

Shaping the Access engagement and communication strategy

- To present an outline engagement and communication strategy for access, and ask the Committee to consider what has previously been in place and how it should be evolved

Recommendations

- Advise the Council executive as to what other elements need to change, stay and/or adapt and for suggestions of other organisations/stakeholders that should be engaged with.
- Discuss this approach and offer suggestions on other opportunities that should be utilised.
- Consider if any other measures should/could be used to determine the effectiveness of our engagement strategy.
- Consider if the Access engagement and communication strategy should be a standing item on the AIC agenda.

Financial implications

- Depending on decisions made on the number of engagement events required, there may be financial implications for 2016-17 and future years, these are likely to be from running costs.

Shaping the Access engagement and communication strategy – discussion paper

Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to present an outline engagement and communication strategy for access, and ask the Committee to consider what has previously been in place and how it should be evolved.

Background

2. At the May 2016 meeting, the Committee considered the best method, for the future, of promoting and developing SFC access work with the wider sectors and access communities. The executive advised that *'(i)n light of budget constraints, the Committee will need to consider what events are required to support the SFC's widening access and equalities vision, strategy and sharing of practice moving forwards. The executive has been advised that budgets for future events will only be approved if they are 'business critical' and there is no guarantee that funding will be available for future Learning for All events.*
3. *The Committee may wish to consider how we can minimise cost and what event/s (if any) would be best to achieve the most in terms of engaging stakeholders, developing policy and achieving outcomes. For example, since 2014, the SFC has held two events under the Learning for All banner – one for practitioners in spring, and a second strategic event for aimed at Principals and senior managers in the autumn. The executive would like to ask the Committee to consider if this approach is still considered appropriate and necessary or if they would like to propose another method of promoting and developing SFC access work with the wider sectors and access communities.'* (AIC/16/09)
4. Following discussion on the matter, the Committee advised that:
 - Smaller regional cluster events, combined with an annual national event with participation from the Commissioner for Wider Access would be the best use of resources and allow engagement with institutional and wider stakeholders.
 - A joined up approach, for schools, colleges and universities, to progress the Commission on Widening Access recommendations and the learner journey and make the best use of restricted resources was the way forward.
5. Following the September 2016 workshop, the Chair noted that a programme of engagement would be developed to support the forthcoming work from the workshop, revised remit and proposed forward agenda.

Shaping the access engagement and communication strategy

What we did and how it has changed

6. In 2003-04, the SFC conducted a 'root-and-branch' review of widening access and participation activity across Scotland. This resulted in the publication of the first Learning for All (LFA) report in 2005 entitled *Learning for All: the report of the SFEFC/SHEFC Widening Participation Review Group*.
7. From 2007, the SFC produced annual updates on the work of LFA entitled *Measures of Success*. These publications were accompanied by an annual event, which allowed practitioners, senior managers, local authorities and other interested parties to attend. The events usually followed a standard format of keynote speeches by the SFC Chair, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning and NUS Scotland in the morning, with workshops in the afternoon. The annual report and event were the main engagement platforms for SFC's access work in Scotland.
8. Over the years, the format and audience for LFA has changed, possibly reflecting the changes in the sectors as well as changes to government priorities and agendas. The most recent formation of the LFA engagement has been online-only publication of the annual update – with streamlined statistics relating to access measures from the original report as well as those in Outcome Agreements – and two separate events: one for practitioners and one for senior managers – in recognition of the different needs of those two groups.
9. In 2016, due to ongoing budgetary constraints and concerns, it was decided to revert to one event and to consider a refreshed strategy.

How else do we engage?

10. As reported at each meeting within the Chair's Business and Executive Update paper, the individual members of the Access team are responsible for maintaining a number of relationships to support ongoing work. A broad sample of the types of organisations engaged with is available at Annex A.
11. The present individual and collective engagement and communication strategy of the Access team is based on ongoing business need – support for funded programmes, or the support and development of new or ongoing policy. A smaller, more ad-hoc element is based in external organisations or individuals approaching SFC for advice, guidance, support and/or information. Both of these elements include seminars and/or conferences that are arranged as part of a funded programme or to meet a new need, such as care-experienced students or results from Impact for Access funded projects.
12. With the exception of Learning for All, the Access team does not hold any other

regular or annual events as a way to reach and engage with key stakeholders.

13. Not all engagement or communication is, or should be, face-to-face; a significant portion of all SFC business is conducted through email and the webpages, which includes links to outcome agreement guidance, reporting templates and statistical publications. The Access webpages have recently been updated, and will continue to be under internal scrutiny with regards to their relevance. In terms of accessibility and meeting the needs of key protected characteristic groups, our virtual presence is vital and will be considered as part of the wider engagement strategy.

What needs to change, what needs to stay and what needs to adapt?

