

Outcome Agreement Guidance 2021-22 FAQs

These questions and answers support colleges and universities in delivering their Outcome Agreements in AY 2021-22.

Q1. Is SFC expecting further Ministerial guidance to be issued in the autumn and are you aware of any new or emerging Scottish Government priorities?

SFC received an initial letter of Guidance from the new Minister Mr Hepburn on [30 August 2021](#). The letter sets out priority areas of work for the short and medium term in the year ahead and also takes account of the continued uncertainty, recognising the need for SFC to continue to be responsive in the face of changing circumstances. The letter advises that further guidance can be issued, if required, to reflect changing, emerging or new priorities. The Government has subsequently published the [Programme for Government 2021-22](#) and the 10 Year National Strategy for Economic Transformation is due to be published in late autumn.

Q2. In terms of self-evaluation, I appreciate it states in the guidance that there is flexibility on the format of that, but it would be useful to have an expected format of this? Previously we have focused on retention, attainment, satisfaction and destination, along with a summary of the impact of the pandemic on the past year and the current year. Are you looking for the same?

In order to reduce the reporting burden on institutions, and recognising that institutions are still operating under recovery conditions, we have decided to continue to allow institutions flexibility in terms of self-evaluation format. This means that we are willing to receive a report already prepared for internal processes, providing it includes the required information. The required content is set out in Annex A of the [Guidance for Outcome Agreements for Colleges and Universities AY 2021-22](#), and comprises of:

- A reflection on available statistical/performance data - including an institution's own data.
- Reporting on qualitative and quantitative progress, including specific reference to published milestones and commitments in the Interim Outcome Agreement for AY 2020-21, and the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing recovery has had on achievement of these milestones and commitments.
- Reporting on the cumulative impact of lockdown and the return to on-campus learning since March 2020, and emerging or existing key issues.
- Reporting on early mitigations in place to address challenges moving into AY 2021-22.

Q3. The guidance asks institutions for their projections against a more focused set of key measures, however the guidance also makes reference to other protected characteristics, and states that SFC will continue to monitor all performance measures. Should institutions not submit projections against all measures if this is the case?

We have provided templates for projections against the core measures continuing the approach introduced in AY 2020-21 of a more focused set of measures. We remain interested in performance in the broadest sense, however, particularly around protected characteristics and special interest groups, such as care leavers and will monitor this with SFC analyst colleagues. If regions or institutions have identified areas for improvement for subsets of the core measures or specific groups we would expect this to be reflected in self-evaluations and in engagement with SFC Outcomes Managers.

Q4. Within the priorities, there is mention of institutions being responsive to employer and industry needs. Will more funding be made available for flexible, part-time study options leading to the achievement of micro-credentials?

In our Review Report we recommended piloting a new national framework for how we fund and recognise micro-credentials, so learners get credit for shorter upskilling and reskilling modules to support lifelong learning. This would span sectors and work across the tertiary system. We are currently awaiting a response from the Government on our Review before we take the next steps.

Q5. The Guidance states that the Outcome Agreements seek to 'ensure colleges and universities outline their contributions to a more focused set of priority issues'. Are these priority issues as detailed in the table on page 12?

Yes, the SFC Outcome and Impact Framework (OIF) on page 12 outlines the priority outcomes and policy expectations which we expect OAs to cover. The Framework sets out policy priorities for AY 2021-22 with the associated indicators for success or national measures for each priority where appropriate.

Q6. Colleges increasingly face the challenge of greater competition for students with schools and universities. Are we sure that the guidance is aligned to other specific policies in terms of what is expected from schools? Colleges also continue to see demand from schools at lower level SCQF 4, and also below senior phase, but are asked to reduce this delivery and focus on S4-S6. The measure in the guidance relates to S4-S6 and SCQF Level 5 and above. However, the credit guidance refers to credits delivered to S3 and above. Are these policies aligned?

The OA Guidance and the Credit Guidance are aligned. The OA guidance has the following national measure "No. of senior phase age pupils on vocational qualifications delivered by colleges" and although the credit guidance is prioritising the Senior Phase it does say "SFC expects, therefore, that credits claimed for school college activity in AY 2021-22 will continue to be for senior phase (S4 to S6), including vocational courses and Highers/Advanced Highers. There may also be some additional activity for learners at S3 that relates to vocational pathways." At present we are only considering vocational pathways from SCQF level 5 and above in the OA Guidance measure (this is outlined in the technical guidance and relates to the wider Scottish Government DYW programme).

