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**Mark Pont, Assessment Programme Lead**

Martin Smith  
Chief Funding and Information Officer  
Scottish Funding Council  
(by email)

27 October 2017

Dear Martin

## **COLLEGE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

As you are aware, we have recently reviewed a range of aspects of your College Performance Indicators against the three pillars – trustworthiness, quality and value – that are fundamental to supporting public confidence in statistics and form the basis of National Statistics status.

I have welcomed your team's positive engagement with our work. In particular I welcome the team's enthusiasm to apply the recommendations from this exercise to your wider suite of official statistics publications. On the whole, I conclude that the College Performance Indicators are clear and insightful. There are also some areas where changes could improve the trustworthiness and value of these statistics.

Our main reflection is that positive results appear to be significantly more prominent than negative results. For example, the 2015/16 publication<sup>1</sup> includes the use of bold text to draw attention to positive headline figures, more references to completion rates than withdrawal rates (in both the text and bar charts), and a suggestion that 'perhaps the most important measure is the percentage of successfully completing'. While each of these may be legitimate statements, the overall impression could call into question the objectiveness of your statistical operations. To ensure the trustworthiness of your statistics you should ensure that figures are clearly presented without bias towards a specific policy stance. In achieving this, it may be helpful to ensure that the lead data analysts have full editorial control of the content of publications, and are sufficiently supported by you as chief analyst and the Scottish Government Chief Statistician where necessary.

A key aspect of maximising value from official statistics is to ensure that as much data as possible is available to users for further analysis. Ensuring accessibility to the data used within the text, graphs and tables within the report would enable users to explore trends, analyse results and draw their own conclusions about performance in the further education sector in Scotland.

Enabling more transparency about those who see the statistics prior to publication would also help to improve the trustworthiness of these statistics. Your team agreed to publish pre-release access lists for each of your publications in line with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics<sup>2</sup>, which should appear alongside your next official statistics release.

Finally, we consider that value could be further enhanced by explaining more clearly within the publication the purposes for which these data should be used (and when other data sources would be more appropriate) and by giving information about the different users and uses of your data. By

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<sup>1</sup>[http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Statistical\\_publications\\_SFCST012017\\_CollegePerformanceIndicators201516/SFCST012017\\_College\\_Performance\\_Indicators\\_2015-16.pdf](http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Statistical_publications_SFCST012017_CollegePerformanceIndicators201516/SFCST012017_College_Performance_Indicators_2015-16.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/images-codeofpracticeforofficialstatisticsjanuary2009\\_tcm97-25306.pdf](https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/images-codeofpracticeforofficialstatisticsjanuary2009_tcm97-25306.pdf)

being open about how the data can be used, including listing some example uses, you may encourage users to make greater use of your information, and to encourage new users.

I would welcome a report back to my team on how you are improving the value and trustworthiness of your statistics to ensure the standards required of National Statistics status are being met, ahead of the next publication of College Performance Indicators in January 2018.

Once again, thank you for engaging effectively with us during this short review.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Pont', with a horizontal line underneath.

Mark Pont  
Assessment Programme Lead