



SFC Operating Plan

Eight-month plan:
August 2020 - March 2021



1. Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability

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| 1.1 | Analyse evidence from stakeholders and continue with our iterative engagement strategy. |
| 1.2 | Provide advice to Ministers from Phase One of our review. |
| 1.3 | Identify further stabilisation measures that should be considered to protect the interests of learners and research capabilities, and the financial sustainability of institutions. |
| 1.4 | Introduce an interim accountability framework that sets out expectations of what institutions will deliver during Academic Year (AY) 2020-21. |
| 1.5 | Evaluate and develop our financial sustainability framework to ensure its continued fit for purpose. |
| 1.6 | Undertake Phase Two of our review, including the development of options for change, detailed proposals for funding and Outcome Agreement |

	reform, and options for SFC's support for research, innovation and knowledge exchange.
1.7	Take forward actions in the Scottish Government's responses to the reports from the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery and the sub-group of the Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board on addressing the labour market emergency.
1.8	Contribute to the implementation of the Scottish Government's COVID-19 Further and Higher Education Sustainability Plan.

2. Access, Learning and Outcomes

To invest in education that is accessible to learners from all backgrounds, gives them a high-quality learning experience, supports them to succeed in their studies, and equips them to flourish in employment, further study and fulfilling lives.

2.1	Monitor the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on students from disadvantaged backgrounds and work with colleges, universities and other partners to mitigate the risk of reduced educational attainment, particularly among disadvantaged groups.
2.2	Respond effectively to Scottish Government policy that affects learners, through the full range of SFC's funding, operational policy and accountability frameworks as appropriate (eg qualifications and admissions, EU funded-places).
2.3	Work with the EHRC to implement our MOU and monitor the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on equality and diversity in colleges and universities and take action to reduce inequality.
2.4	Work with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) to ensure colleges and universities are supplied with high quality labour market information so they can align provision to the needs of priority groups of individuals impacted by the significant challenges within the labour market.
2.5	Continue to support the implementation of the Scottish Government's strategy for Developing the Young Workforce.
2.6	Implement the agreed actions to support improved mental health strategies and Student Mental Health Agreements, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 crisis.

3. Research and Innovation

To invest in excellent research and innovation that adds to current knowledge, delivers economic and societal value, enhances Scotland's international reputation and attractiveness, and makes the world around us prosperous, healthier and more sustainable.

3.1	Work to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the research base, including by engaging with UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and other partners on research strategy and by advising the Scottish Government in interactions with the UK Research Sustainability Taskforce and the implementation of actions in the UK Research and Development Roadmap.
3.2	Contribute to the preparations by the UK funding bodies for the 2021 Research Excellence Framework and the revised submission date of 31 March 2021.
3.3	Monitor the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the training and development of postgraduate research students and take steps to help address the

	challenges faced by students in completing research.
3.4	Continue to invest in and promote initiatives aimed at transforming the innovation environment in Scotland, including Innovation Centres in key sectors of the economy.
3.5	In the context of our Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability, consider how we use our innovation funds to stimulate greater economic, social and cultural benefits from the work of colleges and universities, including their contributions to a just transition to a net-zero carbon economy and society.
3.6	In the context of our Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability, consider how we use our Research Excellence Grant investment to sustainably support: excellence in research; an effective partnership with UKRI funding; and the broad contribution of research to our future society and economy.
3.7	Contribute to the development and delivery of the National Manufacturing Institute Scotland (NMIS), ensuring it leverages Scotland's wider university and college capability to help make Scotland a global leader in advanced manufacturing.

4. A coherent and sustainable system of education

To ensure colleges, universities and specialist institutions form part of a successful, world-leading, coherent and sustainable system of education that responds effectively to the future needs of learners and the skills needs of the economy and society, enhances our rich cultural life, and strengthens Scotland's international connections.

4.1	Ensure that learning and skills provision supports economic recovery by providing colleges and universities with national-level direction, coupled with flexibility to respond to the needs of learners, business and local communities (e.g. through Credit Guidance in the college sector, Upskilling Fund in the university sector).
4.2	Seek to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on young people by working with colleges, universities and other partners to create improved learner journeys and more flexible opportunities for learning, including through new articulation routes.
4.3	Contribute to the development of the Flexible Workforce Development Fund (FWDF), ensuring it supports economic recovery and the need for upskilling and retraining.
4.4	Lead the work with SDS, colleges, and universities, to develop the apprenticeship family and other work-based learning pathways in support of economic recovery.
4.5	Consider how we enhance our role in regional economic partnerships to ensure that colleges and universities connect effectively with local employers, economic opportunities, estate strategies, planning for provision, and match funding.
4.6	Support colleges to enhance effective partnerships with employers and industry groups, building on the work already underway with Education Scotland and with the development of an Employer Engagement Framework.

4.7	Monitor the financial impact of COVID-19 and other factors affecting the financial sustainability of colleges and universities, engaging with them where there are significant challenges and contribute to the development of a COVID-19 University Support Fund.
4.8	Engage with institutions to ensure good governance, the delivery of outcomes for learners and programmes of research, and financial sustainability.
4.9	Use our expertise, knowledge and experience to help develop and implement transformational estate projects through a range of funding models, including Financial Transactions and the Mutual Investment Model (MIM).
4.10	Engage with the new National Investment Bank, particularly on opportunities for low carbon estate investments in colleges and universities and support for institutions' recovery.
4.11	Prioritise and implement carbon reduction capital investment programmes to meet the Climate Change Act targets and to respond to the Scottish Government's renewed focus in this area.

5. An outcome-focused public body

To be an excellent, outcome-focused public body that provides leadership, inspires confidence, models collaborative working, is committed to continuous improvement, and stewards public resources well.

5.1	Provide leadership and support for colleges and universities through the COVID-19 crisis and contribute to the economic and social recovery of Scotland.
5.2	Strengthen our relationships and collaborative working with key partner bodies, including the Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board, enterprise and skills agencies, UKRI, NHS Education for Scotland, to support Scotland's economic and health recovery.
5.3	Act as an authoritative source of guidance, data, analyses, and advice on issues affecting colleges and universities, including through our COVID-19 and Brexit hubs.
5.4	Develop effective funding strategies for Financial Year (FY) 2021-22 through a strong working relationship with colleges, universities, the Scottish Government, and other partners.
5.5	Develop and enhance our data, digital and analytical capabilities.
5.6	Communicate effectively with colleges, universities and partners through our website and other channels.
5.7	Support staff through the COVID-19 crisis and enable everyone to work safely and effectively from home.
5.8	Continually match resources and priorities.
5.9	Invest in learning and development and enable staff to fully contribute to the success of the organisation and outcomes for Scotland.
5.10	Continue to demonstrate high standards of corporate governance and public administration.

5.11 Contribute to a more equal society by embedding equality and diversity across our functions and by placing good relations at the heart of our organisation.