Changes since the previous version issued on 20 March are highlighted in yellow. The main changes are:

- Updated to be consistent with the latest SFC decisions on outcome agreements and other reporting requirements.
- Updated to reflect recent work on financial sustainability of the sector.
- Updated to include latest advice on student travel and accommodation.
- New item on providing advice to international students on visa conditions.

COVID-19 general Q and A for colleges and universities

Contents

General ........................................................................................................................................ 3

What should institutions take into account when considering staff and student access to buildings and facilities? ....................................................................................... 3

When will it be appropriate to reconsider events? ................................................................. 3

When will it be appropriate to reconsider overseas travel? .................................................. 3

SFC funding, Outcome Agreement measures, student activity targets and conditions of grant ....................................................................................................................... 3

Will SFC expect the same level of reporting given the extreme pressure that institutions are under? .................................................................................................................. 3

How will SFC take COVID-19 impacts into account when assessing college and university performance against Outcome Agreement measures (including student activity targets)? ....................................................................................... 5

How will SFC take COVID-19 impacts into account in enforcing specific conditions of grant? ................................................................................................................ 5

How will SFC take COVID-19 impacts into account in relation to specific conditions of grant which have been set by partner organisations (e.g. UK-wide research funders)? ........................................................................................................ 6

College and university financial health ...................................................................................... 6

What support will SFC provide to institutions where COVID-19 has a material impact on financial health? ....................................................................................... 6

Will there be funding to support additional staffing costs that may arise if staff need to be available outwith the academic year? ......................................................... 7
How should institutions respond to requests for support from external contractors? .................................................................................................................................7

Student Accommodation .................................................................................................................................8

How should students in student accommodation self-isolate? .................................................................8

How can those sharing accommodation with students who are self-isolating protect themselves? .................................................................................................................................8

Providing advice to students .................................................................................................................................8

What advice should be given to students planning to travel home for Easter holidays? .................................................................................................................................8

What advice should we give to international students with concerns about breaching their visa conditions? .................................................................................................................................8
General

**What should institutions take into account when considering staff and student access to buildings and facilities?**

Colleges and universities should follow advice from Health Protection Scotland, and specifically the Information and Guidance for Non-Healthcare Settings and the advice in the Scottish Government document Social distancing in non-healthcare public services.

**When will it be appropriate to reconsider events?**

Colleges and universities should follow the most up-to-date advice from the Scottish Government.

**When will it be appropriate to reconsider overseas travel?**

Colleges and universities should take account of the advice from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Fit for Travel.

**SFC funding, Outcome Agreement measures, student activity targets and conditions of grant**

**Will SFC expect the same level of reporting given the extreme pressure that institutions are under?**

We are working through unprecedented times and recognise the pressures facing colleges and universities. We will therefore keep our returns and reporting requirements to an absolute minimum. We have undertaken some rapid work to identify what can be postponed until a later date. While this exercise is not complete, the following provides an update on our reduced requirements.

**Outcome Agreements**

We have received near final Outcome Agreements from colleges and universities and will work from the current versions for AY2020-21, including the important CoWA targets (except where we have engaged with individual institutions).

**Reporting requirements**

We have already:

- extended the deadline for submission of the Institutional Efficiency Return from 3 April 2020 until 30 September 2020; and
agreed with UKRI and other funding bodies the suspension of the REF to enable universities to focus on more pressing and immediate matters (university sector).

We have also decided institutions do not need to make these returns to the previously set deadlines:

- The submission of updated Institutional Gender Action Plans.
- The Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey, due to be returned at the end of April (college sector).
- The formal quarter three Further Education Statistics (FES) data return, which is due at the beginning of July. (However, we ask you to continue, where you can, to provide FES data through the Dataportal.) (College sector)
- The submission of the updated Access and Inclusion Strategies (college sector).
- In liaison with Education Scotland, some planned quality assurance activity, and we are in discussion with Education Scotland about quality arrangements for the sector in AY2020-21 and beyond (college sector).
- In liaison with QAA, some planned quality assurance activity and we have agreed an amended timeline for ELIRs (university sector).
- Reporting on the Upskilling Fund activity (university sector).

