
Coherent Learning Provision

Purpose

1. The paper provides an overview of our work on Coherent Learning Provision, flowing out of the SFC Review on Coherent Provision and Sustainability. The focus being our work on the Tertiary Provision Pathfinders and our delivery approach to this programme.
2. The initial programme of work will complete by February/March 2023, with individual work packages meeting milestones and being reported to Scottish Government. To realise the Pathfinders' overarching vision, delivery is focused around four complementary areas of work, underpinned by our key themes of **evidence, analysis, and collaborative action**.
3. This paper will expand on detail provided to date emerging from the workstreams, to include the new approaches and an account of 'how' the partners are collaborating as well as 'what' is being delivered.
4. The paper will reflect on feedback and responses, including from Scottish Government on the progress of the Pathfinder.

Background

5. The Committee, as part of the Policy Update paper in June 2022, was given an update on the early progress of the Pathfinder programme. The Committee were keen to be kept updated on progress with the Pathfinder. At that stage we had secured internal resources to form a Pathfinder Team and had held one Regional Delivery Board meeting in the South. There has been significant progress since that point over the summer and into autumn and this paper will bring the Committee up to date with the work of the Pathfinder and seek feedback on work to date and welcome suggestions for further project opportunities.
6. It is worth noting that subsequent to the last update, the significance and inter-connected nature of the Pathfinder work has become increasingly more evident. Given that the Pathfinder is a key component of the National Strategy for Economic Transformation – Skilled Workforce Theme, features in Regional Economic Strategies, has been covered in Scottish Parliament Committee discussions (Public Audit and Education, Children and Young people) is germane to the Review of the Skills Landscape and links into funding initiatives around Just Transition and green skills – it will continue to attract significant attention.

Aims

7. This section will provide an overview of the key programme aims, outcomes and impacts of the Pathfinder project.

8. This pathfinder project aims to achieve the following within the pathfinder regions:
 - To assess how well and in what ways colleges and universities in two regional areas plan for coherent provision as individual institutions and in partnership with SFC, each other and with other key partners (for example, local authorities and schools, industry and employer interests); and the factors that currently drive provision planning at an individual and collaborative level. This project, therefore, aims to support partners to achieve collective leadership of skills and education planning and delivery across the region in order to realise their significant role in creating a strong, productive local economy while ensuring more people are able to benefit from inclusive growth, and to maximise the impact of their collective investment.
 - To analyse how the actual provision of skills training and tertiary education by colleges, universities and the independent training advisers commissioned by Skills Development Scotland has changed in recent years; and what may be required in future years to support economic and social wellbeing and to secure a pipeline of talent for the future.
 - To assess current and planned pathways for people furthest away from the labour market to access learning and training through college and university in ways that connect to regional needs; and to examine the links between the senior phase of school, and colleges and universities and what improvements might be beneficial to reduce duplication, provide efficient and effective routes to education and skills provision, enhance articulation to provision that meets learner, employer and system needs.
 - To support SFC in the production of good practice guidance for the sector on strategic provision planning that can be tested with a wider cohort of institutions and partner organisations; and in the development of SFC's assurance and evaluation processes.

Outcomes

9. For individual learners and employers:
 - Enhanced collaborative partnership working in regions resulting in tangible action to address specific skills issues improving outcomes for learners, and better meeting the needs of the economy.
10. For organisations:
 - Increased understanding across the sector of good practice and new thinking in skills analysis and alignment.
 - Consensus between the institutions and national agencies about the way aspects of future provision can best collectively address emerging needs.
 - Enhanced collaborative partnership working across the system

- Improved efficiency, enhanced data sharing and use of evidence
11. For the operating environment:
- An evidence-led, deeper understanding of provision planning within and between institutions informing regional and national policy and practice.
 - Improved efficiency, enhanced data sharing and use of evidence

