
A Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework for Scotland: Update on progress

This version of the papers is published in edited format as it includes information which – if disclosed – could prove prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs

Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide for SEAL an update on work to support development of SFC's Review recommendation for a single tertiary quality framework. It outlines:
 - A summary and the outcome of Phase 2 - Policy Review.
 - An overview of Phase 3 co-creation with the sectors and other key stakeholder engagement.

Summary

2. Between July and October 2022 SFC undertook a policy review of work to develop our Review recommendation for a single tertiary quality framework. This involved consolidation and review of the evidence and stakeholder input developed throughout Phase 1 with a view to supporting a decision point for SFC before progressing into the next phase.
3. Based on the work undertaken through this policy review, it is SFC's view that a single tertiary approach to supporting quality has benefits for learners, for coherence and for supporting meaningful collaboration across the system. SFC considers that it is possible to develop a tertiary approach to quality assurance and enhancement that would extend across both sectors and recognise the diversity of institutions and provision, which could be applied consistently but enable institutions to meet the requirements in different ways relevant to their own context. Therefore, **SFC has decided to proceed with the Review recommendation for a single tertiary quality framework.**
4. In addition, SFC has developed a plan for taking the next phase of work forward. Phase 3 includes a co-creation model with the sectors and key stakeholders, workshop plan and series of development projects.

Background

5. We have taken a phased approach to the development of a tertiary framework:
 - **Phase 1** (November 2021 to June 2022): scoping mapping, evidence gathering and sector engagement to identify what type of single framework is possible.

- **Phase 2** (July 2022 to October 2022): policy review and reflection on evidence and feedback to support co-creation with the sectors.
 - **Phase 3** (October 2022 to June 2023): co-creation – working with the sectors, students, and stakeholders.
 - **Phase 4** (July 2023 to June 2024 tbc): implementation and delivery.
6. At its meeting on 14 June 2022 SEAL received an update on Phase 1 of the project scoping and mapping the development of a single tertiary approach to quality assurance and enhancement (**SEAL/22/07**). In its discussion SEAL agreed with the partnership approach taken and the parameters for further development set out in the paper.

Phase 2: Policy review

7. The Phase 2 internal review and reflection was intended to support decision making and the development of next steps in the development of a tertiary framework. During this phase we:
- Consolidated of the views and inputs received from our extensive stakeholder engagement exercise during Phase 1.
 - Evaluated the evidence co-created with the sectors through mapping for how we might shape a single framework.
 - Reviewed concerns and risks and how these could be mitigated.
 - Engaged with SFC’s leadership team to identify alignment across SFC priorities and considerations across wider sector development, for example the Muir Review and SG Purpose and Principles.
 - Re-engaged with sector leadership to gauge buy-in at end of Phase 1 work.
8. This phase has included close engagement with SFC’s Senior Leadership Group , senior management team and other SFC policy team colleagues around key strategic issues, observations and questions arising from Phase 1 of the project. These are summarised below:

Why a tertiary framework?

9. The development of a new tertiary framework would provide greater clarity and visibility about expected outcomes for students and foster the development of shared learning community across both the college and university sectors.
10. Two separate and distinct quality frameworks for post-16 education in Scotland – with the quality of the 20% of higher education provision delivered by colleges assessed in different way from provision in the university sector – is inconsistent with our ambition for a more integrated tertiary system and more seamless pathways for learners.

11. A focus on quality and potential risks to the student experience become more acute in a financially constrained environment necessitating enhanced partnership and collaboration across the sectors – retaining the two frameworks in this context will appear disjointed and may hamper efforts to enhance collaboration between universities and colleges in response to the funding challenges ahead.
12. The development of a single approach to quality assurance and enhancement, and a shared language and culture around learning and teaching – the core business of all our institutions – can make any potential structural reforms and collaborations less challenging and problematic.
13. SFC’s direction of travel is towards the development of a tertiary approach in most areas of our activity and this work has touchpoints with several other strategic areas where a single tertiary framework could provide an enabling environment including Pathfinders, the developing Assurance Framework, funding reform, the more effective use of data, and our skills agenda.
14. Wider educational reforms, including the replacement of SQA and ES following the Muir review recommendations, mean that now is the optimal time to progress educational reform across the system to secure alignment and coherence.

