

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

1. The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) is the national, strategic body that funds further and higher education, and research, in Scotland. We have been asked by Scottish Ministers to review how best we can fulfil our mission of securing coherent provision by post-16 education bodies, and the undertaking of research, in these changing times. A [briefing note on the review](#) can be found on the SFC website.
2. We invite all interested individuals and organisations to submit evidence to help inform and shape our review. We particularly welcome responses from colleges and universities, students and learners, graduates, industry and employers, local government, equalities interests, unions, quality assessors, other SFC funded bodies, professional representative bodies and academies. Annex A lists the key stakeholders we anticipate will be interested in responding to this call for evidence.
3. It would be helpful if you could provide succinct submissions by **10 August 2020**. We would welcome evidence and data that supports your view. You may choose to respond to any aspect of this review; and any or all of the specific questions we pose, as we recognise the inter-connectedness of many of the themes. Please complete the attached respondent information form (Annex B) when submitting your response.
4. This will not be your only opportunity to contribute to our review. We are planning to undertake the review in a number of phases and to elicit views in different ways, including further calls for evidence. We anticipate that responding organisations will wish to provide additional input and evolving views as the review progresses.
5. 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 sector's diversity is a great strength. There should not be a one size fits all for Scotland's further and higher education. There can be a danger in focusing solely on deliverable skills for immediate economic returns. Creative education (RCS's strength) and Higher Education also play critical roles in developing minds, empathy, adaptable skills to shape and cope with a rapidly changing employment environment. At the RCS, we very much appreciate the nimbleness our SSI status provides, allowing us to adapt our curriculum swiftly to embrace changes and developments in the performing arts, to contribute to the research and knowledge exchange for the nation and, through the creative industries, contribute to the economic recovery of our communities and cities. In the paragraphs below, I will mention some of our planned developments and the need for greater support for Scotland's children to access quality arts education in order to have the potential to reach conservatoire level study. The creative industries sector is one of the fastest growing in the economy and the outstanding performance of the RCS graduates in the employability league table underline this. The creative arts research and innovation of Scotland's two specialist arts SSIs are critical to grow the creative economy and contribute to the national culture strategy.

- 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.)

I think each institution needs to listen to its constituency. Scotland has different needs in different cities and regions. The RCS seeks to keep in close touch with the large and small performing arts companies to ensure our training is current and sector leading. We maintain a national and international profile as our competitors are outside Scotland and beyond the UK. Although we are distinctive in the Scottish HE sector, our unique place in that sector and the support of SFC has helped ensure that the multi-disciplinary education we offer is richly informed by the innovative practice and research of our excellent staff. This makes us unique among conservatoires internationally and helps to ensure that our graduates are resilient, entrepreneurial and self-starting. The Higgins Report specifically references the role of the creative industries in generating Scotland's economic recovery and our national conservatoire plays a key role in the ecosystem for all of the performing arts.

The sector has made great strides in widening access, but this should be broadened into a more thoroughgoing inclusion agenda to help diversify curriculum, students and employees. Culture thrives when it is diverse.

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

The RCS can continue to make a major contribution towards Scotland's international competitiveness and connectedness. Our students are drawn from around the world and they benefit hugely from Scotland's unique and open attitudes towards music, dance and drama. The success of this is demonstrated by the significant increase in applications and places for EU and overseas students for all our disciplines, EU students being particularly critical to the strength of our school of music. The arts have, throughout history, served as connective tissue for society and have the power to bring together diverse communities. The RCS will need support to maintain its international relevance and reputation in teaching, research and innovation – but that support will, in turn, pay huge dividends towards the economic recovery, the rebuilding of communities and society and the education through the arts of Scotland's young people.

- 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 threats are numerous if the international students stay away due to Covid and if we cannot secure scholarships for EU students – who remain a critical part of our shared art forms. In the last twenty years, the RCS has moved from being a relatively provincial institution to one ranked in the QS top 10 in 4 out of the last 5 years and Top 5 in the Complete University Guide. We are recognised world wide as one of the more innovative multi-arts institutions and our staff serve in leading positions on European and UK councils. This reputation took years to build and could quickly be dismantled if our income is reduced drastically.

We are addressing the challenge in a number of ways, seeking to create new courses in digital production and creative producing to embrace diverse methods for our graduates to connect to their communities. We also hope to retain some of the former money used for EU students for international scholarships to help us remain competitive with our wealthier competitive institutions in London and New York.

The opportunities are also numerous. We learned a great deal about digital engagement and teaching in the arts during lockdown and can apply this knowledge for better blended learning and public engagement more permanently. It could also enable us to partner with local councils to help them deliver high quality arts training to more young people, who are facing having their access to arts reduced due to cuts in funding.

