

Glasgow Caledonian University Submission to the SFC Review of HE and FE

- 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 Scottish higher education sector is recognised internationally for the quality of its education, scholarship and research. At its foundation, is a long tradition of institutional autonomy and a respect for the diversity of missions that exists across the universities and HEIs in Scotland.

- **Sustainable funding to preserve and strengthen the features we most prize**

Stability of funding is essential for the sustainability of the sector, and to enable Scotland's universities to continue to innovate and flourish. The higher education sector will play a pivotal role in Scotland's post-pandemic economic recovery through its teaching, professional training, research, knowledge exchange, innovation, and community engagement. We believe that the funding model should encourage and facilitate innovation in delivery, which supports agility and flexibility. We suggest a renewed consideration is given to core funding, and clarity and consistency in how this is allocated. Areas of Scottish Government priority, such as widening participation and knowledge exchange, should be funded to reflect their importance for the nation rather than seeking to spread modest funds thinly across the sector. There should be clarity on additional funding available year-on-year with an open and transparent bidding process for such funding. In addition, reviews of long-standing funding schemes should be undertaken regularly, engaging closely with the sector on the process and outcomes.

- **Contributing to the SDGs**

The Scottish university sector makes a major contribution to the global effort to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and consequently, to the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework (NPF) which localises the SDGs for Scotland. The strength of the sector is shown by the strong performance of a number of Scottish universities in the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings, which are the only global performance tables that assess universities against the SDGs. Demonstrating how we translate our Mission as the University for the Common Good into practice, Glasgow Caledonian University is one of three Scottish universities ranked in the Top 50 in the world for their contribution to the SDGs in the 2020 Rankings, together with the University of Edinburgh and the University of Dundee. The Rankings also highlight universities' strengths within the individual SDGs, for example GCU is ranked first in Scotland and joint 13th in the world for SDG 8 *Decent Work and Economic Growth*, and is also ranked first in Scotland and 12th in the world for SDG 5 *Gender Equality*, both areas of critical importance for the sector and for Scotland.

Our University is a PRME (Principles of Responsible Management Education) signatory since 2012 and one of 30 PRME Global Champions, and was the first Scottish university to join the United Nations Global Compact. All research projects at GCU must be aligned with at least one of the 17 SDGs before it can be approved and there is an institutional commitment to social innovation which drives the way we engage with our communities. As an accredited AshokaU Changemaker Campus, GCU goes beyond the curriculum to support its students as 'changemakers' and social entrepreneurs, attributes which will be critical for the graduates of the future.

This focus on delivering to the SDGs and the NPF through research, teaching and community engagement not only demonstrates our whole-institution approach to the Common Good, but also provides a strong foundation for the sector in leading a sustainable economic and societal recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

- **Quality teaching and transformative education**

The esteem of academic staff and quality of higher education in Scotland is demonstrated through the sector's strong performance in both UK and global contexts in relation to learning and teaching metrics, student satisfaction, and graduate outcomes. Scotland's approach to quality enhancement, which supports universities to meet high academic standards and continuously improve the student experience, should be retained. Degree awarding powers are not, and should not be, easily obtained, preserving the quality, reputation and esteem of the Scottish system.

Widening participation into university study is one element of a broader agenda required to achieve equality of opportunity and outcomes, alongside educational attainment at school and access to FE and HE in colleges. There is a strong commitment by the HE sector to the Commission on Widening Access (CoWA) goals. Delivering on this commitment will be ever more critical as we assess the great strides made in online and blended learning against the impact of the pandemic on the opportunities available to the most disadvantaged in our society as well as those seeking to improve employment prospects through up-skilling and re-skilling.

The position differs between institutions and there is further distance to travel for the sector, but there are many examples of the transformative power of university experience for individuals, regardless of their backgrounds. GCU consistently delivers widening participation at scale, whilst achieving excellent outcomes in key learning and teaching metrics such as degree completion (HESA, 2020).

In recent years some universities have expanded their view of widening participation beyond the traditional focus on young people from SIMD20 zones, to seek to achieve equality of participation and attainment for all learners. Working in partnership with representative groups, universities have intensified efforts to engage learners from care-experienced backgrounds, learners who are carers, disabled students, BAME students and military veterans. GCU has been honoured with a prestigious Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award by the Ministry of Defence in recognition of our outstanding support of the Armed Forces community.

