

## **Skills, Enhancement, Access and Learning Committee: Securing external input and impact**

### **Purpose**

1. This paper provides a proposed updated remit for the Skills, Enhancement, Access and Learning (SEAL) Committee to take account of the publication of the SFC Review and feedback provided by committee members regarding future areas of focus and the development of the Committee's membership.

### **Context**

2. The SFC Review, published in June 2021, and specifically the Scottish Government's response to the Review, published in October 2021, provides important context for the work of the committee, particularly in relation to the role of SFC as the national, strategic body for further/higher education and research in Scotland.
3. In its early formation SEAL discussed it would be important to consider more fully its membership, to ensure SFC has access to a range of expertise and insight as it discharges its role as outlined above.
4. Given the above, it is important that we now consider how to future proof the committee to enable us to implement our mission and to deliver for students and the tertiary system.

### **Future Focus**

5. The SEAL Committee has a significant role to play to recommend and advise SFC in key elements of our mission.
6. Across many of the areas covered by the SFC Review – the protection of student interests, the role of employers in our system, the development of tertiary education – the Committee has a key role to play in providing advice and guidance.
7. One of the key contributions the Committee has made since its establishment has been to provide rich advice to SFC on longstanding but also emergent policy as it develops. In this regard, the Committee played a particularly valuable role in both the lead up to and in the period since the publication of the SFC Review.
8. As we look to the future, it is clear there is an opportunity to both update the remit of the Committee and also to implement expansion of membership, to

ensure the Committee has the necessary range of expertise it would wish, to provide advice to SFC.

9. The Committee has made it clear that it wishes, in addition to advising on near term policy development and implementation, to maintain a longer term, horizon, view. This is consistent with the ambition contained within the SFC Review, which highlighted the need to work in ambitious policy development over the longer term.
10. This may include being engaged in, advised or aware of:
  - **Changing student expectations** especially with the increasing expectations of digital solutions
  - **Future societal and economic issues** likely to impact on students' experiences and the tertiary systems ability to deliver for students
  - **Changing needs of employers** particularly as Scotland implements the recently published National Strategy for Economic Transformation
  - **Implications on advancing technology** for both learning and teaching but also in the ways this changes both patterns and types of work.
11. Accordingly, it is proposed that the high level purpose of the Committee is re-set as follows<sup>1</sup>:

The Committee has a role to respond to, recommend and advise SFC on the development and strengthening of the student and employer experience of the tertiary system, with broad areas of advice including but not limited to:

- The student lived experience including learning and teaching pedagogy and quality and how learners' access, complete and progress from tertiary education. This should include understanding of the range of learners – and how their experiences are being protected and enhanced - within our tertiary system.
  - The maximisation of the tertiary sector's impact on the economy, including the coherence of SFC funded provision, the development of strategic and impactful partnerships with employers across the system and work to address employers' needs.
  - Providing advice on the future development of the tertiary system by understanding and being alert to changing student expectations and needs and future societal and economic issues. This should include learning from policy and system development elsewhere in the UK and globally.
12. In providing this high level purpose we have sought to directly link the work of the Committee to the implementation of the SFC Review. We have also taken into account the statutory requirements of the existing Committee and its

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<sup>1</sup> The remit of the current Committee can be found [here](#)

context. Annex A provides an overview of statutory duties and a brief history of the Committee to date.

13. The Committee is asked to consider and agree the updated remit provided above. If members are supportive of this updated remit, the SFC executive will develop and update the forward annual plan for agreement at the next meeting.

#### **Who can help us deliver this future focus?**

14. At its last meeting, SEAL discussed its membership and members asked the SFC executive to explore options including discussion with the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKEC) colleagues. A summary of that discussion and the advice given to the SFC executive is provided in Annex B. The Chair has met with the Chair of that Committee, Professor Lesley Yellowlees and can give an update on that discussion at the meeting.
15. The SFC has also sought advice from colleagues on the management of the RKEC which is supported by staff within the Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate. RKEC, like SEAL, has a formal clerk to the Committee who works closely with the Chair. The clerk works with relevant colleagues to work up agenda and papers for each meeting. The Committee's secretary, although not officially named as such, is the Director who shapes and drives the work of the Committee in partnership with the Committee Chair, Professor Lesley Yellowlees. The Chair agrees all final agendas, in consultation with the Director. The recruitment and management of Committee membership is the responsibility of the Clerk, Chair and Director with the recruitment process and criteria agreed and managed by this team.

