

To whom it may concern,

We at Abertay Students Association believe that the following points should be taken into consideration when the discussion about the future sustainability of Scottish FE and HE takes place:

1. Students' Associations role and importance:

SAs and SUs are of great importance for all FE and HE students experience, support, and representation. We provide essential services that enhance student life in a variety of forms, such as events, societies and sports, representation, support, and advice. Moreover, we ensure the quality of standards at our institution and drive national policies.

With the current climate and annual funding cuts to our institution, we fear that the importance of the SAs will be overlooked and as such urge you to ensure no further cuts to the annual budget of SAs is in place by recognising and highlighting the vital role we play in Scottish FE and HE sector.

Moreover, we strongly believe that we should be included in all and every relevant discussion regarding the wellbeing of our students from the beginning of said discussions, and as such urge you to strongly advice all institutions to do so.

2. Student Wellbeing

We are all aware that the situation we find ourselves in: COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit and beyond, will have an impact on all of us, including our students. Which is why, we urge you to push for further investment in student wellbeing services and mental health provisions. We are certain that there is to be a decline in student mental health as a result of the pandemic and believe that those resources are vital to our students' health and safety.

Furthermore, we would like to urge you to consider the resources currently available for tackling Gender Based Violence and the support we currently offer to Survivors of sexual assault. We are aware that often survivors come to University already having experienced such trauma and feel Universities are not well equipped to provide the level of support needed by those students. Moreover, in the current climate, with the lockdown and pandemic, the cases of assault have increased, and seeing that is highly likely for another lockdown to be implemented, we feel that all FE and HE institutions should be properly equipped to offer further support as needed. Therefore, we, Abertay Students Association, urge you to look into making available funding to institutions to hire an ESHE (Equally Safe in Higher Education) coordinator, that would train staff and support student survivors of gender-based violence.

3. EU and International students' poverty

With the lockdown and pandemic and subsequent hit on the Scottish economy, a lot of people are likely to lose their jobs in the upcoming weeks and months. This is especially scary for EU and

International students, who are now asked to come back to Scotland for a blended learning approach. Many EU/International students rely on part time jobs, usually in hospitality, to be able to afford to live and study in Scotland. As such, as a Students' Association we worry that the FE and HE sector is not acting in the best interest of their students and is putting them in a precarious position and poverty. We urge you to continue to make emergency funds available for students in Scotland, no matter their background and origin country. We also urge you to have an in-depth conversation with all FE and HE institutions in regards to the levels of support they can provide for EU and International students, and what measures they have in place to ensure those students are not facing poverty.

4. Widening Access

Abertay University are excellent at widening access to students from SIMD20 postcodes in terms of recruitment, retention, and support. As such, we continue to support the work that they do, and hope that we are included in their continued exploration in how to enhance this provision. We urge you to tap into the knowledge and experience and use Abertay University as an example of an HEI that puts an extra effort to support the students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

5. What does not work well in FE and HE institutions.

As President, I would like to draw your attention to the bias elected sabbatical officers experience when talking to our institutions. Personally, when in meetings I often feel overlooked, ignored, and not listened to. It is especially difficult when I am the youngest person around the table, and my way of communicating is not as concise as the University's representatives'. I know, I am not the only sabbatical officer that feels this way, and some have it even worse. Often, institutions address us in a derogatory manner, albeit unintentionally. This behaviour, and the never-ending bureaucracy negatively impacts the drive for change in young sabbatical officers and could cause their mental health to decline. It is a pandemic of its own and should be addressed in order for us to best represent our students and provide the best support and experience.

We, Abertay Students Association, urge you to keep a closer eye on FE and HE institutions relationship with their SAs and SUs elected officers especially in the upcoming months when we are fighting the COVID-19 pandemic and are preparing for Brexit. We should all be working together in a respectful manner and inspire each other to do better for the sake of Scotland's students.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Daniela Bandeva

President of Abertay Students' Association

Abertay University