Ease of articulation from college to university with advanced standing is a feature of the Scottish system. Some universities, like GCU, have experience of articulation at scale and collaboratively working with college partners on curriculum alignment and transition support. Any extension of articulation routes, especially beyond HNC/D, should take account of the expertise that exists in the sector. In addition, it is important that all students gaining a University degree have parity of experience, including access to placements and international opportunities, regardless of the route taken. An increased focus on 1+3 articulation models would help achieve this.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), a well-established mechanism developed and implemented at GCU for supporting the learner journey, is an area in which Scotland has been an international leader, but which could be used more extensively across the sector to support more learners into and through higher education.

Universities have also developed innovative approaches to supporting students to progress and realise their potential, often in partnership with students' association, to tailor health, mental health and wellbeing services to support complex needs. GCU, for example, is the first university in the UK to achieve Autism Accreditation from the National Autistic Society.

- **Employability and entrepreneurship**

The recently published HESA Graduate Outcomes data show high graduate employment rates across the Scottish sector. A strength of the sector is employer and industry engagement for employability, supporting curriculum development, placement opportunities, professional accreditation, industry workshops and so on.

At GCU, for example, over 85% of undergraduate courses are professionally accredited (Unistats, 2019). A sector leader for Graduate Apprenticeships, we have a strategic objective to expand placement opportunities across all courses.

Universities seek to equip their students to contribute to society as global citizens beyond employment, engaging them in active learning through research informed teaching, real-world simulation experiences, international mobility and exchange opportunities. GCU has been at the forefront of inter-professional learning, particularly in the field of health and social care, something which has been an essential foundation for students progressing to clinical settings in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, we are working to embed data science and analytics across the curriculum. Student-led community engagement such as the GCU Law Clinic and Cyber Clinic has benefits for both local communities and for students. Our incubation space specialises in support for social enterprise and we lead a sector-wide forum for social entrepreneurship, working closely with First Port which managed Scottish Government's Third Sector Resilience Fund in response to Covid-19.

- **Impactful research**

Diversity of research strengths should be seen as a success of the Scottish university sector. Traditional notions of research excellence may underestimate the critical importance of applied research in addressing multiple societal challenges, both pre-existing and further exposed by Covid-19. At GCU, our research is highly impactful relative to resources expended. GCU health researchers, for example, collaborate with the World Health Organisation and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control to reduce transmission of infections and on published research in the Lancet on the effectiveness of handwashing against Covid-19.

Research pooling and established mechanisms for research and innovation collaboration are features of the Scottish sector. There is the potential to strengthen these further through support to increase the inclusion of modern universities in areas of their research strengths, to maximise impact and add value.

Research concentration already exists through REG and other funding mechanisms, and we would question the evidence base for diverting the small amounts of the REG monies allocated to modern universities to research-intensive institutions. There is potentially a value-for-money case for such funds to be flowing more freely to modern universities with strong research impact. REG funds facilitated the development of GCU's research base as the first university to adopt the SDGs as the operating framework for our research strategy and to support six research centres covering areas such as Health (especially managing long-term conditions and public health), Climate Change and Climate Justice, Social Business and Health (GCU's Yunus Centre), Economic Justice (focusing on gender, ethnicity and poverty), Smart Technology and the Built Environment. A focussed approach has allowed us to develop research leadership in social innovation and successfully embed the SDG agenda, each of which has only grown in importance in light of the current pandemic. In addition, we have demonstrated, through that approach, our modest core funding can be leveraged to attract further research investment to Scotland from UK Research & Innovation, the National Institute for Health Research and the Wellcome Trust.

Modern universities should be recognised for their impactful research strengths in selected areas, following the 'pockets of excellence' approach which funding authorities recognised in REF2014. As a sector that extols the criticality of the research-teaching nexus, it would be to the detriment of graduates and the economy should even greater concentration of research funding result in students attending modern universities, which attract high numbers of widening participation entrants, experiencing lower levels of research-informed teaching. Likewise, it is crucial that professions, such as nursing, allied health and social work, which have been highly instrumental in the frontline against Covid-19, should continue to receive a research-based education and have opportunities to lead and participate in research-based innovation.

- **Delivering for business and contributing to sustainable economic growth**

In addition to delivering advanced postgraduate level provision, universities are critical to leading the upskilling and reskilling agenda to build capability and capacity, supporting business, the public and third sectors.

