higher education sectors. As a first step, the STUC is looking for urgent, clear and informative sector-wide guidance.

Our priority is for firm written assurances to be given to everyone working in HE and FE that they will continue to be paid their usual wages throughout this crisis and until normal work resumes, whether directly or indirectly employed. In particular, I am concerned about the thousands of people employed on casual, insecure, short-term and outsourced contracts, who are at greatest risk of losing their income without sectoral guidance to protect them.

If early indications are correct, and colleges and universities are unable to operate as normal for several months, it is imperative people whose contracts may be due to expire during this period are offered job security by temporarily extending their contracts, as a matter of protocol, during this period.

As you are well aware, our colleges and universities do much more than deliver teaching. They are also delivering significant programmes of research and a wide-range of professional services. Their economic impact on their local communities and across Scotland is undisputed – and staff are the backbone of this. Any guidance concerning the impact of Covid-19 on colleges and universities must recognise the

wide variety of roles within these institutions and treat everyone fairly and consistently as new ways of working, including home-working, are developed.

I note the risk to public health if cleaning, security and catering staff have no financial alternative but to work when ill. This will compromise the safeguards that are put in place for everyone.

Trade unions are well placed to anticipate the challenges in the workplace and develop effective and fair solutions, as we all respond to Covid-19. I am disappointed trade unions were not included in early strategic discussions concerning the crisis response and workforce planning in many colleges and universities. With your help, I hope this can be rectified immediately.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the response to Covid-19 in colleges and universities last Tuesday. I hope a further call can be scheduled next week to follow up on our concerns and recommendations, as set out in this letter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Grahame Smith', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Grahame Smith
General Secretary