Changes since the previous version issued on 5 June 2020 are highlighted in yellow. The main changes are:

- Reference to the Healthy Working Lives (Public Health Scotland) service advice on planning a return to work and COVID-19 risk assessments
- A revised publication date for the National Student Survey 2020
- Reference to DBEIS’ supplementary guidance on the CJRS for research organisations

COVID-19 general Q and A for colleges and universities: 11 June 2020

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General

What should institutions take into account when considering current access to buildings and facilities for staff and students?

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. Specific guidance is now being developed for the college and university sector. In the meantime, colleges and universities may find the following useful:

- Universities UK has published a set of high-level principles and supporting information for universities to consider as they emerge from lockdown, which may be considered alongside Government and public health advice.

- The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) has published guidance to support higher education providers and their students in their plans for future academic years and has set out its plans for future guidance.

- Guidance on appropriate measures for construction sites, including on campus construction work, can be found here.

- The Healthy Working Lives (Public Health Scotland) service provides online advice on planning a return to work and on undertaking COVID-19 risk assessments.
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). We wrote to Principals on 29 May to provide guidance on steps towards completing the AY2020-21 OA cycle, including clarification that governing bodies would not be asked to sign off the current Outcome Agreements, nor would these be published.

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. An announcement on outcomes from the survey was published on 29 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). A revised date for the publication of the NSS 2020 results has been agreed. The data will be published on the OfS website at 0930 on Wednesday 15 July 2020. The additional time will allow completion of a full assessment of the possible impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on the data.

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 are working 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. Institutions must remain in a position to evidence consideration of equality impact in their decision-making.

- 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.

Colleges and universities should also refer to our letter of 29 May 2020, ‘Guidance on steps to complete the Outcome Agreement cycle for AY2020-21’.

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?

See SFC’s guidance on the UK Government Job Retention and Loan Schemes.

Skills Development Scotland has announced a Grant Scheme for Modern Apprenticeship and Employability Fund learning providers. Applications are open until 30 June 2020.

Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS)

Note that this scheme will close to new entrants from 30 June 2020 and employees within the scheme must have been furloughed for the first time on or before 10 June 2020.

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
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. The UK Government announced adjustments to the scheme on 29 May 2020. The 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”. As above, note that the scheme will close to new entrants from 30 June 2020 and employees must have been furloughed for the first time on or before 10 June 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.

Where can students get advice if they need to change their accommodation agreements?

The accommodation section of the Student Information Scotland website provides an overview of these issues.

The Coronavirus (Scotland) (No.2) Act 2020 which makes provisions in relation to tenancies for students in halls of residence and Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) has come into force. There is a 7 day notice period for those who have already entered into a student residential tenancy agreement and have occupied the property; and a 28 day notice period for those who have already entered into a student residential tenancy but have not yet occupied the property.
and agreements entered into while the Act is in force. Students can only use notice periods for Covid-19 specific reasons.

Students should contact their college, university or Purpose Built Student accommodation provider if they wish to give notice.

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 Student Information Scotland website site provides a wide range of information, including links to individual college and university webpages.

Specialist support services and materials for those experiencing gender based violence are available through this website. Any student or member of staff in need of support can find the contact at their institution or reach out for specialist services through this site.