The success of Graduate Apprenticeships demonstrates the skills of the sector in advancing employer and skills focused education at a national level in Scotland, and consideration should be given to expansion of the Graduate Apprenticeship but ensuring effective and efficient administrative and supporting infrastructure. With distinctive strengths in work-based education, GCU continues to successfully lead on Graduate Apprenticeships in Scotland, in collaboration with Skills Development Scotland and over 100 business partners.

Industry and employer engagement is essential to support skills needs. This is managed at GCU through a combination of structured course-specific advisory boards, dialogue with subject matter experts and business development outreach and engagement. Universities should be supported to ensure that the ongoing development of provision and academic portfolios is informed by employers, professional accrediting bodies and, where appropriate, Scottish Government workforce planning objectives.

The ability to co-create industry-focussed degrees and short courses with stackable credits is a key strength of certain universities. Investment should be directed to enable the scaling up of activity required for sustainable economic recovery, supported by flexible RPL entry arrangements and digital development to further enhance work-based education.

A positive feature of the Scottish system is the facilitation of knowledge exchange centred around a university's mission and research strengths, whilst reflecting Scotland's priorities and Innovate UK's industrial strategy. It is critical for economic recovery that industry and SMEs can harness training, consultancy, contract research and knowledge transfer from our universities and the SFC Innovation Centres. Examples of the importance of KTPs to innovation include the Aggreko partnership with GCU to improve efficiency of generators running in remote locations by producing reliable and secure software and hardware architectures and algorithms. Our KTP with Crear Space to Create is one of the first 'Management KTPs' to be awarded. In addition to our KTP profile, GCU has in place a new Workplace Innovation Voucher, which is designed to support inward innovation to develop the company's internal workforce.

- **Promoting Scotland as an exporter of education**

As set out in section c) universities have an important role to play in promoting Scotland internationally. The global connectivity of Scottish universities is critical to the success of Scotland is Now, international export and branding, working with government (Scottish and UK) and Scottish Development International, SFC, the enterprise agencies, colleges, alumni, amongst others.

At GCU, we have developed our global connections and partnerships in alignment with our University mission to focus education and research for the Common Good, locally and globally. Our strong tradition of transnational education has resulted in over 25% of our total student population being international, and we have driven international mobility to over 13% of our home student population. Like all universities, we are deeply concerned about the major and multi-year challenges to internationalisation due to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, but we remain committed to being a globally connected university now and in the future.

- **Civic role in local communities**

Universities should be recognised and supported as anchor institutions within the communities they serve. As civic institutions, they work collaboratively with local leaders and community organisations to develop scalable solutions to local issues through educational partnerships, research and knowledge exchange, community-engaged learning and student-led engagement for the common good.

GCU has, for example, led on the formation of Fearless Glasgow – a multi-agency partnership tackling gender-based violence (GBV), focusing primarily on further and higher education settings across Glasgow and the West. We shared our *Erase the Grey* campaign against GBV with all Fearless Glasgow partners including Police Scotland.

Researchers from GCU's Yunus Centre for Social Business and Health were commissioned to evaluate the new Asset Transfer Requests (ATRs) policy - introduced by the Scottish Government in 2017 under Part 5 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act. As well as concluding that ATRs have successfully delivered greater community opportunities, the research has also led to several recommendations, such as the need to promote the availability of ATRs more widely, including a key point of contact, especially in less-advantaged areas.

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.)

- **Provision – national and regional requirements**

As a sector, we need to be open to engaging in national and regional discussions, working collaboratively and with the SFC to achieve critical efficiency of delivery and excellence. GCU has been reviewing and reshaping our traditional academic offerings in engineering and computing, for example. There are areas of provision that particular universities have expertise in, and the SFC should engage more closely with those universities at early stages when seeking to expand provision in specialist subject areas, exploring a range of options for achieving expanded provision including collaborative delivery. This is of particular note in relation to supporting the Scottish Government in commissioning for the nation and, on the back of the sector having demonstrated its ability to work, harness technologies for learning and deliver high quality teaching remotely.

As noted above, a funding model which clarifies what is core and fundamental, and includes the capacity to bid for additional funding streams may be a useful approach to enabling institutions to focus on areas in which they can most effectively contribute to an inclusive social and economic recovery, including upskilling that addresses technological developments, and support for older learners to address future demographic challenges.

