



COHERENCE AND SUSTAINABILITY: A REVIEW OF TERTIARY EDUCATION AND RESEARCH



Scottish Funding Council
Comhairle Maoinachaidh na h-Alba

Annex 1

29 JUNE 2021

Annex 1: Full set of recommendations

System Change

Develop a clear strategic, longer term vision and intent for the future of tertiary education and research undertaken by colleges and universities in Scotland, that incorporates multi-year funding assumptions and commitments, and a new National Impact Framework to enable the sector to better plan provision for students and employers, secure excellent research and international reputation, and adapt business models and drive collaborations to remain sustainable and achieve desired outcomes.

Protect excellent discovery research and develop mission-orientated research and knowledge exchange activities, in order to create knowledge of immense social, economic and cultural value; and to maintain Scotland's associated international reputation which acts as a magnet for talent and investment, and is fundamental to the resilience and sustainability of the sector.

Build capacity and a more systematic approach to the way we collectively plan coherent tertiary education and skills provision and investment, so that it responds better to current and future needs of pupils, students, employers and broader economic and social drivers, while holding in balance the policy imperatives of promoting fair access and equalities, and the journey to a net zero carbon future.

Find better ways to support learning throughout life, to enable people to reskill and upskill, as the labour market and the future world of work shifts, and to get credit for that learning, by reviewing existing targets, the assumptions that underpin existing funding models and student support, and qualification frameworks.

Ensure the interests of current and future students are protected and promoted in the development of standards, outcomes, blended and digital learning opportunities, equality and inclusion actions, participation frameworks, investment and approaches to accountability.

Recognise more fully the importance of international education connections and global research standing as an intrinsic part of Scotland's social and economic prosperity, the student and staff experience, and the success and sustainability of the higher education sector.

Galvanise current and future leaders across tertiary education, skills provision and research to work together to effect system change, building from our existing strengths, to tackle knotty long-term challenges and opportunities, and to develop the system for the future.

Emergency Years

We recommend the Government:

- Continues to fund additional places at university for Scottish domiciled students into AY 2022-23, recognises the impact of school assessments on grades and expectations, and enables young people to engage in productive learning, tailored for a challenging labour market. This commitment should recognise that these learner will be in the system for several years
- Recognises, in funding settlements into 2022-2023 and beyond, the role of colleges in school partnerships, for local school-leavers, and with local employers.
- Provides appropriate funding to support Foundation and Graduate Apprenticeships, to maximise places into 2022-23 (recognising the displacement that might otherwise occur in courses for young people in colleges and universities), while assessing how public funds should support the development of apprenticeships as a valued core part of provision..
- Introduces a new one-off scheme to provide learners completing their studies with the opportunity to gain an internship or short employment to moderate the impact of a difficult labour market and to build experience for the future.

Towards a more responsive, coherent education and skills system

SFC will develop and deepen strategic relationships with NES.

We recommend the development of a more strategic and comprehensive Economic Recovery and Employer Engagement Investment Programme for colleges and universities.

We recommend the establishment of an SFC Employer and Industry Advisory Group

We also recommend the Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board invites SFC representation at Board level and SFC's inclusion in its secretariat.

We recommend piloting a National Micro-credential framework and delivery plan working with the sectors to develop a comprehensive approach to upskilling and reskilling that spans sectors and works across the tertiary system.

We recommend the Scottish Government explores with SFC and stakeholders the consequences of the rising school leaver population and the need to provide greater

opportunities to deliver learning throughout life, by reviewing the current approach to existing targets and our underpinning policy assumptions.

We recommend that SFC undertakes work this year to ensure these expectations [re Fair Work] are clear for the bodies we fund or procure, and will assess the progress the sector is making towards Fair Work First criteria.

We recommend that there should be a national vision and strategy for the college and university estate that prioritises areas for collaboration (between institutions, and potentially with industry) and between regional partners.

We also recommend the Scottish Government:

- Reviews its current funding for low carbon estates projects to support colleges and universities (eg funding for low carbon district heating, implementing projects under the Non-Domestic Energy Efficiency Framework or Transport Scotland's EV funding) and considers multi-year funding.
- Works with SFC and the finance industry to investigate new funding vehicles for capital funding (eg through mutual investment models and the Scottish National Investment Bank).
- Supports incentives for collaboration activities between colleges and universities.

