
SEAL Committee 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. The paper is for discussion.

Policy area: Work-Based Learning and Skills Programmes

Skills Landscape Review

2. Following an intense period of collaborative work, involving staff across all directorates and engagement with James Withers and the Scottish Government team leading the Review, SFC submitted our response to the *Review of the Skills Delivery Landscape - Call for Evidence* on 23 December 2022.
3. We continue to work with the Secretariate to provide opportunities for engagement with SFC and the sector including:
 - Update on Regional Tertiary Provision Pathfinders with input from Regional Pilot programmes: Wednesday 18th January.
 - Meet with University of Glasgow: Wednesday 25th January

Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan (CESAP)

4. The Committee previously noted that the Scottish government is planning to undertake a refresh of the [Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan](#) (CESAP), which was first published in December 2020. It is proposed the refresh needed to:
 - Dovetail with the update of Scotland's Climate Change Plan, which is planned for late summer 2023;
 - Refresh the key sector priorities and how the specific net zero targets will be implemented;
 - Utilise the learning from the provisional pathfinder research to inform new learning provision;
 - Consider the whole of the learner journey and engage with disadvantaged groups;
 - Consider how other government strategies such as on innovation and the digital economy, for example, can help support the implementation of the CESAP and its refresh; and

- Consider funding support and alternative financial co-investment models to drive forward investment in skills and education relating to net zero.
5. The Scottish government is currently holding a number of stakeholder workshops to drive forward this refresh. A refreshed CESAP is now planned for autumn 2023.
 6. In November 2022, SDS published a report on [Green Jobs in Scotland](#), which was commissioned by SDS as part of improving the evidence base for the implementation of the CESAP. The report helps strengthen the evidence base but also raised significant questions about the gender gap, age groups and regional differences within new and emerging jobs showing that women and younger people could lose out from emerging career opportunities. The SFC-SDS joint CESAP Education Subgroup considered the report's findings alongside progress updates on joint research on "green provision" and the SFC-led Regional Provision Pathfinders, specifically in the North-East of Scotland.
 7. The transition to a net zero nation has major implications. It will shape the development of the future Scottish economy, change the way businesses and institutions think and work, and transform the lives of Scotland's people. Scotland's colleges and universities already make significant contributions to sustainability and climate action, including through research, innovation, skills and learning, and they each have their own aspirations for environmental sustainability. SFC is committed to helping institutions achieve their own goals for climate change. Overarching this, at a national level, we will hard-wire climate action and a fair transition to net zero into our own strategies, investments and framework for accountability. To accelerate change we will use our ability to bring people together to agree common courses of action. Our recently published [Net Zero & Sustainability Framework for Action](#) sets out our long-term plan, demonstrating our full commitment to responding to the climate emergency and reflecting improved corporate accountability and collective responsibility.

Flexible Workforce Development Fund (FWDF)

8. The announcement of the FWDF for Academic Year (AY) 2022-23 was delayed due to the Scottish Government's Emergency Budget Review and we were unable to issue guidance or funding allocations until this had been concluded. This has now been concluded and the guidance and allocations will be published week commencing 16th January 2023.
9. Following this review, SFC is allocating £10m of FWDF to colleges for AY 2022-23; £7m for Levy-payers and £3m for SMEs. Subject to the availability of funds, additional funding (of up to £3m) is expected to be allocated during AY 2022-23 pending further budget discussions with the Scottish Government. The Open University in Scotland has £0.5m available for delivery to Levy-payers and SMEs.
10. On the publication of the guidance SFC will meet with each institution to determine capacity to deliver, determine any challenges to delivery and clarify any questions relating to the Guidance.

