

7<sup>th</sup> August 2020

Dear Sir/Madam,

At ENSA we welcome the priority that the SFC gives to students in the review by putting them first in the list of concerned stakeholders. Please find below our responses to your questions about achieving coherence and sustainability in the delivery of further and higher education during the Covid-19 crisis, EU exit transition, and beyond.

**a) What do you think works well in the current further and higher education arrangements that we should keep in order to secure Scotland's inclusive social and economic recovery from the current pandemic? How can we best preserve and strengthen those features of education, research and innovation in Scotland that we most prize, in a very challenging funding environment?**

1. Free education for Scottish and EU students is an extremely valuable feature for Scottish Universities and should remain in place for Scotland to continue being an inclusive and attractive place to study.
2. Widening access to Universities and supporting students from SIMD 20/40 areas has been well implemented and developing this going further will allow an increase for students to access Higher Education. Supporting students in their transition from college to university has also had a positive impact on widening access to HE – particularly the opportunity for students with an HND to enter university in the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year of a degree.

**b) What do you think colleges, universities and specialist institutions should stop doing, or do differently, in order to contribute effectively to an inclusive social and economic recovery? (You may wish to comment on teaching and skills development, sectoral and employer needs and employability, research, innovation and knowledge exchange, widening access and equalities issues.)**

1. The Scottish Government should ensure adequate public investment for FE/HE institutions in order to safeguard them from substantial financial losses due to Covid-19.
2. We welcome the Scottish Government ruling out the introduction of tuition fees for Scottish undergraduate students as a solution to the increasing reliance on marketised fee incomes and their commitment to find a more sustainable income source.
3. Integrating important topics into the curriculum is needed to provide up-to-date and relevant education to students. Topics such as climate change, decolonisation of the curriculum, equality and diversity should be holistically integrated into the teaching of all courses in HE.

**c) How can colleges, universities and specialist institutions best support Scotland's international connectedness and competitiveness in the postpandemic, post-EU membership environment?**

1. By developing and strengthening student exchange programmes between universities to replace ERASMUS+.
2. Lowering the fees imposed on international students, who pay these exorbitant tuition fees in addition to visa costs and living expenses, and ensuring low, or no, fees for EU students, as a sudden introduction of costly fees will deter new students from studying in Scotland. Currently, with the rise of unemployment due to Covid-19 and increased associated costs, such as the increased NHS surcharge coming into effect in October, it will be increasingly difficult for international students to support themselves financially when studying. Governments, institutions, and society must ensure that Scotland is a welcoming and inviting place to study and live and fight against the marketisation of the education system.

### 3. Promoting the Post Study Work VISA.

**d) What opportunities and threats does the post-pandemic environment hold for colleges, universities and specialist institutions? For institutional leaders, how are you planning to address these challenges and opportunities?**

1. A threat for HE at the moment is the planned staff redundancies associated with loss of income due to the pandemic. We believe that protections should be introduced to retain teaching and support staff in Universities. This will inevitably impact the students, as diminishing staff numbers will lead to a reduction in services for students.
2. The increasingly challenging job market for students with reduced opportunities. The Scottish Government should provide opportunities for leavers from schools, colleges and universities and those at every level seeking to re-skill, by providing grant-support allowing them to develop their competences.

**e) What forms of collaboration within the tertiary education eco-system would best enable a coherent and effective response to these challenges and opportunities?**

A stronger collaboration between Students' Associations and Universities is crucial to supporting students and responding to the negative impacts of COVID-19. Students' Associations are necessary for ensuring the adequate welfare and representation of students in Further and Higher Education. The Scottish Government, and our institutions, must continue to recognise the key role that Students' Associations play in ensuring quality standards, driving policies and delivering a strong student experience.

**f) How can SFC, alongside government and other enterprise, skills and education-focused agencies, best support colleges, universities and specialist institutions to make their full contribution to Scotland's inclusive, green and education-led recovery?**

**In particular, you may wish to draw out:**

- How scarce public resources should be prioritised to drive recovery**
- Particular areas of collaboration between agencies that would best support the sectors' contributions**
- Adaptations to SFC's funding and accountability frameworks to promote agile and collaborative action by the sectors to build Scotland's recovery**
- How SFC's funding and accountability frameworks should ensure that equality and wide access to educational opportunity are promoted as key elements of the recovery for younger people and adults**
- What support SFC and government could give institutions to adapt to a changed environment**

1. Help universities divest from fossil fuels
2. Public investment from the Scottish and UK governments for institutions facing financial hardship.
3. Support institutions to promote student wellbeing and stress management.
4. Support institutions to adopt new 'green' approaches and ensure sustainability is central to the curriculum, promoting direct student involvement in institution-wide sustainability initiatives and projects to develop an increase appreciation, and care, for our environment.

Yours faithfully,

Ankit Duggal (President), Nikhil Reddy (VP Sports & Societies), Heloisa Fyfe (VP Reps & Volunteers)

ENSA