

Policy update

Purpose

1. This paper provides the SEAL Committee with an update on key areas of policy that underpin the work being undertaken within the Access, Learning and Outcomes Directorate and by the Policy, Insights and Analysis Directorate. It is for noting.

Policy area: Skills and Economic Recovery

Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan (CESAP)

2. The Committee is aware of Scotland's Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan (CESAP), which was jointly developed between SFC and SDS and launched in December 2020. The Plan identified for initial priorities: i) renewable energy generation; ii) decarbonising domestic and commercial heat; iii) transport; and iv) advanced manufacturing. The priorities are now being taken forward by designated subgroups, which tie in with existing skills groups and networks, for example in Life and Chemical Sciences and in Food and Drink Manufacturing. Land based skills and skills to support the Circular Economy are also being recognised as priorities. Industry demand statements are currently being developed in order to meet the net zero targets and in order to develop projects of national scale such as ScotWind.
3. However, we know that climate change is not simply an issue to can be addressed through low carbon technology and technical skills. There is a wider role of the education sector (schools, colleges, universities) to help build "climate literacy" in all learners. Colleges and universities have a vital role to play in the community-based and place-based transformation of our economy to meet the Scotland's ambitious net zero targets. Recognising this it has been agreed to establish an Education subgroup, which focusses on those wider societal and cultural changes that are needed. A full progress report on the implementation of CESAP is expected by the end of September 2022. The work that the SFC executive are undertaking on Regional Pathfinders also has a strong "green skills/green jobs" dimension as regional economies, such as in the North East and the South of Scotland are transitioning to low carbon economies.

Regional Pathfinders

4. The Regional Tertiary Provision Pathfinders aim to explore what further needs to be done to make the education and skills system responsive, integrated and

supportive of economic recovery and inclusive growth in two regions: the North-East and the South of Scotland.

5. Pathfinders are organised into four work packages:
 - Work package 1: Data and analysis
An understanding of current skills provision, unmet demand, available data and other evidence.
 - Work package 2: Regional priorities
Developing approaches to provision planning at a regional level, identifying early areas for action, advancing collaboration, deepening strategic connectedness to employers, piloting new ways of working.
 - Work package 3: Process analysis
Answering the following questions: How is provision planning and curriculum design done? How is provision planning influenced by SFC, employers and other partners? How can we better support institutions to take decisions about their provision? How can our processes be more efficient and effective?
 - Work package 4: Learning and dissemination
6. Progress in the last period
 - Enhanced project resourcing, including appointment of a Governance Officer and Stakeholder Engagement Officer.
 - Appointment of an external consultant to lead on provision mapping as part of WP1
 - First meeting of the Regional Delivery Board in the South of Scotland and identification of three potential regional pilots.
7. Planned activity over the next period:
 - Finalise membership of the National Advisory Board with first meeting by end June.
 - First meeting of the North-East Regional Delivery Board.
 - Progress analytical work with consultants, SDS and other partners.

Policy area: Student Experience and Access

8. Since the publication of the SFC review we continue to pivot from a focus on access only to a wider focus on student interests and pathways with a commitment to fair access. The key areas of progress for Student Interests, Pathways and Access team have been the following areas.

Fair Access and Commission on Widening Access

9. We continue to work with Scottish Government on highlighting the need for a review and reconsideration of COWA Blueprint for Fairness recommendations to consider a wide review of student needs and issues relating to poverty. Scottish Government officials advise that the current Commissioner for Fair Access, Sir Peter Scott, is due to leave his role and they will be advertising for a new Commissioner over the summer period. The Commissioner is independent of the Scottish Government and responsible for leading a system wide effort to deliver fair access in Scotland. James Dunphy will be supporting the Scottish Government in that recruitment process.
10. As a system we have, once again, achieved the Commission on Widening Access's interim target of 16 percent of all Scottish-domiciled full-time first-degree entrants being from the 20 percent most deprived areas by 2021-22 and this achievement represents a year on year increase to 16.7% in AY 2020-21.
11. Despite this progress we recognise there is more to do to assure ourselves that this progress is reflective in all institutions and we note that some institutions are not at the expected SIMD 20 entrant 10% point outlined by COWA. We will, of course, remain committed to this achievement and through our Outcome Agreements will continue to seek improvements and strive towards the achievement of this measure.
12. We also continue to encourage Scottish Government officials to progress work on Free School Meals data to enable use as a fair access indicator of individual disadvantage by SFC and the sectors.