Universities Upskilling Fund

11. AY 2021-22 was the third year of the Upskilling Fund, with overall funding of almost £7m allocated on the same basis as in previous years, based on historic Taught PostGraduate (TPG) place funding. In AYs 2020-21 and 2021-22 upskilling funded activity was in effect 'topped up' by National Transition Training Fund (NTTF) allocations totalling £1.5m and £2m respectively. As the NTTF has now finished, there will be no additional funding.
12. Universities have responded at pace, building on their provision from the previous years to offer more specialised courses, focused on meeting the needs of employers and offering more flexible learning opportunities through short courses for learners. The guidance states that these courses should:
 - Support identified needs for higher level skills in the existing workforce and for those who are seeking employment.
 - Tackle inequality, supporting those with protected characteristics who are most likely to be in sectors affected by COVID-19 and/or the EU Exit to further promote the Fair Work agenda.
 - Support sectors that have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and Britain's Exit from the EU, through upskilling and reskilling interventions and the movement of workers into sectors where we are most confident of a strong recovery, or where demand has increased.
 - Be focussed on HE provision and not be used to supplement intake for degree courses.
13. In AY 2021-22 over 10,340 students enrolled on 548 short upskilling funded courses at Scottish Universities, a 15.9% increase on the number of enrolments and a 46.9% on the volume of upskilling courses compared to the previous year. The most popular subject areas were in Business and Management (174 courses) and Digital, Data and Computer Technologies (137 courses).
14. SFC's [Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability](#) commits us to evaluate the Upskilling Fund in AY 2022-23 in order to assess how it has supported the recovery mission and if it is still well placed to meet demand for changing future skills needs. We intend to undertake this process through an internal evaluation of HESA-reported data and are seeking to employ an external party to gather and analyse additional qualitative and quantitative information.

Young Person's Guarantee (YPG) Funding

15. Following a longer than anticipated period of negotiation between colleagues in Finance and their counterparts in Scottish Government across various Directorates, authorisation was given to publish Young Person's Guarantee college allocations and guidance and to issue award letters for YPG funded project-based activity in December 2022. Award letters were issued in the first week of January 2023. College Guidance and

allocations for the remainder of AY 2022/23 were published in mid-January.

16. Following feedback received from the sector in AYs 2020/21 and 2021/22 SFC has provided greater flexibility in allocating the funding by moving from a credit based model to grant funding to support young people facing the greatest barriers to tertiary education, living in poverty or from the most marginalised groups.
17. Using this model funding will be provided to all college regions which was not the case in AY2021-22 due to the credit-based methodology and the requirement that colleges should meet their core credit target prior draw down of additional credits for YPG. All colleges/regions will receive a share of the first tranche of funding (£3.45m).
18. Initial college allocations have been made on the understanding that further YPG funding will be received in Spring 2023 allowing for additional allocations to be made in year to those colleges where there is unmet demand.

Foundation and Graduate Apprenticeships

19. SFC continue to work closely with Skills Development Scotland on Foundation (FAs) and Graduate Apprenticeships (GAs). SFC has provided funding for 2,500 FA places in the college sector in AY 2022-23. The sector is forecasted to deliver this target with over 1,100 recruits at levels 4 and 5 across three frameworks, and 1,400 recruits at level 6 across 12 frameworks. The target for universities is the delivery of 1,378 GAs in 2022-23 which they are also forecasted to achieve with places split between 13 frameworks.
20. For AY2022-23 SFC committed to reducing the bureaucracy that existed in the dual reporting process of previous years. SFC has worked closely with SDS and has successfully developed a system whereby colleges will report directly to SFC without the requirement to also report through the SDS FIPs system. This is detailed in the FA Guidance which will be published week commencing 16th January 2023.

Policy Area: Assurance and Outcomes

Outcome Agreements 2022-23

21. Outcome managers have discussed and negotiated the draft agreements through the period to December 2022, with signed-off agreements being submitted to SFC by 5 December 2022 – final sign-off continues to be expected in April 2023 once the updated data tables are available. The aim is for the final outcome agreements to be published in late Spring 2023.

Tertiary quality enhancement framework

22. There are some key developments happening now for the TQEF.
 - Firstly, we are updating the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Principals groups at Colleges Scotland and Universities Scotland to outline next steps and the work that

we intend to take forward through the new Steering Group. We want to ensure both sector groups have input to shaping the key discussions that we need to have to facilitate progress.

- Secondly, we have confirmed the Steering Group membership and will hold the first meeting in February. This will be a significant senior level group supporting the project from this point forward and will be Chaired by SFC ALO Director, and Co-chaired by college, university and NUS representatives. Early work for this Group will be shaping the first draft for the framework and providing advice to SFC on commissioning future review methods (building on the mapping work and stakeholder engagement to date).

