

A Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability in Further and Higher Education: Call for Evidence

A response from Education Scotland

Education Scotland welcomes the review of coherent provision and sustainability as an opportunity to improve and enhance the quality of provision and services across all sectors and institutions responsible for delivery of Post-16 education and training. The response from Education Scotland offers comment across the six key questions.

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?

- The emergence of regional approaches to collaboration and coherence is ensuring closer alignment between both the skills requirements and the needs of the economy at both local and national level.
- The development of the senior phase, providing bridges between secondary schools and college-based learning has worked well in many areas of Scotland. This has presented useful opportunities for learners in schools to embark on post-school learning leading towards FE and HE qualifications. There are many examples of young people pursuing this route to successfully attain degree level qualifications.
- Sustained promotion of skills and learner pathways will be key to Scotland's educational recovery. This is exemplified in the collaborative approach led by the College STEM Partnership groups. This approach could be used as a model across other key industry sectors to forge stronger collaboration across education providers (schools, Community Learning and Development (CLD), college, local authorities, industry, and third sector).
- A more holistic approach to delivering professional learning across practitioners working in different educational settings will help us continue to ensure we have highly effective interfaces and learning pathways.
- The continued expansion of wider access programmes in colleges and universities is supporting young adult learners who left school with insufficient academic qualifications, to progress to degree level study. These programmes offer valuable routes to higher education for school leavers who did not achieve the grades required for direct entry to university as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic.

- Over the duration of the DYW programme, good progress has been made to extend the range of learner pathways in the senior phase. This has included significant expansion of school-college partnerships in the delivery of work-related learning/courses and the introduction of Foundation Apprenticeships. Many school-college partnerships have initiated innovative arrangements to plan, coordinate and deliver work-related learning. This effective practice should be built on and widened, to increase pathways for learners to prepare for work during economic recovery. Colleges and universities have been central to this area of development in expanding young peoples' options for progression into sustained, positive destinations at a time of significant economic uncertainty.
- Colleges provide comprehensive support to learners who require additional support to access career pathways. This includes learners who have additional learning support needs; vulnerable young people and adults; learners whose first language is not English, carers, and care experienced young people. For those learners, the interfaces between educational sectors is highly important in ensuring that support is in place to accommodate transition, and should be expanded to support transition to meaningful employment.
- Increasingly, the knowledge of practitioners working in schools, colleges and other sectors of the range of learning opportunities available to young people and adults is improving. In addition, Skills Development Scotland plays a key role in communicating and promoting post-school opportunities to young people, parents and carers.
- There are examples of development of the physical estate to further consolidate and enhance school-college provision. This includes the establishment of shared school-college facilities to deliver industry-standard programmes on joint premises. This has been a significant development and should be extended further to reinforce the importance of joint development of the senior phase curriculum and to galvanise progression pathways from school to college and university.
- Regional approaches to future planning are ensuring closer collaboration amongst providers and institutions to ease and simplify the learner journey. In light of the negative impact on the economy of Covid-19 and Brexit, it is important that any system change reinforces the importance of cooperation and collaboration across all Post-16 providers, locally, regionally and nationally.
- Improving the communications about courses/learning and reciprocal expectations amongst lecturers, teachers, parents and young people is essential. SFC can play a key role in supporting and promoting opportunities for school learners and leavers across the sector.

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.)

- The current system can lead to competition to recruit learners amongst providers. There is scope to review differing contractual and funding arrangements and incentives that can lead to the development of provision that does not always meet the needs of individual learner groups, particularly on full-time programmes at SCQF levels 4-6.
- Over the last five years, there has been no significant improvement in the attainment of learners in colleges on full-time programmes at SCQF levels 4-6. Too many learners do not complete their programme. There is now a need to understand and address the withdrawal rates for these programmes
- Addressing the attainment gap within Post 16 provision should be a key priority moving forward. This requires comprehensive consideration of a range of issue. It will be important that any arrangements to improve learner outcomes must be wider than the work of an individual institution.
- Universities should continue with their efforts to attract suitable candidates to their initial teacher education programmes. This should ensure there is a range of flexible approaches for interested individuals to train to become teachers. It should involve careful monitoring and review of admissions processes to ensure suitably qualified candidates do not face unnecessary barriers in applying.
- In the face of the Covid-19 pandemic is it crucial that sustained and concerted action is taken to avoid losing talent. There may be potential for universities to provide undergraduates with further experience of industry practice and opportunities to explore career options. Graduate apprenticeships may provide a useful model in this regard.
- In order to ensure that provision of learning meets the needs of all, schools and colleges should align planning cycles and take greater account of the current and projected needs of industry and the economy.
- Many young people and adults participating in CLD settings aspire to progress their learning at college to improve their employment prospects. To support this closer attention could be placed on easing transition from CLD provision to college programmes. This could, for example, require a closer look at more systematic planning and funding of provision between CLD and colleges, which aims to meet local and regional economic need.

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

- It will be important to sustain and develop international links with learning and research bodies to ensure Scotland's voice is prominent and its understanding of itself is realistic. There will be a need to make sure that collaboration and joint working across and between all education and industry sectors is used effectively to forge innovation and continuous enhancement of services and provision.

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?