Impacts

12. For individual learners and employers:
- Students are equipped to secure success in their career, meet employer needs and make a positive contribution to society and the economy.
 - Employers develop sustainable collaborative relationships with academic institutions that better meet industry needs and co-create solutions to challenges.
13. For organisations:
- Strengthened strategic planning at regional level where demand signals are picked up quickly by schools, careers services, colleges, universities and students and parents themselves
 - Development of long-term, strategic business/industry/academic relationships to foster improvements in knowledge, curriculum and course design and content, internships, employment, upskilling, research directions, intellectual property, and incubation spaces for businesses.
 - Institutions actively collaborate with other institutions and partners across and out with the sector to maximise resources, expertise and funding leverage in order to secure coherent provision and a sustainable future.
14. For the operating environment:
- Better guidance on strategic planning for coherent provision across the system, including the use of data sources, collaborative approaches to tertiary education planning, and how to track impacts over time.
 - Insight into potential future changes to approaches to funding and approaches to assurance.
 - A strengthened evidence base for national decision making.

FOUR COMPLEMENTARY WORK AREAS

Data and Analysis – October/November 2022

15. This strand of work will provide an **understanding of current skills provision, unmet demand, available data and other evidence in relation to both Pathfinder regions.**

16. This includes an analysis of education and skills provision and how this has changed over time, in response to the needs of learners and the economy. It will also explore how relevant data is made available to institutions to inform provision.
17. Its outputs will include a report on available data and evidence and any apparent gaps, and a report focused on the learner journey and regional pathways between school, colleges, universities and apprenticeships.
18. It has been shaped by close working and partner contributions from Skills Development Scotland on demand, and by qualitative and quantitative input from SFC's data analysts and Anderson Anderson & Brown Consulting.
19. This aspect is approaching the final stages of delivery, with a view to concluding next month following stakeholder validation of its findings.

Regional Priorities – December 2022

20. Working in the North-East of Scotland and the South of Scotland, this element of the programme is focused on developing approaches to provision planning at a regional level, identifying early areas for action, advancing collaboration, deepening strategic connectedness to employers, piloting new ways of working.
21. **The Pathfinder partners in each region** have come together to develop **collaborative pilot projects** which seek to address regional skills priorities in relation to key sectors and are based on their local and regional knowledge and expertise. Seven pilot projects identified are being further developed by the regional partners and overseen by the Regional Delivery Boards.
22. The Pathfinder Regional Delivery Boards (RDBs) are new, and bring together the institutions, key stakeholders and employer representatives in each region. One of the roles of the RDBs was to assess and agree the focus of the regional pilots and mechanisms for delivery- against partners' understanding of regional need and demand. A series of monthly meetings were established from May and the RDB for the South has now met on five occasions, and the North East RDB has met on four occasions.
23. Each regional pilot project has been requested to complete a project summary, to outline objectives, the difference their pilot will make, key deliverables and outcomes. The Pathfinder team are reviewing the summaries received to date which cover 6 of the pilots and await one further summary from the North-East. A monitoring and reporting template has been developed which the pilots will be required to submit in advance of RDB meetings. The regional pilots have also submitted requests for modest levels of financial support, largely for project and development capacity support as well as promotional activities. These requests are currently under consideration by the Pathfinder team.
24. Key milestones in the development phase of the projects will be completed, between now and March 2023 while the actual delivery phase may require a longer timescale for implementation in AY2023-24. The Pathfinders Team members are supporting delivery

through representation on the appropriate regional delivery working groups of the pilots. This allows SFC to contribute to the design, monitor and facilitate the evaluation (formative and summative) of the regional projects. We will want to consider both the “what” and the “how” this way of working is enhancing regional planning and provision; and ensure that the lessons learned from the Pathfinder projects can be shared more widely.

25. The Pathfinder team is mindful of the need to engage and capture the views of learners on pathways as key stakeholders and a Learner Forum is being established to this end.

