

Lead Scotland response to SFC's consultation, 'Call for Evidence: A Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability in Further and Higher Education, August 2020

About Lead Scotland

Lead Scotland is a charity that enables disabled adults and carers to access inclusive learning opportunities. At a local level, we do this by providing direct support to learners through flexible person-centred learning opportunities and individualised guidance and support to help them plan their learning journeys. At a national level, we provide information and advice on the full range of post-school learning and training opportunities, as well as influencing and informing policies affecting disabled learners in Scotland.

Our national [Disabled Student's Helpline](#) supports parents, carers, young people and adults to understand and explore the range of post-school learning options available to them in Scotland. We also provide information and advice to help navigate the often-complex policies and procedures in place to access appropriate support and funding to take up a post school learning opportunity. We also produce a [suite of online guides related to disability and post-school learning](#).

We chair and co-host the 'Improving outcomes for Disabled Students Group' with the Scottish Funding Council and are key members of the Scottish Government and SAAS 'Disability related student support review' steering group.

Consultation Questions

In this first phase of our review we are interested in your views on these six areas in particular:

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 Credit and Qualification Framework gives value to all learning opportunities across Scotland and provides a benchmark for global comparison. It is a jewel in the crown of our tertiary system.
- Continue to build world class accessible digital learning opportunities for everyone in Scotland. Promote a culture of life-time online learning with coherent pathways for progression.
- Preserve and strengthen the policy focus on widening access and equality and inclusion in the Covid19 recovery response. Whilst in general terms disabled people seem to be increasingly well represented within FE and HE, it should be noted that people with specific impairments can experience poorer

outcomes, particularly in HE right across access, retention, success and graduate employment.

- Colleges and Universities are the branded face of our tertiary system with a strong local, national and international reputation for education and research. There are other well recognised public and third sector actors within our tertiary system, who have statutory duties around the provision of post school education. Actors which provide agile learner centred support to engage people who otherwise may not progress along lifetime pathways. The individual parts of our tertiary education system work well on their own to engage individual learners but the sum of their parts do not currently make up a coherent system.

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.)

- More direct learner involvement in shaping the design of post school education services which build accessible attainment routes leading to sustained progression and which also provide a positive experience of participation in FE and HE as well as tangible outcomes.
- Encourage and support colleges and universities to make better use of Equality Impact Assessments and to meet their legal obligations under the Scottish Public Sector Equality Duty to address the persistent inequality experienced by particular groups of students with protected characteristics. Increased scrutiny related to the PSED and EIA's.
- Covid19 brought the digital poverty agenda sharply into focus. Some colleges and universities gave students IT equipment so that they were/are not left behind. Some colleagues in the university sector got in touch to say how quickly teaching and assessments had moved online and they were keen to ensure that lecturers are kept engaged to keep some of these new benefits when they return to campuses. This will be especially important for disabled people who require more distance learning options due to shielding or chronic conditions that limit their ability to attend campuses.
- Recognise that the move to remote learning during Covid19, whilst great for many disabled people, may also disadvantage people with more complex or profound needs. Talking to students, families and agencies will help us to understand what blend of support people need to engage. Some college colleagues have raised concerns about the practicality of supporting students with additional support needs remotely, especially for those with profound and complex needs, and have also commented that they have seen a reduction in students' engagement with support services since remote engagement became the default during Covid19.
- Broaden course eligibility for tuition fees to allow adult learners better access to funding for non-college based employment/professional development as we

regularly take calls on our helpline from disabled people looking for funding for short employment based courses not covered by the ITA, who then have to scabble around searching for funding.

- Stop providing free tuition fees for all Scottish students. Make tuition fee funding means tested, but set a low threshold for eligibility to ensure only the most advantaged families in Scotland have to pay or make a contribution towards tuition fees.
- Improve access to part time funding, especially in the HE sector – widen course eligibility and cap the amount a publicly funded provider can charge to the amount SAAS will cover. Numerous reports suggest parents carers and disabled people are more likely to lose their jobs as a result of the pandemic, so policies that put them at the centre of the recovery are vital.
- Introduce partnerships between employment support programme and FE/HE and ensure mandatory specialist tailored career and employment support and advice is provided to disabled students and graduates.
- Invest in disability services, as colleagues in the sector, especially in HE, often tell us they are under resourced to meet increasing demand.
- Address ongoing staff training needs around disability and inclusion as an urgent priority
- Recognise that physical access to college or university can be a challenge. Lack of timely and/or affordable transport can be a significant barrier. Some people with aspirations for entering college can face up to two or three hours on a bus to reach their nearest learning centre. This transport is often not at a time that matches course offers, with learners either missing the start of the day, the end or being faced with staying a whole day at college when only a part day may be needed. Notwithstanding the challenges of a long journey on public transport which is even more challenging during the Covid19 outbreak. Not all buses in the north of Scotland are accessible and in remote areas only some routes at some times are accessible.
- Revisit the SIMD matrix as a framework for allocation of spend and a way of judging success. Disabled people are more likely to experience barriers to participation in further and higher education than non disabled people regardless of whether they are in an SIMD area.

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

- Invest in disability services and disabled leaders and market accessible learner centred approaches as a product within the global market which builds social and economic capital.
- Capitalise on Scotland's reputation for global excellence in STEM. For example, we have a world class portfolio of cyber security qualifications ranging from SCQF level 4 to 11 which could be expanded further into domestic and global markets leading to jobs in growing cyber industries.

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?

- Insecure annual funding of CLD services for local authority and third sector partners threatens service continuity and resilience. Standstill and reducing grants require top up funding from unrestricted donations and trusts, which detracts energy away from service development, innovation and delivery.
- More visible pathways for CLD learners to articulate into and through FE and HE learning opportunities. There are some positive but limited examples of collaborations which work well between CLD/adult learning and FE and HE to increase the availability of access to pathways, for example Newbattle Abbey College and the Open University have created a visible pathway to support articulation from one service to another using the Adult Achievement Award.

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

- Whilst there are some local and national examples of useful collaboration which serve learners well, in the main our tertiary system resides within a competitive marketplace and we are accountable to different funders with different success measures in play. Those differences get in the way of collaboration.
- Develop a more appropriate offer for young disabled people with complex and profound needs. Currently their only real option is to move straight from school to care settings, and postcode lotteries mean these settings can sometimes be wholly inappropriate. Create and fund partnerships with specialist providers who can continue to deliver lifelong learning to these young people to address the persistent inequality and social exclusion they face and will increasingly face through and after the pandemic.
- Adult learners in particular will be impacted by the pandemic, and they will require a greater deal of flexibility, distance, home and community-based learning opportunities. Delivering partnership courses in collaboration with the CLD sector will better meet those needs.
- The government is committed to halving the Disability Employability gap, an ambition which will require improved collaboration with all tertiary education providers as well as employers.
- Transitioning-in, transitioning-out and articulation into courses is more challenging for disabled people than non-disabled people. There is little provision for continuous support between employment and education and vice versa. Funding systematic collaborations between education providers and/or CLD to offer overlapping support or business/industry training could help support equality of opportunity.

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

Revisit SFC's funding and accountability framework to explore how all actors within our tertiary system are currently funded, valued and joined together, aiming to provide a more cohesive and coherent system, serving current and future learners across Scotland more efficiently and effectively.