#### ***Seeking external members***

16. The SFC executive agrees with the Committee's request for externality but given the strategic importance of the updated remit for the Committee in relation to the oversight of key SFC recommendations, it is proposed that the SFC undertakes an external call for members to secure up to five members now with the aim to grow it further in the following year. This enables existing bodies such as Colleges Scotland and Universities Scotland to respond but also widens the scope to potential members from the rest of the UK or wider. It also enables us to directly target individuals and organisations such as sparqs, NUS Scotland, partner charity organisations and employer groups but still maintain an open and transparent approach. It is also enabling the Committee to choose candidates to grow the membership of the Committee now and potentially opt to further grow the membership in the next year.
17. Taking the advice of the Committee into account and the updated remit (subject to the Committee's approval), the SFC executive recommends that

such a call should encourage applications from individuals who possess expertise in:

- Education, including tertiary education and/or from outside the UK to potentially give us an international perspective
- Skills, particularly in the embedding of skills and capabilities within education, work-based learning and/or the development of new provision to meet changing need
- Employer-delivered education and training
- Developing and strengthening the student voice
- Quality enhancement, including aspects such as strategic management of student experience enhancement and/or online and blended learning
- Influential sector leaders from the tertiary system
- A strategic leader in the school system

18. The call for members would require a short overview of the skills and knowledge the individual has to offer and why they wish to serve on the Committee. Members will be offered two years on the Committee, with an opportunity for a further one year extension, and be expected to attend up to 5 meetings per year.
19. Subject to the Committee's approval we would also like to encourage applications from students and people who may not have served on a Committee before to enable us to provide development opportunities for individuals. These positions would be supported by the secretariat with pre and post meetings as required. These positions could also apply to students particularly those we would define as access students, enabling the SFC to provide opportunities to build up their social capital and competitive edge when seeking employment.
20. To widen the scope of people who could apply we propose offering the option of online attendance to all meetings. In sifting and finalising the applications, the SFC executive will also consider equality and diversity and will seek to achieve a balance of members to cover strategic leadership and specialist knowledge. We will also seek permission in the call to retain people's details and add them to a database of experts to inform the Committee should an application for full membership be unsuccessful.
21. Successful candidates for membership of the Committee will be provided with an induction programme which will include a meeting with the Chair of the Committee prior to their first meeting.
22. The Committee is asked to consider and agree the proposed approach for sourcing and supporting new members. If agreed the Committee is asked to delegate authority to the SFC executive to source external members for the September SEAL meeting.

## **Recommendations**

23. The SEAL Committee is asked to consider how to secure student and employer input into the work of the Committee and is invited to approve:
  - The updated high level remit provided in paragraph 11
  - The proposed approach to seeking new members
24. This paper will be published on the Council website following the meeting.

## **Further information**

25. Contact: Fiona Burns, Assistant Director, [fburns@sfc.ac.uk](mailto:fburns@sfc.ac.uk)

## **Annex A – Background to SEAL**

1. Legislation requires the SFC to have a Skills Committee (or equivalent) and that Committees should be chaired by an SFC Board member. The good governance code outlines that members are appointed in their personal capacity and expertise and are not represented of a particular business or organisation.
2. The SEAL Committee was formed out of the disbandment of the former SFC/SDS Joint Skills Committee, which was discontinued in the process of establishing the Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board. The SEAL Committee met for the first time in April 2019 and is chaired by Dr Paul Little in his capacity as SFC Board member.
3. Its current remit, membership and updated name (to reflect an access remit following the disbandment of the Access and Inclusion Committee) was developed and agreed at its second meeting in September 2019. Details can be found [here](#).
4. The next meeting of the Committee (in October 2020) should have seen the development of the membership but it coincided with a lockdown period during the pandemic and it was decided to keep the membership to Board members only and to review this by the end March 2022. At its next and last meeting on 17 March 2022, members requested that consideration be given to expanding the Committee to include external members. More details on the advice members provided on membership is provided in Annex B.

## **Annex B – Feedback from the existing Committee on membership**

### ***Feedback on membership from the last SEAL Committee***

During the discussion at the SEAL Committee on 17 March 2022 it was agreed membership should be broadened to include external members. It was suggested this could include:

- a member of the SDS Board to take account of the Audit Scotland report recommendations “Planning for Skills”.
- a SME employer representative voice for example Chambers of Commerce or Federation of Small Business.
- A range of academic experts in educational research, digital learning and pedagogy, quality assurance to support advice on the SFC Review implementation.
- A senior manager/expert within the sector with expertise in how the learning system contributes to the development of student’s employability (skills, knowledge and attributes), workforce development, entrepreneurship, and economic and social development.
- A senior manager/expert within the sector with expertise in widening access and participation.
- a nominee from the NUS Scotland to contribute an overview from learners’ perspectives of their needs, expectations and views on colleges’ and universities’ provision.