



University of the
Highlands and Islands
Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd
agus nan Eilean

Chancellor - HRH The Princess Royal
Seansalair - A h-Àirdeachd Rìoghail A' Bhana-phrionnsa Rìoghail

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29th September 2015

Paul Martin MSP
Convener to the Public Audit Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Dear Mr Martin

Highlands and Islands Further Education Region

I write in response to the comments made by Mary Scanlon MSP during the meeting of the Public Audit Committee on Wednesday 9th September 2015.

The draft Official Report minute of the meeting relating to "Scotland's colleges 2015" indicates that, in relation as I understand it to a table that lists the "Sums delivered to students from 10% most deprived areas in Scotland in 2013-14 by region", Mrs Scanlon stated:

...I am shocked that the figures for the Highlands and Islands indicate that only 4% of students come from the 10 per cent most deprived areas, whereas the figure for Forth Valley indicates that 27.0% per cent of students come from those areas. Why can some colleges do so well opening opportunities to students from deprived backgrounds and others do so badly?"

Mrs Scanlon's inference that the Highlands and Islands is doing "badly" is based on a serious misunderstanding of what the table in question actually conveys.

The Scottish Government's website states that *"The SIMD is a key tool for identifying the ongoing problem of area concentrations of deprivation and the specific issues and challenges that these areas face"*.

Of the 6,505 datazones that cover Scotland, 651 are deemed to be the 10% most deprived. However, only 16 of these (2.5% of the 651) are in the local authority areas covered by the Highlands and Islands further education region (5 in Argyll and Bute, 9 in Highland and 2 in Perth and Kinross).

The reason, therefore, why there is such a relatively low percentage of our activity that is delivered to students from the datazones covered by SIMD 10% is that we have a much smaller number of students who live in these datazones compared to, let's say, Forth Valley. This small number of enrolments is then expressed as a percentage of the many thousands of our other students from across the region who come from the remaining 1,000 or





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so other datazones across the rest of the Highlands and Islands that are not deemed to be deprived in terms of SIMD 10%.

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In other words, our low percentage has absolutely nothing to do with the region's nine colleges performing "badly" in attracting students who suffer deprivation and has everything to do with the fact that, on this particular measure, the Highlands and Islands is deemed to be relatively free of deprivation.

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We and many other organisations have long argued that SIMD does not reflect the true extent of deprivation within the Highlands and Islands, our region simply does not have the "concentrations of deprivation" that SIMD is aimed at capturing. However, we nevertheless have significant levels of deprivation and regard this as being so serious that the Further Education Regional Board for the Highlands and Islands has commissioned its own study into this which we will be publishing soon. Arising from this we intend to develop measures that better reflect the reality of deprivation within the Highlands and Islands and will set stretching targets in relation to student enrolments. In furtherance of achieving this we will seek additional funding to tackle this significant, but largely hidden, rural deprivation and would seek government assistance with this.

I can assure yourself and your Committee that, far from failing the deprived members of our communities, all of the colleges within the Highlands and Islands region are very inclusive organisations that are transforming the lives of thousands of people across the region on an annual basis.

I trust that the misinterpretation of the data by Mrs Scanlon will be corrected in due course.

Yours sincerely

Dr Michael Foxley
Chair
FE Regional Board, Highlands and Islands Region

