

Outcomes and Impact Framework 2020-21

Purpose

1. This paper provides an update on the streamlined Outcome and Impact Framework for AY 2020-21, co-produced with the sectors during phase one of the SFC Review, and outlines the aspirations to further reform this framework in phase 2 of the SFC Review to ensure it is appropriate for the future.

Background

2. Since 2012 Outcome Agreements (OAs) have been instrumental in focusing the contribution of the sectors on key government policy priorities and providing accountability for the allocation of core funding. However, feedback from the sectors in the last few years was that the OA process had become unwieldy and overly target-driven, with too many measures and a focus on inputs and outputs rather than impacts and outcomes.
3. In January 2020 SFC began to plan for a major review of Outcome Agreements. Initial desk-based research was undertaken and round-table discussions began with the sectors. However, this work was put on hold when the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic shifted us into emergency support measures.
4. In May 2020 SFC confirmed that we would not expect institutions to sign off commitments and targets in their prepared AY2020-21 OAs given the anticipated scale of disruption to business. This move acknowledged the reality of the emergency situation. The OA process was paused and SFC did **not** publish the AY2020-21 OAs submitted. Our intention was to work closely with the sectors to establish a more high level set of outcomes for AY2020-21 that realigned priorities with what would be needed to support economic recovery, and to continue to support those already in the education system.
5. Early in June SFC was then tasked by the Minister to undertake a major review to consider how best to achieve coherence and sustainability in the delivery of further and higher education during the Covid-19 crisis, EU exit transition and beyond while maintaining and enhancing quality and to propose changes needed for the future. A key task in phase one of the review was to negotiate an interim accountability framework that would set out expectations of what institutions would deliver during this emergency year and how that would be evaluated (as outlined in Review Briefing Note, June 2020¹).

¹ http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Review/Review_Briefing_Note_June_2020.pdf

6. This interim framework was co-produced with sector representatives and is in final draft at the time of writing. See Annex A. Our aim is to publish during the week beginning 26th October 2020.

Co-production approach

7. Over the summer the SFC Review Group met with three separate Co-Production Advisory Groups to discuss the interim approach. We shared a draft Outcomes and Impact framework and then adapted this in response to feedback. The final draft version is at Annex A. Overall the response was positive. The groups welcomed the draft framework and the fresh approach proposed by SFC for the future. Specifically they noted that it:
 - Strikes the right balance (and closer alignment) between both quantitative measures and qualitative evaluation of impact.
 - Allows institutions/regions to express their unique contributions to a more focused set of priority policy issues.
 - Promotes and reflects individual and collective responses to future recovery with narrative on contributions and expected impact.
 - Continues to ensure transparency and clear accountability for public funding.
 - Recognises the challenges of the emergency response to Covid-19.

Key principles of the AY2020-21 approach

(1) A more streamlined set of measures/metrics with no targets.

8. The Framework for AY2020-21 restricts key measures for both sectors. Although we have clearly indicated that SFC would not require targets for this emergency year we will expect a commitment in the agreement to maintain, wherever possible, the institutional/regional/sector baselines as appropriate. SFC will issue a national measures table to each institution/region with their data, including AY2018-19 baselines.

(2) Reflect diversity and respond to economic recovery

9. For AY2020-21 SFC requires a narrative that describes their contribution to supporting the economy and the expected impact. A set of prompt questions is provided to guide the responses from all institutions. This approach will allow each to highlight their specific priorities and contributions to economic recovery in AY2020-21 (in line with mission and strategic priorities). We expect that this will focus particularly on meeting the needs of young people, those who are seeking upskilling or reskilling opportunities and those who may be

For looking to re-enter employment. Their responses will also clearly illustrate their contribution and position in terms of community and/or region.

(3) Move away from including additional reporting on compliance and statutory commitments that may already be reported elsewhere

10. SFC would look to minimise the asks related to compliance. There might still be a need for SFC to intermittently seek specific individual statements of commitment and contributions on priority issues during the year. (For example gender imbalance in subject choice) Where this is required SFC would provide as much notice as possible and outline the specific approach to be used.

(4) Shift the focus from inputs and outputs to impact and success.

11. SFC will introduce a specific mid-year progress reporting point and an end of academic year impact statement that outlines what each university, college or region has achieved which acknowledges the diversity and unique contributions to sector commitments.

Focus in phase two of the review

12. The Phase One Report outlines that we will be operating a streamlined approach for Outcome Agreements in AY2020-21 with a smaller-than-usual number of measures. This recognises the need to be proportionate, responsive and aware of the challenges facing the sectors in this emergency year. It is also clear on the direction of travel and aspiration for an Outcome and Impact Framework for the future that makes outcomes and expectations clear for everyone (institutions, students, researchers, employers, government, and tax-payers). The template included in the Phase One Report outlines the key priorities for our tertiary system identified early in our review: Students, Research, Economic and Social Renewal and Governance and Sustainability, and 20 outcomes that could form the starting point for the new framework. See Annex 5, Page 87.²
13. A national Outcome and Impact Framework would aim to:
 - Provide a clear focus on key outcomes – to distinguish this from specific programme monitoring or grant conditions.
 - Set out more transparent expectations for all stakeholders and for all institutions.
 - Enable institutions to demonstrate their impact across a broad range of outcomes, for the common good and for public expenditure, in terms that are relevant to their particular situation.
 - Help to moderate and contextualise targets and performance based funding premiums, if adopted.

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http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/corporatepublications_sfccp052020/Review_of_Coherent_Provision_and_Sustainability_Phase_1_Report.pdf

- Support self-evaluation and work in tandem with an institution's own performance system as these outcomes should already be evaluated.
 - Help to focus the quality assessment frameworks of other bodies.
 - Recognise that the outcomes are not mutually exclusive and not all outcomes will be relevant to every institution – they can flex to accommodate the diversity in the sectors. They are deliberately broad to capture big ambitions, collaborative approaches and collective challenges.
 - Be used by each individual institution, but also adaptable for use by more integrated tertiary partnerships, particularly in relation to outcomes for students, where joint reporting may work best for certain aspects of the framework.
14. Reaching agreement on specific targets before the start of the academic year would become a simpler and separate process, and an Impact & Accountability Statement at the end of each AY would self-assess what has been achieved, in a way that recognises the diversity of institutions and missions. We would publish these statements. Alongside the collection of data, these statements would provide a narrative about performance, and would better reflect national level analysis, themed insights, and joint work between SFC and the sectors, and other stakeholders. It should also bring focus to quality assurance activity undertaken on behalf of SFC.

Recommendation

15. The Committee is invited to note and comment upon the interim accountability framework for AY 2020-21 and the plans for development of a new national Outcome and Impact Framework.

Publication

16. This paper will be published on the Council website following the meeting.

Further information

17. Contact: Linda McLeod, Deputy Director (Interim), tel: 0131 313 6694, lmcleod@sfc.ac.uk.