



THE UNIVERSITY  
of EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Napier  
UNIVERSITY



HERIOT  
WATT  
UNIVERSITY

UK | DUBAI | MALAYSIA



Queen Margaret  
University  
EDINBURGH

## Scottish Funding Council call for evidence: A Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability in Further and Higher Education

### Brief report and statement of intent from Edinburgh's Universities

The Principals of Edinburgh's four universities have met regularly to discuss issues of shared interest, and new incumbents have continued this tradition. In recent times, the frequency of our meetings has increased (necessarily online because of Covid-19) and their strategic significance has become greater. This is partly because of Covid-19 itself but mostly because we share a desire to collaborate, seek economies of scale and the avoidance of unnecessary duplication, and we wish to identify complementarities which can make us collectively stronger.

Our people constitute about 20% of our city (80,000 students plus 20,000 staff). Our thoughts and intentions pre-date the recent announcement of the Scottish Funding Council (SFC)'s review of the "future provision and sustainability" of the sector <https://www.gov.scot/news/review-of-further-and-higher-education-support/> but we believe that our plans can inform that review, at least for the city of Edinburgh region.

Collaboration between our universities is not new. There have been joint submissions to the Research Assessment Exercise and the Research Excellence Framework; shared endeavour in the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal; joint working on film and screen to help build new sectors and jobs growth in our region, and partnership working on the Hub for SUCCESS – a collaborative programme of work supporting care experienced people into education. Covid-19 had led to the acceleration of many of these themes and we have recently initiated short-life working groups to explore collaborations in some additional areas: mental health and wellbeing support for staff and students; modern languages; a possible Foundation Programme for international students strengthening pathways into and through our universities for those from a diverse range of backgrounds; consideration of ways in which Heriot-Watt's campuses in Malaysia and Dubai could also be utilised by students destined for other universities, including for example those unable to travel because of Covid-19 related restrictions; and ways of responding to the likely need for reskilling and upskilling to support recovery in the city region. We are also considering options to streamline provision of British Sign Language (BSL) across Edinburgh, a feature of three universities. As well as health and wellbeing support, we will consider other aspects of student and staff welfare on which we can collaborate and possibly share services to support our city community in these unusual times.

We met last month with the leadership of Edinburgh International Airport and our Communications leads, and our colleagues are taking forward issues of common interest including health and safety for arriving and departing passengers, transport to and from the airport, quarantine plans, etc. We followed this up with a meeting with the leadership of Edinburgh City Council and with the Principal

of Edinburgh College, Audrey Cumberland, to discuss collaboration. An immediate action from that discussion was a joint exercise (held last week) with NHS Lothian Health Protection Team around students returning to campus for the Autumn Semester.

Looking ahead we will engage fully with the Scottish Funding Council review of further and higher education, while also rapidly pursuing collaborations which we identify with the workstreams outlined above because we believe they are in the best interests of our individual universities, of the tertiary education sector more widely in the Edinburgh region, and of the city region itself.

Sir Paul Grice, Principal, Queen Margaret University

Professor Peter Mathieson, Principal, the University of Edinburgh

Professor Andrea Nolan, Principal, Edinburgh Napier University

Professor Richard Williams, Principal & Vice Chancellor, Heriot-Watt University

10<sup>th</sup> August 2020