- **Increased focus on high-level skills needs and work based education**

Addressing the significant challenges and uncertainties facing our economy and our society will require careful consideration of where skills gaps can be addressed at a vocational level and where higher level technical and professional skills are required. Although the relationship between higher education and regional skills needs could be improved, it is important to consider how to achieve a balance between ensuring a breadth of provision that enables student choice and broad skills development, and meeting specific skills gaps; as well as the balance between meeting national and regional needs. The role of the enterprise agencies in identifying skills needs is crucial to supporting the sector's work in this arena.

To further address skills gaps, more part-time programmes at postgraduate level will support the needs both of those individuals and employers seeking to reskill and upskill. Suitably flexible student support for learners would be required to support demand. Further development of Graduate Apprenticeships at postgraduate level could also an important element in addressing higher level skills needs through a recognised and successful work based learning route.

- **Inclusive approach to supporting graduate employment**

Whilst the sector has a strong commitment to widening participation to a university education, it is recognised that there is more to be done with regard to attainment gaps and equality of outcomes after graduation. The importance of inclusiveness links strongly to our responsibility to provide tailored support to students and graduates who may be additionally disadvantaged by the Covid-19 pandemic's impact on jobs and the economy, notably students from disadvantaged backgrounds, BAME students, and students with a disability. Universities have an important role here, and can provide support such as through our University's MINT (Mentoring, Internships, Networking and Talks) scheme for new graduates backed by honorary graduates and alumni of GCU. This cannot, however, be tackled by universities alone. It is a matter of particular challenge for those leaving university in 2020 and a key concern which would benefit from a wider response from Government and its agencies.

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

- **Education exports, international recruitment**

Education should continue to be promoted as a key export alongside business, trade, tourism, recognising the diversity and range of strengths in the sector but also a unified message on the high quality of Scottish HE, aimed at EU countries as well as more widely.

Universities will continue to recruit in international markets, but in recognition of the impact of the pandemic and the exit from the EU, there can be diversification of the countries of origin or regions that universities work in, built around existing and new partnerships and an understanding of the wider development of international HE provision and the Scottish Government's international engagement plans. International students' positive experiences are important, as is international reputation of our universities.

- **Transnational Education**

A focus on TNE aids Scottish institutions, Scottish "soft power" and contributes to more sustainable development and economic growth. Equitable, collaborative and mutually beneficial TNE partnerships are needed, as is deployment of open and distance learning to deliver quality HE at scale. With the impact of the pandemic, TNE can play a key role in going beyond physical space with strong partnerships drawing on each partner's particular strengths. TNE can increase the cultural richness at a university with two-way student partnerships and co-developed research collaboration. This is exemplified through the range of TNE partnership models adopted by GCU and overseas partners such as the National University of Science and Technology of Oman, The Grameen Caledonian College of Nursing in Bangladesh and the African Leadership College.

At GCU, we believe TNE should be more transformational and less transactional than traditional models have been. Our partnership with Transnet Rail in South Africa is an example of applying the expertise of our academics in Scotland and our work-based learning experience to support capacity and capability building at scale for the benefit of business and the economy. In line with our University mission, the TNE partnership also provides opportunities for GCU's health and vision science students to volunteer on Phelophepa, the custom-built 'train of hope' that delivers health care to remote areas of South Africa, joining a team of professionals on the train's clinics.

- **Research**

Research links play an important role in international connectedness and competitiveness, but significant challenges are raised by the departure from the EU. As noted there are diverse strengths in the sector and all institutions play a role - at GCU a key focus has been on social innovation and delivery of the SDGs at a global level along with Scottish Government's corresponding NPF; the need for each of which has only been reinforced by the Covid-19 pandemic. There is a wide range of existing and emerging cross-sectoral partnerships that universities will seek to maintain despite the challenges. Student exchange should entail both sending students to countries as well as receiving them. The UK Government position, particularly in terms of the outcomes of negotiations with the EU, is crucial, both for research and for student and staff mobility in the future. The recently established Global Challenges and Sustainable Development Unit at GCU has actively promoted engagement with Low and Middle Income Countries through a series of pump-priming and capacity building projects, whilst maintaining multinational networks for social innovation in Southeast Asia and Latin America.

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?

