*** October 2026

Màiri McAllan
Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic
St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh, EH1 3DG

scottish.ministers@gov.scot

CC: **Alyn Smith**
Minister for Innovation, Technology and Tertiary Education

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

Integrated Regional Employability & Skills (IRES) Programme 2027+

I am writing as Head of Integrated Employer Engagement to set out the case for continued investment in IRES 27+. IRES has exceeded all targets, attracted significant leveraged funding and built regional capability well beyond its original expectations. Without continuity, years of progress, infrastructure and future investment would be lost.

What IRES has enabled

- 220+ community asks delivered through ESES Communities, generating significant social value
- 70% positive outcomes through JobFit, supporting people into higher-skilled, better-paid work
- 4720+ meaningful employer engagements responding directly to industry need
- A vital regional employer voice, helping businesses shape skills and workforce provision

What is at risk

Without continuity funding, the region risks losing trusted relationships, infrastructure and cross-boundary capability built over many years. For Integrated Employer Engagement, this means ESES Communities, JobFit and the regional employer engagement function that connects industry directly to skills provision. Once lost, this capability would take years and significant investment to rebuild.

Why continued investment matters

IRES 27+ provides the final intervention, building on poverty and employability investment with the skills and progression routes needed to unlock stuck talent. It will support thousands of people out of poverty into higher-skilled, better-paid jobs, while giving employers access to the workforce needed in growing sectors.

We strongly urge the Scottish Government to protect its investment in IRES by funding IRES 27+ from April 2027. Without continued skills investment, the wider preventative ecosystem cannot succeed.

Yours sincerely,

Ellen Munro
Head of Integrated Employer Engagement
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