- The emergence and impact of the Covid-19 pandemic created an urgency for institutions to put in place arrangements for maintaining delivery of education and training, at pace. Although this experience created significant and often overwhelming challenges, it also surfaced important points that should be capitalised on as follows:
 - Accelerated development and application of online learning. The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted significantly on the ways in which education and training is planned, organised and accessed. The lockdown surfaced issues that stimulated fresh thinking about accepted norms and practices. In addition, it necessitated swift action by institutions to enable education and training to be accessed through digital resources. The pandemic has shown the potential of remote and online learning to make connections in new ways. This should be harnessed and developed to support, for example, learner transition, interagency working, and collaborative delivery across educational sectors to make best use of collective resources to the benefit for learners and the economy.
 - Shared experience has driven collaboration between sectors and institutions in finding local solutions to local challenges. The pandemic created a national crisis, which affected all education and training providers, regardless of sector, level, public or private. This is an important development, which has further enhanced or established and supported closer interagency working for the benefit of all, and should not be lost.
 - Collaboration that has transcended sectors. These have highlighted that practitioners working in different types of institutions, such as colleges, secondary schools, universities and private training organisations, are all facing the same challenges in adjusting to a new operating context. It will be important that arrangements for supporting and overseeing the

quality of provision and services across these Post-16 sectors supports consistent interagency collaboration and support for system-wide improvement.

- Negative impact on the economy and the projected rise in unemployment and poverty levels. This will necessitate the delivery of more with less, and the need to address services that are duplicated or not as effective as they could be. Again, this requires the education system to be reviewed as a whole, and not as a collection of individual component parts. This presents an important opportunity for looking at Post-16 provision differently.
- Leadership of professional learning both for self and in supporting the leadership development of colleagues, is central to planning, recovery, and collaboration across the whole education system. This provides an opportunity to consider the national model of professional learning at a whole education system level.
- The new approach to GTCS professional registration and professional updating for college lecturers presents an opportunity for cross-sectoral collaboration and increased focus on the enhancement of learning and teaching. This is a key aspect for improving quality for Post 16 provision, particularly in colleges.
- The 15-25 Learner Journey Review will need to be considered in light of Covid-19 to ensure that transition from school to colleges and universities is as seamless as possible. This support for transition is especially important given the disruption to learning that many may face due to Covid-19 in the year ahead.
- Identifying opportunities to increase provision to further drive employer engagement would realise multiple benefits such as: 'job ready' graduates; employers influencing learning with industry standards; and learners who are able to apply the degree level learning in their work context.
- A particular challenge during economic recovery will be the delivery of work-based learning elements of programmes, particularly in colleges. Going forward it is important to ensure that these are delivered meaningfully, in line with industry standards, pressures and practices, and accredited appropriately.
- Universities also need to look closely at the pastoral support they provide to learners in the first year of university to minimise students dropping out of courses due to a feeling of isolation and lack of confidence/support.

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

- Given the unprecedented challenges posed by the current pandemic, it is inevitable that individual institutions will respond with varying degrees of effectiveness and this will impact directly on the quality of the learner experience. In these circumstances, it is essential that quality arrangements are suitably flexible and responsive to meet sectoral and provider needs.
- Due to demands on delivery and the need for closer collaboration, there is a need for joint professional learning across sectors. Opportunities to share practice should be fully explored and developed. These would include, for example, the use of interdisciplinary learning to maximise potential benefits.

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**
- To ensure best value it is crucial that we are clear about what is working and making an impact. These approaches then need to be shared and extended, where relevant, to other institutions and contexts.
- It is important that SFC's funding and accountability frameworks are considered to ensure coherence across the learner journey and contain the right drivers, which will prioritise recovery. This may include an emphasis on, for example, effective transitions to positive and sustained destinations – this will be vital in supporting our economic recovery.

- There may be potential to look at funding for research and outreach programmes more strategically to have a greater impact and reach, based on priorities and the needs to drive economic recovery.
- There are opportunities to increase FE collaboration with Community Learning and Development partnerships (established to deliver on the CLD Regulations 2013) led in most cases by local authorities. Enhanced intelligence-sharing with partners would strengthen identification of need, and targeting of resources to support prospective learners most adversely affected by the impact of the pandemic.
- The 15-24 Learner Journey Review asks questions about the senior phase experience, and more specifically in S5/S6, regarding effective transition into colleges and universities. This requires ongoing and careful attention. To support economic recovery, collaborations across sectors, institutions and agencies must ensure that senior phase experiences provide the best blend of school, college, university and industry experience to help young people make appropriate choices.
- HM Inspectors carry out a range of scrutiny activities in colleges on behalf of the Scottish Funding Council under the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005. It will be important that this external and independent scrutiny of quality and improvement continues to provide external assurance and independent professional advice and promote improvement. Approaches to external scrutiny by HM Inspectors is one that has continually developed. Future arrangements will ensure our approaches continue to evolve to suit particular circumstances and contexts. This will enable HM Inspectors to respond with agility and flexibility as key priorities develop. This will ensure that the focus of scrutiny and reporting activities undertaken by HM Inspectors make a substantial contribution to accountability arrangements.
- Any changes in quality assurance arrangements should maintain a focus on promoting improvement. It should encourage providers to be proactive in adapting their provision to meet their local needs and take responsibility for driving their own self-evaluation for self-improvement. There should be a drive to reduce an unnecessary bureaucracy and duplication.
- Strong consideration should be given to more cohesive arrangements for quality and external evaluation. Arrangements for scrutiny of work-based learning and career information, advice and guidance services are undertaken by HM Inspectors separate to external review of colleges. There is scope to ensure that arrangements for ensuring the quality of Post 16 provision and services provide a more cohesive and coherent approach to supporting improvement across the full range of Post-16 provision.