Universities are no longer required to submit the Final Statistics Return to SFC for AY 2019-20.

We are also pausing our work on the following:

- enhancing our in-year data collections and access threshold data (university sector); and
- our consultation on the University Innovation Fund.

We are keen to understand how colleges and universities are providing mental health and wellbeing support to students at this difficult time. We will work closely with your mental health leads and the Scottish Government to consider how best to recognise the pressures in your teams and be proportionate in the quarterly reporting requirements established by the Scottish Government for this counsellor programme.

We are working closely, and at pace, with other bodies in these areas:

- With the EHRC to streamline statutory equality reporting.
• With the Scottish Government to establish whether the deadline for the completion of colleges Flexible Workforce Development Fund activity for 2019-20 can be extended (college sector).

• Changes to the arrangements for: the Business and Community Interaction (HE-BCI) return; TRAC and TRAC(T); and the Student Return (university sector).

• We are considering with UK regulators and funding bodies the implications for the National Student Survey (university sector).

• We know that university research, technological, clinical and engineering expertise is critical to the national response. We are working closely with the other national funding bodies, and with UKRI, to decide how best to build our understanding of the immediate impacts on university research and researchers, and to consider the longer-term implications for Scottish and UK research excellence.

We will provide further updates when we have agreed requirements with our partners.

*How will SFC take COVID-19 impacts into account when assessing college and university performance against Outcome Agreement measures (including student activity targets)?*

At this stage it is not possible to know with certainty what the impact of COVID-19 will be on college and university performance against Outcome Agreement measures (including student activity targets). However, we fully expect that there will be a shortfall against the student number credit target (colleges) / student places (universities) and we will take account of these exceptional circumstances. And we’ll work with Scottish Government departments on controlled subjects in case there are moves to recover funds. We will not recover funds for shortfalls against outcome agreement targets where these are related to COVID 19 for AY 2019-20 and AY 2020-21. Any decisions will be taken in full consultation with the institution.

If a college or university has a specific question about its ability to meet an Outcome Agreement measure or student activity target, it should contact its Outcome Agreement Manager in the first instance (Regional Strategic Body for assigned colleges).

*How will SFC take COVID-19 impacts into account in enforcing specific conditions of grant?*

At this stage it is not possible to know with certainty what the impact of COVID-19 will be on the ability of colleges and universities to adhere to all conditions of grant (both general and specific). While colleges and universities should develop their own mitigating strategies to minimise the risk of not being able to adhere to grant
conditions, we recognise the particular challenges of this situation. As is already the case, SFC will take into account the specific circumstances of any instance where an institution believes it is no longer able to adhere to a specific condition of grant, before deciding on what action to take, and will do so in full consultation with the institution.

If a college or university has a specific question about its ability to meet a condition of grant, it should contact its Outcome Agreement Manager in the first instance (Regional Strategic Body for assigned colleges).

**How will SFC take COVID-19 impacts into account in relation to specific conditions of grant which have been set by partner organisations (e.g. UK-wide research funders)?**

At this stage it is not possible to know with certainty what the impact of COVID-19 will be on the ability of colleges and universities to adhere to all conditions of grant (both general and specific). While colleges and universities should develop their own mitigating strategies to minimise the risk of not being able to adhere to grant conditions, we recognise the particular challenges of this situation.

There are instances where grant conditions have been set by a funding partner of SFC. If adherence to those conditions might be impacted by COVID-19, we will work with that partner to seek agreement to an appropriate approach to enforcing the relevant grant conditions.

If a college or university has a specific question about its ability to meet a condition of grant, it should contact its Outcome Agreement Manager in the first instance (Regional Strategic Body for assigned colleges).

**College and university financial health**

**What support will SFC provide to institutions where COVID-19 has a material impact on financial health?**

While institutions themselves are responsible for securing their financial sustainability, SFC recognises the unprecedented nature of the current situation. Our priority is to ensure stability and continuity.