Development of a National Schools Programme

13. Further progress developing a National School Programme as part of our response to the SFC review to provide senior phase pupils with an entitlement offer to gain access and support into the tertiary system. Progress has included:
 - Successful rationalisation of the current SFC-funded Schools for Higher Education Programme (SHEP) and Access to High Demand Professions (AHDP) funding into four regional hubs.
 - Three other SFC-funded widening access specialist schools' programmes – a hub activity for the teaching of SQA Advanced Highers (GCU Advanced Higher Hub); a programme specifically focused on access to (non-art and design) creative subjects – specifically music, drama, dance, film and technical and production arts (RCS Transitions); and an open access programme (OU Young Applicants in Schools Scheme) will also join the national effort to widen access to higher education in 2022

- Positive development of wider communications strategy on the NSP including with Scottish Government, Schools, Local Authorities, Universities Scotland, Colleges Scotland, School Leaders Scotland, Young Scot
 - The solid place-marking of the programme within Scotland’s educational landscape and against the backdrop of current Education Reform.
14. The combined effort of these programmes working together in Scotland will amplify the NSP’s reach to cover all of Scotland’s schools to:
- build a more consistent Scotland-wide school offer that provides a bridge between school and the tertiary education system, particularly for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and/or communities;
 - to simplify the outreach programme landscape for young people and their parents;
 - to provide a more integrated tertiary education and skills offer in Senior Phase;
 - and to ensure our investment is aligned to wider education priorities.
 - Additionally, we believe a more consistent offer will also enable a more effective response to pupils most impacted by COVID-19
15. A paper was provided to the SEAL Committee at their last meeting on our involvement in the SDS Careers Review. We continue to engage with this review particularly in relation to the development of the National Schools Programme to ensure there is good alignment with the SDS careers offering.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

16. In May 2022 we wrote to the sector about the funding for Additional Counsellors AY 2022-23. The total for this is still to be confirmed, but funding for AY 2022-23 will be broadly comparable to the funding received in AY 2021-22. Individual funding allocations and guidance will be published by SFC when the full academic year budget has been confirmed. We expect this to be by June.
17. We also reassured the sector that there are ongoing discussions within Scottish Government about how counselling provision can continue to be supported beyond AY 2022-23. We hope to have a position on this by the end of May and will update the sector in due course.
18. SFC attended the first Scottish Government Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Working Group chaired by Jamie Hepburn, Minister for FE, HE, Youth Employment and Training. The group will be focused on developing the *Student Mental Health Action Plan*. SFC, along with other key sector and NHS stakeholders, will also be contributing to the Action Plan. It is intended the action plan will help to improve mental health pathways between colleges and universities and the NHS, address waiting times and equity of access to

counsellors in the sector, and support the incorporation of mental health into the curriculum.

19. As we develop as a Student Interests, Pathways and Access team, we will be looking at ways we can support student mental health and wellbeing more widely, including preventative activity. The SFC currently provides funding to Scottish Student Sport, recognising the role that sport, exercise and team activity plays in supporting mental health.

SFC funded access programmes

20. We have worked with external stakeholders and successfully secured funding from proposals to our Non-Core Programme Funds Group to ensure the continued support for the following programmes:
 - SWAP (Scottish Wider Access Programme). The amount of £240,000 was awarded to and accepted for AY 2022-23 to continue the provision and expansion of access courses and research on widening access to higher education to adults
 - SCQFP (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership). The amount of £325,000 was awarded to and accepted for AY 2022-23 for the continued and further promotion, use, and understanding of the SCQF in colleges and universities. This will include quality assurance of colleges as credit-rating bodies, the recognition of prior learning and articulation as well as developing advice and guidance materials specifically for the veterans' and armed forces community towards recognition for that community.
 - SCAPP (Scottish Community of Access and Participation Practitioners). The amount of £175,451 was awarded and accepted from May 2022 to July 2023 for the continued development of SCAPP. The funding will support continuation and further development of key parts of the Scottish Framework for Fair Access. This includes supporting practitioners to develop, conduct and evaluate their work, research access work, development of an accredited programme for practitioners.
 - We also submitted proposals and are awaiting formal notification of the outcome of bids for funding for Sparqs and NUS funding (to support college Student Associations).