College governance review

23. We have placed the college governance review on hold for time being while we await resolution of the matters at South Lanarkshire College. We had been planning to incorporate lessons learned from these matters into the review and therefore we are considering the appropriate time to review the scope and restart the work on this project.

College Performance Indicator project

24. The College Performance Indicator (PI) project is progressing with the development of a prototype data and analysis dashboard, initially for internal SFC use, that will support our understanding of the data and areas of challenge for learner outcomes for individual colleges. Once developed we will work with a subset of colleges, to test what the data are showing and identify how we can best use these dashboards with the colleges to develop a shared understanding of the challenges that they face and the opportunities and possible mechanisms to address these.

UK level quality engagement

25. The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) has confirmed (07/12/2022) its decision that the UK, as a whole, is no longer compliant with European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for quality assurance. The decision is because, under the English regulatory system, higher education institutions are not subject to regular external quality assurance by an EQAR-registered agency. However, EQAR recognise the non-compliance with the ESG is due to the revised approach to external quality assurance in England and have indicated their willingness to separate out the four nations of the UK in considering and recording compliance with the ESG. SFC has written to EQAR to express our concern and to seek confirmation on when the country / nations information will be updated to reflect the more nuanced position across the UK. SFC is also working closely with Scottish Government to explore separate Scottish membership of EQAR. Scotland is currently represented through DfE International but could seek separate membership in addition.

Policy Area: Student Interests, Access and Pathways

Fair Access and Commission on Widening Access

26. On 4 January 2023 the Scottish Government [announced](#) the appointment of the new Commissioner for Fair Access, Professor John McKendrick. John McKendrick is a Professor of Social Justice at Glasgow Caledonian University and Co-Director of the Scottish Poverty & Inequality Research Unit.
27. The Director of ALO has written to the new Commissioner and the intention is to invite the Commissioner to attend a future SEAL committee meeting.
28. Scottish Government officials are currently exploring options, with a view to setting up an Access Data Short-Life Working Group (SLWG) to determine whether specific indicators could be used alongside the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) as part of a 'basket of measures' to identify deprivation. We expect that the SFC executive will be invited to membership of the SLWG.
29. The Scottish Government has re-scheduled the next Ministerial Access Delivery Group to 1 March 2023.

Development of a National Schools Programme

30. The National Schools Programme (NSP) made strong progress in the last quarter of 2022, a key development being the engagement of the NSP with the Hayward Review of Qualifications and Assessment, as part of Scotland-wide work in Education Reform. In addition, significant work was undertaken to prepare the funding proposal required to achieve resource for the full NSP for 2023-24. A new NSP administrator was recruited to support the programme from January 2023 and further national agreements have been achieved across elements of the NSP to support pupil applications to HE in different geographical areas of Scotland. One of the key development areas for the NSP in 2023 will be the creation of new common reporting criteria, which will be used to demonstrate the impact of widening access activity, using simple but effective evaluation tools. This will be a major step forward in the evolution of the NSP in becoming more nationally consistent and coherent. This in turn will help realise the ambition of delivering an excellent, nationally recognised schools programme that enables young people from less advantaged backgrounds to undertake their study ambitions across Scotland.

Education Reform

31. The SFC has responded to the [Independent Review of Assessment and Qualifications](#) consultation. Within this, SFC reinforces its commitment to ensuring the coherence of the education and skills system in Scotland and its responsiveness to learners and their needs, as outlined in our Review of Coherence and Sustainability, published in June 2021. Our response also includes input from those involved in the SFC's NSP (see above).

Student mental health and wellbeing

32. Mr Hepburn MSP, Minister for Higher Education, Further Education, Youth Employment and Training wrote to Universities Scotland, Colleges Scotland and NUS Scotland on 22 December 2022 to confirm that the allocation for student counsellor support for financial year 2022-23 has been set at £4m.
33. The SFC uses Financial Year (FY) allocations from the SG and converts them into AY budgets for the sector. This means that some of this budget has already been allocated for AY 2021-22 which leaves £2.025m for August 2022 until March 2023. The letter outlines they are committed to providing funding for the remainder of AY 2022-23 (i.e., from April to July) and further clarity on this will be provided by the Directorate for Lifelong Learning and Skills and the Directorate of Mental Health. The SFC cannot allocate funds for April onwards until that clarity is provided.
34. Finally the letter makes reference to Scottish Government's Student Mental Health Plan that will set the framework for mental health support in college and universities (the SFC and sector leads are represented on the group that oversees this work).
35. The SFC is working with the Scottish Government to finalise the allocations for August 2022 to March 2023. The Scottish Government set the institutional allocations for this funding based on mental health indicators.