14. Looking back at engagement and communication to date, the focus has been on large-scale, national events targeted at a wide range of stakeholders. Whilst previous evaluations showed them to be broadly effective and well-received, complaints were often around under-representation of students or other stakeholders such as teachers or careers advisors. Real efforts have been made by the SFC executive to improve this including more student presentations and direct targeting of stakeholders. However, it is recognised that despite this it has not been possible to significantly increase representation from schools and LAs.
15. Venue choice has, occasionally, been noted as well with some delegates preferring the use of an institution for an educational conference. Where ad-hoc events have taken place, these have been targeted at key issues and groups, which meant reception of them was largely positive.
16. An off-shoot of this is being able to identify who already engages with us – as a wider organisation and as the more discrete Access team – and who we still want to speak to. Clearly we wish to retain the majority of current stakeholders for our engagement and communication strategy. However as Access links across many threads there is always scope for more engagement – either in-house or externally - with DYW policy, other voluntary agencies, schools, employers, local authorities and local authority community links.
 - Change – develop a series of regional events to enable stakeholders to attend from a cluster of institutions and organisations.
 - Stay – retain a national event to enable a mass sharing of policy developments /workshops. Continue to provide key note speeches and support to stakeholder events.
 - Adapt – review mailing list for events to ensure as broad a range as possible of invited delegates. Promote our work to other stakeholders to secure relevant presentational opportunities to share our work and key messages.

- **Adapt** – consider what engagement is already in place across the SFC and how Access can utilise it.
17. The dedicated pages on the SFC website - <http://www.sfc.ac.uk/Priorities/Access/Access.aspx> - were moved to be listed under 'Priorities' on the front page. However more work still needs to be done for them to be fully reflective of the scope of programmes currently supported by SFC, and how they link to wider strategic aims of the SFC Board and Scottish Government.
- **Adapt** – Access web pages to be monitored and updated regularly.
18. **The Committee is invited to advise the Council executive as to what other elements need to change, stay and/or adapt and for suggestions of other organisations/ stakeholders that should be engaged with.**

How will we do it?

19. It should be noted that this strategy is intended to develop, disseminate and promote SFC Access and ensuring good stakeholder engagement. Whilst that will clearly be influenced by the Commissioner for Fair Access, it is not intended to be a promotional tool for that office.
20. Within the Scottish Government's Communications Strategy for 2016-17¹, *making our education system world class, with equal opportunities for all* is the first Communication priority. An action under this priority is: 'illustrate opportunities for all school leavers to pursue their ambitions, outlining our plans for widening access to university and maintaining college places in a reformed, modern further education sector.' Clearly, any engagement and communication strategy developed by the Access team must strongly reflect and support these ambitions. Equally, we may be able to link in with some of the Scottish Government's strategy; for example, a future development for 2016-17 is 'we will pilot a new strategy for communicating with parents'. This is a commonly recognised 'hard-to-reach' group, therefore it would be useful to find out what works.
21. A proposed approach for the SFC Stakeholder Engagement Strategy was put to the SFC Board in January 2016². The paper recognised that whilst SFC already engages with a wide range of stakeholders, there was scope to do more and this had also been identified by our auditors. Additionally, an evaluation on

¹ Scottish Government Communications strategy 2016-17: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0050/00508199.pdf>; issued 24 October 2016

² SFC Stakeholder Engagement: A Proposed Approach http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/CNP_Councilmeeting29January2016_29012016/SFC16_06_Stakeholder_Engagement_Approach.pdf; January 2016

Board Governance recommended that ‘The Board develops a stakeholder strategy which identifies the purpose of stakeholder engagement, who it wishes to engage with, how it will measure its success and what mechanisms it will use for doing so.’ The paper goes on to provide a proposed plan of action, linked to the 2015-18 SFC Strategic Plan. Again, it is important that the Access engagement and communication strategy dovetails with and complements this wider strategy.

Proposed approach

22. In order to take account of wider stakeholder and communication strategies, as well as meet the needs and priorities of the Committee and Access agenda, it is suggested the engagement and communication strategy for Access consider how best to utilise both face-to-face engagement and virtual engagement.
23. One approach to develop this is by drawing on the Committee’s forward agenda to identify priorities. This will then enable us to identify the key stakeholders; map out what format of engagement is required; how it links across with other work areas/priorities – internally and externally – and the SFC lead/s.
24. By looking at the Scottish Government’s and SFC’s engagement strategies there are elements that can clearly be utilised/replicated with an Access engagement and communication strategy, such as:
 - The use of ‘**Ambassadors**’ to help disseminate/promote SFC information and bring back views on widening access. This could be members of the Committee.
 - Establishing a **feedback loop** to ensure stakeholders are always given an opportunity to comment on policy, even outwith a formal consultation process. The *Learning for All* event table discussions provides this, but with the format changing, there may be option to include something on the evaluation forms for this purpose.
 - Using **social media** more smartly to discuss issues and promote events. The SFC has a Twitter and Facebook account, and there may be other opportunities to explore how we develop our use of social media in our communication and engagement strategy.
 - Analysis of **delegate lists** to determine where the regional events should take place. This may – or may not – point us to different geographical locations beyond the usual Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen routes.
25. An outline plan of this approach is explored in Annex B.

