

Changes since the previous version issued on 28 August 2020 are **highlighted in yellow**. The main changes are:

- Reference to the Scottish Government’s combined guidance to colleges, universities and accommodations providers to help reduce the spread of COVID-19.
- Reference to the Scottish Government’s additional guidance for those living in student households on seeing friends and family, travel, and visits home.

## COVID-19 general Q and A for colleges and universities: 6 October 2020

### Contents

General .....	3
What is the current position on restarting on-campus activities as workplaces and as educational bodies? .....	3
When will it be appropriate to reconsider overseas travel? .....	4
SFC funding, Outcome Agreement measures, student activity targets and conditions of grant .....	4
Will SFC expect the same level of reporting given the extreme pressure that institutions are under? .....	4
Outcome Agreements for academic year 2020-21 .....	4
Other reporting requirements.....	5
How will SFC take COVID-19 impacts into account when assessing college and university performance against Outcome Agreement measures (including student activity targets)?.....	7
How will SFC take COVID-19 impacts into account in enforcing specific conditions of grant?.....	7
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)?.....	8
College and university financial health .....	8
What support will SFC provide to institutions where COVID-19 has a material impact on financial health? .....	8
Will there be funding to support additional staffing costs that may arise if staff need to be available outwith the academic year? .....	9

How should institutions respond to requests for support from external contractors? .....	9
What other financial support is currently available to colleges and universities? 9	
What is the current position on the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS). 10	
Student Accommodation.....	10
What is the current guidance on student accommodation? .....	10
How should students in student accommodation self-isolate?.....	11
How can those sharing accommodation with students who are self-isolating protect themselves? .....	11
Where can students get advice if they need to change their accommodation agreements? .....	11
Providing advice to students .....	11
What advice should be provided to international students? .....	11
What advice should be given to students planning to travel home? .....	12
Where else can students find advice and guidance? .....	12

## General

Guidance for colleges and universities can be found on the Scottish Government's website as follows:

- Guidance for those living in student households on seeing friends and family, travel, and visits home: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-what-you-can-and-cannot-do/pages/students/>
- Combined guidance for higher and further education institutions and student accommodation providers to help reduce the spread of COVID-19: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-universities-colleges-and-student-accommodation-providers/>
- College sector: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-colleges/>
- University sector: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-universities/>
- Laboratories and research facilities (including those on university campuses): <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-laboratories-and-research-facilities/>
- Purpose-built student accommodation: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-college-university-and-purpose-built-student-accommodation/>

The Scottish Government's advice is being updated regularly as we move through the route-map, so colleges and universities should be aware of the need to check that they are always consulting the most up to date version.

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

See answer to previous question.

Institutions are reminded that if the guidance on re-starting campus activities results in any changes to planned term start dates this should be notified to the Student Awards Agency for Scotland as soon as possible.

Colleges and universities may also find the following useful:

- Universities UK 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) 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](#).

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

Students and staff who are travelling to and from Scotland should check the [Scottish Government website](#) for the latest advice. Colleges and universities also 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. The following provides an update on our reduced requirements.

#### ***Outcome Agreements for academic year 2020-21***

We wrote to Principals on [29 May](#) to provide guidance on steps towards completing the academic year (AY) 2020-21 Outcome Agreement cycle, including clarification that governing bodies would not be asked to sign off the Outcome Agreements submitted, nor would these be published. We agreed to revisit the outcomes which would be attached to funding allocations for the coming year and to provide additional information on accountability by end of July 2020.

In June Scottish Ministers commissioned SFC to undertake a [Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability](#). A key component of the phase one activity is to: 'Review SFC's approach to agreeing outcomes, measures, targets and impact assessment for fundable bodies to assess their effectiveness in terms of delivering national objectives . . . .and consider options for further development.'

SFC is therefore prioritising the revised arrangements for monitoring performance in AY 2020-21 as part of phase one of the overall Review. We have been working closely with both sectors to co-produce an interim Outcome and Impact Framework for AY 2020-21.

If a college or university has a specific question about these arrangements they should contact their Outcome Agreement Manager in the first instance (Regional Strategic Body for assigned colleges).