We will use our convening and strategic capability to drive change in the sector and work closely with our institutions to deliver their own ambitious strategies [on net zero]. We will embed climate action and the just transition to net-zero in our forward strategies, our accountability framework and our investments. We will seek to work with our wider stakeholders, Scottish Government and industry to accelerate climate action and bring the wide-ranging expertise of our universities and colleges to the table to deliver a prosperous, low-carbon future for Scotland and the world.

Protecting and promoting students' interests

We recommend working in partnership with students to further develop a National Impact Framework, alongside institutions and other partners, and to build on early work to define the outcomes we expect for students from colleges and universities and a more detailed set of expectations.

We recommend the SFC develops a National Schools Programme for Scotland to enhance access to the tertiary system for pupils in the Senior Phase of school working closely with experts across universities, colleges and schools, and taking account of recent reviews.

We recommend we work with the Scottish Government on how we can take our widening access work further, including the way we measure and invest funds, set targets and track widening access, and the role of a commissioner for the future.

We recommend that we work with students and institutions to develop a refreshed set of institutional expectations on fair access pathways.

We recommend that SFC develops a one year funded intervention to support graduating students into a productive bridging employment opportunity.

We will work with SQA and its successor qualifications body to advance work to further develop HNs.

We will work with CDN and Colleges Scotland to explore curriculum resource development in the first instance.

We recommend developing a single quality assurance and enhancement framework for tertiary education, to uphold academic standards, and enhance the learning experience of all students.

We recommend the Scottish Government explores further with all interested parties – SDS, SFC, SQA and colleges – how a relationship with World Skills UK aligns with Scottish ambition, standards and approaches.

We recommend that we work with sector partners to develop a Scottish level standard for online and blended learning to support institutions deliver an excellent experience for learners.

SFC will work with sector agencies to re-align its investments in educator development and digital to ensure they support the advancement of digital skills of educators.

We recommend the Scottish Government considers further how to improve the provision of equitable digital connectivity, on and off-campus, to enable learners in Scottish post-16 education to take up the technology-enhanced learning opportunities available.

We will work with JISC to explore the creation of a national digital consultancy service for senior leaders in tertiary education, reflecting institutions' own plans for development and SFC's investment, to inform future decisions and investment priorities.

Sustaining Research and Enhancing Knowledge Exchange

We recommend that the Scottish Government continues to protect and sustain the research and science base in Scotland through continued long-term investment; and

considers the potential to use additional capital resource for research when it becomes available.

We recommend that we introduce reporting on the impact of basic research investment and associated spillover benefits, and share good practice and case studies.

SFC will commission the sector to develop a blueprint for establishing a positive research culture in Scotland and instigate a broader debate that explores and defines good practice.

We recommend developing better ways to support the postgraduate research student experience.

We recommend the Scottish Government champions a 'missions-based approach, to harness the power of research, Knowledge Exchange and innovation in tackling big societal challenges.

We will recommission Research Pools, creating next-generation networks that build on our sustained investment in the Research Pooling Initiative with a focus on interdisciplinary challenge-oriented research collaboration, leveraging additional funding and fostering early career researcher communities and training.

As Scottish universities and colleges are such important actors in the green economic recovery, we will use our convening and connecting power to support their integration in the innovation and economic strategies of Scottish Government and UK Government agencies such as UKRI.

We also recommend:

- That Scottish Government continue to support SFC to provide an appropriate level of University Innovation Fund and support SFC to create a College Innovation Fund.
- That the university and college sectors join SFC in repositioning Innovation Centres and Interface as stable long term infrastructure investments, helping to maximise their contribution to the economy and the relationship between the sectors and society in these challenging but opportunity-rich times.

We recommend creating an SFC position to be based in Scotland House, London, to work closely with UKRI and other stakeholders relevant to Scottish interests.

We recommend that SFC rapidly develops a co-owned and co-designed Entrepreneurial Campus Strategy, building on existing successful activity in colleges and universities, and with an ambition to dramatically increase the flow of

entrepreneurs into technology and other ecosystems consistent with the STER report recommendations.

We recommend continuing to develop, in partnership with our academic consortium, the capacity for our Scottish academic community to train entrepreneurs and business leaders to themselves teach the entrepreneurs of the future how to scale up successful businesses.