Threats

- Loss of income, and ability to invest in staff and digital infrastructure.
- Loss of international students.
- Loss of momentum on partnerships and global collaborations for research and TNE.
- Delivering a high quality student experience in 2020-21, whilst meeting all educational requirements (including PSRB requirements).
- Supporting our students through uncertain times and with much delivery/engagement virtual, and protecting the physical and mental health and wellbeing of students.
- Supporting students to prevent potential digital exclusion.
- Supporting staff through uncertain, complex times and in new ways of working.
- Being adaptable and quick to respond to changing risks and events (for example if there is a local lockdown); and understanding the university's role in the context of the health of the city.
- Ensuring awareness of how the pandemic is affecting the student population on and off campus.
- Ability to provide international exchange mobility opportunities (due to pandemic restrictions).
- Supporting graduates as they seek to enter a very challenging environment in terms of employment or vocational education/training.

Opportunities

- Development of new approaches to teaching and learning, which will support not only how we perform our role and support students for the ongoing pandemic period, but also provide opportunities for more provision of online learning/blended learning for a wider audience of learners (for example for reskilling/upskilling).
- Teaching funding - removal of EU students means the funding is available to fund Scottish students at closer to the real cost level and reduce the need to cross-subsidise.
- Making positive changes to working lives built on what we are learning through enforced change.

- Build back stronger after the pandemic with a focus on sustainable development goals. GCU is planning on addressing these challenges through a clear focus on sustainability and social innovation in our - soon to be launched - Strategy 2030.
- Build on the teaching and learning developments to offer new opportunities, which fit with skills, sustainability and internationalisation goals.
- The opportunity to build a more sustainable financial model for the sector.
- Potential for new streams of research funding from a basis focusing on the SDGs and the NPF through social innovation.

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

Many very successful collaborations and positive strategic partnerships are in place across the HE sector and between universities, college and the school sector, providing a sound platform for further collaborations to address the impacts of, and recovery from, the pandemic.

Examples of potential areas of collaboration:

- It is important for the SFC review to take account of the new normal of expanded online provision and to assess whether regionality applies to the same extent in the post-pandemic context. Also, where a need for graduates in a particular area is identified, SFC should engage with current providers to identify options and opportunities for collaborative work between universities to deliver across the country, including remote and rural regions, rather than assuming that expansion in the number of providers is the only approach. There is a strong case for a review of the current model of commissioning for some programmes.
- Provision of space for supporting students undertaking online and distance learning. For example, exploring if mature learners and postgraduate learners are content to pursue courses online within any Scottish institution if there is physical space available for them in their local institutions. There could be a pooling of funding via SFC to support such an initiative.
- Growth in student numbers at university is increasing competition amongst universities and colleges for the same pool of academically successful students, even with contextualised admissions. There needs to be a focus on improving academic achievement and ambition at secondary school level, and consideration of potential 1+3 models across the sector focussed on Advanced Highers and Highers.
- Collaborate to enable a system of credit building across the sector to encourage adult learners to take part in shorter modules or courses that are most relevant to their careers.

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**

It should be recognised that colleges and universities are not only providers of education, skills-training, research and innovation but also important local employers and contributors to the growth of the economy themselves. For instance, in GCU's most recent economic impact analysis showed that GCU adds £1billion in Gross Value Added to the UK economy.

Universities and colleges should be encouraged to support students to develop meta skills and to provide education for sustainable and inclusive development to meet NPF and SDG ambitions on education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles. This would equip students to identify and find solutions to the challenges of the future and ensure Scotland remains to the forefront of ethical economic and social development.

• **Particular areas of collaboration between agencies that would best support the sectors' contributions**

A wider number of businesses and industries need support for skills development. Consideration should be given to how these can be identified and matched with institutions, perhaps through a cross-sectoral approach similar to Interface but focused on training and work based education.

To support enhanced social innovation through working with civic society and crucial areas of the public sector frontline, KTPs could be opened up to make it easier for more-vulnerable (for example community-based) organisations to participate.

• **Adaptations to SFC's funding and accountability frameworks to promote agile and collaborative action by the sectors to build Scotland's recovery**

- A clear focus on key priorities, and the expectations of institutions' contribution to these, through a more focused Outcome Agreement process would allow institutions to more clearly articulate their approach to addressing these priorities in line with their strategic direction.
- Consideration should also be given to how to enable modern universities (and colleges) to be more involved in research groups, or collaborative bids for schemes such as the ISCF, drawing on their areas of distinctive strength, such as GCU's expertise in relation to social innovation.
- SFC should enable resources to be redeployed flexibly to meet new priorities, e.g. for teaching funding to be reassigned in part to initiatives to support upskilling/reskilling and to help meet increased demand for postgraduate study without constraints on institutions' ambitions to deliver innovative new approaches. On this point, part-time learning should be reviewed through the lens of the post-pandemic context and re-prioritised to support economic recovery.
- There are areas where funding arrangements could be more simple or direct, recognising the different roles/stages on the learner journey provided by institution types, such as articulation and the provision of Graduate Apprenticeships.

