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Lewis Macdonald MSP  
Convener  
Health and Sport Committee

By email

21st January 2021

Dear Lewis

**STAGE 1 REPORT ON THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. ANDREWS (DEGREES IN MEDICINE AND DENTISTRY) BILL**

I write in response to the Health and Sport Committee's Stage 1 Report on the University of St. Andrews (Degrees in Medicine and Dentistry) Bill. I thank the Committee for its careful consideration of the Bill.

I am pleased that the Committee has endorsed the general principles of the Bill and recognised that the prohibition contained in the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966 is unfair and was not intended to remain permanently in place.

As the Committee heard during the evidence session, ScotGEM students feel passionately about their unique identity as students of both Dundee University and the University of St. Andrews. It is therefore fair and right that ScotGEM students should be able to graduate with a jointly awarded degree, which reflects the studies they are undertaking and the incredible work being done by both of these universities.

A response to the recommendations of the Committee is attached in the Annex to this letter which I hope the Committee finds helpful.

**JEANE FREEMAN**

## ANNEX

### SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE HEALTH AND SPORT COMMITTEE'S STAGE 1 REPORT ON THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. ANDREWS (DEGREES IN MEDICINE AND DENTISTRY) BILL

#### Removal of the prohibition

36. We are very supportive of the ScotGEM programme. We also support the removal of the prohibition to allow St. Andrews University to award degrees in Medicine and Dentistry. We recognise this prohibition is unfair and was not intended to remain permanently in place. For that reason a partial removal only of the prohibition would not be appropriate.

The Scottish Government welcomes the Committee's support of the innovative ScotGEM programme, which was commissioned with the aim of delivering medical education differently and in a way that is more directly tailored to the needs of our health service.

The Scottish Government agrees that the prohibition contained in the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966 should be completely removed, as it serves no legitimate purpose in today's context. It was only ever intended to be transitional. Accordingly, it would be fundamentally unfair to leave any part of it in place given that no other higher education institution in Scotland, or the UK, is subject to such a legal impediment.

#### Ability of St. Andrews University to offer PMQ medical degrees or dentistry degrees in its own right

37. The issue of whether St Andrews University competes to establish a new medical school is not provided for in this Bill and does not require additional legislative changes. Discussions around proposals for a new medical school have been postponed although we consider it would be prudent, when resumed, they take into consideration the wider evidence we heard on NHS recruitment and widening access to medicine during our Bill scrutiny.

The Scottish Government welcomes the Committee's acknowledgement that the Bill does not provide for the University of St. Andrews to award medical or dentistry degrees in its own right. The Bill itself does not determine the University's ability to do so, as there are separate financial and regulatory controls and decision-making processes in place that determine which institutions are able to offer degrees in these "controlled subjects".

The Scottish Government acknowledges the wider concerns that have been raised in regards to the impact should the University of St. Andrews be able to offer its own medical degree in the future. These and other considerations on the potential gains and impacts of an additional medical school will be taken fully the Government's thinking at an appropriate time.

We would like to assure the Committee that these are important matters that are factored into the financial and regulatory controls on the awarding of medical degrees and are therefore taken into account by the various organisations involved in the decision making-process for approving any new provider of PMQ medical degrees. Those organisations include the Scottish Government, Scottish Funding Council, General Medical Council, NHS Education Scotland, and Health Boards.

## Overall conclusion on general principles

39. We support the general principles of the Bill

The Scottish Government thanks the Health and Sport Committee for its scrutiny of the Bill and welcomes the Committee's recommendation that the general principles of the Bill be agreed to.