Process Analysis (Understanding the Curriculum Review and Planning Process) – December 2022

26. As a result of this work we will gain an **understanding of provision planning and curriculum design within and across colleges and universities, how links with employers and other key partners influence provision planning**. In addition, we will begin to explore **the impact of provision planning on the learner journey**.
27. We are working collaboratively with two expert groups (College and University) across the sector to produce a range of materials, case studies and exemplars which together will clearly describe how provision planning decisions are made and implemented by institutions across Scotland, as well as an analysis of how SFC and other partners support and influence this process. These outputs will be focused and available to a wide group of stakeholders. We will also consider how the outputs from this work can be best used in the development of SFC’s assurance and evaluation processes.
28. College and University Working Groups have been convened to facilitate discussion and the approach to delivery of case studies reflecting current processes and good practice. Representation includes a cross-section of senior leaders working on curriculum design and strategic planning from across the tertiary education sector.

Reflections and Recommendations – March 2023

29. This dimension sits across our activity and aims to capture and share the outputs, recommendations and lessons learned from the Pathfinders programme, as well as communicating new and emerging policy thinking in skills planning and alignment.
30. It will use the insights of the broad range of academics, practitioners, thought and local leaders who have been involved in shaping and delivering the Pathfinders activity.
31. The first meeting of the National Advisory Board (NAB) took place on 4 October, with a broad representation from universities, colleges, SFC board members, academic experts and industry. The Board considered the approach of SFC with the pathfinders and broader principles of provision and skills planning as well as the challenges and opportunities therein. The next meeting is scheduled for December where there will be the opportunity for further reflection on Pathfinder progress.
32. It is envisioned that the perspectives and expertise of National Advisory Board members

will make a valuable contribution to this area of work as it reflects Board discussions, research expertise, and insights.

Coherent Learning and Provision

33. The committee is advised of the creation within the Access Learning and Outcomes directorate of the Coherent Learning Provision team, which will be led by the newly appointed Deputy Director, Elizabeth Shevlin. The team will have a primary focus on supporting the statutory duty of the SFC outlined in the Further and Higher Education Act Scotland 2005 'to exercise its functions for the purposes of securing the -
 - Coherent provision by the fundable bodies (as a whole) of a high quality of fundable further education and fundable higher education
34. The scope and work of the team will be covered at a future SEAL meeting and, following a transition period, the delivery of the Pathfinder and successor projects in collaboration and provision planning will be overseen by the team working across SFC directorates as appropriate.

Conclusion and next steps

35. The Pathfinder has made considerable progress since the last update to Committee in June. There is now an underpinning architecture and governance structure including the RDBs, NAB, Curriculum Expert Groups and key stakeholder groups the project is interacting with. A significant element of the reporting is to Scottish Government, through the Shared Outcomes Assurance Group (SOAG) alongside SDS. It is worth noting that the Pathfinder deep dive at the September SOAG was positively received by Scottish Government colleagues.
36. Importantly the regional pilots are now taking shape with associated steering groups driving forward on the delivery. That said we are attentive to the progress across the seven pilots as not all are at the same level of maturity and development – partly attributed to their respective focuses and new areas of work.
37. Over the coming period, the Pathfinder team will be working across the four work packages including:
 - With the consultants, AAB, to finalise their report output on the data work package to outline current regional demand and provision.
 - Work to finalise regional pilot project reporting, working group arrangements and potential funding support through the RDBs and pilot leads.
 - Convening the second meeting of the NAB in December to consider further progress of the Pathfinder alongside key system challenges and opportunities concerning provision planning.
38. The Pathfinder will also explore other tests of change and opportunities for deeper

collaboration which would fit within the new approach to provision planning.

39. The Team will connect the Pathfinder as appropriate into engagement with the Review of the Skills Landscape.

Recommendations

40. The SEAL Committee is invited to:
- Note the progress of the pathfinder and plans for the next period.
 - Advise the SFC executive on any opportunities or further insight which would benefit the work of the pathfinder.

Publication

41. 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

42. Contact: Seamus Spencer, Assistant Director, email: sspencer@sfc.ac.uk