

Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability

Frequently Asked Questions

Why has SFC been asked to review coherent provision and sustainability of teaching and research activities?

The Covid-19 emergency represents a significant external shock to learners, colleges and universities, researchers, business, funders and Government. It has brought into sharp focus challenges that were already facing the sectors – a tight public sector funding environment, increasing costs, a changing economy and changing skills needs to name a few. Against this backdrop the time is now right to review the coherent provision of post-16 education delivery and research to ensure that the system is delivering for learners, business, the economy and wider society in these challenging and changing times.

What will the review consider?

The review will look at the whole system of colleges and universities and will consider provision, delivery, outcomes and targets, and funding.

What are the objectives of the review?

We have set out four key objectives as follows:

- a) To consider how best to achieve coherence and sustainability in the delivery of further and higher education during the Covid-19 crisis, EU exit transition, and beyond, while maintaining and enhancing quality.
- b) To ensure the sectors can address the outcomes we need to achieve in Scotland.
- c) To propose changes needed to SFC's funding, operations, and accountability frameworks in order to respond effectively to new challenges and opportunities.
- d) To provide advice, where appropriate, to Scottish Ministers on relevant changes to policy, funding and accountability frameworks for tertiary education and research in Scotland.

How will the review process be governed?

The review will be overseen by a Programme Board that will be chaired by the Chief Executive of SFC. It will consist of the senior officials within SFC, the Director of Advanced Learning and Science at the Scottish Government, and a small number of expert advisers. The Programme Board will ensure that stakeholders are fully engaged in the review, and that recommendations and decisions are appropriately directed within SFC, to Scottish Ministers and to funded bodies.

Who are the expert advisors on the Programme Board?

External members of the Programme Board are as follows:

- Petra Wend
- Richard Armour
- Grant Ritchie
- Scott McLarty
- Sarah Davidson

Copies of their biographies will be made available on the SFC website.

Will colleges and universities have the opportunity to contribute to the review?

Yes, we want this to be an inclusive and collaborative process with opportunities for colleges, universities, learners, employers, industry and other stakeholders to shape the conversation, explore options and together bring forward recommendations. We will engage with colleges and universities through our regular channels but also through short-life groups which will be established in consultation with the sector. There will also be opportunities to respond to written calls for evidence.

Will students have the opportunity to contribute to the review?

Yes, we want this to be an inclusive and collaborative process and learners' interests will be at the heart of the process. We will work with NUS Scotland and sparqs to agree how best to engage the learner voice.

How will the interests of employers and the business community be taken into account?

We want this to be an inclusive and collaborative process and for the outcome of the review to be an education, skills and research system that provides the right skills to meet business demand but also the knowledge and innovation that will help Scotland address the challenges of a Covid-19 environment and beyond. We will engage with employers and the business community through a number of channels, including written consultations and roundtables. There will also be opportunities to respond to written calls for evidence.

How will the interests of college and university staff be taken into account?

We want this to be an inclusive and collaborative process and for the outcome of the review to be an education, skills and research system that provides the right skills to meet business demand but also the knowledge and innovation that will help Scotland address the challenges of a Covid-19 environment and beyond. To ensure the interests of staff are taken into account we will engage with trade unions through a number of channels, including written consultations and roundtables.

How will the review align to the other external reviews that are currently underway / or been completed?

We will draw on the findings from the report from the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery, the ESSB Sub-Group Report, the Anton Muscatelli Report, the Cumberford-Little Report, and other work currently underway and these findings will provide very useful input to our discussions.

What is the timescale for the review?

There will be three reporting phases (August 2020; December 2020; and May 2021) and two time horizons (AY 2020-21 and a four year change horizon).

Why are there three reporting phases?

We need to deal with the immediate crisis and support institutions to manage immediate challenges to avoid pre-emptive decisions that may damage Scotland's longer term capabilities and ambitions. But we also need sufficient time to consider complex issues properly so that we maintain key national assets and capabilities; and our education, skills

and research system emerges stronger than ever to meet the needs of Scotland's wellbeing, green economy, its research and innovation base, and wider society.

