Changes since the previous version issued on 15 May 2020 are highlighted in yellow. The main changes are:

- What we know about the phasing of restarting of activity on campuses
- Various links to supporting information have been updated.

COVID-19 general Q and A for colleges and universities: 22 May 2020

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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.

What is the current position on restarting on-campus activities as workplaces and as educational bodies?

Colleges and universities should refer to our letter of 21 May 2020, which summarised the relevant aspects of the Scottish Government’s route-map.

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:

• Extended the deadline for submission of the Institutional Efficiency Return from 3 April 2020 until 30 September 2020;

• agreed with the other UK funding bodies the suspension of the REF to enable universities to focus on more pressing and immediate matters. A survey on options has been undertaken and outcomes will be shared by the end of May. (university sector);

• cancelled this year’s Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey (SSES), due to be returned at the end of April (college sector). The SSES was running in colleges for a 6 week period from the beginning of March until the end of April. Given the current situation, the survey would have been severely compromised and any data received could not have been compared with previous years. We also expected the response rates to be low and not to be fit for publication. We have therefore cancelled this year’s SSES. Colleges may still want to use any results internally for course evaluation and review purpose, but they should not return

• the SSE Summary level; and

• in conjunction with the Office for Students (OfS), considered how we will interpret data from the National Student Survey (university sector). NSS fieldwork started on 6 January and is continuing, but we will keep it under review in conjunction with our UK partners. When received, the data will be examined to assess any impact the COVID-19 outbreak has had on the results. For example, responses before and after the COVID-19 outbreak will be reviewed to test whether that has had an effect. We will also consider as part of that process the validity of this year’s results for different purposes, including publication and dissemination to providers.

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 formal quarter three Further Education Statistics (FES) data return, which is due at the beginning of July (college sector). However, we ask you to continue, where you can, to provide FES data through the Dataportal. We are also exploring the feasibility of bringing forward the final quarter four return from early October to either the end of August or the beginning of September.

• The submission of the updated Access and Inclusion Strategies (college sector).
• Colleges should pause work on Evaluative Reports and Enhancement Plans (EREPs) until further notice. We are in discussion with Education Scotland about quality arrangements for the sector in AY2020-21 and beyond.

• 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).

• The normal deadlines for the TRAC and TRAC(T) returns will be delayed for the current cycle (2019-20).

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

We have also paused 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 with other bodies in these areas:

• With the EHRC to streamline statutory equality reporting.

• With the Scottish Government to provide guidance to the sector on the Flexible Workforce Development Fund for 2019-20 (college sector).

• Changes to the arrangements for: the Business and Community Interaction (HE-BCI) return; and the Student Return (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.
• Potentially postponing further work on the National Articulation Database (NAD) (university sector). We are working through refining the NAD for this second year and have been liaising with universities to address the issues they raised. We are at a somewhat crucial point in that the quality assurance of changes would have been happening around now and we would have required a fast turnaround from universities to meet the planned publication date. Postponing the NAD for a period allows us more time to complete the work and the quality assurance without adding unnecessary extra pressure on the universities.

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 has published funding allocations for the academic year 2020-21. This is to provide institutions with as much clarity as possible to allow them to start their own financial planning for 2020-21.

SFC is continually reviewing the impact of COVID-19 on the financial sustainability of the college and university sectors. The outputs of this work are being 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.

**What other financial support is currently available to colleges and universities?**


**Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS)**

**Why has SFC drawn the CJRS to the attention of colleges and universities?**

There was previously some uncertainty as to whether colleges and universities should apply to the CJRS. Following the Department for Education’s confirmation on 17 April 2020 (restated on 4 May 2020) that they could apply, SFC communicated that position to Scottish colleges and universities.
Does SFC require institutions to apply to the CJRS?

No. The CJRS is one of the schemes available to colleges and universities to help them mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on their operations and finances. Colleges and universities should give full consideration to making an application to the CJRS.

Do institutions have to apply to the CJRS to the maximum extent possible under the Scheme?

No. The purpose of SFC’s guidance is simply to ensure colleges and universities are aware of the CJRS as one potential strand of their mitigating strategies. It is for each college and university to determine whether to apply and the nature of its own application.

Can staff only be furloughed where there is a direct relationship between a funding source that has ceased and their work?

No. Although the Department for Education document states that institutions should not furlough staff whose salaries are paid from continuing public funds, it also recognises the reality of mixed public and private funding sources. It therefore states that where it is difficult to distinguish whether staff are funded through continuing public funding, then the total proportion of staff (based on gross payroll) that are retained (i.e. not furloughed) should, as a minimum, be equivalent to the continuing public income, as a proportion of all income that the institution usually receives.

How should institutions balance maintaining teaching and research delivery with making an appropriate application to the CJRS?

Institutions need to ensure that they doing all that they can to maintain delivery of teaching and research. SFC does not require institutions to make a particular level of application to the CJRS and therefore it is for each institution to determine the appropriate balance.

What if a particular source of public funds is no longer being received?

The Department for Education has stated that institutions should not furlough staff whose salaries are paid from continuing public funds. Therefore, if a particular source of public funds is not being paid, the institution has the option of taking that into account in its application to the CJRS.

Can an institution apply to the CJRS for staff who are paid a variable number of hours each pay period?

Reference should be made to the ‘Employees whose pay varies’ section of HMRC’s guidance on working out CJRS claims.
Until when is the current CJRS open?

The CJRS will continue in its current form until the end of July. Full details should be available by the end of May on changes impacting from July to October. The UK Government’s Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme webpages should be consulted with regard to any further changes to the CJRS.

If I am currently looking at furloughing staff, from what date can I claim?

In the Check if you’re eligible section of the UK Government’s ‘Check if your employer can use the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme’ webpage, it states: “the grant will start on the day you were placed on furlough and this can be backdated to 1 March 2020”.

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 provided to international students?

Reference should be made to the Scottish Government’s Coronavirus (COVID-19): advice for international students.
What advice should be given to students planning to travel home?

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 is the current position with regard to the UCAS applications process for academic year 2020-21?

On 14 April 2020 the Minister for Further Education and Higher Education wrote to students and institutions about the school exams and UCAS applications processes, which includes information about extension of the UCAS acceptance deadline for students.

Where else can students find advice and guidance?

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) - information and advice webpage of the new Student Information Scotland website site provides a wide range of information, including links to individual college and university webpages.