### ***Other reporting requirements***

We have:

- Extended the deadline for submission of the [Institutional Efficiency Return](#) from 3 April 2020 until 30 September 2020;
- Following consultation with UK HEIs, [announced](#) a revised timetable for the Research Excellence Framework (REF) of which full details are on the [REF website](#);
- Cancelled this year's [Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey \(SSES\)](#). 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.. 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 would interpret data from the [National Student Survey](#) (university sector). The data has now been published on the [OfS website](#). The additional time allowed 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 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 have been 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 have been working to understand how colleges and universities are providing mental health and wellbeing support to students at this difficult time. We have been working closely with your mental health leads and the Scottish Government to consider a proportionate approach to the 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)?***

The impact of COVID-19 on college and university performance against Outcome Agreement measures (including student activity targets) is not yet clear. 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](#)' and '[SFC's Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability: A Briefing Note](#)'.

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?***

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 the current situation. 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)?***

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 the current 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. 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).

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 5/2020 and supplementary guidance SPPN 8/2020). 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 Schemes](#).

Skills Development Scotland announced a [Grant Scheme](#) for Modern Apprenticeship and Employability Fund learning providers. Applications were open until 30 June 2020.

On 6 May 2020, the Scottish Government announced a ["£75 million boost for Scottish university research"](#) in order to contribute to the mitigation of effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Scottish university research base, recognising a wide range of impacts to both the income and activity of university research in the short, medium and longer term. The allocations, conditions of grant and reporting requirements for this support were [published](#) on 12 June 2020.

On 9 July 2020 the Scottish Government published its [COVID-19 Further and Higher Education Sustainability Plan](#). This plan provides a summary of the actions taken and those to be implemented, to help address the immediate issues that colleges and universities in Scotland are facing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It includes

further allocations of [£10 million for estates maintenance](#) and [£5 million for digital inclusion](#).

On 27 June 2020, the UK Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) announced a [package of support for UK universities](#). This will include a [fund to support costed extensions to UK Research & Innovation \(UKRI\) research projects](#) paused as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. The same announcement also describes the outline of a [stabilisation fund](#) to come into operation in Autumn 2020, designed to compensate for losses of research income arising mainly from the expected loss of international student fee income. This will contribute up to 80% of a university's losses from international student income, capped at the level of its non-public research income. The overall balance between loans and grants will be at least 75:25 in favour of loans.

SFC is working with BEIS to help shape the details of these arrangements and will provide further details as these are announced. With regards to the UKRI costed extensions, since that will be processed directly by UKRI, institutions are advised to engage their usual UKRI contact if they have any specific questions on that element.

On 17 August 2020, SFC published an [Invitation for expressions of interest in Financial Transactions](#) from universities. One of the two themes is the COVID-19 University Support Fund, to support sustainability in the transition to the post COVID-19 environment, particularly for those institutions which have exhausted all other avenues of borrowing and still require support (for example, to provide an injection of working capital).

### ***What is the current position on the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS)***

The [Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme webpages](#) should be consulted with regard to all aspects of the CJRS.

### **Student Accommodation**

#### ***What is the current guidance on student accommodation?***

The Scottish Government has published guidance on the [safe re-opening of college, university and purpose built student accommodation](#). This guidance came into effect from 22 July 2020. It was developed in partnership with student accommodation providers, trade unions and student associations and sets out expectations and practical advice on the safe, phased, full re-opening of accommodation.

The accommodation guidance is part of a set of Scottish Government sectoral guidance on Safer Workplaces, which institutions should be aware of as we progress through the phased lifting of lockdown restrictions. Also relevant to this accommodation guidance is that on student travel to and from accommodation.

Please note that all of the above guidance may be updated periodically and institutions should check regularly to ensure they are working with the most up to date version of the guidance.

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

Colleges and universities should follow advice from [Health Protection Scotland](#) 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](#).

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

Colleges and universities should follow advice from [Health Protection Scotland](#) 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](#).

The Home Office has published [guidance](#) setting out temporary policy concessions for Tier 4 Sponsors, Tier 4 students and short-term study students in response to the outbreak of Covid-19.

***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](#).

From 29 June 2020, all home moves are permitted, including moves from student accommodation, and the Scottish Government has issued [guidance](#) which sets out how to do this safely.

***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.