COVID-19 Q&A for colleges and universities

Contents

COVID-19 Q&A for colleges and universities ................................................................. 1
Contents...................................................................................................................... 1
General ....................................................................................................................... 3
   Q: What should institutions take into account when considering any changes to access to buildings and facilities? ........................................................................... 3
   Q: When will it be appropriate to reconsider events? ........................................... 3
   Q: When will it be appropriate to reconsider overseas travel? ............................. 3
   Q: What advice should be given to students planning to travel home for Easter holidays?................................................................................................................. 3
SFC funding, Outcome Agreement measures, student activity targets and conditions of grant .................................................................................................................. 3
   Q: How will SFC take COVID-19 impacts into account when assessing college and university performance against Outcome Agreement measures (including student activity targets)? ........................................................ 3
   Q: How will SFC take COVID-19 impacts into account in enforcing specific conditions of grant? ................................................................................................... 4
   Q: 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)? .......................................................................................... 4
College and university financial health ..................................................................... 4
   Q: What support will SFC provide to institutions where COVID-19 has a material impact on financial health? ........................................................................... 4
   Q: Will there be funding to support additional staffing costs that may arise if staff need to be available outwith the academic year? ........................................ 5
Student Accommodation ......................................................................................... 5
   Q: How should students in student accommodation self-isolate? ........................ 5
   Q: How can those sharing accommodation with students who are self-isolating protect themselves? .......................................................................................... 5
FE Student Support in Colleges (college sector only) ............................................... 6
   Q: Who should students contact if they have COVID-19 related questions about their student support? .................................................................................... 6
Q: Has SFC put in place any contingencies regarding potential COVID-19-related student support funding implications for colleges? ..........................................................6
Q: Will colleges be allowed to fund students beyond 43 weeks if it is necessary to extend a course? ........................................................................................................6
Q: Will student support funding be available in the event we need to extend our courses into June and/or July to allow students to finish the course and achieve their qualification? ..................................................................................................................6
Q: Should colleges still be paying out student support funding if the student is not meeting the usual attendance criteria? .................................................................7
Q: Will students continue to be paid if they advise the college that they are self-isolating? If yes, how long can this continue for? .................................................................7
Q: Do colleges require evidence students have been advised to self-isolate because they are experiencing some symptoms? .................................................................7
Q: Do colleges require evidence of diagnosis if a student has COVID-19? .................7
Q: Do students still have to show engagement in their studies? ..................................7
Q: Should colleges continue to pay travel costs to students if they are off sick / self-isolating? ....................................................................................................................7
Q: In the event of the college having to change access to buildings and facilities due to COVID-19 would we still be able to pay our direct third-party providers such as Childcare providers and Transport companies? ..........................................................8
General

Q: What should institutions take into account when considering any changes to access to buildings and facilities?

Colleges and universities should follow advice from Health Protection Scotland, and specifically the guidance to educational settings.

Q: When will it be appropriate to reconsider events?

Colleges and universities should follow advice from the Scottish Government.

Q: When will it be appropriate to reconsider overseas travel?

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

Q: 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.

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

Q: 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). In the first instance, colleges and universities should develop their own mitigating strategies to minimise negative impacts on delivery of teaching and research. At this point in time, it is not appropriate to implement blanket changes to Outcome Agreement measures or student activity targets.

As is already the case, SFC will take into account the specific circumstances of any instance where performance falls short of a measure or target, before deciding on what action to take. This will be done 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).
Q: 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). In the first instance, colleges and universities should develop their own mitigating strategies to minimise the risk of not being able to adhere to grant conditions.

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. At this stage, it is not appropriate to implement blanket changes to conditions of grant.

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).

Q: 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). In the first instance, colleges and universities should develop their own mitigating strategies to minimise the risk of not being able to adhere to grant conditions.

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

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

It is institutions themselves which are responsible for securing their financial sustainability. Colleges and universities should therefore develop their own
mitigating strategies to minimise negative impacts on their short, medium and long-term financial sustainability. Similarly, SFC will be analysing the main risks to institutional financial sustainability and will engage with institutions as appropriate.

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).

**Q: 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. 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).

**Student Accommodation**

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

Colleges and universities should follow advice from Health Protection Scotland (specifically the Guidance to educational settings) and NHS Inform’s Self-isolation advice for people without symptoms (specifically the section ‘What about if I live in shared accommodation?’). The UK Government has also published stay at home guidance for people with confirmed or possible COVID-19 infection with a particular section on use of shared spaces if you live with others.