We are building on the insights gained supporting students during the pandemic to explore new forms of delivery for Masters programmes that will permit students to gain their qualification without having to leave employment. We will also develop more short and part-time courses embracing the blended learning approaches as well as face to face teaching.

We regularly partner with key universities towards our mutual benefit. St Andrews partners with RCS to validate our doctoral degrees, and we are full members of the Scottish Graduate School for Arts and Humanities Doctoral Training Partnership; Glasgow is our partner for a shared historically informed performance degree. We have used the investment of the Universities Innovation Fund to achieve a step-change in our collaborations for innovation, KE and entrepreneurial education. One outcome of this is a successful partnership between RCS, GSA and QMU, from which we created “Shift”, a programme that is designed to help emerging artists develop their entrepreneurial skills and launch small businesses in the arts. We believe we can build on this strength in both live and virtual environments.

We have a deep engagement in pre-He through our Junior Conservatoire of Music and our Junior Conservatoire for drama, dance, production and film. We need to work closely with LEAs, with MPEG, with the Scottish Drama training network, and with our own regional hubs to help ensure young people can move beyond access to arts and into real progression, potentially up to conservatoire level.

e) 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

The Conservatoire needs to build its income to remain competitive with the top institutions in the rest of the UK, and internationally. We see a strong role for the creative industries and cultural sector in driving Scotland’s recovery, and a relatively small investment by SFC and Scottish Government (perhaps across government divisions i.e. education, culture and enterprise) could pay significant dividends in supporting us to play the fullest role in the national recovery from Covid and ensuring our competitiveness and sustainability as a world-class institution that is emblematic of a culturally vibrant and world-class Scotland. The RCS is the only conservatoire and institution of its type in Scotland and our work is not replicated in other institutions. Our ability to remain both accessible and world class will be an important part of Scotland’s recovery through the arts and its cultural reputation in the wider world.

- Particular areas of collaboration between agencies that would best support the sectors' contributions
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In past years we have discussed the fact that we are both an HEI and a cultural organisation, as well as one of Scotland's busiest performing arts venues. We have lost all of our commercial income from live performance in the Covid Period. A partnership between Higher Education, Culture and the Economy and Enterprise might help the RCS make a sustainable contribution into the future.

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

We think a more bespoke outcome agreement process could be more appropriate for the RCS. In particular, the Outcome Agreement process could take better account of our uniquely networked position within our industries and better support the role we play in the ecology of the art and creative industries in Scotland. The contribution of RCS research to the health and justice agendas could also be incorporated.

- 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

Our transitions programme is a critical access point for young people to make progress into the arts and we are grateful for the SFC's support. This needs to be part of our core funding rather than be at risk each year in strategic funds. I do think our work could widen out to more of Scotland using digital tools and key hub and spokes through our RCS hubs which we hope to increase across Scotland through local partnerships and the use of blended learning. I also think widening access should broaden to include other forms of diversity.

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

We need a "Covid-bridge" to get RCS through the near term challenges. If we can maintain our reputation, grow our own fundraising as is planned, and return our recruitment to pre-Covid levels, the benefits for the nation will be well worth the investment.

6. Please send your response or any queries to reviewsecretariat@sfc.ac.uk by **10 August 2020**. We look forward to receiving your views.

SFC Review Secretariat
July 2020

Stakeholders likely to be interested in responding

- Colleges, universities, specialist institutions (and their representative bodies) and other funded bodies
- UK counterparts
- Audit Scotland, Education Scotland and QAA
- Enterprise & Skills Strategic Board and agencies
- NUS, sparqs, student bodies, learners, SAAS
- Employers and industry
- NHS
- RSE
- Cultural bodies
- Trade Unions
- EHRC and equality interests
- Local Authorities and Scottish Cities Alliance
- Expert advisers, e.g. Chief Scientific Adviser
- Development bodies, e.g. College Development Network (CDN), Advance HE
- Community and adult learning

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

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Summary: This publication invites all interested individuals and organisations to submit evidences to help inform the SFC review of coherent provision and sustainability in Further and Higher Education.

FAO: Colleges and universities, students and learners, graduates, industry and employers, local government, equalities interest groups, unions, quality assessors, other SFC funded bodies, professional representative bodies and academies

Further information: **Contact:** Review Secretariat
Email: reviewsecretariat@sfc.ac.uk

Scottish Funding Council
Apex 2
97 Haymarket Terrace
Edinburgh
EH12 5HD
T 0131 313 6500
F 0131 313 6501
www.sfc.ac.uk