Accountability

15. While current quality arrangement for colleges and universities are widely understood and held in high regard, to non-practitioners they can appear lacking in challenge with insufficient visibility of outputs that would give reassurance on quality and value. How our current quality frameworks align with and support the delivery of SFC and Scottish Government priorities is also not clear.

Benefits for SFC

16. The key benefits of a new tertiary framework for SFC were identified as:
 - More effective oversight and accountability of the key issues facing students, staff and institutions through more consistent methodologies, data and reporting.
 - Better value from our investment in delivery partners.
 - Enhanced collaboration to secure better effectiveness, value and impact for our investment in tertiary provision.

Benefits for the sectors

17. The key benefits of a new tertiary framework for the sectors were identified as:
 - Reduction in duplication and dovetailing of delivery of quality assurance and enhancement across the system (QAA, ES, CDN, SQA, SDS, SCQF, PSBR’s, etc.) to reduce the reporting and engagement burden on institutions.

- Maximising institutional resource by streamlining activity through closer cross-agency collaboration, for example SQA and GTCS could provide some of the assurance we need, and vice versa, that would allow institutions to focus on key areas of impact.
- More effective identification and sharing of good practice and challenges across and between colleges and universities, noting that significant higher education provision is delivered by Scotland's colleges and that the divide between colleges and universities is somewhat artificial.

Benefits for students

18. The key benefits of a new tertiary framework for students were identified as:

- Clearer links between our quality arrangements and successful outcomes for students.
- Better support for student transitions and more seamless pathways for learners from senior phase and between colleges and universities.
- Enhanced consistency of arrangements across different types of provision (e.g., work-based learning and micro-credentials). A significant proportion of higher education provision is delivered by Scotland's colleges, and with more joint provision between the sectors planned, the divide between college and university quality approaches is already artificial.
- Secure confidence in standards and quality of qualifications – the value of qualifications is crucial to students, employers as well as to the reputation of our system.

Managing key stakeholders

5 x [] paragraphs

Phase 3: Co-creation

19. Based on reflections during Phase 2 we have concluded that a single tertiary approach to supporting quality has benefits for learners, for coherence and for supporting meaningful collaboration across the system. In Phase 3 we will seek to facilitate the development of a shared understanding across both sectors around what we want from our quality arrangements, and the co-creation of a final framework.

3 x [] paragraphs

Conclusion and next steps

20. As a result of the evidence building, mapping and sector engagements the project team

undertook throughout Phase 1 of the project, we feel we now have good sector buy-in to the concept and rationale for developing a single approach. Feedback from key sector stakeholders through Phase 2 has shifted significantly from highlighting potential risks, to a keenness and urgency to start work on the co-creation of a new framework.

21. A co-creation phase is crucial to the success of the project and will help secure buy-in and ownership of the final Framework. We recognise the relationship and partnership within the current QEF as a strength. We will want to clearly shape SFC's role within the new approach as our view is that this needs to be more clearly defined.
22. We will update Scottish Government and sector colleagues on the outcome of Phase 2 of this work, and plans for engagement with our key stakeholders on Phase 3.
23. We have agreed with Colleges Scotland and Universities Scotland that the Chair of Colleges Scotland Principals Group, and the chairs of US Main Committee and Learning and Teaching Committee will be the conduits for ongoing communication with the leadership of the college and university sectors respectively on this work.

Recommendations

24. The SEAL Committee is asked to note the outcome of Phase 2 and plans for Phase 3 of this work.

Publication

25. This paper will be published on the SFC website in edited format as it includes information which – if disclosed – could prove prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.

Further information

26. Contact: Derek Horsburgh, Senior Policy Officer, Quality and Learning, email: dhorsburgh@sfc.ac.uk.