Q7. What will the engagement with QAA and Education Scotland be?

Institutions should continue to reference the outcomes of review work undertaken by QAA Scotland and Education Scotland in their Outcome Agreements for 2021-22 as evidence of their success with delivering high quality learning, teaching and support. SFC's review of coherence and sustainability has recommended the development of a single quality assurance and enhancement framework for tertiary education, and the development of a new National Impact Framework for colleges and universities. In taking forward these recommendations we will seek to ensure better integration and enhanced alignment of our outcomes and quality assurance arrangements from 2022-23.

Q8. The desire to reduce the burden is very much appreciated but we do see separate pots of funding with specific and separate reporting requirements outwith the OA framework. Can we give some thought to consolidating/simplifying?

SFC's review of coherence and sustainability reaffirms our commitment to keep returns and reporting requirements to a minimum and to provide institutions with the maximum flexibility in the use of funding to respond to the needs of learners. The Scottish Government may periodically make additional funding available to SFC for a particular purpose, or to deliver specific outcomes, and this may be accompanied by additional reporting requirements. In such instances our priority is to allocate this funding to institutions as fairly and efficiently as possible, consistent with ensuring value and impact.

Q9. We find the reports provided by SFC on performance across the sector for each measure (providing numbers and proportions) very useful. This report was not provided in 2020-21, please can it return for 2021-22?

Yes, here are the sector performance measures for 2021-22:

- [College sector level measurements.](#)
- [University sector level measurements.](#)

Q10. Can submission deadlines be extended or made more flexible to account for the fact that deadlines may not be in synch with Board or Court meetings?

Yes, we've said in the guidance that we're happy to be flexible around dates though we also need to ensure that submission and review timelines allow us to meet our accountability requirements. Any extension of submission dates should be discussed with your Outcome Agreement Manager in the first instance.

Q11. What do we expect the OA to look like going forward as we move beyond the emergency phase? The Phase 3 report of the SFC Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability outlines a series of expectations which don't seem all too different to what we are providing this year, so how do you expect it to evolve? And when do we expect these changes to take effect, or will it be a gradual process? It also talks about an OA Accountability and Assurance Report (taking this to be replacing the current Self Evaluation) and also Regional OAs. What would they involve?

The [SFC Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability](#) phase 3 report considered our approach to accountability and outcomes and made a recommendation for the development of a National Impact Framework. As with the other recommendations we are currently awaiting Ministerial response to the Review's recommendations. Any changes proposed within the review will require engagement and consultation with the sector and have to take effect in time for AY 2022-23.

Q12. Is there any further information on funding for Foundation and Graduate apprenticeship funding beyond AY 2021-22?

For 2021-22 we have, enabled by our discussions in the sector, secured additional investment to support GA and FA programmes through UK COVID consequential funding. This was a positive outcome that recognised the value we all place on GAs and FAs as a part of the education and skills system. We recognise that funding beyond 2021-22 – including for the cohort that starts in AY 2021-22 - is important. Our review recognises the commitment institutions have made to the GA and FA programmes and our recommendation asks that SG provides appropriate funding to support Foundation and Graduate Apprenticeships, to maximise places into 2022-23. Our review is with the Scottish Government and we expect a response from the Minister.

Q13. I think the issue of ensuring FA & GA reporting/evidence is significantly streamlined and fully embedded into SFC mainstream reporting (i.e. be no different to our other provision reporting requirements) is also of vital importance to ensure these programmes remain financially viable.

We have been working with our colleagues in Skills Development Scotland (SDS) to streamline the reporting requirements for 2021-22 and have reduced the reporting that was associated with ESF requirements. Our aim is to move to one system of reporting however that was not achievable for 2021-22. We are now looking to 2022-23 and it is our intention to set up an advisory group from the sector to assist us in creating the reporting and programme management systems for the future.

Further information

If there are further questions on the OA guidance 2021-22 please contact your [Outcome Agreement Manager](#).