• **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**

When making changes to funding streams, SFC should be cognisant that universities cross-subsidise to support the delivery of their priorities and outcomes in support of the Scottish Government's agenda. SFC should therefore take account of the entire SFC grant that universities receive, and not just that individual stream. This is particularly important when reducing specific funding allocations.

It should be recognised that the continuous development and delivery of articulation provision, partnerships and frameworks is resource intensive if done correctly and in a way that maximises student choice and positive outcomes. Consideration could therefore be given to applying a higher funding level for students entering with advanced standing to support the expansion of articulation routes and pathways.

SFC previously allocated places for widening participation students but only to a limited number of institutions. Any changes to funding for widening participation should also take account of this “mainstreamed” funding.

SFC and the higher education system should maintain a focus on widening participation as not just encouraging more students from non-traditional backgrounds into university but also ensuring that students achieve parity of outcomes, in particular reducing gaps in attainment and graduate employment.

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

There are multiple drivers for change, from the Covid-19 pandemic and EU exit to wider Scottish Government priorities across a range of policy areas, and timescales for change will vary. This may result in a range of pushes and pulls on institutions. Recognising the interconnections and ensuring a sector wide understanding of the mechanisms for providing support will enable a more effective response.

To the extent that the changes concern the social and economic recovery post-pandemic, the sector will benefit from the continued Scotland-wide work, led by the Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board, on what the recovery issues are, which sectors, which types of role, who has lost out due to the pandemic in order to identify where we have strengths and expertise to support learners or work with particular employers and industries.

As stated at the outset, stability of funding will support the sustainability of our universities. In addition, a revised approach to outcome agreements should focus on a more strategic relationship between the SFC and institutions to support flexibility, adaptability and innovation across the diverse landscape of the HE sector in Scotland.

Summary of key points / proposals

Funding and accountability

- We suggest a renewed consideration is given to core funding, and clarity and consistency in how this is allocated. Areas of Scottish Government priority, such as widening participation and knowledge exchange, should be funded to reflect their importance for the nation rather than seeking to spread modest funds thinly across the sector.
- There should be clarity on additional funding available year-on-year with an open and transparent bidding process for such funding. In addition, reviews of long-standing funding schemes should be undertaken regularly, engaging closely with the sector on the process and outcomes.
- A clear focus on key priorities, and the expectations of institutions’ contribution to these, through a more focused Outcome Agreement process would allow institutions to more clearly articulate their approach to addressing these priorities in line with their strategic direction.
- SFC should enable resources to be redeployed flexibly to meet new priorities, e.g. for teaching funding to be reassigned in part to initiatives to support upskilling/reskilling and to help meet increased demand for postgraduate study without constraints on institutions’ ambitions to deliver innovative new approaches.
- Part-time learning should be reviewed through the lens of the post-pandemic context and re-prioritised to support economic recovery.
- When making changes to funding streams, SFC should be cognisant that universities cross-subsidise to support the delivery of their priorities and outcomes in support of the Scottish Government’s agenda. SFC should therefore take account of the entire SFC grant that universities receive, and not just that individual stream. This is particularly important when reducing specific funding allocations.
- The continuous development and delivery of articulation provision, partnerships and frameworks is resource intensive if done correctly and in a way that maximises student choice and positive outcomes.

Consideration could therefore be given to applying a higher funding level for students entering with advanced standing to support the expansion of articulation routes and pathways.

- SFC previously allocated places for widening participation students but only to a limited number of institutions. Any changes to funding for widening participation should also take account of this “mainstreamed” funding.

