

## **Chief Executive's Report**

### **Purpose**

1. This paper provides Council with a report on matters of current interest and an overview of my key external engagements (at Annex 1).

### **Scottish Budget**

2. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Derek Mackay MSP, has announced that the Scottish budget will be published on Thursday 6 February 2020. This announcement follows on from the UK Government announcement that the UK budget will be published on Wednesday 11 March 2020, only three weeks before the start of the new financial year.
3. The Finance Secretary will also introduce the Budget Bill in Parliament on the same day that the budget is announced. It is envisaged that the timetable for consideration of the Bill will be compressed. In order to ensure a new Budget Act is in place by 1 April, the proposed timetable would see Stage 3 of the Bill concluded before 11 March. Any changes to the budget position arising from the UK budget will be applied through an in-year revision.

### **In-Year Budget Management**

4. In November 2018 a new process for in-year budget management was introduced which required Scottish Government approval for commitments for all discretionary spend over £1m. SFC has now been advised that there is no longer a requirement to seek Cabinet Secretary Finance approval for any new discretionary spend over £1m. It is proposed that any multi-year future commitment will be handled with the sponsor team on an individual basis.

### **Higher Education Statistics Agency Report**

5. The Higher Education Statistics Agency published its Higher Education Students Statistics report on 16 January. The report showed a rise in the number of both Scottish-domiciled and international entrants to full-time first degree courses at Scottish universities. The report also shows that the gap between the least deprived and most deprived areas of Scotland is closing, with an increase in the proportion of Scottish-domiciled full-time first degree entrants from the 20% most deprived areas.
6. Key highlights from the report include:

- An increase in Scottish-domiciled entrants to full-time first degree courses of 4% between 17/18 and 18/19; and of 8.5% over the full reporting period between 14/15 and 18/19.
- An increase in full-time first degree entrants from international students of 7.4% between 17/18 and 18/19; and of 21.4% over the full reporting period between 14/15 and 18/19.
- A very slight increase between 2017/18 and 2018/19 in the number of EU full-time first degree entrants of 0.9% but a drop of 4% over the full reporting period between 2014/15 and 2018/19
- An increase in the proportion of full-time first degree Scottish-domiciled entrants from the 20% most deprived areas, up to 15.9% in 2018/19, a rise from 15.6% in 2017/18 and from 13.9% in 2014/15.

### **Access to Postgraduate Study: Representation and Destinations**

7. The Commissioner on Widening Access published a report on access to postgraduate study on 21 January. Highlights from this report are as follows:
  - Representation of full-time entrants from deprived areas (SIMD20) is lower at postgraduate level than first degree level. This reflects the lower progression rates from first degrees to postgraduate degrees among leavers from these areas.
  - Differences in progression rates between students from the least and most deprived areas can be accounted for by differences in first degree outcomes, subject studied and institution attended between these groups.
  - Differences in leaver destinations between SIMD20 leavers and other leavers at postgraduate level are starker than those observed at first degree level and persist when subject studied, institution attended and qualification type are accounted for.

### **College Statistical Publications**

8. SFC will be publishing the College Statistics 2018-19 and the College Performance Indicators 2018-19 on Tuesday 28 January. As these are Official and National Statistics respectively, details cannot be shared in advance but a separate Board communication will be issued on the day of release and a verbal update will be provided at the meeting.

### **Student Debt**

9. A recent report from Audit Scotland has highlighted an increase in the value of student loans. The Auditor General for Scotland has reported that £533m of loans were authorised in 2018/19, up 185% on the £187m of debt created in

2008/09.

10. The average annual loan has grown from £2,420 per person in 2008/09 to £5,300 in 2018/19, with students from deprived areas borrowing more than those from the most affluent.

#### **Equality and diversity assessment**

11. There are no equality and diversity issues arising from this report.

#### **Recommendations**

12. The Council is invited to consider Strategic Framework Progress Report and the Risk Register.

#### **Financial implications**

13. There are no direct financial implications arising from this paper.

#### **Publication**

14. This paper will be published on the Council website.

#### **Further information**

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## **Chief Executive's key external engagements from 29 November 2019 to 23 January 2020**

### **Colleges, universities and specialist institutions**

University of Aberdeen  
Scotland's Rural College (SRUC)  
Glasgow Colleges Regional Board (GCRB)  
Robert Gordon University (RGU)  
Borders College  
Dumfries & Galloway College  
New College Lanarkshire

### **Enterprise and Skills Agencies**

SDS/SFC Chair and CEO meeting

### **Scottish Government**

SFC/SG senior teams meeting  
Colleges Strategic Futures Group meeting with the Minister Richard Lochhead

### **Scottish Parliament**

Quarterly Ministerial meeting with Richard Lochhead

### **Key partners**

CEOs of Perth & Kinross Council and Aberdeen City Council with CEOs of SFC and SDS to discuss skills and the future workforce  
SQA  
Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation, UK Statistics Authority  
Royal Society of Edinburgh  
International dinner hosted by Andrea Nolan Convener of Universities Scotland  
Universities Scotland/SFC roundtable meeting

### **Other**

Visit of Victorian Minister for Skills and Training and Higher Education, the Hon Gayle Tierney MP  
Sir Peter Scott, Commissioner for Fair Access  
Visit of Minister for Education in the Government of the State of South Australia, the Hon John Gardner MP