In the current academic year, we will continue to make payments to colleges and universities according to the agreed schedule and we will support them to keep paying staff and to do their best for students (particularly vulnerable people).

To help with financial planning, SFC is proceeding with publication of funding allocations for the academic year 2020-21. This is so we can provide institutions with as much clarity as possible to allow them to start their own financial planning for
2020-21. It is our current intention to publish the final allocations during week commencing 6 April.

SFC has been undertaking a detailed analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on the financial sustainability of the college and university sectors. SFC will shortly be issuing guidance to the college sector to provide colleges with updated planning assumptions to allow them to complete their Mid-Year Financial Forecasts, taking into account the impact of COVID-19. The outputs of this work will be shared, as appropriate, with the Scottish Government to help shape collective and collaborative responses to the challenges we face together.

Colleges and universities should continue to develop their own mitigating strategies to minimise negative impacts on their short, medium and long-term financial sustainability.

If an institution identifies that there is a short-term risk to its financial sustainability, it should contact its Outcome Agreement Manager in the first instance (Regional Strategic Body for assigned colleges).

**Will there be funding to support additional staffing costs that may arise if staff need to be available outwith the academic year?**

SFC does not currently have any funding set aside to support additional costs in the event that staff need to be available outwith the academic year. It is expected that any additional costs due to COVID-19 would, in the first instance, be met by individual colleges and universities. However, we recognise the unprecedented nature of this current situation. Therefore, where increased costs will have a material impact on an institution’s financial sustainability, the institution should contact its Outcome Agreement Manager in the first instance (Regional Strategic Body for assigned colleges).

**How should institutions respond to requests for support from external contractors?**

Institutions will be focussed on sustaining employment across the economy and supporting the fair work principles.

Institutions should take account of the Scottish Government guidance in relation to relief for suppliers due to COVID-19 (SPPN 5/20). Careful consideration should be given to what support may be appropriate for individual suppliers, taking into account the supplier’s financial position and any other support from the public purse (e.g. the UK Government’s Job Retention Scheme). Institutions should aim to minimise expenditure as far as possible. Institutions should liaise with Advanced Procurement for Universities and Colleges (APUC) for further guidance.
Student Accommodation

**How should students in student accommodation self-isolate?**

Colleges and universities should follow advice from Health Protection Scotland (specifically the Information and Guidance for Non-Healthcare Settings) and on the NHS Inform’s COVID-19 page. The UK Government has also published guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection and the Scottish Government has issued advice on social distancing in non-healthcare public services. On 27 March the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science sent a letter to college and university Principals with further advice from Scottish Government on supporting students who are remaining in term-time accommodation during the COVID-19 outbreak.

**How can those sharing accommodation with students who are self-isolating protect themselves?**

Colleges and universities should follow advice from Health Protection Scotland (specifically the Information and Guidance for Non-Healthcare Settings) and NHS Inform’s COVID-19 page. The UK Government has also published guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection. The Scottish Government has issued advice on social distancing in non-healthcare public services.

**Providing advice to students**

**What advice should be given to students planning to travel home for Easter holidays?**

Colleges and universities should take account of the advice from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and from the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science. The Minister highlights that the Chief Medical Officer and Scottish Government’s advice is that students remaining in their term-time accommodation should stay where they are and not attempt to travel home, even if that is to another part of Scotland.

**What advice should we give to international students with concerns about breaching their visa conditions?**

International students may have specific concerns that their visa is about to expire whilst they are unable to travel home or that they will be penalised for being taught via online learning whilst physically unable to attend classes. The UK Government is working to review existing immigration rules and regulations to ensure that they are suitably flexible to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak. Students with questions about their visa status are advised to contact the Home Office’s Coronavirus Immigration Helpline: 0800 678 1767 (open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm - calls are free of
charge if made from within the UK). Alternatively, they can email: CIH@homeoffice.gov.uk.

6 April 2020