Equality and Diversity

21. The Action Plan to support the [EHRC SFC Memorandum of Understanding \(MoU\)](#) has recently been refreshed to take into account the impact of the pandemic. Our key focus remains the same, to ensure that action taken by SFC and across the sector drives improvements for people from marginalised and under-represented groups studying and working in our Colleges and Universities

22. A Persistent Inequality Group formed to support the delivery of the priority actions in the EHRC SFC MoU Action Plan is near to concluding its work. Persistent Inequalities have been identified and work is underway to agree the National Equality Outcomes for SFC and the sector.

Care-Experience

23. SFC has established a focused Care-Experience National Policy Group. Membership of the Care-Experience Policy Group comprises of SFC officials, regional Care-Experience Forum leads, and representatives from SAAS and Care-experienced organisations. The group remit is to:
- Evaluate and drive progress on the [SFC's National Ambition for Care-Experienced Students](#).
 - Advise on interventions required to achieve the National Ambition.
 - Advise on the current interventions in place to support the national ambition including the SFC Care-Experience Bursary.
 - Make recommendations for 2023 onwards.
 - Share information, updates and feedback with wider practitioner Groups

Publication of the SFC Report on Widening Access for AY 2020-21

24. On 17 May 2022 SFC published the statistics publication *SFC Report on Widening Access for AY 2020-21* presenting data relating to the Commission on Widening Access targets, and on Scottish-domiciled entrants to higher and further education in Scotland by socio-economic deprivation, gender, ethnicity, disability, care experience and age. The report also now includes data on BSL students, Estranged students, Carers and Service leavers.
25. Key findings outlining progress include:
- As noted above, in 2020-21, 16.7% of all Scottish-domiciled entrants to full-time first-degree courses were from the 20% most deprived areas. That is an increase from 16.4% in 2019- 20 and represents an additional 545 students.
 - When combining all full and part-time undergraduate HE at Scotland's universities and colleges, 19.7% of entrants were from the 20% most deprived areas
 - Scotland's colleges made a substantive contribution to the tertiary sector's delivery with 25.3% of their Scottish-domiciled entrants to HE courses being from the 20% most deprived areas.
 - Care-experienced students at Scotland's colleges and universities accounted for 1.9% of Scottish-domiciled entrants to undergraduate courses. (In Scotland, 1.5% of children under 18 were looked after in 2020-21.)

- In 2020-21, 7,665 students entered university first-degree courses in 2020-21 with an HNC/D qualification achieved in the last three years. Of those, 4,470 (58.3%) entered university straight into year 2 (if they held an HNC) or straight to year 3 (if they held an HND). This is known as Articulation with Advanced Standing (AS). A quarter (25.1%) of those 4,470 students were from the 20% most deprived areas.
- Of the Scottish-domiciled full-time first-degree university entrants in 2019-20, 93.5% returned to study in year 2. This is up on the previous year's figure of 90.9%. Retention rates of students from the 20% most deprived areas have also increased, from 87.5% in 2018-19 to 90.2% in 2019-20

Student Internships in ALO directorate

26. The ALO directorate have supported 3 student interns in the period January to June and are looking to secure funding for another round of student interns. This programme has brought significant benefits to the Directorate and enables students to gain valuable work knowledge and insight in the tertiary education sector.

Policy area: Learning Quality and Enhancement

27. This policy area is covered as a major item on the agenda and is for discussion.

Policy area: Outcomes

28. The Outcomes Team has been working to finalise arrangements for the 2021-22 OAs. This has included follow up in a small number of cases with institutions to make amendments or additions to their OA. It has also involved an update to all OA institutional data tables to reflect the recently published college and university data for AY 2020-21. Steps to finalise the OAs for AY 2021-22 will continue in June, alongside work to prepare a summary publication which will be issued alongside the OAs when they are published.
29. Planning for assurance and accountability arrangements for AY 2022-23 continues and new guidance for the period will be issued in the summer.

Recommendation

30. The SEAL Committee is invited note the contents of this paper.

Publication

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

Further information

32. Contact: André Reibig, Senior Policy Officer, areibig@sfc.ac.uk