

**29 May 2020**

**Dear Principal and COVID-19 Co-ordinator,**

**Guidance on steps to complete the Outcome Agreement cycle for AY2020-21**

I am writing to provide you with further reassurance and guidance on the steps we will take to complete the Outcome Agreement (OA) cycle for AY2020-21.

We have been working closely with colleges and universities to understand the full impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the future of our institutions and how and what they deliver. We already know that rapid reprioritisation and urgent reshaping and rethinking is underway. Alongside this we are working to design a process for a comprehensive review of OAs which will impact from AY2021-22 going forward and we will provide you with an update on that soon.

Our immediate priority is to provide you with further reassurance and guidance on how we will complete the OA cycle for AY2020-21. We are now in a position to provide some clarity on the status of the OAs you submitted to SFC by 30 April 2020 and in particular to address the following:

1. Arrangements for signing off OAs (institutions and SFC) and the timing of this
2. Publication of OAs
3. Reprioritisation and establishing new commitments linked to core funding for AY2020-21
4. Next steps

**SFC confirms the following**

1. SFC will **not** ask governing bodies (College Boards and University Courts) to sign off the AY2020-21 Outcome Agreements in the usual way.

We recognise that most institutions produced their near final AY2020-21 OAs prior to the COVID-19 crisis. Therefore institutions will not be in a position to sign off commitments and targets that they already know they can no longer deliver. To do so would lead to a reputational risk for the sector and for SFC. This move acknowledges the reality of the current emergency situation and the anticipated scale of the disruption to business. However, the current OAs do contain ongoing high level commitments that may still be relevant moving forward and SFC would want to recognise this.

2. SFC will **not** publish the AY2020-21 Outcome Agreements on our SFC website.

We will not move to publish the OAs on our website as usual, acknowledging that there will be no formal sign off of the accepted AY2020-21 OAs.

3. SFC **will** attach the allocation of core funding in AY2020-21 to refocused sector commitments and activity which will provide us with reassurance on use of designated funding.

Although we do not yet know exactly what those commitments will be, we are working closely with the sectors to establish a more high level set of outcomes for AY2020-21 that realign priorities with what will be needed to support economic recovery, to support those already in the education system (schools, colleges and universities) during the crisis period, and those who may be looking to re-enter employment. At the same time we expect colleges and universities to continue to widen access, deliver high quality research and ensure a high quality learning experience for all students that may be different in shape, structure and mode to previous years.

We are particularly aware of the need to maintain volume of provision over the coming year when the economy will be in a recovery period, to allow students to continue to access the learning and employability skills that will ensure a pathway to employment when jobs become available. Research Excellence Grant and University Innovation Fund impacts and outcomes will also remain a priority in AY2020-21 as they contribute directly to the knowledge economy vital for economic recovery.

4. Timelines for further information

SFC will continue to engage closely with the sector over the coming weeks to reach agreement on a more general set of outcomes and provide reassurance on the shape of the commitments for future delivery. We will then seek agreement from our Board and move to confirm in more detail what the refocused sector commitments and priorities will be for AY2020-21. We will communicate with you again in July to progress this.

We already know from the soundings taking place at senior level across the sector that the immediate policy priorities for institutions are going to be in the areas of:

- Transitions and pathways for students, (from school to college or university; college to university; and into work) are supported and clearly signposted.
- A high quality learning experience for all students, no longer predicated on always being physically in a classroom/lecture space. We are already seeing a move to online learning and repurposed blended delivery.
- Delivering for economic recovery including building on the work already underway on Upskilling.

I trust that this information provides the reassurance that you need for now on AY2020-21 Outcome Agreements. During this period and beyond I would ask that you continue to communicate regularly and clearly with current and prospective students to ensure they are fully aware of plans for the 2020-21 academic year.

Once again I am grateful for your engagement on emerging priority issues, the response to requests for non-routine intelligence and information, and the on-going dialogue at all levels with key leads across both our organisations. Our Outcome Agreement Managers remain important contact points for institution-specific matters, particularly over the coming weeks, and our COVID-19 mailbox (covid19@sfc.ac.uk) helps us capture all COVID-related issues and get information to the right people.

Thank you, again, for everything you are doing for students, staff and the communities around us in these challenging times.

Kind regards



**Dr Donna MacKinnon**  
Director of Access, Learning and Outcomes