

**SFC Review of coherent and sustainable provision
Response from The Glasgow School of Art**

- 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?**

- 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.)**

As a small specialist institution we acknowledge that the current further and higher education arrangements are framed in the context of larger institutions. We would suggest that this is a view held by other small institutions within the further and higher education sector where a comparable diversity in size (student, staff, finances and estate) of institutions exists but the expectations, constraints and reporting structures remain consistent. While consistency and coherence in the system is important to manage and account for public funds, the one-size-fits-all approach presents significant challenges.

This is particularly evident in respect of strategic funding where the level of reporting is often disproportionate to the level of funding received. However, we would argue that strategic funding is important, that it should be retained and also enhanced to support and frame change and innovation within the sector.

Our position on this is framed from our experience of The Glasgow School of Art securing additional funding in the initial introduction of the Outcome Agreement process. This was specifically in respect of widening participation and articulation places (and then the University Innovation Fund) where an internal step-change was achieved more quickly than could have been achieved otherwise.

Equally, while there is value the Outcome Agreement and the opportunity it presents for engaged and substantive dialogue with the SFC on priorities and how institutions can deliver against these, the disconnect between core requirements, priorities, expectations, institutional ambition and level and additional funding is evident. We would welcome changes to the Outcome Agreement system to reflect this, being much more clearly focused on areas that are directly funded by the SFC, with strategic funding being used to support changing priorities. However, strategic funding should be allocated based on commitment and need, not a formula based approach based on size which significantly disadvantages small HEIs who can often provide disproportionate return on the investment from the SFC both in terms of impact and innovative approach. Built into strategic funding needs to be models for sustainable funding which needs to be the responsibility of the institutions, ensuring activities are strategically aligned to institutional ambition and direction and not purely a short-term response to a Governmental initiative or objective. As independent institutions, higher education institutions are best placed to know how best they can contribute to or deliver

against national ambitions and its needs to be recognised that not all institutions can contribute to or deliver against all ambitions nor is it right to expect them to do so.

The sector-wide response to and focus on undergraduate widening participation and articulation has, and will continue to, increase the participation rate in higher education from Scotland's most deprived communities. However, we would strongly argue that articulation from college to university should not be seen as the default or optimum route for SIMD20 students to access higher education, but an appropriate route for any learner and for this to be strengthened through further development of the Associate Student programme and additional funded places to support this to ensure an expansion of opportunity for learners rather than a shifting or spreading of those opportunities.

The momentum and commitment from higher education to widening participation, which for most HEIs in Scotland is embedded within their DNA, needs to be maintained as a long-term, shared objective and value of both the SFC and the sector through continued innovative and collaborative approaches. We would welcome support for mature learners from SIMD20 postcodes to be supported alongside targets for young entrants and a more partnership approach with local authorities and schools in support raising attainment in schools to narrow the continued attainment gap.

As we continue to develop widening participation at undergraduate level, moving forward we would like to see initiatives, activities and funding focused on widening participation in postgraduate study, where currently across the sector, taught postgraduate study is dominated by international students. Ensuring that our wp students can not only gain entry and achieve successful outcome, but also realise their potential post-graduation, whether through further study or employment, including self-employment and entrepreneurship, is incredibly important.

While across the board greater financial support is required for all home domiciled students to participate in postgraduate study, specific support and targets for universities, for SIMD20 students to participate in postgraduate study, could be considered a priority, recognising that for SIMD20 student's challenges to participation remain. For specialist institutions like The Glasgow School of Art, this would open up opportunities for more non-creative graduates to study creative education, recognising that creative occupations are considered to be less at risk from automation than other sectors¹, and allow for the development of collaborative programmes out with our disciplines to contribute to an inclusive and sustainable social and economic recovery.

Linked to this is the place of specialist creative institutions to skills development engaging with both our traditional learners who may require upskilling to further develop their creative practice and more importantly, learners from non-creative backgrounds. The ability to be creative, analytical, problem-solve and strong communication are characteristics of a highly skilled workforce and are required across all parts of the economy including the public and third sectors which are key learning outcomes of creative education. Within this, opportunities for collaboration across disciplines and economic sectors exist and institutions should be encouraged.

¹ https://www.thecreativeindustries.co.uk/media/292766/creativity_vs_robots_wv.pdf

Collaboration is and should continue to be fundamentally important to our approach to research (specialist higher education institutions, regardless of size, have a unique role within the research ecosystem both in Scotland and the UK from fundamental discovery to working in partnership with other disciplines to apply research outcomes to social, economic and environmental challenges) but also the communities and places we are part of. Scotland's universities and particularly its small specialist institutions within the creative disciplines have been central to the development, international standing and inward investment of Scotland's cities.

Specifically, in respect of Glasgow's creative economy, the role of The Glasgow School of Art and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland cannot be underestimated. Both institutions are globally ranked, attract large numbers of international students, contribute to widening participation and access, not purely to undergraduate study but to creative education through young people and adult classes and exhibitions, events and performances and importantly, a high proportion of their graduates remain in the city contributing to sustaining and developing its creative eco-system. Collaborative and appropriate approaches to support business start-up, incubation and talent/graduate retention between universities, local authorities and the enterprise agencies needs to be developed and likely not through a one-size fits all Scotland approach but focused to the place-based, economic strategies of city regions.

