

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

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<p>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 and innovation in Scotland that we most prize, in a very challenging funding environment?</p>	<p>Recognition that Colleges are sometimes part of an overarching sector but also are individual organisations which are best placed to respond proactively to the needs and direction of our local communities within an overarching framework for the sector is a valuable approach that should not be lost.</p> <p>It is recognised that the pandemic will have a significant impact on our communities, but this impact will vary by location with, for example, the challenges facing the central belt differing from more rural locations.</p> <p>Research already indicates that young people are being disproportionately effected by the pandemic and are most at risk of losing their employment. A flexible, responsive training environment will offer these young people valuable opportunities to develop their skills to re-enter employment as soon as possible.</p> <p>Colleges have consistently demonstrated the value and return on investment in their provision and we require the funding in place to be able to deliver the services and support that will be desperately needed. We do not underestimate the challenges on public sector budgets with a range of competing, and indeed compelling, demands upon the available funding but feel that imposing cuts on the sector is only a potential short term that would have real, long term negative impacts on the value of the investment. Further cuts would also come on the heels of consistent efficiencies that the sector has had to deliver for a number of years now, raising questions about the feasibility of maintaining the quality and level of service from the sector to learners.</p>
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	<p>Funding to private sector training organisations by bodies such as SDS should also be urgently reviewed in terms of value for money and focussed investment of public funds.</p>
<p>B). What do you think colleges should stop doing, or do differently, in order to contribute effectively to an inclusive social and economic recovery? (SFC suggest that 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.)</p>	<p>Colleges should examine more flexibility in terms of the delivery of their courses, moving away from the traditional on campus delivery model where this does not meet the needs of the learners or employers. Increased flexibility will support inclusiveness and ensure Colleges are ‘fleet of foot’ enough to offer value to our users. This will also support ongoing ambitions in terms of lifelong learning within Scotland with seamless entry and exit of education at stages that meet learner needs.</p> <p>To support this, there is a need to focus on the sectors digital capacity to not only continue to deliver teaching and skills development during the pandemic period but to introduce the flexibility of provision needed. This will require investment in College IT infrastructure as we move away from the traditional delivery pedagogies.</p>
<p>C). How can colleges best support Scotland’s international connectedness and competitiveness in the post-pandemic, post-EU membership environment?</p>	<p>The most effective manner for improving the connectedness of Colleges internationally would be a robust replacement for ERASMUS type activities. In terms of competitiveness, the quality of our learners as they enter international markets is the most significant demonstration of the quality of Scottish education.</p>
<p>D). What opportunities and threats does the post-pandemic environment hold for colleges? How are you planning to address these challenges and opportunities?</p>	<p>Opportunities include activity such as this consultation which will provide a comprehensive review of tertiary education in Scotland and allow a focus on emerging best practice and ensuring support is provided where it will do the most benefit for Scotland. Other opportunities include the possibility of reengagement with education for individuals who require retraining and upskilling to re-enter employment.</p> <p>The threats are primarily funding related to ensure that Colleges have the capacity to meet demand. Prior to the pandemic, Colleges were already facing fundamental questions regarding how to remain viable in a challenging funding environment and how to plan effectively for the future in a climate of annual funding allocations. The pandemic and its associated, unbudgeted costs have further</p>

exacerbated this challenge.
As senior management, we are already scenario planning on a range of possible budget positions however the uncertainty of future funding and demand levels makes this task more difficult.

<p>E). What forms of collaboration within the tertiary education eco-system would best enable a coherent and effective response to these challenges and opportunities?</p>	<p>The articulation agreements in place with universities we have had provided valuable opportunities to our learners and these could be developed further, delivering significant savings for the public purse as years 1 and 2 of degree courses are delivered at College. Going forward, there is a need for greater cohesion, reduction of duplication of offer between College's and the universities in their regional areas.</p> <p>Greater parity of esteem between colleges and universities is also required to promote entry into tertiary education at College level being a valid and valuable approach. We have been heartened by comments on the sector from Ministers in recent months and would welcome an expansion of this.</p>
<p>F). How can SFC, alongside government and other enterprise, skills and education-focused agencies, best support colleges to make their full contribution to Scotland's inclusive, green and education-led recovery? SFC suggest that in particular, you may wish to draw out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How scarce public resources should be prioritised to drive recovery <p>Public resources should be directed to public institutions and not toward private training organisations who factor profit margins into their activity. A review of all resources available to meet the needs of each region should be undertaken and allocated based on impact for individuals and the community rather than on established funding models.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Particular areas of collaboration between agencies that would best support the sectors' contributions <p>As mentioned above a review of funding within areas of Scotland, supported by a cohesive overarching strategy for funding allocation would be of significant benefit.</p> <p>Additionally, the range of external bodies places a significant administrative burden on colleges, diverting resource from front end delivery. A review of how this could be more cohesive, perhaps with the bodies sharing information more or requesting information in common formats, would reduce this burden slightly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adaptations to SFC's funding and

accountability frameworks to promote agile and collaborative action by the sectors to build Scotland's recovery

While appreciating the level of diligence required by SFC, any significant changes to the manner in which the sector is funded, for example the ongoing review of the funding model, takes a significant amount of time. For colleges to be able to respond agilely to developing challenges, there needs to be increased flexibility in the model within which we operate and more support for emerging best practice.

- **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**

We agree that equality and widening access should remain a key determinant of effective tertiary delivery. The outcome agreement model has enshrined targets for institutions and a similar model, perhaps more dynamic, moving forward to maintain an overview of progress in these areas would be valid

- **What support SFC and government could give institutions to adapt to a changed environment**

SFC and government should recognise the wealth of experience within the sector and allow the flexibility for individual institutions to respond or indeed be proactive in response to the particular needs of their local communities, employers and students. Again, funding for the College sector is crucial to allow the capacity to do this.