

Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture  
Ministear airson na h-Eòrpa, Cultair agus Chùisean Taoibh a-muigh  
Linda Fabiani MSP/BPA

T/F: 0845 774 1741  
E: scottish.ministers@scotland.gsi.gov.uk



Mrs Elizabeth Burns CMG OBE  
Chair  
HEACS  
Longmore House  
Salisbury Place  
Edinburgh  
EH9 1SH

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Dear Elizabeth

Thank you for your letter of 11 April explaining how HEACS intends to manage the remainder of its work programme and seeking certain reassurances.

First, I would like to take this opportunity to repeat my comments in the Parliament last week, and express to you directly my gratitude to the Council for its professionalism across the board. I am delighted that members of the Council are committed to completing the current work programme and am pleased that the budget provided to the Council to support its work this year has been well-received. I am assured that Historic Scotland stands ready to provide practical assistance to Council as required.

It is clear that the Council will be working to a very tight timetable. You ask for a reassurance that we will be able to respond to all the Council's reports by May 2009. I understand that Council members are keen to know what will happen to their work. But I do not think I can in fairness commit myself and my colleagues to providing responses to all the Council's reports that quickly. I understand that at least one report will reach us sometime during 2008: in that case, I would very much hope that we could provide a response in good time. However, for the remaining three reports, a May deadline would mean 12 to 16 working weeks (perhaps less, if Council felt it needed to take any further time, as it reasonably might) to consider three substantial pieces of work in parallel. One or more of these may well require me to consult within government and perhaps take soundings with external partners, while, as you must appreciate, other business also has to go on. At this stage of course none of us can have any idea what recommendations these reports will contain. I would not want to commit to a timetable which does not allow time to do justice to what we will receive.

Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ  
Cidhe Bhictoria, Dun Eideann EH6 6QQ  
www.scotland.gov.uk



I am certainly happy to provide a reassurance that there will be a formal response to each one of the reports. But I am concerned that in seeking to obtain responses to all these reports by May 2009 the Council is setting not only the government but also itself a very demanding deadline. I wonder if I might instead leave you to discuss this further with officials at Historic Scotland, in the first instance, and come back to me if need be, having had those discussions?

You also kindly invite me to HEACS' planned conference in May 2009. I am happy to accept this provisionally, recognising that the date is some way off and it would make sense nearer the time to be in touch again about the detailed format and programme.

yours sincerely  
*Linda Fabiani*

**LINDA FABIANI**