26. **The Committee is invited to discuss this approach and offer suggestions on other opportunities that should be utilised.**

How will we know it has worked?

27. An evaluation of the strategy will be necessary for two purposes:
- To determine if the EHRIA assumptions were accurate;
 - What has been successful, what needs to adapt and what needs to go.
28. An evaluation strategy will be developed as part of the engagement and communication strategy, in order to demonstrate its effectiveness. This will include consideration of how event evaluation forms are structured and acted on, as well as establishing a feedback loop (as noted above).
29. There are also online resources for evaluation frameworks that could be examined for guidance on valid evaluation measures, such as the Government Communication Service's (GCS) Evaluation Framework³. This document sets out different areas of communication – media, digital, stakeholder, etc. – and shows the measures - inputs, outputs, outtakes, outcomes and organisational impact - attached to each.
30. **The Committee is invited to consider if any other measures should/could be used to determine the effectiveness of our engagement and communication strategy.**

Next steps

31. The executive will take the advice from the Committee to further develop the EHRIA and the plan (annex B). Both of these will require wider consultation to ensure appropriate measures are considered.
32. On completion of that consultation, a finalised engagement and communication strategy with completed EHRIA and plan will be circulated for approval. This method will be used to enable planning for the regional workshops to go ahead immediately.
33. If the Committee wishes, the engagement and communication strategy can be a standing item on the agenda for regular reporting.
34. **The Committee is invited to consider if the Access engagement and communication strategy should be a standing item on the AIC agenda.**

³Government Communication Services (GCS) Evaluation Framework: <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/GCS-Evaluation-Framework.pdf> ; published January 2016

Risk assessment

35. The most immediate risk is the lack of capacity to reach and engage with all necessary and relevant stakeholders/ agencies/parties. Ideally through the development of a robust engagement and communication strategy and careful scheduling of events, this could be mitigated.
36. A secondary risk is the lack of financial capacity to travel to and/or host the number of meetings required to fulfil the strategy. Changes to the executive's physical space means that meeting rooms will be shared with Scottish Enterprise, and not for our exclusive use. This may result in increased costs for external meeting rooms.

Equality and diversity assessment

37. An Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment (EHRIA) for this strategy has begun and the Committee's discussion and advice will form part of the consultation. It is also suggested that an online survey be developed and hosted through the SFC website to gather more evidence about what stakeholders want in terms of communication and engagement on access.
38. Whilst the improvements being made are about wider policy development, and engagement and communication strategy, it is recognised there will be implications and impacts on protected characteristics that must be taken account of. One proposal of the improved strategy is to include equality and diversity monitoring in event evaluations.
39. Once the strategy is fully developed, it will be brought back to the Committee alongside the final EHRIA.

Financial implications

40. The current running costs budget for the regional engagement programme is £4,000 – this is the remaining Learning for All events budget for 2016-17.
41. Should there be agreement for two or three regional events before March 2017, the executive's intention would be to try and secure facilities within college and university partners to keep costs down.
42. Should the Committee propose an engagement strategy that exceeds the current or expected running costs budget for either 2016-17 or future years; a budgetary uplift will need to be applied for.

Recommendations

43. The Committee is invited to:

- Advise the Council executive as to what other elements need to change, stay and/or adapt and for suggestions of other organisations/stakeholders that should be engaged with.
- Discuss this approach and offer suggestions on other opportunities that should be utilised.
- Consider if any other measures should/could be used to determine the effectiveness of our engagement strategy.
- Consider if the Access engagement and communication strategy should be a standing item on the AIC agenda.

Publication

44. This paper will be published on the Council website.

Further information

45. Contact: Anna Thomson, Senior Policy/Analysis Officer, tel: 0131 313 313, email: athomson@sfc.ac.uk.

Example of Access team current external engagement

As noted in attached paper, the following list presents a sample of the organisations, agencies and institutions which the individual members of the SFC Access team currently engages with, either as a funded programme or as part of wider policy development. This list is not exhaustive and seeks to reflect ongoing sustained engagement. It does not reflect ad-hoc meetings.

- Access to High Demand Professions (AHDP) programme
- Association for Real Change (ARC) Scotland
- Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES)
- Carers Trust
- Carers Scotland
- Dyslexia Scotland
- CareerReady
- Centre of Excellence for Looked after Children in Scotland (CELCIS)
- Colleges
- College Development Network (CDN)
- Colleges Scotland
- Education Scotland
- Equate
- Equality Challenge Unit (ECU)
- Higher Education Academy (HEA)
- Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)
- National Union of Students (NUS) Scotland
- Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)
- Schools for Higher Education Programme (SHEP)
- Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)
- Scottish Government

- Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)
- Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum (STAF)
- Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP)
- Skills Development Scotland (SDS)
- Social Work Scotland
- Students Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS)
- The Robertson Trust
- Universities
- Universities Scotland
- Who Cares? Scotland
- Who Cares? Trust