What will be delivered at each reporting phase?

Phase One will organise the general process around the review; address immediate stabilisation issues and accountability measures; and start the process of considering the shape of the college and university system and how changes might be implemented.

Phase Two will move towards more detailed development of options for change, focusing on sustainability assessments, quality of provision, funding and outcome agreement reform, evaluation and quality assurance systems, support for innovation and knowledge exchange, branding and promotion.

Phase Three will develop more detailed delivery and implementation plans which will be calibrated with the outcome of the Scottish Parliament elections.

When will colleges and universities be informed of the outcomes of the review?

At the end of each reporting period there will be a report to the SFC Board and Ministers. Colleges and universities will be briefed as part of the engagement process.

Given the financial challenges facing the sectors, is there a danger that the review will not be completed in time to avoid some institutions failing?

We have already made a commitment to provide stability and continuity of funding. We are working very closely with the sectors and individual institutions to assess their financial sustainability and we have asked institutions to advise us immediately in the event of particular cash flow problems. The UK Government support packages have provided some short term help to address immediate cash flow challenges and we will continue to work with institutions as the situation progresses.

Does the Scottish Funding Council have the capacity to undertake a review of this scale?

The scope and timescale of the review are challenging but we have established a programme management structure and internal processes which will support delivery of the task at hand. We will also engage support externally as appropriate. We will continue to keep the resources required under review to ensure that there is sufficient capacity to deliver.

What models of funding will you consider as part of the review?

We will review a range of existing research on funding models to learn lessons and consider options for further development. We will also challenge the sectors to provide suggestions and scenarios that would strengthen the funding regime.

Will charging students tuition fees be considered as an option for future funding?

No, the Scottish Government has maintained its commitment to providing full-time Scottish students with free tuition at SFC-funded colleges and universities.

Will Outcome Agreements continue following the review?

When we published our Strategic Framework in 2019 we indicated that we wanted to review the current framework for measuring outcomes. Outcome Agreements have been an important tool for setting targets and measuring progress and we will continue to require a framework that will measure outcomes. It is too early to say what that framework might look like but we will review other accountability frameworks from both within and outwith Scotland to learn lessons and consider options for the future.

Will colleges and universities be subject to Outcome Agreements for academic year 2020-21?

We have already confirmed with colleges and universities that we will not require governing bodies to sign Outcome Agreements that were drafted in a pre-Covid-19 environment. However, as part of phase 1 of the review process we will urgently negotiate an interim accountability framework that sets out expectations of what institutions will deliver during this emergency for Academic Year (AY) 2020-21 and how that will be evaluated.

When you say you are reviewing innovation do you also intend to review SFC's support for Scotland's world-class research base?

We are aware that Covid-19 has placed significant pressures on Scotland's research base. We also recognise that research must continue to flourish and to develop its contribution to our culture, society and economy. We will therefore be considering our support for research in the context of this review to ensure that, as REF2021 outcomes approach and the UK R&D strategy develops, we can use our support most effectively to enable the carrying out of excellent research in Scotland to be sustainable, impactful and internationally significant.

Will the principle of autonomy continue to be recognised?

We will continue to respect the autonomy of universities and the governance of colleges. However, we will balance that autonomy with accountability for public funding.

Will colleges and universities be subject to greater scrutiny / control following the review?

Colleges and universities are already subject to scrutiny through the Outcome Agreement process. The review will consider whether this process continues to meet the needs of a changing environment and we will consider a range of accountability frameworks.

Will the targets for colleges and universities be changed?

We cannot presuppose the outcome of the review. However, we are not committed to current arrangements and the review will consider whether the targets for colleges and universities continue to reflect the changing needs of Scotland's learners, the economy and wider society.

How can you ensure that the review will be conducted objectively?

The review will be evidence based. The Programme Board will include external advisors and we will seek input from a wide range of external partners, including commissioning research and analysis to support the decision making process.