**Q: 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 Guidance to educational settings) and NHS Inform’s Self-isolation advice for people without symptoms (specifically the section ‘What about if I live in shared accommodation?’). The UK Government has also published stay at home guidance for people with confirmed or possible COVID-19 infection with a particular section on use of shared spaces if you live with others.
FE Student Support in Colleges (college sector only)

**Q: Who should students contact if they have COVID-19 related questions about their student support?**

In relation to any COVID-19 related health concerns, individuals must engage directly with the health authorities (see [NHS Inform](https://www.nhsinform.scot)).

If students have questions about their FE student support, they should contact the college’s own student advice service.

**Q: Has SFC put in place any contingencies regarding potential COVID-19-related student support funding implications for colleges?**

SFC does not currently have any additional funding set aside to respond to potential COVID-19-related student support funding implications for colleges. It is expected that any additional costs due to COVID-19 would, in the first instance, be met by individual colleges. If a college finds itself running out of student support funds for COVID-19 related reasons, the college should contact its Outcome Agreement Manager (Regional Strategic Body for assigned colleges) at the earliest opportunity to discuss financial options at that point. If such a situation looked like it may be affecting a substantial proportion of the sector, SFC would then conduct an overall assessment in coordination with the Scottish Government.

**Q: Will colleges be allowed to fund students beyond 43 weeks if it is necessary to extend a course?**

Yes, colleges will be allowed to fund students beyond 43 weeks if required for COVID-19 reasons, where that is necessary to allow students to complete their course and achieve their qualification, and if funding is available. But colleges must seek individual approval for any such extensions by contacting their Outcome Agreement Manager in the first instance (Regional Strategic Body for assigned colleges).

**Q: Will student support funding be available in the event we need to extend our courses into June and/or July to allow students to finish the course and achieve their qualification?**

There is currently no rule that prohibits student support being provided in any particular month. Colleges will be allowed to fund students beyond 43 weeks if that is required for COVID-19 reasons, where that is necessary to allow students to complete their course and achieve their qualification, and if funding is available. But colleges must seek individual approval for any such extensions, by contacting their Outcome Agreement Manager in the first instance (Regional Strategic Body for assigned colleges).
Q: Should colleges still be paying out student support funding if the student is not meeting the usual attendance criteria?

Yes, if the reason for non-attendance is reported to be due to self-isolation or diagnosis (in accordance with NHS Scotland COVID-19 guidance), colleges should continue to pay out all student support funding (except travel costs, see below). These absences should be considered as outwith the college’s usual student absence / sickness absence allowances. If the reason for non-attendance is not related to COVID-19, then this should be treated by the college in the usual way.

Q: Will students continue to be paid if they advise the college that they are self-isolating? If yes, how long can this continue for?

Yes, students should continue to receive all student support funding (except travel costs, see below), when they are self-isolating in accordance with NHS Scotland COVID-19 guidance. When the NHS Scotland COVID-19 self-isolation guidance ceases to apply to the student, the student should return to college (unless there is another reason for them to be absent, which should be handled under the college’s usual sickness absence policy).

Q: Do colleges require evidence students have been advised to self-isolate because they are experiencing some symptoms?

No.

Q: Do colleges require evidence of diagnosis if a student has COVID-19?

Given the nature of the measures required, it may not be possible for a student to provide evidence to their college at the time of a positive COVID-19 diagnosis. Colleges should therefore continue paying student support (except travel costs) but wait until the student is able to return to college before seeking evidence of the positive COVID-19 diagnosis.

Q: Do students still have to show engagement in their studies?

Yes, if they are self-isolating with no symptoms, and have the access to be able to engage remotely / digitally. If they have symptoms that make them too unwell to study, or indeed receive a positive diagnosis for COVID-19, then they would not be expected to show engagement throughout the duration of their illness.

Q: Should colleges continue to pay travel costs to students if they are off sick / self-isolating?

No, if the student is self-isolating either with or without symptoms, they should not be travelling anywhere outside of their home, and hence should not require any travel costs.
Q: In the event of the college having to change access to buildings and facilities due to COVID-19 would we still be able to pay our direct third-party providers such as Childcare providers and Transport companies?

Yes, as national guidance currently stands, no external providers should be left out of pocket. However, if the external companies are able to recoup this source of income through other means, such as insurance, then the college should not be required to pay for services not used. It will depend on the conditions in the contracts that colleges have with their external providers. It will also depend on advice or provisions announced by the Government relating to access to institutions’ buildings and facilities.

At present, there is no general requirement on colleges and universities to change access to their buildings and facilities.