Teaching and learning

- SFC and the higher education system should maintain a focus on widening participation as not just encouraging more students from non-traditional backgrounds into university but also ensuring that students achieve parity of outcomes, in particular reducing gaps in attainment and graduate employment.
- Universities and colleges should be encouraged to support students to develop meta skills and to provide education for sustainable and inclusive development to meet NPF and SDG ambitions.
- Any extension of articulation routes, especially beyond HNC/D, should take account of the expertise that exists in the sector. In addition, it is important that all students gaining a University degree have parity of experience, including access to placements and international opportunities, regardless of the route taken. An increased focus on 1+3 articulation models would help achieve this.
- Universities should be supported to ensure that the ongoing development of provision and academic portfolios is informed by employers, professional accrediting bodies and, where appropriate, Scottish Government workforce planning objectives.
- Investment should be directed to enable the scaling up of activity required for sustainable economic recovery, supported by flexible RPL entry arrangements and digital development to further enhance work-based education.

Research and innovation

- A focus on delivering to the SDGs and the NPF provides a strong foundation for the sector in leading a sustainable economic and societal recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.
- There is the potential to further strengthen research pooling and established mechanisms for collaboration to increase the inclusion of modern universities in areas of their research strengths, to maximise impact and add value. Consideration should also be given to how to enable modern universities (and colleges) to be more involved in research groups, or collaborative bids for schemes such as the ISCF, drawing on their areas of distinctive strength.
- Research concentration already exists and we would question the evidence base for diverting the small amounts of the REG monies allocated to modern universities to research-intensive institutions.
- It would be to the detriment of graduates and the economy should students of modern universities experience lower levels of research-informed teaching. Likewise, it is crucial that professions, such as nursing, allied health and social work, which have been highly instrumental in the frontline against Covid-19, should continue to receive a research-based education and have opportunities to lead and participate in research-based innovation.

Employability and skills

- Consideration should be given to expansion of the Graduate Apprenticeship scheme, including at postgraduate level, ensuring effective and efficient administrative and supporting infrastructure.
- It is important to consider how to achieve a balance between ensuring a breadth of provision that enables student choice and broad skills development, and meeting specific skills gaps regionally and nationally. The role of the enterprise agencies in identifying skills needs is crucial to supporting the sector’s work in this arena.
- A wider number of businesses and industries need support for skills development. Consideration should be given to how these can be identified and matched with institutions.

- To further address skills gaps, more part-time programmes at postgraduate level will support the needs both of those individuals and employers seeking to reskill and upskill. Suitably flexible student support for learners would be required to support demand.
- We have a responsibility to provide tailored support to students and graduates who may be additionally disadvantaged by the Covid-19 pandemic's impact on jobs and the economy. This is a matter of particular challenge for those leaving university in 2020 and a key concern which would benefit from a wider response from Government and its agencies.

Collaboration and regionalisation

- It is important for the SFC review to take account of the new normal of expanded online provision and to assess whether regionality applies to the same extent in the post-pandemic context.
- Where a need for graduates in a particular area is identified, SFC should engage with current providers to identify options and opportunities for collaborative work between universities to deliver across the country, including remote and rural regions, rather than assuming that expansion in the number of providers is the only approach. There is a strong case for a review of the current model of commissioning for some programmes.
- Provision of space for supporting students undertaking online and distance learning. For example, exploring if mature learners and postgraduate learners are content to pursue courses online within any Scottish institution if there is physical space available for them in their local institutions. There could be a pooling of funding via SFC to support such an initiative.
- Growth in student numbers at university is increasing competition amongst universities and colleges for the same pool of academically successful students, even with contextualised admissions. There needs to be a focus on improving academic achievement and ambition at secondary school level, and consideration of potential 1+3 models across the sector focussed on Advanced Highers and Highers.
- Collaboration could enable a system of credit building across the sector to encourage adult learners to take part in shorter modules or courses that are most relevant to their careers.

Community engagement

- Universities should be recognised and supported as anchor institutions within the communities they serve.
- To support enhanced social innovation through working with civic society and crucial areas of the public sector frontline, KTPs could be opened up to make it easier for more-vulnerable (for example community-based) organisations to participate.

International connectedness

- Education should continue to be promoted as a key export, recognising the diversity and range of strengths in the sector but also a unified message on the high quality of Scottish HE, aimed at EU countries as well as more widely.
- The outcomes of the UK Government's EU exit negotiations particularly in terms of the outcomes of negotiations with the EU, is crucial, both for research and for student and staff mobility in the future.
- A focus on TNE aids Scottish institutions, Scottish "soft power" and contributes to more sustainable development and economic growth. Equitable, collaborative and mutually beneficial TNE partnerships are needed, as is deployment of open and distance learning to deliver quality HE at scale.