Equality and Diversity

36. The SFC and European Human Rights Commission (EHRC) have recently published guidance to institutions on a set of National Equality Outcomes. This is a substantive agenda item for the meeting and a paper has been provided with more details on the approach.
37. Following accusations of abuse which came to light through [Degrees of Abuse](#), the University of Glasgow commissioned an [independent review](#) of staff and student procedures and support arrangements in relation to Gender-Based Violence. The report was published in December 2022. The university has committed to implementing all recommendations as soon as possible as detailed in the Ross Report Recommendations and Action Plan. As part of the Scottish Government's Equally Safe in Colleges and Universities Core Leadership Group, SFC is reflecting on the review and considering what more can be done across the tertiary system to ensure students and staff in all Scottish FE and HE institutions are safe from all forms of gender based violence. Our work in this area will build on previous work following the conviction of Kevin O'Gorman in 2019 of sexually assaulting seven students at the University of Strathclyde and Heriot-Watt between 2006 and 2014, specifically SFC's call for information ([SFC/CI/03/2021](#)) to all Scottish colleges and universities.

SDS Careers Review

38. On 12 December 2022 the SFC Chair and CEO were invited to attend a meeting with the

Chair of the Careers Review Programme Board, Grahame Smith, and SDS Director of CIAG Operations, James Russell to discuss progress with the SDS Careers Review implementation.

39. SFC welcomed the strategic discussions on the review, at Chair level, to date but the CEO encouraged enhanced and closer engagement by SDS with SFC to enable alignment and co-design of review implementation and the intended establishment of a Careers Collaborative. A further follow-on meeting is expected early in 2023.

Policy Area: Coherent Learning Provision

Health

40. SFC's work is continuing at pace with a focus on three key areas:
 - Further prioritization of the SFC/NHS Education for (NES) Scotland Joint Action Plan and taking forward some of the key actions such as collaboration on the pathfinder projects, and apprenticeships.
 - Work on the controlled subjects:
 - SFC is providing advice to Scottish Government on the intake for 2023-24 for all the controlled subjects;
 - In November 2022, Scottish Government Health and Social Care Directorate (SGHSCD) ask SFC to provide advice on increasing the number of Scottish domiciled students and widening access to students to medicine. The draft was submitted in December, and Scottish Government has asked for additional advice to be prepared for the Medical Undergraduate Meeting in February.
 - Undertaking workshops with key stakeholders (Chief Nursing Officer's Department, Board for Academic Dentistry, NES Allied Health Professions team) to help develop SFC's understanding of coherent provision in health.

Tertiary Provision Pathfinders

41. Since the substantive paper update provided at the last SEAL Committee meeting on 1 November 2022, work has progressed across all four work packages of the Tertiary Provision Pathfinders. The project remains on schedule to deliver the initial programme of work by Spring 2023 to be followed by the operational development of the regional pilots. It is envisaged that new provision ensuing from the regional pilots will be offered to learners from AY 2023-24 at the earliest.
42. The programme, a significant recommendation of the SFC Review on Coherent Provision and Sustainability, continues to attract a high level of political interest, featuring as it does within the Skilled Workforce Theme of the National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET) and as an important element to showcase within the Skills

Landscape Review.

43. The Pathfinder team has worked with stakeholders and regional leads in the South and North-East to confirm modest levels of funding support for the regional pilots: £196k has been awarded across the three regional pilots in the South and up to £291.5k is being finalised with the four regional pilots in the northeast.
44. It will be important to monitor and capture interim learning from the pilots, in advance of their longer-term impact on outcomes and pathways for learners. With this in mind, the team has undertaken initial discussions with partners around the design and development of the evaluation approach, adopting an action research methodology with the involvement of an external evaluator. We will be able to update on progress and early insight at the next SEAL meeting.

Recommendations

45. The SEAL Committee is invited to discuss the contents of this paper.

Publication

46. This paper will be published on the SFC website.

Further information

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