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

Higher education institutions are distinctively global in nature. They collectively provide Scotland with a significant asset to attract talent, export and foreign direct investment, and international research partnership alongside the soft-power reach of its international staff and students, globally-located alumni networks and world-significant cultural assets and collections. Eight of Scotland's universities are ranked in the World 500² of which three are World 100 alongside The Glasgow School of Art and Royal Conservatoire of Scotland who are ranked in the global top 10 and 20 respectively.

Maintaining financial stability and continued investment in higher education is critical not only to maintain this global positioning but to enhance it and the continued international confidence that the full range of Scotland's higher education is being supported to be excellent. This confidence in the whole sector, is key to all of Scotland's universities' ability to attract international staff and students, essential to the internationalisation of the experience within our campuses and wider communities and Scotland's openness to the world and global reach. Maximising the use of our global networks, particularly the contribution of our alumni networks and their ambassadorial role and soft-power impact.

In this regard, universities have a unique contribution to make as part of national or regional (city-level) inward investment propositions. This was well demonstrated by Glasgow's recent and successful bids for Channel 4 and Barclays Bank where the city's higher and further education institutions were an integral part of both the proposition and bid process, articulating the role we play not only in terms of people, skills and knowledge exchange, but in contributing to the vibrancy and attractiveness of Scotland's cities and towns. KPMG's 2015 report on Magnet Cities³ continues

² <https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2021>

³ <https://assets.kpmg/content/dam/kpmg/pdf/2015/03/magnet-cities.pdf>

to be relevant here as a point of reflection of the integral role universities have in driving innovation, place and new forms of economic growth within small, second-tier cities.

Within a post-BREXIT environment, the importance of our European connections will become increasingly important. Alongside the sector-wide priorities of continued participation/association with Horizon Europe and Erasmus Plus (or failing that participation in UK-wide schemes that support continued international research collaboration and the continued European mobility of students), the importance to creative institutions of retaining a diversity of European students is paramount.

While all universities will be impacted by the fee-status change of European students for most this will be at programme level. For small, creative institutions, the impact is more significant and at institutional level, with a culturally diverse student body drawn from all 27 member states. Maintaining the social, cultural and economic diversity of our European student post BREXIT remains a priority and therefore the development of national scholarship programmes both for European and international students should be considered.

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 risks facing Scotland's higher education sector have been well articulated and documented by the Scottish Funding Council, recognising that severe risks remain that higher education institutions will face damaging levels of losses which will have continued, multi-year impact. This will compromise universities' ability to invest in people, research infrastructure and estate and the contribution it can make to Scotland's economic recovery and competitiveness.

While planning for and dealing with the financial impacts of the pandemic are underway, we are cognisant of the point we are at, as an institution, within our strategic planning cycle. Over the next 12 months The Glasgow School of Art will develop and publish its next strategic plan. Therefore, decisions taken to address the immediate impacts will require to be framed in the context of the wider strategic changes and direction of the GSA over the next five years particularly around learning and teaching including programme offer, curriculum and digital; internationalisation; our estate; sustainability and the outcomes of this sector-level review.

This review presents a necessary opportunity to build a sustainable funding model for Scottish higher education where core activities are not reliant on cross-subsidy from international fees. Equally, it presents an opportunity for simplification of reporting and bureaucracy, removal of duplication with the sector in terms of the learner journey and potentially programme offer, investment in new growth areas and existing specialist strengths. This will inform the strategic decisions the GSA takes.

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

As a small, specialist institution, collaboration is an established approach across research, graduate enterprise, academic programmes, associate student programmes, widening participation activity and international student recruitment. This is at a regional (city); national and UK level and also in some cases internationally. It is how we engage with new audiences, generate new knowledge through working with STEM and other disciplines, increase impact and where appropriate operating efficiency.

Collaboration is required to be purposeful to add value and not merely as a method of creating efficiencies, it should not be viewed purely as a solution in and of itself. Different forms of collaboration will be appropriate in different contexts.

- 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:**
- a. How scarce public resources should be prioritised to drive recovery**
 - b. Particular areas of collaboration between agencies that would best support the sectors' contributions**
 - c. Adaptations to SFC's funding and accountability frameworks to promote agile and collaborative action by the sectors to build Scotland's recovery**
 - d. 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**
 - e. Continued target setting and accountability through Outcome Agreements**
 - f. What support SFC and government could give institutions to adapt to a changed environment**

We support the submission of Universities Scotland in response to this specific question.

In addition we would restate the point made in a) and b) above that as a small specialist institution while we acknowledge that the current further and higher education arrangements are framed in the context of larger institutions and a need for consistency and coherence in the system, but that the one-size-fits-all approach presents significant challenges for small institutions. Not all institutions can contribute to all agendas, targets need to be appropriate and reporting simplified.

We would also refer to our points in a) and b) above in respect of widening access and articulation. Within limited funded places, substantively addressing widening participation, articulation and equality measures becomes increasingly complex without detriment to the participation of other non-targeted groups. In this context, a recognition of the intersectionality of SIMD20, protected characteristics, care experienced and equalities issues are needed, rather than the setting of a series of individual targets which may be mutually contradictory in some cases and focus resource away from the learner.

Allocating additional funded places strategically, ensuring sustained and progressive change to opportunities for young people and adults both at undergraduate and postgraduate level would be welcomed. This may require existing SFC funding and resources to be redeployed flexibly and designing new funding mechanisms to make it affordable for business and learners to undertake upskilling/reskilling through higher education including postgraduate opportunities should be a priority and as detailed above particularly to enable Scotland to widen participation at postgraduate level.