International

We recommend the Scottish Government works with stakeholders and considers the issues we raise in the International chapter and more widely across this Review – in particular:

- International education as an intrinsic part of Scotland’s economic and social recovery strategies.
- The importance of positioning Scotland as a primary destination for international students and staff, maximising education and research as exports, promoting Scottish interests and enabling partnerships in particular countries and markets.
- The inclusion of colleges within all aspects of the international education strategy.
- The need to found the strategy in an analysis of trends in competing destination countries, major student exporting nations, transnational education, reliance on particular countries for international students and possible diversification strategies.
- Enhancing the international student experience.
- The development of a strong, competitive marketing strategy with urgency for the Scottish tertiary education and research brand, particularly across prime digital channels, that showcases our beacon research institutions, and emphasises Scotland as a safe, welcoming, supportive, socially progressive, environmentally aware destination.
- The development of a web presence that highlights virtual, blended and in-person international programs on offer across Scotland’s colleges and universities.
- Maximising connections with alumni to build and strengthen global connections and secure ambassadors for Scotland through mutually

beneficial activity. This should link to the work of the Scottish Government's external network of offices, SDI, trade envoys and Global Scots.

- The opportunity to tackle significant missions across the spectrum of science, global and industrial challenges and innovation through international partnerships and collaborations.
- An assessment of the outcome of the UK Turing scheme, the new Welsh international learning exchange programme, and how best to secure existing networks and enhance mobility from a Scottish perspective.
- The ability to boost European research and innovation ties through Saltire research exchange schemes and multi-disciplinary projects.
- Maximising the impact of Ministerial overseas visits for the further and higher education sectors, when those engagements resume post-pandemic.

Sustainability

We believe there is merit in SFC continuing to act as a national co-ordinator of learning, training and upskilling funded activity in universities and colleges and the Scottish Government makes the case for SFC's continued strategic oversight of replacement European funds from the UK Government that affect the delivery of programmes in colleges and universities.

We recommend greater flexibility is offered to colleges around the March financial year-end, to support re-profiling income and expenditure to end July.

We recommend Scottish Ministers consider whether they wish to explore the ONS classification of incorporated colleges, with a careful assessment of associated benefits and risks.

We recommend that the Scottish Government engages with us on our recommendations for multi-college regions, receives an update on progress since our Phase One Report, and works with us and key stakeholders on next steps.

Ambition and frameworks for the future

We recommend the Scottish Government sets out more clearly its overall strategic intent for tertiary education and research.

We recommend the development of a new National Impact Framework for colleges and universities, linked to Scotland's National Performance Framework.

We propose that SFC should operationalise the Scottish Government's strategic intent and the National Impact Framework through four interlinked and mutually

reinforcing activities: Investment, Quality Assurance, Impact and Accountability, and Analytics and Insight.

We recommend that the Scottish Government enables SFC to provide more certainty for our investments, beyond one year.

We recommend SFC convenes a working group, to include the Scottish Government and the college sector, to agree a plan to move towards a fairer distribution of investment across the sector.

We recommend exploring a greater realignment of our funding and targets for UHI and SRUC, to pilot a more integrated tertiary approach.

Our two proposed Tertiary Provision Pathfinders provide an opportunity to test and model how a more integrated tertiary model might work in practice. We recommend that the Tertiary Provision Pathfinders should explore the necessary conditions for a more integrated tertiary funding model in order to draw lessons for any wider policy development.

We will work with the sector to devise a fair and inclusive approach to WARF – taking account of related funding - to ensure this funding is leveraged to best support student outcomes.

We reviewed the purpose of access and inclusion fund and will revise the distribution of this funding based on less historic data.

Will review these expensive strategically important subjects premium to ensure its continued relevance and to consider our response to the recommendations of the Logan report on how we develop a world class technology sector in Scotland.

System Leadership

We will explore the establishment of a National Leadership Programme that would bring together colleges and universities to invest in current and future adaptive leaders, who will need resilience and support to become the innovators we need to develop our system for the future.

The Scottish Government and the sector, together, need to invest in SFC and its capacity to be an agent of change that can hold in tension the often delicate dynamics of public policy, institutional autonomy, and pressured funding rounds.